

**‘Dark, Mysterious, and Undocumented’: The
Middlebrow Fantasy and the Fantastic
Middlebrow**

Simon Thomas

**Magdalen College
University of Oxford**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Trinity 2013**

For Colin, Mum, and Dad

Abstract

‘Dark, mysterious, and undocumented’: The Middlebrow Fantasy and the Fantastic Middlebrow

**Simon Thomas, Magdalen College, Oxford University
DPhil Trinity 2013**

The concept of ‘middlebrow’ literature in the twentieth century, which received minimal critical attention from the Leavises onwards, has recently become a site of literary and sociological interest, especially regarding the interwar period. This thesis considers the ways in which a corporate middlebrow identity, amongst an intangible community of like-minded readers, was affected by a popularity of the fantastic in the 1920s and 1930s. This subgenre, which I term the ‘domestic fantastic’ (in which one or more elements of the fantastic intrude into an otherwise normalised domestic world) allowed middlebrow authors and readers to focalise and interrogate anxieties affecting the status of the home and its inhabitants which were otherwise either too taboo or, conversely, too well-worn for a traditional, non-fantastic examination. This fantastic vogue was largely initiated by the success of David Garnett’s metamorphosis novel *Lady Into Fox* (1922), which prepared the way for the other novels discussed in this thesis, predominantly Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowes* (1926), Elinor Wylie’s *The Venetian Glass Nephew* (1926), Ronald Fraser’s *Flower Phantoms* (1926), Edith Olivier’s *The Love-Child* (1927), John Collier’s *His Monkey Wife* (1930) and *Green Thoughts* (1932), and Frank Baker’s *Miss Hargreaves* (1940). Through the lenses of metamorphosis, creation, and witchcraft, these novels respond to and reformulate contemporary debates concerning sexuality in marriage, childlessness, and autonomous space for unmarried women. The ‘middlebrow fantasy’ of the stable, idealised home was being revealed as untenable, and the fantastic responded. During the interwar years, when assessments of British society were being widely recalibrated, the domestic fantastic was a subgenre which produced a select but significant range of novels which (whether playful or poignant, hopeful or tragic, nostalgic or progressive) provided the means for both author and reader to interrogate and comment upon the most pervading middle-class social anxieties, in unusual and revitalising ways.

Contents

Introduction: ‘There may be not one marvel to speak of in a century, and then [...] comes a plentiful crop of them’	1
• Chapter outline.....	10
Chapter One: Placing the Middlebrow and the Middlebrow Place	19
• ‘The British, with their tidy minds / Divide themselves up into kinds’: between the brows.....	22
• “I am not an Intellectual and don’t wish to be thought one”.....	27
• ‘This literary allusion not a success’: playing with the classics.....	35
• The places and communities of middlebrow reading.....	45
• ‘Good service for the ordinary intelligent reader’: the role of the Book Society.....	51
• The fantasy of the ideal home.....	59
• The home in flux.....	64
• Servants and the geography of the home.....	70
Chapter Two: ‘Adventures of the everyday are much the most interesting’: Finding Room for the Domestic Fantastic	78
• Minding Ps & Qs: commonsense, etiquette, and inheriting the Gothic.....	81
• ‘The duration of this uncertainty’: questioning the fantastic.....	89
• ‘Slipping from waking into sleep’: turning points.....	93
• The complicit reader and the style(s) of the fantastic.....	100
• ‘The Oedipus complex was a household word, the incest motive a commonplace of tea-time chat’: the middlebrow Freud and the fantastic language of psychoanalysis.....	110
Chapter Three: ‘My Vixen’: Marriage and Metamorphosis	119
• ‘Hold her husband and share his ecstasy’: marriage and sexual knowledge.....	124
• Woman-as-animal.....	133
• Woman-as-plant.....	142
• Non-fantastic versions of metamorphosis.....	146
• Observer and observed.....	153
• Metamorphosis of the domestic.....	163
Chapter Four: “Creative Thought Creates”: Childlessness and Creation Narratives	167
• <i>Frankenstein</i> : the modern creation novel.....	169
• ‘A rather muddled magic’: (lack of) method in the domestic fantastic.....	172
• Blurring the line between creator and created.....	176
• The creative power of desire and the difficulty of identity.....	182
• Adoption, agency, and non-fantastic creation.....	190
• “I hate her and I love her and – I’m half afraid of her”: power struggles.....	198
• <i>Miss Hargreaves</i> , madness, and the God complex.....	207

Chapter Five : ‘She can touch nothing without delicately transforming it’ :	
Re-creating Self in <i>Lolly Willowes</i>.....	215
• ‘A sort of extra wheel’: Laura and the Willowes’ home.....	216
• ‘One of these floating aunts’.....	224
• ‘A Constant Flux’: the quasi-metamorphosis of Laura Willowes.....	235
• ‘The bugaboo surmises of the public’: subverting stereotypes of the witch...238	
• ‘You are too lifelike to be natural’: Laura’s Satan.....	248
• ‘She smiled at the thought of having the house all to herself’: Laura’s independent space.....	254
Conclusion: “Is this really a part of the house, or are we dreaming?”: Fantastic Novels as Alternative Spaces.....	270
• Why the fantastic?.....	274
• The fantastic as investigation.....	283
• After the Second World War.....	287

Introduction

‘There may be not one marvel to speak of in a century, and then [...] comes a plentiful crop of them’¹

There is no longer any need to apologise for studying middlebrow literature. Since Nicola Beauman’s pioneering 1983 survey *A Very Great Profession: the Woman’s Novel 1914-39* (which sought to ‘correct [an] imbalance and to present a portrait through their fiction of English middle-class women during the period between two world wars’²), the middlebrow has become steadily more ‘respectable’ as an object of investigation. While Beauman conceded that she was not primarily writing literary criticism, instead choosing ‘to write about these novels because I loved them’³, her successors have been more objective and analytical. Nicola Humble’s invaluable study *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s*, with its ‘central aim [...] to rehabilitate both the term and the body of literature to which [it refers]’⁴, tells of the middlebrow ‘remain[ing] firmly out in the cold’⁵ in academia; Alison Light’s *Forever England* (1991) writes similarly that studies of literary culture as a whole (incorporating the middlebrow as an important aspect) are still ‘felt as heretical by twentieth-century critics’.⁶ Thankfully this is broadly diminishing – in no small part because of these works by Humble and Light – and (though to speak of cultural legitimacy seems at odds with a middlebrow sensibility) exploration of this literature

¹ David Garnett, *Lady into Fox* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1922 repr.1928) p.1

² Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman’s Novel 1914-39* (London: Persephone Books, 1983 repr.2008) p.3

³ *Ibid.* p.343, p.335

⁴ Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 repr.2007) p.1

⁵ *Ibid.* p.1

⁶ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991) p.ix

has been given an academic legitimacy.⁷ Yet there has been little recognition of a significant trend in the interwar years, particularly in the 1920s, for fantastic middlebrow novels (I follow many writers in middlebrow studies by concentrating on its most prolific and characteristic era, the interwar years.)⁸ By identifying and exploring this popularity for the fantastic, greater light can be shed upon the ways in which middlebrow writers interrogated contemporary societal anxieties (particularly those to do with marriage and singleness, as shall be seen), as well as expanding an understanding of the early twentieth-century middlebrow novel as a complex and multifaceted entity.

Writers about the middlebrow have tended towards the broad or the specific. Works like Beauman's and Humble's consider the middlebrow as a whole, albeit divided into valuable subsections devoted to particular concerns and aspects of identity.⁹ Others who have addressed the area have tended towards examining specific authors or topics. Alison Light thus shapes an argument based on the 'idea of a conservative embracing of modernity'¹⁰ – what she terms 'conservative modernism' – by examining the oeuvres of Ivy Compton-Burnett, Agatha Christie, Jan Struther, and Daphne du Maurier. Fifteen years later, Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei read

⁷ Janet Galligani Casey even argues that study of the middlebrow 'has largely enabled the very concept of hierarchy in the literary realm'. [Janet Galligani Casey, 'Middlebrow Reading and Undergraduate Teaching: The Place of the Middlebrow in the Academy' in Erica Brown and Mary Grover (eds.) *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: the Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 25-36, p.28]

⁸ As Alison Light writes, "'Between the wars" is a convenient and workable fiction' [Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* p.18]; I have not incorporated precise years into my title because exact parameters for the domestic fantastic are impossible to draw, and wartime dates (though helpful as an approximate) are not flexible enough: the vogue arguably started in 1922, with *Lady Into Fox*, but while Frank Baker's *Miss Hargreaves* is (since published in 1940) technically a wartime book, the war is never mentioned and it more closely allies with a peacetime sensibility.

⁹ Beauman divides *A Very Great Profession* into chapters discussing war, surplus women, feminism, domesticity, sex, psychoanalysis, romance, and love, while Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel* has chapters on readers and reading, class, home, family, and gender.

¹⁰ Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* p.11

‘domestic modernism’ (‘how the meaning of home and the narration of domestic space were articulated in the impressive upsurge of women novelists in Britain between the two world wars’¹¹) primarily through the novels of E.H. Young, and most recently Erica Brown has considered comedy in the middlebrow novel through a discussion of Elizabeth Taylor and Elizabeth von Arnim.¹² In turn, Rosa Maria Bracco (although she has also written a short monograph on the middlebrow as a whole¹³) chose to frame her study *Merchants of Hope* through responses to the First World War, while others have focused on the middlebrow predominantly as an extension of, or antagonism to, modernism.¹⁴ Any selective investigation must run the risk of attempting to extrapolate to a generality that which is only true locally. This risk remains, of course, present in this thesis, but by considering the middlebrow through a genre lens, I intend to reveal and examine one important facet of the middlebrow which has been hitherto sidelined, rather than embarking upon a comprehensive definitional exercise.

Writing on the fantastic has, perhaps understandably, been rather more theoretical than that on the middlebrow. Tzvetan Todorov is widely regarded as a pioneer in fantasy theory, and his 1970 work (translated into English in 1975) *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* was the first treatment of the fantastic to move away from the inventories of fantastic ‘ingredients’ favoured by writers such as

¹¹ Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006) p.1

¹² Erica Brown, *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel: Elizabeth von Arnim and Elizabeth Taylor* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012)

¹³ Rosa Maria Bracco, *Betwixt and Between: Middlebrow Fiction and English Society in the Twenties and Thirties* (Melbourne, Victoria: University of Melbourne, 1990)

¹⁴ Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Providence, RI; Oxford: Berg, 1993); Stella Deen, *Challenging Modernism: New Readings in Literature and Culture 1914-45* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2002); Lynne Hapgood and Nancy L. Paxton, *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel 1900-1930* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000)

Propp and Penzoldt.¹⁵ I shall expand upon various approaches to the fantastic in my second chapter, but theorists (notably W.R. Irwin, Eric Rabkin, T.E. Apter, Neil Cornwell, and Kathryn Hume¹⁶) have chiefly developed or responded to Todorov's theory with the aim of establishing an overarching theory of the fantastic, independent of period or 'brow'. Even when fantastic theory has been investigated through a specific framework (as the Marxist theorist Rosemary Jackson does¹⁷) there is rarely a sense of compartmentalising subsections of the fantastic, or analysing one branch of its manifestation in actual novels (this is largely because Todorov and other fantasy theorists write as structuralists.) In essence: there has thus far been no middlebrow study which has explored the fantastic at any length, and no critic of the fantastic who has specifically considered the middlebrow.¹⁸

While practical uses of 'middlebrow' and 'fantastic' will be explored throughout this thesis, they are both slippery terms which have often been employed in disparate ways by different writers. Although the word 'middlebrow' has been the subject of considerable debate, the shifting nature of its application tends to be ideological rather than definitional. That is, the fundamental differences in use concern value statements, rather than understanding of the terminology. 'Highbrow', 'middlebrow', and

¹⁵ Vladimir Propp, Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson, and Laurence Scott, *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1958); Peter Penzoldt, *The Supernatural in Fiction* (London: Peter Nevill, 1952). Although from different critical standpoints, there is striking similarity between the approaches of these theorists, both of whom tackle fantastic novels with a logic that dismisses nuances and extradiegetic factors.

¹⁶ W.R. Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); T.E. Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Neil Cornwell, *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984)

¹⁷ She concludes: 'Structurally and semantically, the [modern] fantastic aims at dissolution of an order experienced as oppressive and insufficient.' [Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981) p.180]

¹⁸ The closest is the handful of pages devoted to middlebrow authors, including Edith Olivier and Rachel Ferguson, in Glen Cavaliero, *The Supernatural and English Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) pp.86-89

‘lowbrow’ have straightforward physiognomic associations (‘high-browed’, denoting a ‘lofty forehead’ dates to 1848¹⁹), but by the early twentieth century were much more common as descriptions of cultural predilections. ‘Highbrow’ developed from an adjective (dating to 1884) into a noun by 1908, while the noun ‘lowbrow’ was already in use in 1901.²⁰ ‘Middlebrow’ did not follow immediately, and in 1940 Robert Graves and Alan Hodge still prefer the term ‘mezzo-brow’,²¹ but the earliest use of ‘middlebrow’ as a noun is dated to 1924 (and, as an adjective, to 1928).²² The label is not, then, solely a retrospective classification (in the way that modernism is) but it had a multiplicity of applications, which will be addressed in chapter one.

As an (intentionally loose) initial definition for the adjective, which is developed at length in my first chapter, ‘middlebrow’ can be considered to apply to the variety of novel most commonly read by members of the middle-class. An investigation into the class-consciousness of the middlebrow novel, or the varying class distinctions of the middlebrow reader, would doubtless be fruitful (and has, indeed, been performed in *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*²³) but I have found it simplest, and close enough to truth for practical purposes, to assume this correlation. I do not, however, consider the middlebrow solely a feminine endeavour. Of the authors I consider, several are men, and fruitful work has been done on the masculine middlebrow in a recent

¹⁹ "high-browed, adj." <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86864> OED Online, Oxford University Press. (accessed September 18, 2013).

²⁰ "lowbrow, n. and adj. (and adv.)" <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/110661>; "highbrow | high-brow, n. and adj." <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/86863> OED Online, Oxford University Press. (accessed September 18, 2013). It should be noted that the entry for ‘lowbrow’ has been updated for the OED’s third edition, while ‘highbrow’ has not.

²¹ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-end: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940) p.52

²² "middlebrow, n. and adj." OED Online. Oxford University Press <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/252048> (accessed September 18, 2013)

²³ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* pp.57-107

collection of essays on that topic edited by Kate Macdonald.²⁴ Having said that, many of the concerns used to organise my chapters (sexuality, childlessness, spinsterhood) are predominantly feminine ones, and while interwar middlebrow literature is not an exclusively female domain, there is a definite leaning in that direction.²⁵

Turning to the fantastic, terminology is used with even greater elasticity (as well as being necessarily belated, since the field of fantasy theory was essentially non-existent before the second half of the twentieth century.) The malleability of the words ‘fantastic’ and ‘fantasy’ in different theorists’ hands has led to what Kathryn Hume describes as an ‘inchoate imprecision of wordlessness’,²⁶ and Walter Scott’s 1827 article on the topic, one of the earliest pieces of critical writing to name and address the fantastic, refers to its ‘dark and undefinable nature’²⁷ – not dissimilar to the title of this thesis. (I, like Scott – and like Woolf, from whom the quotation is taken²⁸ – intend the word ‘dark’ to allude to the nebulous and obscured nature of the fantastic, rather than the horrific or macabre.) Paradoxically, the freedom and removal of barriers which inspire many fantastic novels is antithetical to theory, which demands precision and categorical barriers (even if these are muddied by introducing reception and perception). Theorists have simply failed to agree on the placement of dividing lines.

²⁴ Kate Macdonald, *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr. Miniver Read* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

²⁵ It should be noted that the feminine is not, of course, necessarily feminist. Many of these novels are neither regressive nor progressive (as regards a feminist agenda) but simply reflective.

²⁶ Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* p.3

²⁷ Walter Scott, ‘On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman’ *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1/1 (1827) 60-98, p.62

²⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928 repr.2008) p.63

I believe the most useful understanding of the terminology is to consider a Fantasy²⁹ novel one set in a world different from the reader's own, subject to different and distinct natural (or perhaps unnatural) laws, whereas a fantastic novel is one which incorporates one or more elements of the fantastic within a recognisable world, subject to the same natural laws as the reader's (or, at least, this is the premise as the novel begins) – ‘almost in our time, happening in Oxfordshire amongst our neighbours’³⁰ being the example framed in Garnett's *Lady into Fox*. Thus the fantastic exists in constant and contingent interconnection with the real, and in turn comments back upon the real; flights of imagination remain firmly tethered to the ground. To quote Amaryll Chanady:

In the former, nothing surprises the characters, since magic is the norm, while in the latter, the protagonist is surprised and often terrified by a situation that his culture has taught him to reject as impossible.[...] [T]he second example belongs to the fantastic, since the world view coincides with our own, and is threatened by an event which does not fit into the logical code expressed by the rest of the text.³¹

This thesis is concerned only with fantastic novels, rather than Fantasy novels, since the former were read far more widely among interwar middlebrow readers, and offer more valuable reflections back upon that audience – since the ‘actual’ is never abandoned. The debate regarding whether the fantastic ought to be considered a mode, a genre, or an impulse is one which is only limitedly useful, and almost entirely irresolvable.³² These divisions tread uncertain critical territory and terminology, with

²⁹ Following Eric Rabkin's lead, I will use a capitalised ‘F’ for Fantasy, to distinguish it from other uses of the word, such as ‘fantasy theorists’ – a term I will use as the easiest way in which to group those with disparate definitional bases. [Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* p.29]

³⁰ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.2

³¹ Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York: Garland, 1985) pp.2f. Chanady is comparing the ‘marvellous’ and the fantastic; her ‘marvellous’ here incorporates Fantasy and magic realism.

³² Merely sampling three critics: Todorov incorporates the word ‘genre’ into the title of his work, Jackson labels the fantastic a mode, between the marvellous and mimetic, and Cornwell borrows

porous boundaries between them – few of which would have occurred to middlebrow readers and writers, and none of which are very illuminative about why and how the middlebrow used the fantastic. Simply for ease of discussion, ‘subgenre’ shall be used to designate the middlebrow or domestic fantastic, as a compromise between various terms.

If the definition of ‘fantastic’ were extended to more abstract applications as an impulse or hysteria (Kathryn Hume, for instance, argues that all literature is composed of both mimetic and fantastic impulses³³), examples could be found in an enormous range of middlebrow novels, from the surreal conversations in E.M. Delafield’s *Diary of a Provincial Lady* to the heightened dialogue of Ivy Compton-Burnett’s novels, to every misunderstood contretemps which permeates the writings of Wodehouse and Saki. By drawing a tighter net around the definition of the fantastic, and thus the body of novels studied, the investigation is not only more manageable but more revealing, as those authors who used more stringent genre structures were also more obviously making a choice to occupy a separate diegetic space, still within the reach of the domestic novel.

It need hardly be added, after the work done by the various writers about the interwar middlebrow mentioned above, that the period saw a significant rise in the number of middlebrow domestic novels, and it would be superfluous to attempt to replace the list, created by Briganti and Mezei, of ‘converging factors [which] contributed to the proliferation of the interwar domestic novel’:

Jakobson’s term to call the fantastic the ‘dominant’. [Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.32; Cornwell, *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* p.145]

³³ Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* p.xii

the post-war reification of the home, domestic values and Englishness; the campaign of 'homes fit for heroes'; the mass production, advertising and consumption of domestic goods; the increase in women's magazines; and the implementation of government policies like the marriage bar, National Insurance Acts and dole office practices that removed women from the workplace in spite of their immense contribution to the war effort.³⁴

As such, in combining an examination of the domestic novel and the fantastic novel, I have coined the (fairly logical) term 'domestic fantastic' to apply to the novels I consider. The fantastic incident(s) need not take place within the confines of the home in these narratives – indeed, as shall be seen, places contiguous to, or imitative of, the home are often the most fruitful sites of the fantastic – but domestic space is challenged or changed as a direct result of the fantastic in all the examples I consider. Todorov suggests that there is 'a curious coincidence between the authors who cultivate the supernatural and those who, within their works, are especially concerned with the development of the action, or to put it another way, who seek above all to tell *stories*.'³⁵ Although middlebrow writing is not unable to adapt highbrow literary approaches, the primary importance of 'stories' is one of the reasons why the middlebrow is particularly fertile ground for the fantastic.³⁶ While the fantastic often works its way backwards to affect the style of a novel, it must be predominantly evident scenically ('narratological rather than verbal',³⁷ as Gillian Beer writes of *Lolly Willowses*) – that is, through plot, character, and the set pieces of a novel. The middlebrow novel is perfectly suited to this approach where more avant-garde

³⁴ Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* p.2

³⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cornell Paperbacks; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975) pp.162f

³⁶ The middlebrow novelist E.F. Benson, for example, laments that 'anything like a plot or story is crowded out' of E.M. Forster and Virginia Woolf, and argues that 'the art of fiction [is] practically equivalent to the art of story-telling, whether the story in question is the physical story of a soul or one of more material adventure'. [E.F. Benson, 'Two Types of Modern Fiction' *London Mercury*, February (1928) 418-427, p.426]

³⁷ Gillian Beer, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner: "The Centrifugal Kick"' in Maroula Joannou (ed.) *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 76-86, p.78

narratives, with a focus upon ‘fluidity, fragmentation, [and] indeterminacy’,³⁸ would not be.

With uncertain and contested definitions from two directions, the domestic fantastic finds itself in dual critical wildernesses, on the peripheries of two spheres, but it is in this overlap that unconventional and interesting narratives can be found, as well as a demonstration that middlebrow authors did not, contrary to Bracco’s suggestion, refuse ‘to deviate from comfortably familiar presentations.’³⁹ The familiar and unfamiliar are, instead, allowed to confront one another, in a dialogue which re-forms the everyday lived experience of the reader.

Chapter outline

The following chapter outline will also introduce the principle novels under consideration and, where necessary, provide justification for the inclusion of certain authors within the range of this thesis. In many instances, writing about the middlebrow has been intended to rehabilitate or aggrandise novels perceived to be unduly neglected, or (to quote Hilary Radner) ‘legitimate certain women writers as artists by establishing them within the literary canon’.⁴⁰ (For instance, Briganti and Mezei state that ‘[r]ather than dooming Young’s texts, along with many other domestic novels, to be shelved under ‘culturally significant’ writing, we claim a

³⁸ Rita Felski, ‘Modernism and Modernity: Engendering Literary History’ *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, (1994) 191–208, p.196

³⁹ Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* p.10

⁴⁰ Hilary Radner, ‘Extra-Curricular Activities: Women Writers and the Readerly Text’ in Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (eds.) *Women’s Writing in Exile* (London & Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 251–267, p.252

literary status for them'.⁴¹) Revisionists often follow the process laid out by John Guillory:

In the case of devalued or forgotten works, revaluation typically appeals to the “real” value or quality of the work; nothing other than a strong assertion of such value is likely to succeed in the actual institutional circumstances of canonical revision.⁴²

In this manner, a number of middlebrow novels have been ‘rescued’ since the 1980s, with reprint publishers such as Virago and Nicola Beaman’s own Persephone Books seeking to instate, in the same way as Briganti and Mezei for E.H. Young, a corrective measure against a book’s exclusion from the canon: as Beaman stated in one of the early *Persephone Quarterly* newsletters, ‘We are going to find it quite tricky thinking up openings for these pieces that do not always begin, “it is a mystery why this book has been forgotten”’.⁴³

My thesis may seem to work in the opposite direction. Not only do I resist evaluative assessments and attempts to add to a canon (or even to what Jane Marcus calls ‘the highly-privileged “non-canonical”’⁴⁴), I pull certain authors and novels away from their current standing as ‘legitimate culture’ and back into the hinterland of the middlebrow. From the works I have chosen, Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowes* and (to a lesser extent) David Garnett’s *Lady Into Fox* have both been subject to attempted inclusion in an expanded definition of modernism.⁴⁵ As Humble

⁴¹ Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* p.12

⁴² John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1993) p.26

⁴³ Nicola Beaman, 'Persephone Quarterly 2', (London: Persephone Books, 1999) p.4

⁴⁴ Jane Marcus, 'Bluebeard's Daughters: Pretexts for Pre-Texts' in Alice A. Parker and Elizabeth A. Meese (eds.) *Feminist Critical Negotiations* (Philadelphia: John Betjamins Publishing Company, 1992) 19-32, p.26. Her examples include Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*.

⁴⁵ Gay Wachman discusses the place for *Lolly Willowes* in the ‘mainstream, modernist canon’, while Jane Garrity argues that it should not suffer ‘exclusion from studies of literary modernism’ – although

writes of modernism, '[w]e can negotiate its definition endlessly, but it brings us no closer to seeing the literary map of the time as contemporaries would have seen it.'⁴⁶ It is this 'literary map' that I privilege when choosing which novels to incorporate in my study, and (as I will argue below) *Lolly Willowes* and *Lady Into Fox* belong with the other middlebrow texts in my schema, since that is the way they were perceived by their initial public, or by sizeable portions of it. This is also one of the reasons that I have considered only novels, rather than plays, poetry, or short stories; novels were the primary reading choice of the middlebrow public. (Q.D. Leavis was condemnatory when she wrote that 'for most people "a book" means a novel',⁴⁷ but it is a practicable assumption.) The other reason this thesis concerns novels alone is because it is the narrative form most suited to a sustained and clear use of the fantastic.

In dividing my chapters, I have considered first (in chapter one) the non-fantastic middlebrow, to ground exploration of the domestic fantastic in an understanding of its broader audience. This discussion is indebted to Humble and Beauman for various debates and topics used as lenses for the establishment of both the middlebrow identity and contemporary interpretations of this identity. I explore how middlebrow literature was classified, received, and understood both by its intended readership and by critics including the Leavises, Woolfs, and Desmond MacCarthy (the 'middlebrow fantasy', in this context, is a series of misreadings perpetuated by these writers) and

others like Wendy Mulford have championed instead its 'supremely-crafted traditional art'. [Gay Wachman, *Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties* (London; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001) p.3; Jane Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p.148; Wendy Mulford, *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics 1930-1951* (London: Pandora, 1988) p.16]

⁴⁶ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.25

⁴⁷ Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Pimlico, 1932 repr.2000) p.6

the fundamental importance of the home in discovering, procuring, reading, and discussing this literature. In delineating the middlebrow ethos, and especially the role of place in reception and distribution of literature, this chapter uses Delafield's *Provincial Lady* novels (1930-1940) and the Book Society (founded in 1929) as representative voices of the middlebrow, and I privilege mimetic writing as one of the cornerstones of the middlebrow novel. The other 'middlebrow fantasy' is the image of the home as stable and passive: this chapter introduces potentially disrupting influences in the middlebrow home (particularly the evolving role of servants) which prepare space for the introduction of the domestic fantastic.

My second chapter looks broadly at the domestic fantastic as a subgenre, relating it to Todorov and other fantasy theorists, but (more importantly) considering the ways in which the middlebrow novel must compromise and make allowances to permit the fantastic, battling against fundamental facets of its identity, particularly a prioritisation of commonsense and etiquette. I explore the structures of domestic fantastic novels, particularly the pivotal moments at which the fantastic enters a narrative, and how this is affected by paratextual and extradiegetic factors. These influences build up a portrait of the tacitly complicit middlebrow reader, whose participation in the dynamics of credulity and suspended incredulity shows them not to be passive dupes but acquiescent in the sustainment of the fantastic. Finally, stylistic approaches are considered: domestic fantastic novels tend towards either a dispassionate (faux)biographical approach or a more ornate, often symbolic, style. The latter of these is considered in relation to the language of Freudianism, a theory which (as will be shown) was selectively well-known to middlebrow readers and, though often laughingly dismissed, the source of potential domestic instability.

The final three chapters are divided into manifestations of the fantastic, in a manner not dissimilar to Farah Mendlesohn's ('these categories are determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world'⁴⁸) but, rather than her structurally vast categories (portal-quest, immersive, intrusive, and liminal) I have chosen the specific manifestations of metamorphosis, creation, and witchcraft (which I read as an intermediate between metamorphosis and creation). I make no pretence that this is an exhaustive list of the ways in which the fantastic can appear in a narrative; for instance, Jorge Borges' supposedly-exhaustive list ('the basic devices of all fantastic literature are only four in number: the work within the work, the contamination of reality by dream, the voyage in time and the double'⁴⁹) contains none of my classifications, and I none of his. Rather, those I have chosen are those most commonly found within domestic fantastic novels (particularly the most influential examples) and those most clearly related to specific middlebrow concerns, as detailed below.

To divide the forms of the fantastic at all may appear reductive or in danger of short-circuiting theory and returning to the cataloguing endeavours of Propp or Penzoldt. Their techniques, however, should not be thrown out with the bathwater, despite the work of Todorov and those after him. Rather, a division of fantastic narratives based on internal elements must also take extradiegetic catalysts or effects into account. By lending weight to both internal and external factors – that is, the forms and structures of fantastic novels alongside their readers and those readers' implied and actual

⁴⁸ Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008) p.xiv

⁴⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, Donald A. Yates, and James East Irby, *Labyrinths; Selected Stories and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p.18

responses – it is possible to arrive at a more nuanced portrait of the interrelation between society and the fantastic.

I read metamorphosis, in my third chapter, in relation to changing dynamics of female sexuality in marriage – the idea of woman-as-animal – primarily using David Garnett's *Lady Into Fox* (1922). This novel (depicting Silvia Tebrick's metamorphosis into a fox) was possibly the first, and certainly the most influential, fantastic novel of the 1920s – and affirmably (if not solely) middlebrow. Garnett was aware of the nuances of cultural placement, and keen to resist his father's idea that *Lady Into Fox* be 'issued as a *jeu d'esprit* for the intellectual public'.⁵⁰ Although D.H. Lawrence did indeed condemn the novel as a 'childish *jeu d'esprit* for the grown-up nursery', Garnett was applauded by highbrow critics including Leonard Woolf and Desmond MacCarthy – but *Lady Into Fox* was also 'immediately read and talked about by the fashionable world', so much a part of popular consciousness that by 1924 it could inspire the fashion slogan 'Leopard Into Lady'.⁵¹ Although a highbrow success, then, it was also widely regarded as an exemplar of the middlebrow; even MacCarthy's description of it as 'a perfect literary nick-nack'⁵² situates it as a domestic ornament, adding to the décor of literature rather than a supporting wall. Other metamorphosis novels (including two tales of metamorphosis into plants, Ronald Fraser's *Flower Phantoms* [1926] and John Collier's *Green Thoughts* [1932]) and non-fantastic narratives about marriage to animals (particularly Collier's 1930 *His Monkey Wife*) contribute to a picture of metamorphosis narratives playing with

⁵⁰ David Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955) p.246

⁵¹ D.H. Lawrence and H.T. Moore, *Collected Letters*, 2 vols. (2; London: Heinemann, 1962) p.800; Leonard Woolf, 'Mr. Garnett's Second' *The Nation & The Athenaeum*, 26/04/24 (1924) p.115; Desmond MacCarthy, *Criticism* (London: Putnam, 1932) pp.223-9; Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* p.248; 'The Leopard and the Lady', *Birmingham Post* (02/12/24), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/29 (Press Cuttings vol.27a, 1924), University of Reading

⁵² MacCarthy, *Criticism* p.225

fantastic extrapolations of metaphor and simile to engage with the contemporary Stopesian debates and changing opinions about a middle-class woman's sexual role in marriage. The fantastic permits discussion of that which, while no longer taboo, was still culturally uncertain and sensitive; it is an opening up of the scope of the permissible.

My fourth chapter turns attention to the question of spinsterhood and childlessness in the 1920s; the often-cited two million 'surplus women'. I compare Edith Olivier's 1927 novel *The Love-Child* (about a lonely spinster who accidentally conjures her imaginary childhood friend into life) and Elinor Wylie's *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, published a year earlier (and concerning an eighteenth-century priest, Peter Innocent, commissioning a nephew, Virginio, to be created from glass) with the quintessential modern creation narrative, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). By contrasting characters' methods and motivations for creation, I show how *Frankenstein's* connection between creativity and knowledge is replaced by that between creativity and artistry, spontaneity, and questions of selfhood and identity. Desire for scientific knowledge is replaced by desire for (a form of) parenthood, thus more closely corresponding with the perceived social ill of childlessness. By 1940, when Frank Baker's *Miss Hargreaves* was published, attention had turned away from 'those endless old maids of the country that are now so constantly the butt of novelists and short story writers',⁵³ as described by a commentator in 1926, and Baker's novel shows how the creation narrative shifted in the period to a broader examination of power, life, and the afterlife.

⁵³ C.H.W., 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*' *The Bookman*, March (1926) 326-327, p.327

Sylvia Townsend Warner's 1926 novel about witchcraft, *Lolly Willowes* (the focus of my fifth chapter), responds to another aspect of the status of unmarried women in the 1920s; a lack of autonomous space. Although, as discussed, *Lolly Willowes* has been the subject of attempted canonisation, it was received as determinedly middlebrow (though not, as Warner ruefully noted, a bestseller⁵⁴) when it was published.

Described as 'one of the "smart" things to read this season',⁵⁵ *Lolly Willowes* was also the first (albeit unpopular⁵⁶) choice of the new Book-of-the-Month Club in America.

I resist the dominant reading of the novel as a triumphant 'escape from imperialist patriarchy',⁵⁷ and instead use the text to explore how quasi-metamorphosis and the (re)creation of self work in tandem with the spinster's search for selective (rather than total) freedom.

Finally, I consider how peripheral placement is articulated spatially throughout domestic fantastic fiction, and how the subgenre more broadly relates to reality, as a way of observing and commenting upon the readers' lives and concerns. As W.R. Irwin writes, when 'the amazing is kept in plausible contact with the normal, the literary result will be fantasy of lowered intensity but greater speculative interest.'⁵⁸ Intensity (as immersion in a different sphere) is a form of separation resisted by the fantastic, which permits speculation into the narrative world and back towards the reader, by signposting their reasons for engaging with the text. In trying to identify

⁵⁴ Sylvia Townsend Warner, Val Warner, and Michael Schmidt, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner in Conversation' *PN Review*, 8/3 (1981) 35-37, p.36

⁵⁵ 'The Modern Witch', *Newcastle Daily Journal & North Star* (26/06/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁵⁶ Janice Radway notes that the partners were 'swamped [...] with returned copies.' [Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) p.195]

⁵⁷ Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt, 'Footsteps of Red Ink: Body and Landscape in *Lolly Willowes*' *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49/4 (2003) 449-471, p.449

⁵⁸ W.R. Irwin, 'The Metamorphoses of David Garnett' *PMLA: Publication of the Modern Language Association*, 73/4 (1958) 386-392, p.392

any overarching motivation for writing and reading the domestic fantastic, I conclude that it forms narratives which are neither unduly optimistic nor pessimistic, but primarily investigative – allowing the reader to be both observer and observed, experiencer of and commentator upon the ‘actual’ – offering a new, unusual, and valuable vantage upon (and resetting of) the everyday experience of the middlebrow public.

Chapter One

Placing the Middlebrow and the Middlebrow Place

One of Rose Macaulay's characters defines a middlebrow novel as 'not exactly stupid, and not quite tosh [...] [b]ut no intellectual background'.⁵⁹ Similarly, a review of Richmal Crompton's *Journeying Wave* (1938) labels the novel 'pleasant – neither more nor less. If it were less, it would be gossip; if it were more, it would be genius'.⁶⁰ The wide scope between gossip and genius – between 'stupid' and 'intellectual' – indicates the critical and receptive wilderness for this variety of novel in the interwar period. In the same year that Crompton's novel was published, a very similar spectrum is suggested for the house belonging to Edith Olivier (author of *The Love-Child*):

It might be a keeper's cottage if it were a little less elegant; and if it were not quite so sober and workaday, it could easily be one more of those small pavilions of pleasure which were dotted about the park during the eighteenth century.⁶¹

Homes and narratives are treated with the same appraising eye. The house and the novel are assessed for the space they provide, how inhabitable they are, and for what they reflect back upon the person living with (or in) them. Through both fiction and life outside the text, a sense of, and the determining of, physical and cultural place is fraught in the interwar period for middlebrow readers. There is a tussle between a celebration of the domestic – not only as a home but as a paradigm for the middlebrow's ideology, reception, and reading process – and the unravelling fantasy of the archetypal stable home.

⁵⁹ Rose Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances* (London: Methuen, 1928 repr.1986) p.163

⁶⁰ Anthony Bertram, 'New Novels' *Times Literary Supplement*, 02/07/38 (1938) p.447

⁶¹ Edith Olivier, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938) p.244

The middlebrow's mediocrity (in the true sense of the word) encourages reception which peers over boundaries, into categories either side. Q.D. Leavis' consequent accusation that 'the middlebrow is anxious to get the best of both worlds'⁶² employs the belittling vocabulary of social nervousness. Woolf, meanwhile, dismisses intermediacy as inherently self-defeating: middlebrows are, she writes, 'neither one thing nor the other. [...] Their brows are betwixt and between'.⁶³ Ultimately the reading (or misreading) of middlebrow novels depends upon the codes and structures by which they are understood.

For many readers, this engagement with codification was self-reflexive; mimesis forms the chief point of identification not only with the characters and situation of a middlebrow novel but (by extension) with the unknown, broad community of middlebrow readers and writers (as will be discussed).⁶⁴ It is difficult to single out a disproportionately significant middlebrow novel – a facet of middlebrow's difference from (and resistance to) highbrow literature is the absence of a delineated Great Tradition; every middlebrow novel is, in effect, *the* middlebrow novel. Bearing this in mind, it is still useful to choose an example as a continuing thread. E.M.

⁶² Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* p.197

⁶³ Virginia Woolf, 'Middlebrow (1942)' in Leonard Woolf (ed.) *Collected Essays: Volume Two* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972a) 196-203, p.198. In this essay/letter, Woolf suggests similarities between highbrow and lowbrow, also discussed by John Collier in an unpublished review of his own fantastic novel *His Monkey Wife*: 'This is a strange book. It clearly sets out to combine the qualities of the thriller with those of what might be called the decorative novel. Like most things which are extremely far apart, these two are also surprisingly near to one another.' Collier appears to define his middlebrow work as the overlapping of disparate attempts ('sets out' is hardly the same as 'accomplishes') rather than its own entity. [John Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimp* (London: Robin Clark, 1930 repr.1994) p.xv]

⁶⁴ Northrop Frye's influential definitions of mimesis would ascribe that favoured by middlebrow authors 'low mimesis' since 'the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity'. The adjective 'low' is useful in comparison to 'high mimesis' (for characters whose 'authority, passions, and powers of expression [are] far greater than ours') but loses value outside of this binary. I, thus, use 'mimesis' with the same definition Frye attributes to 'low mimesis'. [Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957) p.34]

Delafield's popular *Provincial Lady* novels, published between 1930 and 1940 in four instalments, are intentionally a representative voice for the interwar middle-class, middlebrow woman (the *Provincial Lady* is described by *Time and Tide* as 'a complete and therefore composite portrait of, not only one woman, but a type of woman, a state of society, a phase of life'⁶⁵) – and, since they are not fantastic, can act as the 'control group' of middlebrow literature. Delafield describes the first instalment as 'a casual chronicle of the everyday life of an everyday group'⁶⁶ and reports receiving many letters, 'almost all of [which] said in effect the same thing: This is an exact transcription of my own life.'⁶⁷ Her self-effacing, ironic diaries take experience of the domestic world as both their catalyst and their principal subject – and it is the language and structure of the home that form the outlines of her perceptions of reality, as well as the language for 'decoding' literature. Lest it appear that the novels present an unduly saccharine concept of the home, it should be noted that Delafield also describes her inspiration as 'the many disconcerting facets presented by everyday life to the average woman.'⁶⁸ Throughout her contribution to *Titles to Fame* (from which the above quotations are taken) Delafield iterates the term 'disconcerting', in relation to the diaries' topic, creation, and reception alike. Rather than asserting the stability of the home, Delafield hints towards its more disturbing and uneasy aspects; those aspects that distort a neat codification of the readership and the middlebrow prototype.

⁶⁵ Anon., 'Review of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*' *Time and Tide*, 20/12/30 (1930a) 1609-1610, p.1609. This article purports not to be a review, since that would 'seem almost too personal, for week by week the *Diary* has appeared in these columns'.

⁶⁶ E.M. Delafield, 'The *Diary of a Provincial Lady*' in Denys Kilham Roberts (ed.) *Titles to Fame* (London: Thomas Nelson & Son 1937b) 121-138, p.123

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.131

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.125

**‘The British, with their tidy minds / Divide themselves up into kinds’⁶⁹ :
between the brows**

Novels which use the fantastic invite their own (often competing) structures for analysis, as will be addressed in the next chapter – from Tzvetan Todorov’s structuralism to Rosemary Jackson’s Marxism – but the choice of evaluative practices is no less crucial for middlebrow literature as a whole. Much of the discussion and antagonism regarding middlebrow literature in the interwar period can be attributed to misreadings; that is, choosing an inappropriate code by which to interpret.

Middlebrow writers and readers, as shall be seen, privilege the home as the site of literary activity and use the language of the domestic to discuss and understand literature. This refusal to acknowledge a chasm between literary and other activities is one of the sources of angst for those interwar critics seeking to rationalise the cultural placement of the middlebrow – led by the Leavises and their attempts variously to understand, dismiss, and ridicule. Q.D. Leavis’ influential study *Fiction and the Reading Public* professes to ‘take account of the fiction that does not happen to be, or to have become, literature.’⁷⁰ In this sentence, she ostensibly appears to embrace the possible differences between inherent and interpreted literary value. She ultimately refuses, however, to recognise any estimable semantic code beyond the literary, and evolves her own fantasy of the middlebrow.

To begin with, Leavis dismisses the role of the intellect, and suggests that ‘the reading habit is now often a form of the drug habit’,⁷¹ degrading the reading of the novels in question to an instinctive or habitual urge. Habits are intrinsic to the experience of the

⁶⁹ Pont and E.M. Delafield, *The British Character Studied and Revealed* (London: Collins, 1938) p.18

⁷⁰ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* p.xxxiv

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p.7

everyday, yet Leavis' chosen collocation precludes an affirmative reading of the commonplace. The reader has (in her model) abdicated any autonomy, and is at the mercy of their 'fix'. Similarly, she writes that 'this body of writing has exerted an enormous influence upon the minds and lives of English people'⁷² By suggesting that the 'body of writing' is active in the reading relationship, rather than the 'English people', Leavis disempowers the non-highbrow reader, and her use of 'body' in close proximity to 'minds and lives', and the words 'exerted an influence', promotes a somatic phraseology debased and separate from the intellectual, as though middlebrow novels had an inevitably negative effect on the body as a form of intoxicant or disease.

Leavis is not alone in suggesting the vocabulary of drug addiction; this image is acknowledged by the middlebrow community, often in a humorous manner (tacitly recognising the limitations of this interpretive model), but in Leonora Eyle's guide for spinsters, *Unmarried But Happy*, she writes:

The employment of leisure is another thing that may bring dangers. Cinema-going and novel-reading are excellent pastimes, but they can easily become something of a drug. Some films, of course, like some novels, inspire and stretch the mind, but to get into the habit of seeing a film – any film – several times a week or of borrowing a light "escape" novel from the library almost every day can become a sort of drug.⁷³

Again, it is the quality of the work in question which leads Eyles to suggest a narcotic comparison, but it is significant that the activities she warns against involve an engagement with entertainment outside the home – going either to the cinema or the library. Although the library's 'escape novel' presumably returns with the reader to

⁷² Ibid. p.xxxiii

⁷³ Leonora Eyles, *Unmarried But Happy* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1947) p.81

the home, this breach of the domestic exacerbates the denial of reality which is a symptom of drug abuse.

For drugs, of course, are often a route to resisting reality and causing the everyday to be transformed (and oneself to be transformed with it, however temporarily).

Fantastic novels are susceptible to comparison with hallucinogenic drugs, however much they seem to cling to the reality surrounding the fantastic occurrence. It is an image made concrete in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, where her perspective changes through growing and shrinking after eating the food she discovers. The idea of the fantastic being brought about by eating is teasingly mentioned in Elinor Wylie's 1926 novel *The Venetian Glass Nephew*:

This impression was the more amazing, in that Angelo Querini believed in neither apparitions nor fables save as the results of an imperfect digestion and an inferior intellect.⁷⁴

The humour with which Wylie satirises the attribution of intellectual interpretations to bodily causes is reflected in the way middlebrow colloquialisms use the metaphors of reading as somatic or addictive: 'can't put it down' and 'immersed in this book', for instance. A review of *The Provincial Lady Goes Further* speaks correspondingly of reading in '100-page doses'.⁷⁵ Idiomatically however, these expressions playfully comment upon the inseparability of the literary and prosaic, rather than Leavis' intention: to separate middlebrow reading from highbrow reading, and do so through somatic images debasing the middlebrow beyond civilised activity. It is a metaphor which can be used humorously and knowingly (by many middlebrow writers),

⁷⁴ Elinor Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew* (London: William Heinemann, 1926) pp.81f

⁷⁵ Francis Iles, 'New Fiction' *Time and Tide*, 12/11/32 (1932) 1253-1254, p.1253

anxiously (as with Eyles) or, with Leavis, as the basis for a misreading of middlebrow codes.

Ironically, in an essay critiquing Dorothy L Sayers as prototypical of ‘the *educated* popular novelist’, Leavis uses a corporeal (rather than critical) term for her own response, describing the writing as ‘nauseating’, adding that novelists of this variety are ‘really subjects for other kinds of specialists than the literary critics.’⁷⁶ Lurking behind this phrase are the silent collocations ‘medical specialist’ or even ‘psychoanalyst’ – given the rising belief caused by Freudianism that hallucinogenics (as indicative of an inability to control the mind and its projections) were not the exception but the rule.⁷⁷

In describing herself as nauseated, Leavis reveals her own neurosis. As Humble notes in *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, Leavis ‘demonstrates a palpable fear of fiction run wild, proliferating beyond control’.⁷⁸ This proliferation threatens highbrow critics on two levels: novels may ‘usurp’ the techniques of literature, or may simply be produced at too fast a rate, to too wide an audience – clashing with the highbrow celebration of the minority.⁷⁹ Indeed, as Steven Fischer notes, the lowering costs of book production in the twentieth century meant that, rather than the reserve of the

⁷⁶ Q.D. Leavis, ‘The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers’ *Scrutiny*, VI (1937) 334-340, p.334

⁷⁷ See Virginia Woolf, *Reviewing* (Hogarth Sixpenny Pamphlets; London: Hogarth Press, 1939) p.20 for the somewhat satirical point that ‘with some differences the medical custom might be imitated – there are many resemblances between doctor and reviewer, between patient and author.’

⁷⁸ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.18

⁷⁹ F.R. Leavis’ choice of the name ‘Minority Press’ indicates this pride in the quality, and he assumes as unquestionable truth that ‘only a few are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment’ [F.R. Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (Minority Pamphlets; Cambridge: The Minority Press, 1930) p.4.] Similarly, Eliot suggests that ‘it is an essential condition of the preservation of the quality of the culture of the minority, that it should continue to be a minority culture.’ [T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948) p.107] J.B. Priestley is loudest amongst those who object to the fact that ‘the very term “popular novelist” is beginning to look like an insult.’ [J.B. Priestley, ‘Some Reflections of a Popular Novelist’ *London Mercury*, XXVII/158 (1932) 135-142, p.141]

minority, ‘the book had become a mass commodity’.⁸⁰ This rapid increase in novel-publication, and widespread literacy⁸¹ – John Carey states that ‘[t]he difference between the nineteenth-century mob and the twentieth-century mass is literacy’⁸² – challenged the supremacy of the minority, and preclude careful ascription or taxonomic control over the literary marketplace.

Secondly, there is also a sense (for Leavis) that this ‘proliferation’ was a disorder which would infect the home: that reading women, and especially reading servants, will undermine the efficiency of the household with their addiction, fed by this uncontrolled procreation. The intellectual’s role becomes one of implementing judicious birth control; a loaded image in the wake of works such as Marie Stopes’ *Married Love* (1918). Just as pregnant maids are discharged as issues of awkward household anxiety in many novels of the period,⁸³ so Leavis suggests the overproduction of literature threatens the stability of the home.

Without an appropriate literary language to describe or ascribe middlebrow works, definitions often depend upon what the middlebrow is not. Even within Delafield’s novel, a character (self-reflexively) seeking a similar work can give only a formula of anti-criteria:

⁸⁰ Steven Fischer, *A History of Reading* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003) p.295. He gives the example that, in Germany, ‘raw materials had accounted for 30 per cent of a book’s price in 1870, but only 12 per cent in 1912.’

⁸¹ Ninety per cent of the population in England in 1900 were literate. [Ibid. p.297]

⁸² John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992) p.5. Fischer calls literacy in the twentieth century the ‘union card to humanity’. [Fischer, *A History of Reading* p.301]

⁸³ See, for example, Rachel Ferguson, *Alas, Poor Lady* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), Dorothy Whipple, *The Priory* (New York: Macmillan, 1939)

Not a detective novel, not a novel about politics, nor about the unemployed, nothing to do with sex, and above all not a novel about life under Nazi régime in Germany.⁸⁴

Given these strictures, it is difficult to pinpoint the middlebrow. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s first recorded use of 'middlebrow' as a noun, from 1924, is: 'Ireland's musical destiny, in spite of what the highbrows or middlebrows may say, is intimately bound up with the festivals.' A year later, in *Punch*, the illustration is more satirical:

The BBC claim to have discovered a new type, the "middlebrow". It consists of people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like.⁸⁵

Presumably these instances are superseded by colloquial or spoken use since both examples anticipate readerly knowledge of the term (and its implications). Early use of 'middlebrow' thus sets the tone for its connotations; *Punch* in particular (though themselves labelled middlebrow by Leavis)⁸⁶ bases its pejorative definition upon that which the middlebrow is not. This definition suggests that middlebrow reception of literature takes place on dual planes: the actual reading process, and the aspirational reading process, as though the reader were readying themselves for a stride into the highbrow. The middlebrow reader is depicted as peeping into the highbrow category in the manner of a social inferior eavesdropping at a party.

"I am not an Intellectual and don't wish to be thought one"⁸⁷

This interpretation is fundamental to the most prevalent interwar misreading of middlebrow writers: that they are simply the 'stale, second-hand, hollow' counterparts

⁸⁴ E.M. Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime' *The Provincial Lady* (London: Macmillan, 1940 repr.1947) 371-529, p.434

⁸⁵ "middlebrow, n. and adj.". OED Online. June 2013, Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/252048> (accessed September 21, 2013)

⁸⁶ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* p.76

⁸⁷ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime' pp.477f

of their highbrow cousins, with ‘an appearance of literariness’ easily seen through by those with any aptitude.⁸⁸ Indeed, Leavis adds that ‘these [writers] are to some extent undoubtedly conscious of what they are doing (and so are able to practise more adroitly on their readers)’.⁸⁹ ‘Practise [...] on’, an image redolent of both doctor and deceiver, implies that readers (and lesser writers) are incognisant and helpless – relating to T.S. Eliot’s later statement that ‘we should not consider the upper levels as possessing *more* culture than the lower, but as representing a more conscious culture’.⁹⁰ Leavis thus presents readers of these texts as victims preyed upon by devious writers; passively, almost involuntarily, reading the books provided. Central to Leavis’ misreading of middlebrow intention is the concept of awareness, with her assumption that divergence from her primary model of literature must be caused by deliberate deception or oblivious naivety.

Leavis’ rhetoric echoes Gustav Le Bon’s influential 1895 work *The Crowd*, in its portrayal of the semi-conscious mass. Le Bon depicts crowds as ‘extremely suggestible, impulsive, irrational, exaggeratedly emotional, inconstant, irritable and capable of thinking only in images – in short, just like women.’⁹¹ Association in the period between the middlebrow and the feminine⁹² further enabled highbrow critics to

⁸⁸ Leavis, ‘The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers’ pp.142f. Similarly, Desmond MacCarthy suggests in ‘Popular Writers’ that ‘Popular taste [...] likes barefaced imitations of the qualities it understands as much as those qualities themselves.’ [Desmond MacCarthy, *Experience* (London: Putnam, 1935) p.283]. He implies that the act of repetition is itself comforting, and middle- and lowbrow readers thrive on recognition, in contrast to Ezra Pound’s famous mantra of the period ‘make it new’.

⁸⁹ Leavis, ‘The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers’ p.141

⁹⁰ Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* p.48

⁹¹ Carey’s paraphrase: Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* p.27

⁹² Much could be written on the topic of this association but, as an example, Orwell writes in ‘Bookshop Memories’ (1936) that ‘what one might call the *average* novel – the ordinary, good-bad, Galsworthy-and-water stuff which is the norm of the English novel – seems to exist only for women’. [George Orwell, *Narrative Essays*, ed. George Packer (London: Harvill Secker, 2009b) p.41] As mentioned in my introduction, I believe there *is* an association between the middlebrow and feminine, but not an exclusive one.

dismiss the middlebrow as the voice of crowd hysteria⁹³ – propounding a them/us dichotomy without permitting an equivalent responding voice from ‘them’, and thus transmuting the middlebrow voice into an unreasoning mob. The anonymous mob is, indeed, the frivolous and malevolent model of gossip writ large. Although middlebrow readership does embrace a wider, intangible community, it does not (of course) follow that they are unreasoning or de-individualised. Indeed, the same argument is levelled in the other direction, with highbrow and middlebrow commentators using identical images of ‘the sheep-like crowd who follow the dictates of highbrow literary critics’ (or whichever ‘brow’ they are believed to be unthinkingly following) to discredit each other.⁹⁴

Many highbrows of the period pre-empt Bourdieu’s tenet that middlebrow/middle-class literature is ‘a culture of pastiche’, always in a reverential relationship with ‘legitimate culture’.⁹⁵ In the (later) view of Dwight Macdonald, ‘[t]he special threat of Midcult [his equivalent of ‘middlebrow’] is that it exploits the discoveries of the avant-garde.’⁹⁶ ‘Exploitation’, however, need not mean imitation: instead, middlebrow writers could adopt and adapt ‘avant-garde’ techniques, with or without experiments with the fantastic. It is curious that a Macmillan’s Reader’s Report could write of Delafield’s *Nothing Is Safe*, which deals with the psychological aftermath of

⁹³ As noted in the title chosen by Clare Hanson, *Hysterical Fictions: The "Woman's Novel" in the Twentieth Century* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000)

⁹⁴ George Birmingham, *Book Guild Bulletin* (July 1930), cited in Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* p.25; c.f. also p.194; J.B. Priestley, 'High, Low, Broad' *The Saturday Review*, 20/02/26 (1926) 222-223, p.222. Cuddy-Keane notes how Woolf mocks this image in ‘Middlebrow’ – “The hungry sheep – did I remember to say that this part of the story takes place in the country?” – and goes on to explore imaginatively the various possible levels of Woolf’s sheep metaphor. [Melba Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p.27]

⁹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) p.327. Carey offers an interestingly divergent view, that ‘[t]hough it usually purports to be progressive, the avant-garde is [...] always reactionary’ since it defines itself in its difference from, and ‘its ability to outrage and puzzle the mass’. (Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* p.18)

⁹⁶ Dwight Macdonald, 'Masscult and Midcult II' *Partisan Review*, 27/Fall (1960) 589-631, p.605

a divorce upon two children: ‘She cannot, of course, shift our point of view suddenly from the consciousness of Julia to objective narration, or skip suddenly into the head of Terry’;⁹⁷ generally techniques such as free indirect discourse, unusual focalisation, internal monologue, and stream-of-consciousness were sufficiently widespread to be accepted by the middlebrow, and used without directly duplicating. It is perhaps disingenuous of Rosa Maria Bracco to suggest that middlebrow authors intended their work to ‘keep the canon of nineteenth-century fiction, as it understood it, alive and functioning by safeguarding it against modernism.’⁹⁸

Indeed middlebrow writers, rather than being either oblivious to or unquestioningly echoing experimental forms of writing (the alternatives asserted by highbrow critics) could react with balanced criticism. Novelist E.F. Benson writes in 1928 that stream-of-consciousness is ‘nothing more than skimming off the scum that is continually rising to the surface of the brain’; Priestley suggests it is the ‘sloppiest of all methods’, and Rose Macaulay’s parody of the technique in *Crewe Train* elicits the response: “‘I suppose,” said Denham doubtfully, “Jane did think like that. I suppose she was a little queer in the head.””⁹⁹ When middlebrow writers do use these techniques, they can be misread as failed imitations by their refusal to forfeit the commonsense and self-effacement essential to their middlebrow voice, demonstrated here by Denham’s tone of rationality (even though she herself is often left outside the brow schema, bewildered by each strata).

⁹⁷ Macmillan’s Reader’s Report (20/05/36) on *Nothing Is Safe* by E.M. Delafield. (British Library, *Society of Authors* archive, Add.MSS.54927)

⁹⁸ Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* p.12

⁹⁹ Benson, ‘Two Types of Modern Fiction’ p.424; Priestley, ‘Some Reflections of a Popular Novelist’ p.139; Rose Macaulay, *Crewe Train* (London: Methuen, 1926 repr.1985) pp.122f. In another of Macaulay’s novels, *Keeping Up Appearances*, it is ironically the servant (‘morning woman’) who speaks in a stream-of-consciousness style, described thus: ‘still the stream flowed, until, like the weariest river, it ran somewhere safe to sea.’ [Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances* p.59]

Even when fanciful or fantastic, this middlebrow voice insists upon a Denham-like practicality and domestic rationality: it must exist harmoniously within everyday experience. Literary activity is not permitted to supersede the domestic – an attitude to which Delafield alludes frequently, especially after the protagonist herself becomes a published author: ‘Aunt Mary hopes that my writing does not interfere with home life and its many duties, and I hope so too’.¹⁰⁰ Delafield emphasises the middlebrow’s lack of undue veneration for ‘Literature’ in the *Provincial Lady* novels, particularly the final volume wherein an iterated theme is that wartime conditions will ensure people are ‘almost *forced* to take to books’.¹⁰¹

Prentention is anathema to the middlebrow (the fact that the *Provincial Lady* is ‘unpretentious’ is singled out as her most characteristic attribute by the critic Henry Seidel Canby¹⁰²) and, while Delafield writes flippantly, there is a recognition that reading is an activity on the same level as going to the cinema or for a drive; taking up time in the day, rather than an atemporal, purely intellectual exercise. Priestley refers to ‘the ultra-ultras’¹⁰³ in a 1931 *Book Society News* as shorthand for the ultra-highbrow, an expression used frequently in this publication to separate unsympathetic highbrows from the sympathetic middlebrow. Storm Jameson uses ‘ultra’ with the same disparagement in her description of occasions when modernist techniques fail:

The flames, the burning intense phrases, might have leapt – and reduced the characters to ashes. Which is precisely what happens in those ultra-modern

¹⁰⁰ E.M. Delafield, ‘The Provincial Lady Goes Further’ *The Provincial Lady* (London: Macmillan, 1932 repr. 1947) 123-260, p.227

¹⁰¹ Delafield, ‘The Provincial Lady in Wartime’ p.523

¹⁰² Quoted in Rachel R. Mather, *The Heirs of Jane Austen: Twentieth-Century Writers of the Comedy of Manners* (New York: P. Lang, 1996)p.44

¹⁰³ J.B. Priestley, ‘Brute Cult’ *Book Society News*, October (1931) 8-9, p.9

novels written in sharp jerky sentences, splendidly destitute of verbs. And reminiscent of nothing so much as of a fat woman with palpitations.¹⁰⁴

Her own language is intentionally (one presumes) heightened, written with ironically unorthodox syntax and conflicting imagery – brought to earth with a feminised, but deliberately grotesque, image. In a similar vein, Walpole writes in 1937 that the ‘novel in general now has become so coldly sophisticated that we, as readers, are constantly made to feel that we are fortunate indeed to have met anybody as intelligent and well educated as the author.’¹⁰⁵ In the same article, he suggests that ‘intelligence’ and ‘creative imagination’ are antagonistic forces, and the sense pervades the Book Society’s publications that overtly-demonstrated intellect was inelegant and poor form, even if possessing this intelligence was positive. Writing about Rebecca West’s *The Thinking Reed* in a 1936 *Book Society News*, Julian Huxley states that ‘there is very much besides intellection here’.¹⁰⁶ Huxley demonstrates the uneasy status of cleverness in middlebrow reception by substituting the unusual word ‘intellection’ (which sounds as though one were sampling intellect) for ‘intellect’ or ‘intelligence’, and by apologising for any hint of its presence.

A middlebrow intellectual inferiority complex is thus transformed into a superiority complex, whereby openly flaunted intellect is a social faux-pas rather than a merit, as shown by Delafield:

Pamela lavishly announces that I am very, very clever and literary – with customary result of sending all the very young gentlemen into the furthest corner of the room, from whence they occasionally look over their shoulders at me with expressions of acute horror.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Storm Jameson, *The Georgian Novel and Mr. Robinson* (London: William Heinemann, 1929) p.35

¹⁰⁵ Hugh Walpole, 'Review of *And So - Victoria*' *Book Society News*, May (1937) p.5

¹⁰⁶ Julian Huxley, 'Review of *The Thinking Reed*' *Book Society News*, April (1936) p.7

¹⁰⁷ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further' pp.222f

Social anxiety about ‘cleverness’ is here dramatised into spatial isolation – even while bringing the readership on side with the implication that the Provincial Lady does not consider herself to be ‘very, very clever’ (the duplicated modifier acting in the same way as ‘ultra ultra’¹⁰⁸), nor feels any regret that she is not – yet because of the label she is banished to a corner. Throughout the *Provincial Lady* diaries, Delafield attaches heightened semantic significance to terms including ‘literary’ and ‘distinguished’ as labels which provoke horror in the protagonist – ‘literature’ and ‘literary’ are divorced spheres in the Provincial Lady’s vocabulary, the latter as an anti-domestic (and thus unsympathetic) term:

Conversation runs on personal and domestic lines, and proves thoroughly congenial, after recent long spell of social and literary exertions.¹⁰⁹

The dichotomy of ‘congenial’ and ‘domestic’ against ‘literary exertions’ (which is given the language of a strenuous physical regime) is a clear indication of the middlebrow ethos, where mimicry of the ‘literary’ is far from a sought-after label. G.M. Young’s image of a cohesive literary organism, from 1937, is a more useful paradigm than that of imitation:

A true, a sound, a social culture must be middlebrow, the highbrow elements serving as exploratory antennae, to discover and capture new ideas for the middlebrow mass to assimilate.¹¹⁰

This view, though sympathetic, is still too reductive in its idea of middlebrow ‘assimilation’; a term which does not sufficiently allow middlebrow mediation to these ‘new ideas’. Young’s critical language – ‘true’; ‘sound’; ‘social’ – offers only

¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere in the diaries, examples include ‘Very, very distinguished Novelist’; and ‘Conversation very, very literary and academic’. [E.M. Delafield, ‘Diary of a Provincial Lady’ *The Provincial Lady* (London: Macmillan, 1930 repr.1947) 1-121, p.26; p.99]

¹⁰⁹ E.M. Delafield, ‘The Provincial Lady in America’ *The Provincial Lady* (London: Macmillan, 1934 repr.1947) 262-370, p.343

¹¹⁰ Cited in Bracco, *Betwixt and Between: Middlebrow Fiction and English Society in the Twenties and Thirties* p.46

vague, abstract epithets for a middlebrow culture, with malleable interpretations and no literary connotation. The terminology resonates with a moral register, rather than a scholarly one. More fundamentally, in depicting the middlebrow as purely derivative (something which persists even in Nicola Humble's sympathetic study of the middlebrow, where she terms it 'an essentially parasitical form'¹¹¹), he does not recognise the significance of the middlebrow emerging *mise-en-scène* from within, and for, a domestic milieu.

While Young writes with an objective voice (if not an entirely objective theory), most contemporary commentators nailed their colours to the mast by way of collective pronouns. Each writer on the topic assumes an acquiescent audience and a shared community of likeminded 'brows'. In an essay titled 'Broadbrow', Priestley lists his criteria, and writes that if the reader can tick them off, 'you are a Broadbrow. In short, you are the salt of the earth, and, of course, one of us.'¹¹² Similarly, Woolf's 'Middlebrow' includes 'We highbrows read what we like and do what we like and praise what we like.'¹¹³ In both cases, the use of 'us' and 'we' reasserts a collective response and collective identity. Priestley's evolution from 'you' to 'us' represents a process of inclusion, or welcoming into the fold, but when claiming that highbrowism is something innate, with no verifiable means of assessment, MacCarthy makes an unusual choice of pronoun:

You cannot even, alas, be certain of qualifying as a highbrow by hard work, by reading the best books, looking at the best pictures, hearing the best music. You may get an entrance on those terms, but you will be found out when you are there.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.11

¹¹² Priestley, 'High, Low, Broad' p.223

¹¹³ Woolf, 'Middlebrow (1942)' p.199

¹¹⁴ MacCarthy, *Experience* p.310

Rather than ‘we’ or ‘they’, MacCarthy addresses those outside the highbrow community, and the ambiguity of ‘you’ – that is, whether it is plural or singular – puts those addressed in an uneasy isolation. His image of ‘an entrance’, accompanied by the spatially specific ‘when you are there’, conjures the idea of a venue, and an experiential place to be visited or occupied – if one is permitted beyond its cordoned-off parameters. A very similar spatial image is used in Forster’s *Howards End*, focalised through the intellectual outcast Leonard Bast:

They had all passed up that narrow rich staircase at Wickham Place, to some ample room, whither he would never follow them, not if he read for ten hours a day. Oh, it was no good, this continual aspiration. Some are born cultured; the rest had better go in for whatever comes easy.¹¹⁵

Again, a physical locale (here elevated as though it were celestial) is equated with intellectual success, which cannot be accessed by studiousness alone. There is even the hint of Bast’s ill-fated literary leanings in the free indirect discourse (signalled by the sigh ‘Oh’): ‘some are born cultured’ has an echo of the letter Malvolio reads in *Twelfth Night*; that ‘some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.’

‘This literary allusion not a success’:¹¹⁶ playing with the classics

Mention of Shakespeare highlights a paradox in middlebrow treatment of a stratification of writers. Despite a refusal to elevate a select few contemporary writers, a literary heritage remains significant in a formation of the middlebrow voice. Although Leonard Woolf claims that ‘in the majority of cases before a great work of art is accepted generally as such, it is accepted by a few highbrows and rejected by the

¹¹⁵ E.M. Forster, *Howards End* (London: Penguin Books, 1910 repr.2000) p.67

¹¹⁶ Delafield, ‘Diary of a Provincial Lady’ p.14

general public',¹¹⁷ this process was true, if at all, for only a specific period of past literature – no latent mass popularity has come to fruition for, say, *Ulysses*. Both middlebrows and highbrows of the interwar period claim 'ownership' of the classic novels as their inherited legacy, and consider themselves the continuation of this heritage. While recent adherents of middlebrow literature have sought to widen the canon, or promote anti-canoncity (borrowing Stanley Fish's argument of 'interpretive communities', that 'there are no fixed texts, but only interpretive strategies making them'¹¹⁸), interwar middlebrow writers rarely challenge the idea of an extant (past) canon. Even Hugh Walpole, when advocating literary egalitarianism in the *Book Society News*, does not deny the existence of 'Masters':

I don't know what the first class is. There are no classes in literature. There are about half a dozen Masters, and then the writers whom we prefer.¹¹⁹

These 'Masters', for the middlebrow reader, are represented most significantly by Dickens, the Brontës, and Shakespeare, all of whom are frequently alluded to in the *Provincial Lady* novels. The extent of literary allusion within the diaries is such that a spoof (by Delafield herself, in her regular column 'The Sincerest Form...') appearing in *Time and Tide* a week after the final column of the first book, suggests that the 'Provincial (but not necessarily a Lady)' reads her children *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.¹²⁰ Throughout the series, allusions are generated by everyday actions provoking the Provincial Lady's memory, rather than direct acts of reading. As Humble notes, these mentions tacitly identify and encourage a united readership which 'appreciates the emblematic power of certain fictions to map the tribulations of

¹¹⁷ Leonard Woolf, *Hunting the Highbrow* (Hogarth Essays: Second Series; London: Hogarth Press, 1927) pp.14f

¹¹⁸ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) p.171

¹¹⁹ Hugh Walpole, 'Review of *Festival*' *Book Society News*, November (1931) 1-2, p.1

¹²⁰ E.M. Delafield, 'The Sincerest Form...' *Time and Tide*, 30/12/30 (1930a) p.1605

their daily lives.’¹²¹ These moments go even a step further, and blur the lines between fiction and daily life, so that the novels are not so much distanced referents as effectively memories on the same relational level as everyday experience. Burnt porridge reminds the Provincial Lady of *Jane Eyre*; seasickness of Mrs. Gamp; the need to ‘make an effort’ of Mrs. Dombey.¹²² While Mrs. Pankerton’s references to ‘Dostoeffsky’ and Hardy indicate her character is pretentious,¹²³ the Provincial Lady’s choices of allusion mark her out as a middlebrow model. When choosing books to pack for holiday, for example, she ‘[f]inally decide[s] on *Little Dorrit* and *The Daisy Chain*, with *Jane Eyre* in coat-pocket. Should prefer to be the kind of person who is inseparable from volume of Keats, or even Jane Austen, but cannot compass this.’¹²⁴ (It is perhaps surprising to see that Austen cannot be compassed, viewed as intellectually superior to Dickens, Yonge, and Brontë, given that several reviewers cite Austen as Delafield’s precedent.¹²⁵)

The elaborate process of deciding which books to pack presents the novels as travel companions; an idea reflected within an article by George Gordon in the August 1931 *Book Society News*. Gordon sees ‘old and well-tried favourites’ as the reserve of middlebrows and writes that a holiday is opportunity ‘to escape from the present time and recover the quieter spaces of one’s past.[...] Mix, therefore, in your holiday reading the old with the new, and for that time at least let the old predominate.’¹²⁶

Despite writing in a newsletter intended to sell *new* books, Gordon sets up an ideal reader who loves books of the past, and considers them in the manner of social

¹²¹ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.173

¹²² Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.14; Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in America' p.367; Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further' p.193

¹²³ Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.98; p.101

¹²⁴ Ibid.p.86

¹²⁵ Mather, *The Heirs of Jane Austen: Twentieth-Century Writers of the Comedy of Manners* pp.43f

¹²⁶ George Gordon, 'Holiday Reading' *Book Society News*, August (1931) p.11

companions invited into the reader's life and home. In the same way, Rachel Ferguson's semi-fantastic novel *The Brontës Went To Woolworths* (1931) is based around this imagined closeness between reader and classic author; the platitude that "They'll never die [...] they've made something that's going to go on"¹²⁷ is transformed into narrative fact (albeit an uncertain one). The family of avid readers within the novel make a common metaphor literal, and actually receive the Brontës into their home – with no clear barrier between fantasy and reality. It is precisely this sense of intimacy which middlebrow readers privilege; the belief in a human connection, rather than the analytical documentation of a Great Tradition. Members of this audience do not only know the books well as readers, they feel they know the characters well, as close social acquaintances. The same intimacy is reflected in contemporary reviews of the *Provincial Lady*: 'The Lady has become as well known as Queen Victoria and as much loved'; 'She has, through her diary, become the intimate friend of hundreds of people'.¹²⁸ Any supposed gap between literary and social relations is closed even further through these discourses of intimacy.

Rachel Ferguson's novel is an example of this identification with 'the Masters' taking place outside of those narratives which seem most closely aligned with the Victorian classics. While the *Provincial Lady* novels draw comparison with Jane Austen, and it does not take too audacious a critic to identify the influence of her great-grandfather on Monica Dickens' 1940s comic novels, this sense of literary sympathy is not exclusive to the domestic narrative. Even middlebrow writers exploring the fantastic treat this accepted canon as their bedrock and birthright – whether openly, as with *The Brontës Went To Woolworths*, or more covertly. H.C. Harwood, reviewing *Lolly*

¹²⁷ Rachel Ferguson, *The Brontës Went to Woolworths* (London: Ernest Benn, 1931) p.193

¹²⁸ Anne Armstrong, 'Review of *The Provincial Lady Goes Further*' *The Saturday Review*, 05/11/32 (1932) p.481; Anon., 'Review of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*' p.1609

Willowes, acknowledges this middlebrow embrace of antecedents, when labelling an exchange between Laura Willowes and Satan not (as might be expected) with reference to the Bible or *Faustus*, but ‘the conversations of an elderly Jane Eyre with a mellow Rochester.’¹²⁹ The fantastic is not considered to be divorced from the community’s shared cultural references, whereby middlebrow novels can act as a form of literary archive or re-imagined oral tradition, preserving (and contemporising) the reading experiences which influenced the middlebrow readership and helped form their literary identity – resisting a fantasy which isolates them from a cultural chronology.

Both antagonistic and generous critics in the 1920s and ‘30s – whether or not they acknowledged estimable antecedents for middlebrow writing predating the twentieth century – used an illusory framework of contemporary authors as a substitute for any semantic consensus. Often this exercise was a matter of simplistic qualitative comparison – when writing about Dorothy L Sayers, Leavis uses various names for shorthand assessment: Ouida, Marie Corelli, Baron Corvo (‘better than’), Joyce and Lawrence (‘worse than’), Naomi Mitchison and Rosamond Lehmann (‘belongs with’).¹³⁰ When Ivy Compton-Burnett wrote to Elizabeth Taylor ‘I never see books in terms of other books, or writers in terms of other writers, and I want simply to

¹²⁹ H.C. Harwood, 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*' *The Outlook*, 06/02/26 (1926) Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

¹³⁰ Leavis, 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers' pp.334-40. The various interpretations of Sayers' literary status are illuminating. While Leavis dismisses her (as has been seen), two middlebrow novelists consider her differently. Rachel Ferguson refers to her as 'that encyclopaedia of various specialized knowledge', and Clemence Dane, in the *Book Society News*, notes a number of highbrow quotations in *Busman's Honeymoon*, ending her review: 'Particularly charming is the Vicar with the passion for cacti! – I dare not say "cactuses" when I review Miss Sayers.' [Rachel Ferguson, *Passionate Kensington* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939) p.121; Clemence Dane, 'Review of *Busman's Honeymoon*' *Book Society News*, June (1937) p.6]

congratulate you on your achievement'¹³¹ she was expressing her frustration at an evaluative framework which relies upon the illusory ability to place authors into discrete groups – again, more like a social gathering than a literary genetics.

Storm Jameson provides one of few examples where stringent taxonomies are avoided, and her image of a literary landscape is more egalitarian:

[...] this teeming countryside in which we may meet casually Francis Brett Young, Walter de la Mare, Maurice Baring, James Joyce, Romer Wilson, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Norman Douglas, C. E. Montague, R. H. Mottram, Stella Benson, Virginia Woolf, Ford Madox Ford, T. F. Powys, E.M. Forster, Hugh Walpole, and a host of other men and women[...] all talented in a high degree.¹³²

Highbrow and middlebrow authors mingle indiscriminately, and the language of impromptu social encounter – ‘we may meet casually’ – indicates Jameson’s middlebrow sensibilities, as does her choice of a ‘teeming countryside’ over the archetype of urban literary gatherings. (This setting also, of course, is suggestive of a naturalist’s treatise, placing the reader instead as anthropologist.) The *Provincial Lady* novels, despite often referring to Victorian authors, seldom mention living writers. When these do appear, it is in the literal context of a *Time and Tide* party and the names used (including Rose Macaulay, L.A.G. Strong, and Ellen Wilkinson) appear in the *Time and Tide* serialisation but are edited out of the published version of the diaries, perhaps indicative of the transitory nature of such authors as literary landmarks.¹³³

¹³¹ Cited: Elizabeth Jane Howard, Introduction to Elizabeth Taylor, *A Game of Hide and Seek* (London: Virago, 1951 repr.1985) v-xi, p.v

¹³² Jameson, *The Georgian Novel and Mr. Robinson* pp.5f

¹³³ E.M. Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady at the "Time and Tide" Party' *Time and Tide*, 25/06/32 (1932a) 711-712

Understanding an author only in relation to others – who, in turn, are only understood in relation to others – avoids finding a suitable language to write about them, and acts as a chain of indefinite receptive deferment, whereby a genuine response can be perpetually avoided. Dependence upon a network divorced from novels' contents becomes closer to gossip than to literary criticism, and begins to resemble society columns' 'list of people present', or publishers' advertisements – indeed, Jameson's teeming countryside is echoed in this letter sent by James B. Pinker & Sons to Edith Olivier, enquiring about the possibility of being her agent:

In case my name is unknown to you, I may say that among my clients are Mr. Arnold Bennett, Mr. John Galsworthy, Mr. A.S.M. Hutchinson, Mr. Hugh Walpole, Mr. Compton Mackenzie, Mr. de la Mare, Mr. Frank Swinnerton, Mr. W.W. Jackobs [sic], Mrs. Stockley, and many other well-known authors, and I should like to be able to add your name to the list.¹³⁴

In this instance, the writers are evidently listed to impress, rather than analyse – and come with the 'Mr's and 'Mrs's favoured by reviewers and publishers, but omitted from Jameson's description, giving even greater a sense of being introduced to luminaries in a social setting.

Certain authors were so exemplary of a 'brow' that they could be detached from these frameworks, and used as shorthand – Hugh Walpole, for instance, is frequently proffered as a middlebrow-benchmark in the *Provincial Lady* novels,¹³⁵ not least for his role in running the Book Society (some of their own advertisements describe themselves as 'Mr. Hugh Walpole and his colleagues'¹³⁶). On occasion, an author's name need not even be stated openly: side glances were sufficient. J.B. Priestley's

¹³⁴ James B. Pinker & Sons, letter to Edith Olivier (09/06/27), Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Century, Edith Olivier Papers 982/228

¹³⁵ For example: Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in America', p.323; Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime', p.412

¹³⁶ Book Society, 'A Letter' November (1932) [unpaginated]

1932 BBC broadcast ‘To a High-Brow’ (which helped inspire Woolf to write ‘Middlebrow’ as a letter to the *New Statesman*) dismisses ‘authors entirely without feeling, who write about human life as an educated **wolf** might be expected to write about it’.¹³⁷ The play on ‘Woolf’/‘wolf’ is self-evident. In return, Woolf’s ‘Middlebrow’ includes the following description of Bloomsbury: ‘a place where lowbrows and highbrows live happily together on equal terms and priests are not, nor priestesses, and, to be quite frank, the adjective “priestly” is neither often heard nor held in high esteem.’¹³⁸ As well as pejoratively incorporating Priestley’s name, Woolf converts it from a noun into an adjective. In doing so she linguistically derogates Priestley to a ‘type’ and removes his authorial individuality, while also investing the word ‘priestly’ with connotations of false grandeur.

In the same way, Leavis asserts that ‘to the highbrow public “Ethel M. Dell” or “Tarzan” should be convenient symbols, drawn from hearsay rather than first-hand knowledge’.¹³⁹ Ethel M. Dell was the very popular author of over forty romance novels, generally considered to be towards the lower intellectual end of the middlebrow, or even, as E.M. Delafield writes when noting the curious similarity between their names, the reading material of servants.¹⁴⁰ In using inverted commas for both author and character, Leavis reinforces the idea of Dell as a symbol rather than a real person. She does not attempt to disguise the fact that her judgement is

¹³⁷ Cited in Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* pp.23f (Cuddy-Keane’s emphasis.)

¹³⁸ Woolf, ‘Middlebrow (1942)’ p.203

¹³⁹ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* p.35

¹⁴⁰ Delafield reports being told that “My housemaid has shelf upon shelf full of your books”, and concludes that she has been mistaken for ‘Miss X’ – where ‘Miss X’ is presumably Dell. [Delafield, ‘The Diary of a Provincial Lady’ p.124]. A spirited defence of Dell, in Patrick Braybrooke, *Some Goddesses of the Pen* (London: The C.W. Daniel Company, 1927), that she has ‘the secret of life’ (p.52) could only serve to hinder her reputation amongst intellectuals.

made without engaging in a direct reading act – indeed, she is proud of it, and extends this policy to an imperative, with the modal verb ‘should’.

While Leavis castigates middlebrow readers for undue moral outrage in avoiding writers like D.H. Lawrence,¹⁴¹ her advocated censorship shows more premeditated intent than that evinced by the middlebrow, as represented by the Provincial Lady, who is frequently curious about banned or ‘indecent’ novels:

[...] pallid young man who reads book mysteriously shrouded in Holland cover. Feel that I must discover what this is at all costs, and conjectures waver between *The Well of Loneliness* and *The Colonel's Daughter*, until title can be spelt out upside down, when it turns out to be *Gulliver's Travels*. Distressing sidelight thrown here on human nature by undeniable fact that I am distinctly disappointed by this discovery, although cannot imagine why.¹⁴²

Curiosity concerns the social implications of the book in question, and the expected consequent covert reading act, rather than the text itself. She both gives and anticipates this voyeuristic judgement, demonstrating the parallel middlebrow codes of social cohesion and the surreptitious hope that others will not cohere. Rather than the reading experience itself, the Provincial Lady's qualms surround the *discussion* of literature and the connotations which might reflect upon her, once again socialising the reading act. When receiving a letter suggesting that her own novel is ‘harmful to art and morality alike’, it is the thought that her servants might find the letter that occasions the greatest anxiety.¹⁴³ These anxieties are most prevalent when trying to secure a controversial novel in a public arena:

¹⁴¹ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* p.274

¹⁴² Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further' p.169

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* p.127

Ask for *Symphony in Three Sexes* at the library, although doubtfully. Doubt more than justified by tone in which Mr. Jones replies that it is not in stock, and never has been.¹⁴⁴

Similarly, when the Provincial Lady does consider reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, her usual locations of acquiring books prove fruitless:

Conversation in my immediate vicinity concerns [...] *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which everyone except myself seems to have read and admired. I ask unknown lady on my right if it can be got from the Times Book Club, and she says No, only in Paris, and advises me to go there before I return home. Cannot, however, feel that grave additional expense thus incurred would be justified, and in any case could not possibly explain *detour* satisfactorily to Robert.¹⁴⁵

Although Delafield does report middlebrow opinions which demonstrate some prudery – ‘old Mrs. B. observes that much that is published nowadays seems to her unnecessary, and why so much Sex in everything?’¹⁴⁶ – literary censorship is not championed in her writing. Avoidance of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is due to the impracticality of locating it and bringing it to the home (and the social etiquette of explaining the purchase to her husband, which would upset domestic equilibrium), rather than a moralistic imperative regarding the book's contents. The book would require smuggling as contraband goods, as though it were illegal drugs; the link Leavis saw between drugs and low literature is seen by the middlebrow, in terms of finding, buying, and living with books, to be more applicable to works like *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Humble suggests that, in bolder middlebrow novels of the period, familiarity with *Lady Chatterley's Lover* ‘is used to suggest broad-minded tolerance and an openness to new sexual mores and psychological issues’.¹⁴⁷ Although the Provincial Lady's readers would largely have shared her inability to bring this book to

¹⁴⁴ Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.9

¹⁴⁵ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further' p.141

¹⁴⁶ Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.85

¹⁴⁷ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.55

the home, Delafield relies upon at least a vague awareness of Lawrence's novel (or, more precisely, its reputation) in her reader in order for the humour of this moment to succeed.

In this public forum, the issues of distribution and etiquette combine to reinforce a peculiarly middlebrow inhibition. While highbrow readers were relatively unconcerned about the physical procuring of literature, the locations of acquiring and reading novels were paramount for the middlebrow reader, as were the consequent codes of social interaction.

The places and communities of middlebrow reading

Location and the construction of communities are central to the identity of 'brow' classifications in the period, whether through fixed locations or the absence of them. Highbrows, especially in popular consciousness, were associated with the specific location of Bloomsbury – this association was not neutral, and (as with 'Ethel M. Dell' for Leavis or 'wolf'/'Woolf' for Priestley), existed as often dismissive shorthand. Leonard Woolf satirises this trope by making caustic reference to pseudo-intellectuals 'lurking in the undergrowth of Cambridge, Oxford, Chelsea, Bloomsbury, and other favourable localities'¹⁴⁸, and Virginia Woolf famously queries the need to mention her location when writing about her work:

[a journalist] always finds space to inform not only myself, who know it already, but the whole British Empire, who hang on his words, that I live in Bloomsbury[.] Is your critic unaware of that fact too? Or does he, for all his intelligence, maintain that it is unnecessary in reviewing a book to add the postal address of the writer?¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Woolf, *Hunting the Highbrow* p.39

¹⁴⁹ Woolf, 'Middlebrow (1942)' p.196

By privileging the practical function of Bloomsbury ('postal address') over its ideological or cultural significance, Woolf disingenuously seeks to undermine the geographical shorthand that, elsewhere, she applies to others – dismissing Rose Macaulay as among 'the riff raff of South Kensington culture' and 'uneasy about Bloomsbury', despite publishing her through the Hogarth Press.¹⁵⁰ In turn, Macaulay's novel *Keeping Up Appearances* features a highbrow character bemused by a middlebrow periodical which refers to Bloomsbury as 'the very temple of the intellectuals'.¹⁵¹ In practice, adding this description (with its satirical 'very') was scarcely necessary, since readers were already aware of Bloomsbury's connotations. The fact that Titus, Laura's nephew in *Lolly Willowses*, lives in Bloomsbury is one of the several alienating factors when he moves to Laura's rural home.

Great Mop, Laura's village, (while aberrational for other reasons) is representative of the fictive middlebrow location – that is, a *type* of place, rather than a specific and locatable area. Creating a firm link between highbrows and a specific locality gives them an uncomfortable fixity (particularly given modernism's privileging of fluidity) whereas middlebrow readers inhabit more anonymous locations. This readership is defined either by suburbia or by rurality, both imprecise quantities and, since unplaceable, regarded as threatening – yet their relationship with space is less exclusive. Desmond MacCarthy refuses entry to all; by being spread out and

¹⁵⁰ (Virginia Woolf to Vanessa Bell, 25th May 1928): Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume 3 (1923-1928)*, eds Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975a) p.501. The Hogarth Press published several non-fiction books by Macaulay – for more on her involvement with The Hogarth Press, see Melissa Sullivan, 'The Middlebrows of the Hogarth Press: Rose Macaulay, E.M. Delafield and Cultural Hierarchies in Interwar Britain' in Helen Southworth (ed.) *Leonard and Virginia Woolf, The Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 52-73

¹⁵¹ Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances* p.147

unbounded, the places of the middlebrow are closed to no one. Even the privileging of the individual home as the point of reception, rather than the interactivity of literary society, amplifies this geographical anonymity and introduces the paradox of openness and privacy: the suburbs and villages are not exclusive, but the individual homes are sites of personal acquiring and reading, as opposed to literary salons which, though exclusive, are not private to the individual. There is no membership test to pass to own the middlebrow home, but almost all middlebrow fiction reinforces the importance and sanctuary of the private home, even if only to unsettle it later.

Middlebrow readership, as a group, is conceptual rather than concrete, and is partly defined by this abstract and dispersed geography. Similarly, the rural middle-class home could be considered only in the abstract, through representative homes of the everywoman, such as the Provincial Lady's and that of *Mrs. Miniver* (1939) by Jan Struther, or Laura Willows' countryside cottage. It is echoed in the upper-middle class homes which form the background of the fantastic occurrences which happen to Agatha Dobenham (*The Love-Child*), the Tebricks (*Lady into Fox*), the Carnes (*The Brontës Went To Woolworths*), and many others. Whilst the infinite openness of countryside, in contrast to the enclosure of domestic space, is explored in some fantastic literature of the period, the provinces were largely viewed by intellectuals as culturally insignificant and irrelevant. Delafield consistently exploits this perception in her *Provincial Lady* novels, basing the second novel of the series in both London and Devon as a means of comparing a middlebrow experience of the two. Having been asked to go and read a satire written by her friend Emma that will 'set the whole of London talking', the Provincial Lady says that, instead, she will be returning to the countryside:

What, shrieks Emma, *leaving London*? Am I mad? Do I intend to spend the whole of the rest of my life pottering about the kitchen, and seeing that Robert gets his meals punctually, and that the children don't bring muddy boots into the house? Reply quite curtly and sharply: Yes I Do, and ring off – which seems to me, on the whole, the quickest and most rational method of dealing with Emma.¹⁵²

Delafield does not necessarily endorse Emma's domestic vignette, which Emma aligns with insanity (indeed, Delafield counters this with 'most rational'), but this synecdochical portrait of rural life is pragmatically accepted by the Provincial Lady, undermining the surreal image Emma conjures as being the antithesis of London. (Similarly pragmatic is the Provincial Lady's ability to sever communication by hanging up – another approach possible in the private home but not in face-to-face literary society.) What Emma does not recognise is that the provincial, middlebrow choice is not one of isolation, but performed in a community of others (albeit in the abstract, and largely anonymous) whose shared outlook helped ensure the success of Delafield's novels. While reception of literature in the twentieth century was chiefly an individualised act, the tradition of concurrent reception and response (found in reading aloud to a group¹⁵³) is re-imagined, rather than replaced.

Reading, for this community, is an essential facet of the apparatus for interpreting and inhabiting the home. The home is read through the lens of literature, and literature is read in the midst of the domestic maelstrom: 'I pack frantically in the intervals of reading *Vice Versa* aloud'.¹⁵⁴ For the Provincial Lady, both activities here – packing and reading – are interwoven, equally domestic tasks. Her reading is part of the

¹⁵² Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further' pp.250f

¹⁵³ Face-to-face reading groups for discussion existed, but tended not to be middlebrow-focused, and were to a large extent all-male societies. [Jenny Hartley, *Reading Groups* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) pp.18ff] Elsewhere, reading aloud tends to be in the form of monologue from somebody granted a dominant position (e.g. an author giving a reading) rather than a democratic experience.

¹⁵⁴ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in America' p.280

everyday fabric of her activities as wife and mother; the ‘primary duty of every woman’ according to the final, ironic words of her novel in serialised form, omitted from the published version.¹⁵⁵ Delafield role-plays her own reception within her novels: the *Provincial Lady* is the paradigmatic domestic reader, and her engagement with literature can take place only in snatches. This sense of interruption and cacophony is mirrored by the diaries’ serialisation in *Time and Tide*, where Delafield’s voice is one among many. For example, the first excerpt appears beside a poem about butterflies by V.H. Friedlaender and a letter castigating conscientious objectors; nearby paratexts encompass a miscellany of advertisements, including Viyella’s ‘cosy intimate wear’; Allenby’s throat pastilles, and ‘Face Massage & Electrolysis: superfluous hair permanently removed leaving no scar’.¹⁵⁶ Fiction and the more mundane or (indeed) pragmatic aspects of the everyday intertwine, with each new *Provincial Lady* extract appearing both *mise-en-scène* and *in media res*. The middlebrow becomes part of a discourse about personal cosmetics and health cures, as well as the minutiae of the day.

Contemporary reviews of the *Provincial Lady* diaries reflect its interest in the place of reading, suggesting that ‘[i]t is a book for travelling, it is a book to read aloud, it is a bedside book’¹⁵⁷ and that it ‘should be read over a hot fire’.¹⁵⁸ For middlebrow readers, the place of reading is not simply functional, but has a symbiotically influential relationship with the book in question. These ‘serving suggestions’, as it were, indicate the perceived character and role of Delafield’s novels: a model of the fireside companion, even a like-minded substitute for a spouse. The archetypal

¹⁵⁵ E.M. Delafield, ‘The Diary of a Provincial Lady’ *Time and Tide*, 13/12/30 (1930b) p.1570

¹⁵⁶ *Time and Tide* (06/12/29), p.1474; p.i; p.1484; p.1483

¹⁵⁷ Armstrong, ‘Review of *The Provincial Lady Goes Further*’ p.480

¹⁵⁸ Marjorie Grant Cook, ‘Review of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 18/12/30 (1930) p.1084

depiction of husband and wife by the hearth, later emblematised (and problematised) in 1945 by *Brief Encounter*, is distorted to offer the middlebrow novel as a wholly sympathetic domestic companion.

The pragmatics of the reading process are not ignored – the Provincial Lady complains of not having time to read, or (as with *Lady Chatterley's Lover*) being unable to access certain books: 'my own part in [the conversation] being mostly confined to saying that I haven't yet read it, and It's down on my library list, but hasn't come, so far.'¹⁵⁹ Acquiring books is not an invisible element of the reading process: *Time and Tide*, for instance, notes that 'Readers who obtain the paper from bookstalls or newsagents are asked to notify the Circulation Manager if they experience any difficulty or delay in obtaining it.'¹⁶⁰ Middlebrow readers are conscious of the geography and dynamics of procuring books in a manner which holds too great a taint of commerciality for highbrow readers, unlikely to discuss the Circulation Manager. As Denham (in Macaulay's *Crewe Train*) responds to her husband's wish that 'stupid people' should not buy his books: 'it's mostly stupid people who buy books or get them from libraries, because intelligent people can usually get hold of them, if they want to, some other way.'¹⁶¹ In place of literary connections, exclusive publishing houses, or other minority-focused means, middlebrow books are located through libraries, street stands, and increasingly, book societies.

These means of acquiring books all blur the line between public and private: libraries, for instance, are public buildings offering books to private homes – but books which

¹⁵⁹ Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' pp.99f

¹⁶⁰ *Time and Tide* (06/12/29) p.1478

¹⁶¹ Macaulay, *Crewe Train* p.128

have previously inhabited other homes, so that they become effectively shared between strangers. In *Civilization* Clive Bell writes that

savage rams and silly sheep are slaves to the gentleman in a frock-coat. Shop-walkers dictate what should be their most intimate and personal decisions. [...] Messrs. Hatchard and Mudie decide what books they shall read.¹⁶²

Again using the common ovine metaphor, Bell sees these services as dictators to the mass, rather than providing an individualised service, and laments that the ‘intimate’ has been made public. Similarly, his almost metonymic image of the ‘gentleman in a frock-coat’ dehumanises – and de-intellectualises – this exchange of literature. In his reluctance to acknowledge that reading could be an act of commercial engagement, or one on the same strata as other activities around the home, he aligns it with the only domestic practice that requires absolute privacy: the ‘most intimate and personal’ deed is, arguably, sexual intercourse. While Delafield and others celebrate a taxonomic egalitarianism, which makes literature accessible and practical, Bell equates this cultural levelling to, at best, unthinking tawdriness and, at worst, prostitution. Reading as a communal activity becomes, to Bell, an act of exposure; to the middlebrow public it is a welcome point of connection with others.

‘Good service for the ordinary intelligent reader’: the role of the Book Society

Though highbrow writers might disapprove of the ‘gentleman in the frock-coat’ selling or lending books on the high street, the anonymity and pseudo-privacy of book societies appeared even more threatening to those such as Leavis, who lamented that ‘a middlebrow standard of values has been set up [and] that middlebrow taste has thus

¹⁶² Clive Bell, *Civilization: An Essay* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929) p.181

been organised [by the Book Society]'.¹⁶³ Such societies were, indeed, the perfect representation of the amorphous middlebrow community; 'compasses of middlebrow taste',¹⁶⁴ as Bracco writes – emphasising both the individual and the collective. Books were delivered directly to the home, and the Book Society made the unlikely claim that 'study is made of each individual members' [sic] tastes and special requirements,'¹⁶⁵ yet despite this rhetoric of individualised service, also represented the joining of separate homes into one collective, if anonymous, group. T.S. Eliot's belief in 'the necessity that a culture should be analysable, geographically, into local cultures'¹⁶⁶ is replaced with the illusion of a homogenous, de-geographical community of readers – impossible for the outsider to know whether the books were being read in London or the provinces. Above all, book societies were determinedly middlebrow in their approach (if not always in their selections), and proud of their mass circulation. While *Scrutiny* never printed more than 750 copies per issue in the 1930s, The Book Club (ironically with T.F. Powys, much lauded in *Fiction and the Reading Public*, on the Selection Committee) announced itself as having over 125,000 members at the end of that decade.¹⁶⁷ Yet they distance themselves from the lowbrow; the Book Society prospectus is scathing about those 'book-clubs dealing in general literature [...] at reduced rates [...] limited by trade regulation to choosing works at least twelve months old', adding that these 'serve their purpose for a popular market'.¹⁶⁸ The society proclaimed that it was providing 'a good service for the ordinary intelligent reader'.¹⁶⁹ This slightly paradoxical individual was the ideal

¹⁶³ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* p.24

¹⁶⁴ Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* p.11

¹⁶⁵ Book Society, 'Prospectus' (1934) p.10

¹⁶⁶ Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* p.15

¹⁶⁷ Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* p.7; Book Club, 'Prospectus' (1939[?]) [unpaginated]

¹⁶⁸ Book Society, 'Exclusive Privileges of Membership' (1939[?]) p.1

¹⁶⁹ J.B. Priestley, in Book Society, 'Some Privileges of Membership' (193[?]). The same phrase – 'ordinary intelligent reader' – is used by Ethel Mannin, in *The Bookworm's Turn*, published by the

audience of the book societies. He/she is unpretentiously average, the everyman, and yet has above-average aptitude: intelligence without intellectualism.

Chief among these clubs was, indeed, the Book Society, started in April 1929 with a Selection Committee including Hugh Walpole and J.B. Priestley – and it is worth noting that, though collectively middlebrow, there was no single voice of the Book Society. Reviews were written by members of the Selection Committee and varied widely, from Sylvia Lynd’s forward-looking acceptance of the modern, to Clemence Dane’s feminism, to the self-proclaimedly traditional and conservative viewpoint of Walpole.¹⁷⁰ Each month this committee offered a selected book, which could be exchanged for an alternative recommended title if the reader desired. These rules were laid out in prospectuses with names like ‘Exclusive Privileges of Membership’¹⁷¹ but were exclusive only to the extent that anybody wishing to become a member could do so; the semantics of literary gentlemen’s clubs (a common feature of particularly masculine middlebrow books, like *Jeeves and Wooster* and *Sherlock Holmes*) were borrowed for an inclusive society, where bare economics were the only barrier to membership.

These semantics may have existed for the purpose of aggrandising customers, but it is avowedly absent for the book choices. Although they were eclectic in their recommended titles – including those by D.H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson, and

Book Guild, quoted in both Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* pp.24f and Leavis, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* pp.20f

¹⁷⁰ Walpole recognized this reputation, and whilst usually affirming it, noted in his journal from 1931 that ‘My only trouble in my writing is that, wriggle as I may, I’m definitely old-fashioned. Now I’d like to be modern. I’d rather be a male Hugh Walpole to a female Virginia Woolf than anything else on earth.’ Cited: Rupert Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1952) p.328

¹⁷¹ Book Society, ‘Exclusive Privileges of Membership’ p.1

Virginia Woolf¹⁷² among the anticipated domestic novels – they did not claim, in the newsletters which accompanied each month's book, that every book would be a lasting classic. Walpole writes in his review of *Festival*, the selected book for November 1931, 'it is not well written in any sense in which good writing means good writing'.¹⁷³ As Radway comments, book clubs' 'principal aim [... was] not to place books in the long sweep of literary history but to match readers with books appropriate to them',¹⁷⁴ rather in the manner of a literary dating agency (and once more tied to the language of social encounter.) However, the mixture of dogmatism and liberality in their publications is occasionally illogical – for example, in the 1934 Prospectus:

[The Committee] lay down no literary laws, and do not claim to find monthly masterpieces, but they state their belief that certain books are well worth reading, and indeed should not be missed.¹⁷⁵

The middlebrow audience were resistant to any suggestion of elitism, but 'should not be missed' hovers over the line between imposed taste and the accepted language of commerce. The difference between 'masterpiece' and 'well worth reading' is essentially one of semantics. 'Masterpiece' is deliberately hyperbolic, whereas the

¹⁷² Throughout the newsletters Woolf's name is used as a byword for the great modern novel. In April 1937, for instance, they write 'Virginia Woolf is said to be among the contemporary writers whose work is most likely to endure.' While 'is said to' slightly distances the society from the opinion, in 1931 Sylvia Lynd wrote that 'in *The Waves* Mrs. Woolf has invented a new method of fiction'. [Anon., 'Mostly About Authors' *Book Society News*, April (1937) 16-17, p.17; Sylvia Lynd, 'Review of *The Waves*' *Book Society News*, November (1931a) p.5]. Woolf was not especially grateful, writing to Vita Sackville-West: 'Yes, much against my will, L[eonard] insisted upon sending an advance copy [of *The Waves*] to the Book Society. But what did Hugh say? Damned it utterly I suppose from your silence on this head. Please tell me. You know how I mind even the workhouse cats view, vain as I am.' [Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume 4 (1931-35)*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin, 1982 repr.1983) p.377]. The comparison is hardly generous, and perhaps Woolf would have been disappointed that Walpole – often considered synonymous with the Society – did not himself write the review. Elsewhere (ironically, given highbrow disapproval of the Book Society's commercialism), Woolf did prize the financial benefits of being selected. [Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume 4 (1931-35)* p.160]

¹⁷³ Walpole, 'Review of *Festival*' p.2

¹⁷⁴ Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* p.271

¹⁷⁵ Book Society, 'Prospectus' p.2

litotes of ‘well worth reading’ sounds similar to the sort of recommendation which could be given casually between individual middlebrow readers – the voice which the Book Society sought to achieve. By imitating the language of recommendation used by their customers, the Book Society similarly did not elevate literary discourse above other discussions and this, alongside their business model, led (as Radway notes) to accusations that they treated ‘culture as just another consumer product [...] packaging and selling cultural objects as if they were no different from soup, soap, or automobiles’.¹⁷⁶ In this they were not, of course, alone. David Garnett was certainly aware of the commercial aspect of literary production, writing in his autobiography about the publication of *Lady Into Fox* that ‘[t]here was no time to be lost as I wanted the book out in plenty of time for Christmas.’¹⁷⁷

This commoditisation of literature, and the way in which the material value of books was considered alongside the cerebral, is echoed by discussion of the physicality of books. When the Provincial Lady writes about Book Society choices, the first things she recounts from dinner table conversations about *The Good Companions* and *A High Wind in Jamaica* is that they are, respectively ‘a very long book’ and ‘quite a short book’.¹⁷⁸ Although Delafield is satirising a stereotype of middle-class literary conversation (as she is doing by reporting the discussion as though everyone had spoken in unison), a Member’s Letter in the 1934 Book Society Prospectus writes ‘Generally, they give me something interesting, and very often long, which is what I demand’, and amongst the single-line advertisements given in a Book Club magazine

¹⁷⁶ Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* p.244

¹⁷⁷ Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* p.247

¹⁷⁸ Delafield, ‘Diary of a Provincial Lady’ pp.10f

is one which states simply ‘542-page novel’.¹⁷⁹ A review of *Lolly Willowes* in the Chatto & Windus archives has the following section underlined, presumably (judging by other underlinings in the archive) by a publisher looking for advertisement content:

I enjoyed reading it, and I think many others will do so; and the binding and presentation of the book are so beautiful that it makes a desirable possession.¹⁸⁰

Although this review, in *Granta*, also included a favourable appraisal of Warner’s writing, it is the physicality of reading (or at least purchasing and owning) that is highlighted by the publisher.

While the rhetoric of the Book Society avoids the language of elitism, it is closer to that of prescription, offering a cure – again blurring distinctions between mind and body. Joan Rubin writes, of The Book-of-the-Month Club, ‘the particular ailment club membership promised to heal was [...] the modern anxiety about the self.’¹⁸¹ The cure offered was not for ignorance, or even for a lack of entertainment, but for social dis-ease. While middlebrow culture opposed the idea of a limited canon (or, more importantly, proscription of reading outside this canon) they promoted the idea of choosing books for social acceptance. The initial Prospectus of the Book Society frames this in fantastic imagery: ‘only the man who has not read the outstanding book of the day is a lonely soul locked out of the fairy palace’, adding that ‘[t]he average man is influenced [...] most emphatically of all by finding himself at a dinner table where some book he has not read forms the topic of conversation’.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Book Club, 'Additional Books' ([undated]) [unpaginated]

¹⁸⁰ G.E.G, ‘Lollypops’, *Granta* (12/02/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

¹⁸¹ Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (London; Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992) pp.98f

¹⁸² Book Society, 'The Books You Read' (1929) p.1

For middlebrow readers, the dinner table was indeed one of few places where literary discussion was widely accepted and expected, without associations of pretension – for instance, a review of *Lady Into Fox* calls it a ‘quaint little thing, which has given us something to talk about at dinner parties’.¹⁸³ The Book Society Prospectus makes overt the connection between eating and reading: ‘Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be cherished, yet of making books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.’¹⁸⁴ With a whimsical reference to *Ecclesiastes* 12, this prospectus is flippantly comparing itself to Scripture – taking the common metaphor of books-as-sustenance and essential urge, and making it closer to a moral imperative. For middlebrow readers, however, there is another significant comparison between food and books. Both reading and eating were governed by a framework of etiquette and social expectation, partly done for one’s own benefit and partly for the appraisal of others.

For the value of these ‘discussable’ books, aesthetically and culturally, Book Society members had to trust the distant arbiters of the Selection Committee. Even while part of the middlebrow community, the committee necessarily rose above the readers, their biographical material stressing their educated and successful backgrounds, even stating their first class degrees. Though the Book Society’s committee never morphed into ‘Judges’, as the Book-of-the-Month Club’s did, they had the power of both choosing and reviewing the books in their *Book Society News* – the word chosen for the publication indicates the scientific rather than the artistic, suggesting objective fact and reporting of events, when in fact it held necessarily subjective reviews. Despite

¹⁸³ *English Herald Abroad* (April 1923), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/25 (Press Cuttings vol.23, 1922), University of Reading

¹⁸⁴ Book Society, ‘The Books You Read’ p.1

anti-elitist rhetoric, the Book Society could never claim to be democratic: the middlebrow did not reject the idea of guidance, and developed trust in these voices.

This trust was not, however, absolute and unthinking. Though booksellers¹⁸⁵ and intellectuals alike responded with concern to the homogenisation of books within middle-class homes, and consequently the topics of conversation within those homes, middlebrow assimilation was not as uncomplicated as both book societies and their critics implied. Although it served the purposes of the Book Society, and those of its detractors, to suggest wholehearted endorsement by their audience, in truth middlebrow readers were neither oblivious to, nor wholly acquiescent with, attempts at creating similitude. They were not ‘infantilized, passive dupes’.¹⁸⁶ *Diary of a Provincial Lady* mentions six of the first thirty Book Society selected titles (and was itself selected in December 1930), but the *Provincial Lady* still openly criticises certain choices,¹⁸⁷ and in *Time and Tide* Delafield ends a spoof review of Evelyn Waugh’s *Black Mischief* with the tongue-in-cheek words:

(Publisher’s Query: But is that the end?
 Author’s Reply: I’m afraid so. Rotten, isn’t it?
 Publisher’s Note: That’s all right, my dear chap – we’re sending it to The Book Society.)¹⁸⁸

Echoing the use of the parenthesised ‘aside’ which often appears in the *Provincial Lady* series, Delafield is satirising the prevalent disregard for the Book Society among highbrow writers and publishers (which was still coupled with a recognition of its

¹⁸⁵ Woolf reports booksellers being ‘violently against the Book Society[...] they say it is all a wash out and favouritism.’ [VW to Vita Sackville-West (8? May 1930), Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume 4 (1929-1931)*, eds Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975b) p.165]

¹⁸⁶ Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* p.227

¹⁸⁷ ‘Read *Hatter’s Castle* after they have gone to bed, and am rapidly reduced to utmost depths of gloom. Mentally compose rather eloquent letter to Book Society explaining that most of us would rather be exhilarated than depressed’. [Delafield, ‘The *Provincial Lady* Goes Further’ p.155]

¹⁸⁸ E.M. Delafield, ‘Review of *Black Mischief* *Time and Tide*, 15/08/32 (1932b) 1109-1110, p.1110

lucrative possibilities), yet tacitly acknowledging at least some recognition of the truth of this slur. The Provincial Lady goes on to offer resistance to the idea of readerly homogeneity asserted by book societies:

Arrival of Book of the Month choice, and am disappointed. History of a place I am not interested in, by an author I do not like. Put it back into its wrapper again, and make fresh choice from Recommended List. Find, on reading small literary bulletin enclosed with book, that exactly this course of procedure has been anticipated, and that it is described as being “the mistake of a lifetime”. Am much annoyed, although not so much at having made (possibly) mistake of a lifetime, as at depressing thought of our all being so much alike that intelligent writers can apparently predict our behaviour with perfect accuracy.¹⁸⁹

Delafield writes ‘Book of the Month’ here, but it is possible that this entry, dated November 14th 1929, refers to the Book Society’s selected title for November 1929: *Gallipoli Memories* by Compton Mackenzie. The Provincial Lady’s annoyance at the ‘thought of our all being so alike’ is compromised by the fact that the diaries rely upon the same concept of a shared middlebrow outlook. The ‘our’ in that sentence is indicative of Delafield’s appeal to a middlebrow shared experience – even the shared experience of resisting uniformity. Once again, individualism and collectivity paradoxically merge, in Delafield’s resistance to the analysis of a species or genus of writer and reader – since she is acting in both roles in this excerpt, offering her character as the paradigmatic reader, while inevitably conscious of her status as a writer for the market she is discussing.

The fantasy of the ideal home

By privileging the home as the point of reception, and celebrating it as the shared point of collective response (either through dinner parties or through an abstract

¹⁸⁹ Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.6

community of readers), book societies supported the cult of the home which many critics have identified as a facet of the aftermath of the First World War.¹⁹⁰ The love for home is seen throughout many documentations of the period, and the following is one example from a multitude. Maud Churton Braby writes immediately after the war, in *Modern Marriage and How To Bear It*, that a

passionate love of home is one of the most marked feminine characteristics; I don't mean love of being *at* home, as modern women's tastes frequently lie elsewhere, but love of the place itself and the desire to possess it.¹⁹¹

Braby highlights a relationship with space, in opposition to the act of occupying that space. It is identification of a space as 'home' that is paramount. Although this might be expected to be the dominant characteristic of men returning home from the radically undomesticated space of the trenches (in terms of domestic ownership, potentially just as much a no-man's-land as the area thus named), Braby identifies it as characteristically feminine – and separates 'tastes' from passions and desires. Tastes may change, but Braby points towards an innate need to demarcate and possess a home territory – reflected in the dynamics of spatial conflict in *Lolly Willows* (as will be explored in chapter five) and the significance of homes throughout other middlebrow fantastic novels.

This love for home is shown, ever increasingly, in middlebrow novels of the interwar years. As Sylvia Lynd writes in a review of *Lady Into Fox* in *Time and Tide*:

[The Victorians] did not give us the sound of a thimble hemming shirt frills or the look of sunlight on a glass case of wax fruits. But nowadays everything

¹⁹⁰ Including, among many, Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* and Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1918-1939* (London: Pandora, 1989).

¹⁹¹ Maud Churton Braby, *Modern Marriage and How To Bear It* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1919) p.31

claims our notice. We are acutely aware of whatever touches our senses, however light its touch.¹⁹²

This observation of the everyday is not a uniquely middlebrow trait, of course. It is perhaps the greatest point of overlap between the middlebrow and the modernist, seen in the focus upon domestic minutiae in the work of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Katherine Mansfield, to name representatives of many. Where they differ is in the middlebrow sense of ownership over the ordinary, as distinct from the avant-garde chronicling of the mundane. Lynd's review reveals the significance of a shared outlook; repeated first person plural pronouns indicate that the middlebrow reader treats these recognitions of everyday insignificances as the emblems of community. By privileging the home, and the tiny details of its mechanics (which are, here, determinedly middle-class) the I/you orchestration of author/reader, and the many 'I's of many readers, become 'us', 'our', and 'we'.

This gaze upon the trivialities of the domestic is not a looking-in or a looking-out, but a looking-around. One of the fundamental bases for these novels is, as mentioned, mimesis. Delafield claims to be frustrated by queries regarding 'how much of the [*Provincial Lady*] was a transcription of real life',¹⁹³ but she draws constantly upon shared loci of her readership's identity, incorporating mimesis to the extent of writing as though there were no literary barrier between her accounts and her audience's lives. Whether discussing the likelihood of romance with a stranger on the bus, or the effect of weeping on make-up, the *Provincial Lady* repeatedly asserts the sentiment that

¹⁹² Sylvia Lynd, 'New Novels' *Time and Tide*, 08/12/22 (1922) 1184-1185, p.1185

¹⁹³ Delafield, 'The Diary of a Provincial Lady' : Delafield asserts that the *Provincial Lady* 'was never intended as a self-portrait' (p.127) but ironically *did* herself sit for Arthur Watts' illustrations (p.130).

‘Real life, as usual, totally removed from literary conventions’.¹⁹⁴ It is the language of autobiography, which seeks to surmount the chasm between lived experience and the (necessarily artificial) documentation of it. Alison Light suggests that one of the reasons literature of this variety is ‘peculiarly resistant to analysis’ is because of its ‘apparent artlessness and insistence on its own ordinariness’.¹⁹⁵ This insistence certainly resists traditional apparatus for literary analysis, but is itself worthy of enquiry; a fundamental facet of the middlebrow, rather than a cloudy obscuring of its nature.

Similarly, the middlebrow novel as a whole relies upon mimesis in terms of attitude and outlook, rather than (necessarily) verisimilitude. Although most focus upon the domestic, it is this shared attitudinal basis which is most significantly mimetic. While contemporary reviews comment that Delafield’s novels are successful because they are ‘true to life’; ‘steer the safe course between truth and burlesque’, or the reviewer’s own ‘daily life is cast in much the same sphere’, the same mimetic effect extends to novels not intended to mirror the everyday so accurately.¹⁹⁶ In this way, fantastic middlebrow novels do not lose their hold on the advantages of mimesis simply because they are impossible; indeed, the establishment of familiar stances and the normative is even more essential, as shall be seen, in order for other aspects of the familiar to be effectively disruptive.

¹⁹⁴ Delafield, ‘The Provincial Lady Goes Further’ p.216; Delafield, ‘The Provincial Lady in America’ p.281; Delafield, ‘The Provincial Lady in Wartime’ p.460

¹⁹⁵ Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* p.11

¹⁹⁶ Cook, ‘Review of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*’ p.1084; J.E. Arrowsmith, ‘Review of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*’ *London Mercury*, February (1931) p.385; C.E. Bechhofer Roberts, ‘Review of *The Provincial Lady in America*’ *Time and Tide*, 22/09/34 (1934) p.1167

The anthropologist Alison Clarke writes that '[h]istorically, the construction of the household as an expressive form has been associated with the consolidation and formation of middle-class identity', adding that 'home [is] a process, as opposed to an act of individual expressivity'.¹⁹⁷ This consolidation and expression is a communal action in literature, where it helps establish the middlebrow voice, but Clarke points out that it also dominates the establishment of the middle-class home. The household may be individual, and the dynamics of privacy always exist alongside the recognition of a shared community, but the existence of an ideal home is vital to middlebrow identity (and to the dissemination and acceptance of novelistic mimesis), even while this stable home is both undetermined and undermined. This construct is essential as a normative structure, but not an actual entity.

Bachelard writes that '[a] house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.'¹⁹⁸ The difference between 'proof' and 'illusion' is absolute, but perhaps Bachelard uses the word 'proof' with irony, suggesting that proofs can be identified if the observer chooses to consider them as such: the ultimate difference between proof and illusion is the eventual conclusion at which the observer arrives, and to some the existence of strong walls and unmoved objects may constitute a broad ontological truth (but Bachelard, of course, undermines this potential truth; the need for 'proof' already assumes a faltering faith.)

His comment can be extended beyond the individual home to the *concept* of the home, which is itself a 'body of images' intended to offer stability. The great

¹⁹⁷ Alison J. Clarke, 'The Aesthetics of Social Aspiration' in Daniel Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions: Material Culture behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) 23-45, pp.24f

¹⁹⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1958 repr.1994) p.17

middlebrow fantasy, unravelling in the period, is that of the stable home and (thus) the stable household. As Charlotte Haldane writes in 1927:

“The Home” cannot merely be defined as the place we live in. It includes the people we live with. [...] But so long as a private, as opposed to a communal, dwelling, continues to house individuals either singly or in small family groups, an interest in its structural organization must persist if the institution is not to alter unrecognizably or to decay. Profound alterations, definite signs of decay, some pessimists declare, are at present appearing in the home. The private home does still lack the applied fruits of scientific research on a really practical scale, while the asylum, the prison, the hospital enjoy them.¹⁹⁹

Her initial point is, perhaps, obvious. Few would dissociate the home from the people within it. But Haldane does draw attention to a growing awareness of disorder and ‘decay’ in the family unit – yet seems unconsciously to resist this statement, by modifying the ‘we’ of her first two sentences with ‘individuals’, ‘its’, ‘the institution’, and other substitutions which replace the personal pronoun with labels indicating authorial detachment. Mention of asylums, prisons, and hospitals may be intended to act in contrast to the individual home (in terms of ‘scientific research’), but comparison inevitably suggests the taint of insanity, criminality, or illness upon the ordinary family home – or at least the disorder concomitant with these, and the artificial domesticity of these institutions.²⁰⁰

The home in flux

As Bachelard writes, ‘the house furnishes us with dispersed images and a body of images at the same time’²⁰¹ – this paradox becomes more obvious in this period, where great changes (the returning of soldiers; Freudianism; sexual politics; the role

¹⁹⁹ Charlotte Haldane, *Motherhood and its Enemies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927) p.122

²⁰⁰ Mezei and Briganti include prisons amongst examples of ‘domestic spaces [that] criss-cross and destabilize the already uncertain borders between inside and outside and between the public and private spheres’. [Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* p.19]

²⁰¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* p.3

of servants) were partially acknowledged and partially ignored, recognising instability (dispersed images) while still refusing to relinquish stability (a body of images).

Briganti and Mezei note:

As represented in the novel, home and house are associated with comfort, privacy, belonging and well being, whether present or absent, and most importantly with *control* [...] For many women writers and their characters, the domestic sphere thus offered a site for potential control over material objects, household duties, family members and servants.²⁰²

Although this is a reductive view of ‘the novel’ (and one which is later significantly and sophisticatedly developed in their monograph) it is an indication of the battle lines drawn between the idealised (general) home and the subverted (individual) home. Novels of the period were beginning to demonstrate the uncontrollability of the home, owing to the societal changes mentioned above (among many more), and Briganti and Mezei adroitly make reference to ‘site for potential control’, rather than actual control. This elusive control is an element of the ideal home, and a latent potential, rather than a practicable possibility, alongside the inevitable instability of both home and household. Humble gives a range of examples which demonstrate ‘Bohemianism, casualness, and an expressed disregard for the conventions’²⁰³ in the face of changing or unwinding domestic ideology, but there are just as many fictional homes which remain (like that, for instance, of Agatha in *The Love-Child*) trapped in the ideology of the past; Agatha feels she must stay ‘furtively watching the hands of the clock moving minute by minute towards the bedtime hour of ten’²⁰⁴ rather than sleep when she wishes. Many middlebrow characters embody this timid obedience to rigors of the past, even while the structures of the house and household are evidently under threat and in flux.

²⁰² Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* pp.18f

²⁰³ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.148

²⁰⁴ Edith Olivier, *The Love-Child* (London: Martin Secker, 1927) p.11

The idea of the house in flux is shown through various literary techniques in the period. These range from unusual perspectives on, and descriptions of, the domestic (echoing the 1930s emergence of film noir, with its unusual camera angles used to defamiliarise the familiar) to literal depictions of the shifting home in fantastic novels (a disappearing and reappearing staircase in David Lindsay's *The Haunted Woman*, for instance, where the house is described as 'somehow [...] discordant'²⁰⁵), but chief among ways of illustrating the house in flux are the anthropomorphic house and the synergetic house.

The anthropomorphic house offers a glimpse of the fantastic, as it is a metaphor of metamorphosis, without leaving the realms of imagery for the sphere of the fantastic. Sylvia Townsend Warner's interest in the possession and possessiveness of houses in *Lolly Willowes* is preceded by many depictions of anthropomorphised houses, including Laura Willowes' first house that is 'like an old blind nurse sitting in the sun and ruminating past events' (an image to which she returns in her poem 'Sparrow Hall', which opens "Who lives in this house, / That is so old and grey, / Like a sleepy old nurse').²⁰⁶ In these two instances, Warner maintains the detachment between the fantastic and the non-fantastic by using simile rather than metaphor – it is not suggested that the house *is* a nurse, even linguistically (for metaphor does not intend to deceive the reader – indeed it has failed if it does – it only wears the mantle of linguistic deception). Elsewhere in *Lolly Willowes*, however, Warner describes a

²⁰⁵ David Lindsay, *The Haunted Woman* (Edinburgh: Canon, 1922 repr.1987) p.35

²⁰⁶ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes* (London: Virago, 1926 repr.2007) p.41; Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Time Importuned* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1928) p.86. Whether intentionally or not, these images are strikingly similar to the 'elderly grey nurse' next to whom Peter Walsh sits in *Mrs. Dalloway*. [Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925 repr.2009) p.47]

‘small surprised cottage near the church’,²⁰⁷ without the alleviation of simile. Yet she also doesn’t mention any particular human character; the description is only anthropomorphic if surprise is considered a uniquely human trait. Instead, Warner attributes emotions and reactions to houses – in a letter to William Maxwell she describes one as ‘lonely, having lost eleven neighbours’²⁰⁸ – bypassing comparison with humans, and destabilising the relationship between the two. The same refusal of domestic taxonomy is reversed in *Lolly Willowes*: ‘They could look after Lolly. Henry was like a wall, and Caroline’s breasts were like towers.’²⁰⁹ People and buildings are merged into one stronghold. As Rosemary Sykes has noted, Warner’s image is borrowed from the Old Testament book *Song of Solomon*.²¹⁰ In its Biblical context, it follows a verse about a ‘little sister’, appropriately (since Henry and Caroline are Laura’s brother and sister-in-law) – ‘If she is a door / we will enclose her with panels of cedar’ – auguring the entrapment and depersonalisation Laura will feel.

Blurred lines between house and self have been immortalised in the trope of room-as-psyche, developed by Jung and popularised in fiction by Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1891), but in many cases it is too simplistic a correlation. Instead, in many novels (particularly in *Lolly Willowes*) houses are shown synergetically to affect or reflect self, rather than act as a metaphor for the mind. Bachelard states that ‘[s]pace that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measure and estimates of the surveyor’.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.122

²⁰⁸ Sylvia Townsend Warner, William Maxwell, and Michael Steinman, *The Element of Lavishness: Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner & William Maxwell* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001) p.131

²⁰⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.81

²¹⁰ Rosemary Sykes, 'The Willowes Pattern' *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2001 (2001) 1-17, p.8. The alluded verse is Song of Songs 8:10a ‘I am a wall / and my breasts are like towers.’

²¹¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* p.xxxvi

While houses in non-fantastic novels remain the same size (although even here Bachelard refers to the imprecision of ‘estimates’), they are altered by inhabitancy. It is not simply owners’ perspective which Bachelard suggests changes, but rather it is the space itself which is no longer ‘indifferent’, following the same semi-anthropomorphism of Warner’s writing.

The mutual affect of houses is firmly attested in interwar non-fiction, as well as fiction, and is not just the preserve of fantastic or quasi-fantastic novels (like *The Brontës Went To Woolworths*, where the narrator Deirdre claims that ‘in my own experience, new places invariably own me, until I have fought them down.’)²¹²

Marjorie Hillis writes in *Live Alone and Like It* that the home

should reflect your personality – and it will, whether you want it to or not. There is nothing more tell-tale than a room that has been lived in. It can be gracious or artful, masculine or feminine, ignorant or altered. It will give you away to everyone who comes in, and it will influence your moods and your morale.²¹³

In statements like this, there is no clear distinction between material and non-material impressions made on the house. While the human is considered to change mentally and emotionally,²¹⁴ Hillis offers the room a list of adjectives which could be either traits or visual aspects – domestic space again hovers on the border of anthropomorphism, with the added dimension that it is involuntary for the inhabitant (‘whether you want it to or not’), who thus loses agency over the synergy of their

²¹² Ferguson, *The Brontës Went to Woolworths* p.19

²¹³ Marjorie Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It* (London: Duckworth, 1936) p.62

²¹⁴ Charlotte Cowdroy similarly depicts the house as an agent of change, writing that the ‘order, beauty, and general atmosphere of the home in which [a child’s] life unfolds will profoundly modify his character and whole outlook on life.’ It is a point echoed in Edith Olivier’s autobiography, where she describes living in Salisbury’s Cathedral Close and ‘observing how much the beauty and character of the houses there affected the people who lived in them’, going on to suggest that this was a catalyst for her novel *The Seraphim Room*. [Charlotte Cowdroy, *Wasted Womanhood* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1933) p.95; Olivier, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* p.294]

home. For the middlebrow reader, as iterated above, the home is the main point of literary engagement (both physically and thematically) and this sense of the malleable house, reflecting and affecting the reader, is amplified by the situating of the reading experience within a territory that is neither stable nor independent of the reader.

The place of narratives within the house (the books being read) is further complicated by common analogies of the house itself as narrative, and of narratives as houses. It is a multifaceted, overlapping series of images that demonstrate how complex the mimetic reading of novels like the *Provincial Lady* series can truly be. For example, Warner wrote to Garnett in 1924 about the construction of short stories:

First we build our houses of air and geometry. The stairs that no foot can tread go up undeviatingly, and underneath there is a convenient cupboard in which we can house darkness (or coats and hats: just as we please). Then we begin to write and build them of brick. The horror is, not that the bricks are square and solid, but that they are an insult to geometry, not a pure right angle among them, and no more solid than a crumpled mosquito net.²¹⁵

These comparisons are not newly-developed in the interwar period – they are perhaps as old as narratives themselves (it is probable that ‘story’ and ‘storey’ have the same etymology²¹⁶) – but the emphasis on homes in these decades makes the allusions more marked. Particularly pertinent is Warner’s mention of the author’s potential to ‘house darkness (or coats and hats: just as we please).’ She implies that the line between the strange (or macabre) and the prosaic is unstable, and easily able to be crossed. And yet the ‘horror’ for her is not the darkness that can be woven into a story, but the instability of writing and the lack of control the writer has over even these fictitious, metaphorical houses.

²¹⁵ Sylvia Townsend Warner, David Garnett, and Richard Garnett, *Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner/Garnett Letters* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994) p.17

²¹⁶ "story | storey, n.2". OED Online, Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/190982> (accessed July 29, 2013)

The same frailty and uncontrollability of space is seen in many aspects of middle-class homes in the 1920s and '30s. Primarily this lack of control is witnessed metaphorically, in the ways the home is considered by its inhabitants, but it is also enacted spatially, with regard to areas of the house which were 'out of bounds', or considered by the owners of the house to be (literally and figuratively) beneath them.

Servants and the geography of the home

The kitchen is the epicentre of the domestic – indeed, a servant working there was often known metonymically as 'the domestic' – but for middle-class families in the interwar period, it was often an area which could not be accessed: the geography of the middlebrow home remained influenced and subverted by the co-existence of servants. Although the number of middle-class homes with servants was decreasing fairly sharply throughout these decades,²¹⁷ the impact made by this sharing of space was proportionally concentrated in instances where servants were still employed.

Servants had always represented an unknowable alternate reality sharing the same domestic space – that is, they were *in* the home, but not *of* the home. Only in the 1920s, however, were servants' desires and motivations beginning to be truly explored. They were becoming recognised as individuals rather than automatons (or 'domestic appliances'²¹⁸), and less depersonalised.²¹⁹ (Daisy, in Rose Macaulay's

²¹⁷ 'There was a sharp fall in entry into domestic service in this period; in 1901 42 per cent of the female workforce were employed as domestic servants, but by 1931 that had dropped to 30 per cent.' [Anthea Todd, *Women's Writing in English: Britain 1900-1945* (London: Longman, 1998) p.19]

²¹⁸ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.121

²¹⁹ Deirdre Beddoe documents, at the beginning of this period, the 'the de-personalising nature of their experience. Servants with 'fancy' names would be renamed by their employers as plain Mary.' [Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1918-1939* p.62]

Keeping Up Appearances, counters the idea that servants are an amorphous, identical mass, arguing that “morning women can’t be all like one another. Going out to work in people’s houses in the morning can’t make thousands of women alike. Why should it?”²²⁰) The transition was gradual, and during the 1920s servants were often considered effectively both human and un-human – or at least both family and non-family. Violet Firth’s *The Psychology of the Servant Problem* (1925) is emblematic of the changing flow of contemporary discussion. Firth not only introduces the humanity of servants, but discusses their relationship to domestic space: ‘the house in which a domestic servant is employed is her home [...] she can have no other’²²¹ – and yet even her title emphasises the perspective of the employer rather than the employee: it seems unlikely that any servant ever referred to the Servant Problem (usually given with these capitalised letters).

Ever the middle-class representative, the Provincial Lady does mention the Servant Problem (or, in her case, ‘the servant problem’ and ‘the servant difficulty’²²²) but not with the genteel venom seen in Hugh Braun’s 1940 work *The Story of the English House*, where he describes ‘[t]he ever-increasing menace of the Servant Problem’ as the cause of an exodus from the house to ‘the labour-saving delights of the mass-production Flat.’²²³ He adds that the ‘emancipation of women and consequent Servant Problem sounded the death-knell of the dwelling-house.’²²⁴ Only from a certain viewpoint could ‘emancipation’ equate ‘menace’ – although many middlebrow novelists portray their middle-class characters being at the mercy of their

²²⁰ Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances* p.59

²²¹ Violet Firth, *The Psychology of the Servant Problem* (London: C.W. Daniel 1925) p.68

²²² Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.8; p.40

²²³ Hugh Braun, *The Story of the English House* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1940) p.v

²²⁴ *Ibid.* p.110

servants, in what Alison Light terms ‘a compensating and reassuring fantasy’.²²⁵

Braun does highlight, though, the significant effect on middle-class choice of homes occasioned by the revolution in the number of servants, and attitudes towards them.

A year earlier than Braun, in a review of a quintessential middlebrow novel, *Mrs.*

Miniver, E.M. Forster writes:

The castles and the great mansions are gone, we have to live in semi-detached villas instead, they are all we can afford, but let us at all events retain a Tradesman’s Entrance. The Servants’ Hall has gone; let the area-basement take its place. The servants themselves are going; Mrs. Miniver has four, to be sure, but many a suburban mistress batters the registry offices in vain. The servants are unobtainable, yet we still say, “How like a servant!” when we want to feel superior and safe.²²⁶

As with all middle-class accounts of the lack of servants, the pronouns are decidedly on the side of the employer, even while Forster recognises foolishness and hypocrisy in the employer’s stance. He highlights the importance (for employers) of maintaining a ‘Tradesman’s Entrance’ and, by endowing it with capitalized letters, emphasises the perceived significance – even sanctity – of this aspect. The ways in which people enter a home are fundamentally significant as indicators of their relationship with the household, and the power they have (or do not have) in that relationship. By making the hierarchy of occupants tangible and spatially divided, the dynamics within the home are predetermined by access *to* the home. Doors and windows – that is, entrances and exits – are also often significant as predictions of the fantastic, prefiguring the moment of revelation with a strange, but non-fantastic,

²²⁵ Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* p.119. Among various examples in fiction, the Provincial Lady suggests that ‘[s]ervants, in truth, make cowards of us all’, and Agatha in *The Love-Child* often worries about being ‘the Miss Bodenham her maids expected her to be’. Whether disingenuous or otherwise, this portrait of the servants as covert masters was common in 1920s novels, and part of coping with change in a once-stable relationship. [Delafield, ‘Diary of a Provincial Lady’ p.97; Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.20]

²²⁶ E.M. Forster, ‘Mrs. Miniver (1939)’ *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1951c) 305-308, p.307

architectural domestic detail. In *Harriet Hume*, ‘fantastically enough, there was no entrance to Harriet’s abode’; in Rachel Ferguson’s *A Harp in Lowndes Square*, where scenes from the past appear on the stairs, ‘[w]indows and doors in the upper regions of the five-storied house fitted ill’.²²⁷ Instability creeps into the novels through domestic curiosities and eccentricities, acting as harbingers of the fantastic.

For those households which (against Braun’s and Forster’s generalisations) remained in the same location, and kept the physical structure of the house consistent, the engagement with space still metamorphosed as the status of servants evolved. Woolf’s statement that ‘in or about December, 1910, human character changed’ is often repeated; less frequently mentioned is that one of her primary illustrations concerns interaction with servants. She was perhaps prescient, though, and certainly hyperbolic in describing ‘the Georgian cook [...] a creature of sunshine and fresh air; in and out of the drawing-room’ in contrast to the ‘Victorian cook [...] like a leviathan in the lower depths, formidable, silent, obscure, inscrutable’.²²⁸ In reality, as Forster’s mention of ‘area-basements’ suggests, many Georgian (relating here, of course, to George V) middle-class houses still had a literal division between upstairs and downstairs. Violet Firth acknowledges the impossibility of understanding servant psychology ‘from an above-stairs Olympus’,²²⁹ using a semantics of domestic placement also seen in many contemporary novels. In Lettice Cooper’s *The New*

²²⁷ Rebecca West, *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (London: Virago, 1929 repr.1980) p.13; Rachel Ferguson, *A Harp in Lowndes Square* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936) p.7. Similarly, the house in which Silvia Fox (the lady of *Lady into Fox*) was raised had ‘no proper road to it, which is all the more remarkable as it is the principal, and indeed the only, manor house for several miles round.’ [Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.3]

²²⁸ Virginia Woolf, ‘Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown (1924)’ in Leonard Woolf (ed.) *Collected Essays* (1; London: Chatto & Windus, 1966) 319-337, p.320

²²⁹ Firth, *The Psychology of the Servant Problem* p.8

House (1936) the servant issue is no longer new, but the servants' domain is still depicted as incomprehensible and foreign:

[Rhoda] always felt shy when she penetrated to that downstairs world. The life lived so near to them and so far apart from them was a dark continent, full of unexplored mystery.²³⁰

This description would aptly fit a voyage across the world, yet it is the dynamic within a single domicile. Many fantastic or fantasy novels incorporate the idea that the house is flexible and hides greater expanses than initially appears, from David Lindsay's *The Haunted Woman* and C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) to Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) – but this unstable geography of the home need not be fantastic. Areas of the house that are seldom or never accessed (to quote Rachel Ferguson's *Alas, Poor Lady*, 'naturally one never went into the kitchen'²³¹) become akin to fantastic realms, both inaccessible and untranslatable. The quarters and activities of the servants are given this inscrutability in *Lolly Willowes*:

Bells were answered, meals were served, all that appeared was completion. Yet unseen and underground the preparation and demolition of every day went on, like the inward persistent workings of heart and entrails. Sometimes a crash, a banging door, a voice upraised, would rend the veil of impersonality. And sometimes a sound of running water at unusual hours and a faint steaminess in the upper parts of the house betokened that one of the servants was having a bath.²³²

Laura recognises that the servants perform human functions, and the 'veil of impersonality' is not absolute, but their actions are still chiefly presented in the passive voice, excluding the servants themselves from the actions they perform – and

²³⁰ Lettice Cooper, *The New House* (London: Persephone Books, 1936 repr.2004) p.100. Quoted by Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39* p.153

²³¹ Ferguson, *Alas, Poor Lady* p.119

²³² Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.47

although they are compared to elements of the human body ('heart and entrails') rather than cogs or machinery, this portrayal of servants still hovers between the human and non-human. Vita Sackville-West's *The Heir* (1922) – a novella about the captivating power of a house over its reluctant owner, who comes to love it deeply – incorporates a more unalloyed horror at the idea of servants pursuing human activities:

In the hall he hesitated, uncertain as to which was the door of the library, afraid that if he opened the wrong door he would find himself in the servants' quarters, perhaps even open it on them as they sat at supper.²³³

All three instances – from Cooper, Warner, and Sackville-West – demonstrate an anxiety about discovering and trespassing into servants' quarters, as though they might appear arbitrarily and without warning. Their areas of the house are considered (by the characters focalised in these excerpts) to be imprecisely laid out, unlocatable ('the upper parts of the house'), and disturbing the geographical equilibrium of the home so fundamental to a middlebrow sense of placement.

The stability of the middlebrow home depended also upon the stability of the middlebrow family. Many interwar influences threatened the supposed invulnerability of this institution – from the number of unmarried women to the popularisation of the Oedipus and Electra Complexes – and the status of servants was also amongst these influences. As well as creating curious spatial tensions within the home, they were both family and not-family (to take a small etymological step; familiar and unfamiliar, that is, an example of Freud's *unheimlich*). Servants can act like theatrical extras, 'in and out of the drawing-room' (to quote Woolf again),

²³³ Vita Sackville-West, *The Heir* (London: Hesperus Press, 1922 repr.2008) pp.21f

‘always going and coming’²³⁴ (to quote Edith Olivier). This gives them the opportunity to interrupt and observe; to know the intimacies of the family without revealing anything themselves: Olivier describes servants in her autobiography as ‘paid strangers’.²³⁵

The idea of servants reading in an ‘uncontrollable’ manner was part of Leavis’ anxiety about the proliferation of publishing, but their reading material could be a source of fascination. Sylvia Townsend Warner admitted to William Maxwell that, when she had a servant, she and Valentine Ackland would ‘count the hours till her half-days & evenings out when we would rush into the kitchen and read her novels and magazines: not quite up to the level of Mrs Henry Wood (she was too young for that) but such a grateful change from Dostoevski.’²³⁶ While this viewpoint is not prescriptive (and proscriptive) in the manner of Leavis, it is still a manifestation of intellectual and social snobbery which places servants at a communicative distance. Although some middlebrow protagonists shift between these roles (Laura Willowes’ self-sufficiency includes taking on many activities previously done by maids, for instance) the structure of the archetypal middlebrow home maintained this distance between spheres, even though it was evolving.

The evolving role, status, and number of servants are among many other interwar anxieties threatening the emblem of the ideal middlebrow home (other anxieties will be examined in closer detail in subsequent chapters.) While each household

²³⁴ Olivier, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* p.69. *The Brontës Went To Woolworths* also refers to dolls they can’t give personalities as ‘rather like the servants and governesses who come and go; they won’t immortalise.’ [Ferguson, *The Brontës Went to Woolworths* p.18]

²³⁵ Olivier, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* p.69

²³⁶ Warner, Maxwell, and Steinman, *The Element of Lavishness: Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner & William Maxwell* p.146

recognised the limitations of their own attempts to match this exemplar, and some (such as the Servant Problem) became discussable tropes of fiction and non-fiction, the middlebrow fantasy of the unchanging ur-home was retained as a standard, even while it was neither expected nor realisable. Aspirational replications of this elusive standard are not, as Clarke writes, ‘escapist fantasy spaces conjured up to deal with the limitations of the materiality of “real” homes, but rather are used as measures or as proactive forces that intermittently meld with or mock the reality of lived experience.’²³⁷ Behind each home lurked the ideal home (for it is an instance, again, of the middlebrow paradoxical thirst for, and resistance to, homogeneity) as a prototype or palimpsest – or, indeed, the ghost of an ideal home. While it could ‘meld with or mock’, or haunt, the actual lived experiences of middlebrow families, it also informs the codification of fictional middlebrow homes, and the point of departure for their undermining. The disparity between this projected paradigm and experienced reality lead to a wider interrogation of the ways in which reality could be undermined, and made domestic space the perfect territory for explorations of the middlebrow fantastic.

²³⁷ Clarke, 'The Aesthetics of Social Aspiration' p.27

Chapter Two

‘Adventures of the everyday are much the most interesting’²³⁸ : Finding Room for the Domestic Fantastic

The domestic fantastic, to reiterate, is the variety of middlebrow novel which maintains an emphasis upon matters of the (realistic and mimetic) home, but introduces an element of the fantastical into this world. Erica Brown and Mary Glover suggest that ‘during the 1920s this realism became persistently identified as middlebrow’,²³⁹ and this was often the legacy inherited by authors in the interwar period, from Walpole, Galsworthy, and other writers whom Storm Jameson described as ‘half-legendary figures in [the] background’.²⁴⁰ Yet realism was beginning to be recognised as one of the least valid ways of presenting reality, and (as a reviewer of *Lolly Willowes* wrote)

Novelists are at last ceasing from trying to photograph life and beginning to treat it as the greatest of our painters do – as a deep mystery which may be approached from any angle except that of the photographer.²⁴¹

The fantastic offered a means of finding this angle, stretching and reorganising the everyday, particularly for those writers who would not privilege more avant-garde approaches to literature. Yet approaches to the fantastic are not singular and universal. The influential fantasy theorist Tzvetan Todorov, as shall be seen, tidies away the nature of a non-fantastic existence with the single criterion that there be no

²³⁸ Sylvia Townsend Warner, interviewed in Louise Morgan, *Writers at Work* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931) p.31

²³⁹ Erica Brown and Mary Grover, 'Introduction' in Erica Brown and Mary Grover (eds.) *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960* (Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire, 2012) 1-21, p.8

²⁴⁰ Jameson, *The Georgian Novel and Mr. Robinson* p.3

²⁴¹ S.P.B. Mais, ‘Fiction Makers Dipping Into the Past’, *Daily Graphic* (01/04/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

‘devils, sylphides, or vampires’²⁴² but although he uses the expression ‘our world’, as a structuralist he adds that ‘we have in mind no actual reader, but the role of the reader implicit in the text’.²⁴³ As such, his theory cannot encompass the nuances brought to the fantastic novel when it is written for a certain section of the reading public – in this case, the middlebrow, with their own particular identity and thus version of reality, which necessitates various willing compromises, to ‘fit in’ the fantastic.

Although the domestic fantastic questions, augments, and disturbs the middlebrow novel, it cannot alter its fundamental tenets of identity; that which Jonathan Culler terms ‘cultural *vraisemblance*’, or the ‘accepted knowledge which a work may use but which do not enjoy the same privileged status as [...those which] derive directly from the structure of the world.’²⁴⁴ That is to say, they are not natural laws, but are still anticipated as unspoken components of (a perception of) reality; what Elizabeth Bowen termed a novel’s ‘pre-assumptions’.²⁴⁵ But where Culler assumes an universal cultural intelligibility, it is more practicable to see different societal strata recognising and identifying with different codes of cultural *vraisemblance*.

Certain elements of the middlebrow *vraisemblance*, which invite the mimetic identification vital to the middlebrow reader, are not lost with the arrival of the fantastic – contrary to Eric Rabkin’s suggestion that in a fantastic novel ‘the ground

²⁴² Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.25

²⁴³ Ibid. p.31. It should be noted that Todorov borrows the concept of the ‘implied reader’ from Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1961)

²⁴⁴ Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) pp.140f

²⁴⁵ Elizabeth Bowen, *Collected Impressions* (London: Longmans, 1950) p.258, quoted in Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39* p.4

rules of the narrative world must be diametrically contradicted.²⁴⁶ A *diametric* contradiction (were that possible) would render the narrative incoherent and even nonsensical, and the referential and symbiotic relationship between real and fantastic stages of a domestic fantastic novel make the application of this definition particularly untenable. Rabkin adds that '[i]f we know the world to which a reader escapes, then we know the world from which he comes',²⁴⁷ but in the middlebrow fantastic this analytical procedure is unnecessary for two reasons. Firstly, each domestic fantastic novel must start in the mould of the normative domestic novel, depicting a world akin to the reader's own, to be thwarted (or enhanced, or reconfigured) by the introduction of the fantastic.²⁴⁸ Any fantastic narrative which posits a default reality distant from the reader's own alienates the reader and is received as a strange realm, even before the fantastic is introduced. The familiar must be established to be defamiliarised. Secondly, as stated, this 'world from which he comes' is never entirely absent, and middlebrow *vraisemblance* is not lost. Instead, the fantastic must make concessions to these markers of identity, particularly those which would appear to resist the fantastic, chief among which are etiquette, commonsense, and (as has been established) the home. The middlebrow ethos must make room for the fantastic, and the fantastic must accommodate these vital aspects of the middlebrow.

²⁴⁶ Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* p.8. Perhaps he has in mind the psychoanalytical idea of the unconscious representing a desired or feared object as its opposite.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p.73

²⁴⁸ Even those novels which announce the fantastic on the first page introduce it into an otherwise normative environment, and must delineate this by contrast with the change that is effected. Of course a reader's world and a fictive world cannot completely overlap. The inherent 'falseness' of fiction is discussed by several fantasy theorists, including Todorov, who summarises Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, incorporating this paraphrase: 'The literary text does not enter into a referential relation with the "world," as the sentences of everyday speech often do; it is not "representative" of anything but itself.' Todorov adds later '[b]y its very definition, literature bypasses the distinctions of the real and the imaginary, of what is and of what is not.' [Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.10; p.167]. Yet this chasm does not fundamentally alter the dynamics of a reader's involvement and reception, which is the point under consideration.

Minding Ps & Qs: commonsense, etiquette, and inheriting the Gothic

The home is self-evidently important for the domestic fantastic, and the ideal home, standing for familiarity, intimacy, and enclosure, is frequently the accepted basis as a novel opens, and remains as a latent potential throughout all its disruptions. Even if contemporary concerns proved the idealised household an unattainable myth, it remains the fictive norm against which the strange is measured – but always a vulnerable one, with a sense of latent disruption. As Farah Mendlesohn writes in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, at the outset of such novels there must be ‘simultaneously – the construction of a sense of a protected space, one that cannot be ruptured, and a sense that such a rupture is imminent.’²⁴⁹ In this, the domestic fantastic borrows from Gothic fiction, but adapts this significant predecessor in order not to compromise either a middlebrow resonance or the effects of the fantastic. The archetypal Gothic house (or, often, castle) had become synonymous with the sinister, thus neutering the effect of the unusual: strangeness was expected in the old, vast, crenulated homes of the genre. The Gothic house needed, ironically, domesticating. As Glen Cavaliero notes, the domestication of the exotic Gothic, ‘even while it diminishes the apparent occasion for the onslaught of the unexpected, serves to localize it and thus to render it more inescapable.’²⁵⁰ The strange and determinedly unfamiliar site of the castle may come with narratively convenient trapdoors and tunnels, but the resolutely ordinary home could afford none of these plot luxuries. Its familiarity is itself a cause of enclosure.

²⁴⁹ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* p.117.

²⁵⁰ Cavaliero, *The Supernatural and English Fiction* p.55

Mary Pendered's popular 1927 novel *The Uncanny House* plays upon inherited Gothic archetypes, and the consequent shock when the strange afflicts a normal house rather than the exaggerated and subverted versions of home in Gothic fiction:

It was all nonsense, she told herself, about the house being haunted. It was a nice, homely, commonplace sort of house; not a bit the kind in which any ghost would disport itself; Like most of us, she visualized the haunted house as of the Moated Grange type – a place where awful crimes had been committed.²⁵¹

The prosaic home – that lived in by the 'us' Pendered uses to encompass the reader – is, however, exactly that with which the domestic fantastic is most concerned. The Gothic legacy in domestic fantastic novels leads to a conflation of rational, but improbable, anxieties and those of a supernatural character. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, in the most multifaceted, though not middlebrow, of fantastic novels (published in 1928 and documenting the life of a person who lives for centuries and metamorphoses from a man into a woman) 'became nervous lest there should be robbers behind the wainscot and afraid, for the first time in her life, of ghosts in the corridors.'²⁵² The domestic fantastic is characterised by this meeting of natural (robbers) and supernatural (ghosts) concerns.²⁵³ Yet often the fantastic occurrences are not inherently supernatural, but the way they are manifested is. Agatha's child in *The Love-Child*, the fox of *Lady into Fox*, and the appearance of *Miss Hargreaves* do not introduce anything akin to 'devils, sylphides, or vampires', but rather congruous novelistic components in an incongruous manner. The normalised environment is

²⁵¹ Mary Lucy Pendered, *The Uncanny House* (London: Hutchinson, 1927) pp.55f

²⁵² Woolf, *Orlando* p.234

²⁵³ Rosemary Jackson writes that 'the history of the survival of Gothic horror is one of progressive internalization and recognition of fears as generated by the self.' [Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.24] This perceptive point goes slightly too far: the Gothic influence is not wholly transmuted from an external to an internal anxiety. Rather the domestic fantastic usually focuses upon the troubling dynamics of the internal self in relation to an external world.

fantastically disturbed and rearranged, rather than fundamentally altered in its constituents.

Within this normalised space, commonsense is a valued and celebrated commodity.

While Leavis considered reality an anathema to the middlebrow,²⁵⁴ the Provincial Lady demonstrates a privileging of the down-to-earth, often as a counterpart to more grandiose ideas:

Life, declares Pamela, is very, *very* difficult, and she is perfectly certain that I feel, as she does, that nothing in the world matters except Love. Stifle strong inclination to reply that banking account, sound teeth and adequate servants matter a great deal more.²⁵⁵

Delafield's choice of practical elements in contrast to an ironically capitalised 'Love' is a reflection of her audience's calm instinct for the prosaic and level-headed. The same mantra occurs throughout middlebrow fiction and non-fiction; Marjorie Hillis' solution to the 'surplus women' problem, for instance, is an 'enormous fund of common sense and cheerfulness'.²⁵⁶

It is precisely this insistence and reliance upon commonsense that presents an obstacle for domestic fantastic novels to overcome. The Provincial Lady writes: 'I have brief, extraordinary hallucination of having returned to childish days of Robin and Vicky. Cannot possibly afford to dwell on this illusion for even one second.'²⁵⁷ This step

²⁵⁴ Leavis writes of Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night* that '[i]t is a vicious presentation because it is popular and romantic while pretending to realism', giving a peculiar dichotomy of 'popular' and 'realism'. Conversely, Priestley viewed brutality and 'a "face-the-unpleasant facts" snobbery' as the doctrine of the highbrow. [Leavis, 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers' p.338; Priestley, 'Brute Cult' p.8]

²⁵⁵ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further', p.181. A contemporary review also notes her 'irony and commonsense'. [Helen Moran, 'Review of *The Provincial Lady Goes Further*' *London Mercury*, XXVII (1932) 170-171, p170]

²⁵⁶ Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It* p.39

²⁵⁷ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime' p.456

into the ‘extraordinary’ is treated as a domestic foible, not to be indulged – whereas it could conceivably be the premise for a domestic fantastic novel, and is indeed not unlike that of Rachel Ferguson’s *A Harp in Lowndes Square* (1936). The fantastic is seemingly antagonistic to commonsense, as exemplified by the use of the word ‘fantastic’ in the interwar period to mean something unlikely and even indecent, as (in Macaulay’s *Crewe Train*) when a character committing adultery is said to ““behave in such a fantastically improbable manner?””²⁵⁸ ‘Fantastically improbable’ appears to be tautologous, and thus the word ‘fantastic’ must offer wider semantic significance than simply the improbable, in the same way that Priestley refers to ‘grandly fantastic Dickens’²⁵⁹ without intending to suggest that his plots or characters break natural laws; the label is widened to indicate the unnatural or outlandish.²⁶⁰

When middlebrow reviewers turn their attention to the fantastic, they often consider the subgenre less a new frontier than an authorial and readerly indulgence. Priestley terms *Lady Into Fox* ‘a quiet little fantastic novel’, adding ‘I hope he will set to work next time on an ampler theme’²⁶¹ and, similarly, T. Earle Welby’s review of *The Love-Child* states that

a brilliant future might be predicted for [Olivier] if it were not for the consideration that the thing is a *tour de force*, and that it has yet to be discovered what she can do when dealing with lives lived out soberly under the light of the sun and not with a world of fantasy.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Macaulay, *Crewe Train* p.218

²⁵⁹ J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: William Heinemann, 1934) p.404

²⁶⁰ An image in *Miss Hargreaves* encapsulates two definitions of ‘fantastic’, when Norman’s sister and mother discuss Miss Hargreaves’ unusual headwear: ““But, mother, it’s a *fantastic* hat!” / “Of course it is. But Miss Hargreaves is a fantastic person.”” [Frank Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* (London: Bloomsbury, 1940 repr.2009) p.151] Jim intends social censure, and while her mother is not intentionally referring to Miss Hargreaves’ nature (she is not real; she has been inadvertently created), Baker allows the reader (who is aware) to interpret the word in that way.

²⁶¹ J.B. Priestley, ‘Review of *Lady Into Fox*’ *London Mercury*, February (1923) 436-437, p.437

²⁶² T. Earle Welby, ‘Review of *The Love-Child*’ *The Saturday Review*, 28/05/27 (1927) p.835 and similarly, Olivier’s friend Mary Morrison wrote to her, on the publication of *The Love-Child*: ‘I am immensely proud of your success & ever so keen for you to begin at once with another: a real story

His image of being away from ‘the light of the sun’, although perhaps suitable for some instances of fantastic literature (including the subterranean world of ‘boundless space’²⁶³ discovered in Herbert Read’s 1935 novel *The Green Child*) is scarcely appropriate for the almost stultifyingly normal household in which *The Love-Child* takes place.²⁶⁴

Middlebrow fantastic novels often atone for their fundamental compromise with the prosaic and mimetic by acknowledging it. In *The Love-Child*: ‘the caustic drops of Miss Marks’ common sense fell like a weed killer upon the one blossom of Agatha’s imagination.’²⁶⁵ (The ‘blossom’ is Agatha’s imaginary friend Clarissa, before she is accidentally brought to life.) This natural simile in a novel where the natural and unnatural are so closely interwoven, resisting their traditional dichotomy, deepens the threat commonsense could pose to the novel’s premise. Later Agatha recognises this conflict:

It was quite impossible for her to tell anyone that Clarissa was nothing but a toy child of her own making. Moreover, her own common sense told her that no person with equal common sense would for a moment believe such a story.²⁶⁶

Olivier establishes the protagonist’s ‘own common sense’, whilst incorporating the person of the reader (as someone ‘with equal common sense’) and their anticipated scepticism. She predicts and determines her own reception, fusing implied and actual readers, and thus helps the middlebrow audience overcome any sense of alienation

about people in the work a day world. I love your style, it just exactly suited your theme. But you can go deeper next time & give us some of your innermost thoughts’. [Mary Morrison, ‘Letter to Edith Olivier’ (31/05/27), Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers 982/94]

²⁶³ Herbert Read, *The Green Child* (London: Capuchin Classics, 1935 repr.2010) p.161

²⁶⁴ Olivier’s own tale of an underground world, *The Underground River*, is often equally prosaic in event, albeit depicting a literally dark space. [Edith Olivier, *The Underground River* (London; Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1928)]

²⁶⁵ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.14

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp.49f

effected by the introduction of the fantastic. Welby, despite asking for a more ‘sober’ follow-up from Oliver, does also exemplify those reviewers who emphasise any realistic content by praising her ‘matter-of-fact setting, and mak[ing] intelligent use of the stolid servants, the blundering policeman, the uncomprehending neighbours.’²⁶⁷ These elements tie *The Love-Child* down securely to the constituents of everyday middlebrow reality, and a commonsensical heroine hosts the fantastic.

Walter Scott, in one of the earliest English essays to treat the fantastic, ‘On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman’ [sic], labelled the ‘mode of writing’ as one demonstrating ‘the most wild and unbounded licence’.²⁶⁸ He acknowledges only a small collection of examples, including *Frankenstein* and *Gulliver’s Travels*, that justify the supernatural:

In such cases the admission of the marvellous expressly resembles a sort of entry-money paid at the door of a lecture-room, - it is a concession which must be made to the author, and for which the reader is to receive value in moral instruction.²⁶⁹

Scott’s concept of entrance to a lecture-room also prefigures MacCarthy’s spatial metaphor and ethos of access to certain spheres – although in this case it is the author seeking attendants, rather than the reader attempting to join a certain intellectual

²⁶⁷ Welby, ‘Review of *The Love-Child*’ p.835. Similarly, Frank Baker’s *Miss Hargreaves* is lauded for being ‘as plausible as it is incredible’, and David Cecil’s introduction to a reprint of *The Love-Child*, praises the ‘fantastic fairy-tale hypothesis, [being worked] out in accordance with the laws of sober, everyday reality’. [Erica J. Royde-Smith, ‘Willed But Unwanted’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 26/10/40 (1940) p.545; David Cecil, ‘Introduction’ *The Love-Child* (London: The Richards Press, 1951) 3-8, p.3]

²⁶⁸ Scott, ‘On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman’ p.72. It is perhaps no coincidence that Hoffmann’s work was integral both to one of the earliest articles about the fantastic and Freud’s ‘Das Unheimliche’, a central text on the uncanny, which labelled Hoffmann the ‘unrivalled master of the uncanny in literature’. [Sigmund Freud, ‘The ‘Uncanny’ (1919)’ in Albert Dickson (ed.) *Art and Literature* (Penguin Freud Library, 14; London: Penguin, 1985) 339-376]

²⁶⁹ Scott, ‘On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman’ p.73

milieu. While ‘moral instruction’ is not the paramount concern for interwar novelists that it was for Scott’s contemporaries, entertainment or self-examination takes its place; the fantastic figures as an authorial indulgence which must be off-set with other forms of gain.

Sylvia Townsend Warner uses a similar image in a 1929 lecture on ‘Mystery and Fantasy’ (though it is not clear whether or not she intentionally echoes Scott, or even E.M. Forster’s 1927 claim that the fantasist ‘asks us to pay something extra’):²⁷⁰

Since [the fantasist’s] main thesis surprises by itself, he must deny himself further surprises.... The novelist not only *may* niggle away with small licences all the time, he is a dull dog if he *doesn’t*. But the fantasist, having taken his initial liberty, must mind his Ps and Qs for the rest of his adventure.... The fantasist who has begun by asking for one vast initial credit must do on that credit to the end.²⁷¹

Rather than the wildness Scott saw in the 1820s, a century later the fantasist wishing to use the remit of the domestic novel must exercise notable self-control.²⁷² Warner’s reference to ‘Ps and Qs’ brings the colloquial language of etiquette into play, and thus demonstrates the ways in which the extant dynamics of middlebrow reality are superimposed as a restraint upon the fantastic. That is, the fantastic lends some licence *to* the middlebrow novel, but must not take licence *with* it. As a facet of this interplay, the fantastic is often discussed through a framework of etiquette.

Condorex, in Rebecca West’s *Harriet Hume*, refers to Harriet’s telepathic powers as

²⁷⁰ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Pelican, 1927 repr.1962) p.113

²⁷¹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, lecture at the City Literary Institute, October 21st 1929. Quoted in A.C. Ward, *The Nineteen-Twenties: Literature and Ideas in the Post-War Decade* (London: Methuen, 1930) p.132. (Ward’s ellipses.) A few years later, H.G. Wells writes similarly that there must be ‘a rigid exclusion of other marvels from the story’ and that the author must ‘*domesticate* the impossible hypothesis’. [H.G. Wells, *Seven Famous Novels* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1934) p.viii]

²⁷² A review of *Miss Hargreaves* notes likewise that ‘[t]he realm of fantasy is by some people erroneously supposed to be free and untrammelled, but actually the fantastic story must conform to far stricter rules [than most novels].’ [Royde-Smith, ‘Willed But Unwanted’ p.545]

‘your high occult kind of eavesdropping’,²⁷³ making the supernatural seem merely inappropriate and even tawdry. (Telepathy offers another instance where the Provincial Lady treats images of the fantastic as idle indulgences: ‘tr[y] to send silent telepathic message to Cook that meat-pie will now not be enough, and she must do something with eggs or cheese as first course.’²⁷⁴) Similarly, *The Love-Child* focalises through Agatha to muse that it is ‘terribly embarrassing not to know whether they saw her as one person or as two.’²⁷⁵ Social awkwardness is privileged, as the main focus of her dilemma, over wonder at the supernatural; crossing the boundary of possibility parallels crossing the more flexible, but no less domestically significant, thresholds of acceptable behaviour. But this breach serves to emphasise that etiquette is not lost in a fantastic narrative, but instead shown more clearly by contrast.

The importance of etiquette, both in the writing of fantastic narratives and the instances of the fantastic within these narratives, parallels the archetypically middlebrow Provincial Lady and her determination to adhere to the unwritten rules governing middle-class society. She constantly engages in self-questioning about the ‘correct’ way to live, almost in the manner of a Platonic dialogue and often enacted through a series of ‘Queries’ in parenthesis. There are more than forty such queries in the first volume alone, ranging from ‘Query: Does motherhood lead to cynicism?’ to ‘Is not silence frequently more efficacious than the utmost eloquence?’²⁷⁶ More broadly, though twentieth-century middlebrow fiction resists a (purportedly) Victorian model of the novel-as-instruction, its predilection for mimesis remains often a form of interrogating ways in which to live. The *Provincial Lady* does not portray

²⁷³ Warner, *Lolly Willowses* p.57; West, *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* pp.184f

²⁷⁴ Delafield, ‘The Provincial Lady Goes Further’ p.251

²⁷⁵ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.40

²⁷⁶ Delafield, ‘Diary of a Provincial Lady’ p.95; p.66

an ‘ideal life’, but rather a paradigmatic, self-reflective middlebrow life, in which Ps and Qs are of vital importance for structuring relationships.

Etiquette is defined by a 1920s guide as ‘laws of conduct by observance of which social intercourse can be maintained and prevented from degenerating into chaos’.²⁷⁷

While the fantastic is partly a response to the chaos of the unstable home, acting like etiquette to attempt to stabilise and give structure to the uncontrollable, it almost invariably brings its own chaos. Yet it is also an investigation of the limits of reality and the (chaotic) problems in the readers’ real lives, acting from within to perform this interrogation.

‘The duration of this uncertainty’: questioning the fantastic

This interrogation acts in both directions, of course. While the arrival of the supernatural gives a new vantage to various aspects of real life (both in the narrative and extradiegetically), the character affected by this arrival also engages in an interpretive act of questioning the fantastic. The character may not try to rationalise the supernatural incident, but they invariably (however briefly) *compare* it to the rational, and investigate the discrepancies. This forms the central aspect of Todorov’s definition of the fantastic, cited by almost every subsequent fantasy theorist:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, or a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us.
[...]

²⁷⁷ Ursula Mary Lyon, *Etiquette: A Guide to Public and Social Life* (London: Cassell & Co., 1927) p.1

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.²⁷⁸

Todorov's argument, though it is only intended to apply to an implied reader, sets a precedent by delineating an encounter and elision between the 'familiar world' and unfamiliar intrusion. His theory permits fantastic elements to be de-alienated and recognises the coexistence of natural and supernatural elements within a narrative, which is, of course, an essential model for the domestic fantastic.²⁷⁹ Todorov views this state (the fantastic) of interrogating the supernatural as temporary within a novel, existing only during the period of enquiry.

This period *is* often dramatised in domestic fantastic novels – for instance, in *Miss Hargreaves* Norman enumerates all the possible explanations for Miss Hargreaves' existence, from 'escaped lunatic' to the Freudian possibility that 'I had actually met her somewhere in the past and [...] she'd slipped out of my subconscious mind.'²⁸⁰ In other domestic fantastic novels, however, it is only a momentary indecision, narratively sidelined; in *The Love-Child* Agatha wonders briefly about the servants seeing her chase after Clarissa in the garden: 'They would have thought her mad. And would they be right or wrong?'²⁸¹ Since the narrative is always in the third person, this qualm is introduced through a version of free indirect discourse, but remains on the outside of Agatha's mind. Her self-questioning about her sanity

²⁷⁸ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.25. Todorov's 'uncanny' is that which appears fantastic but has a rational explanation, and 'marvellous' that which has an irrational explanation. It is worth noting that devils, vampires etc. can appear in a fantastic novel – but as intrusions, not as part of the non-fantastic world.

²⁷⁹ Todorov slips up when he writes that 'the superlative, the excessive will be the norm of the fantastic.' For a novel to be executed fantastically, the norm must *remain* the norm, for the superlative and excessive to resist. [Ibid. p.93]

²⁸⁰ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.77

²⁸¹ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.28

becomes also an authorial questioning, and an invitation to the reader to participate in the same enquiry. Yet it is not dwelt on, and is not a dominant apparatus for reading the fantastic in this novel, either for the reader or for the character. According to Todorov, once Norman settles upon an indisputably supernatural explanation, and once Agatha has realised that she is not mad, their novels are ‘marvellous’ rather than ‘fantastic’.²⁸² I follow the path of many theorists responding to Todorov, by disputing the idea that supernatural novels are non-fantastic – and, indeed, I see those novels which remain in a hesitant limbo as separate from my concept of the fantastic.²⁸³ His paradigm of hesitation – of the real and fantastic in dialogue seeking an interpretation of each other – is useful, but not (I believe) practicable in defining the parameters of the fantastic subgenre. It would, for instance, exclude *Lady Into Fox* altogether, and include novels where hesitation is extended by imprecise writing, as much as authorial intention.

Todorov’s theory has been the source of much debate and significant repudiation, as well as developmental inquiry. To mention three, Harold Bloom writes casually: ‘I pause here to cast off, with amiable simplicity, the theory of fantasy set forth by Todorov.[...] [T]he reader who hesitates *is* lost and *has* lost that moment which is the agnostic encounter of deep, strong reading.’²⁸⁴ (He invites, of course, the rejoinder that agnosticism *is* simply a prolonged period of hesitation.) Christine Brooke-Rose’s criticism of Todorov’s work points out that he appears to postulate theoretical genres,

²⁸² This concept has precursors in psychological theory; Ernst Jentsch (in an essay which is the only psychological precedent acknowledged in Freud’s ‘Das Unheimliche’) states ‘As long as the doubt as to the nature of the perceived movement [of a supposed inanimate object] lasts, and with it the obscurity of its cause, a feeling of terror persists in the person concerned.’ [Ernst Jentsch and Roy Sellars (trans.), ‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny’ *Angelaki*, 2 (1906 (trans. 1996)) 7-15, p.11]

²⁸³ For example, Irwin disputes the idea that hesitation is necessary, writing that ‘[i]n successful fantasy all is certainty and clarity’. [Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.55]

²⁸⁴ Harold Bloom, *AGON: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p.204

but in fact concentrates on historical genres, while Neil Cornwell subdivides Todorov's categories still further, splitting 'marvellous' into 'What if?', 'Fairy story', and 'Romance/fantasy'. The definition he gives to the first of these is more feasibly stretched across 'the fantastic' altogether: 'works set in what seems to pass for 'our' world, but with a single (or at least a small number of) element(s) of the manifestly impossible.'²⁸⁵

Most usefully, Amaryll Chanady directly dismisses Todorov's idea of hesitation, suggesting the substitute 'antinomy, or the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text.'²⁸⁶ The fantastic novel, Chanady proposes, does not seek to resolve this conflict, but rather the fantastic and mimetic co-exist without either dominating. This model moves beyond Todorov's contained moments (or periods) of hesitation to incorporate the entirety of a work, both structurally and receptively. *Lady into Fox*, for instance, ends with the vixen's death in her husband's arms:

Then at that moment there was a scream of despair heard by all the field that had come up, which they declared afterwards was more like a woman's voice than a man's. But yet there was no clear proof whether it was Mr. Tebrick or his wife who had suddenly regained her voice.²⁸⁷

In these final pages the parallel codes of fantastic and mimetic, or natural and supernatural, overlap in an audible sign. The scream – or, rather, the other characters' reception of the scream – acts metaphorically for the codes of reception for the novel. The overhearing neighbours cannot distinguish between the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Tebrick (representing natural and fantastic respectively) nor do these voices

²⁸⁵ Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p.71; Cornwell, *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* p.40

²⁸⁶ Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* pp.11f

²⁸⁷ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* pp.90f

comfortably and conclusively elide. Ambiguity remains for both neighbours and readers, with neither ‘code’ being eliminated, offering a more applicable model for the domestic fantastic (even though this is not specifically the audience Chanady has in mind.)

‘Slipping from waking into sleep’: turning points

While the fantastic is not permitted to replace the mimetic, only distort and interrogate it, each novel of this subgenre is bisected by the introduction of the fantastic. Before this point, the establishment of a norm makes (or should make) the first section of each example the equivalent of other middlebrow novels – excepting any elements of presentiment which reveal a fantastic latency. The initial appearance of the fantastic acts as a pivot, though the moment at which each novel confesses its fantastic nature varies significantly, in terms of narrative placement, and it is illuminating to examine how various authors play with this point and their readers’ expectation of it. *Lady Into Fox* announces the fantastic overtly, on the first page, with what Garnett would later call ‘a bang of the drum in the first paragraph’:²⁸⁸ ‘the sudden changing of Mrs. Tebrick into a vixen is an established fact which we may attempt to account for as we will.’²⁸⁹ Although there remains the possibility of an unreliable or duped narrator, the fantastic is fairly securely established.²⁹⁰

Turning points can function either as pivot-as-event or pivot-as-framework. While both necessitate a shifting from the domestic novel to the fantastic novel, only in the former does the turning point feature as a momentous narrative event, as well as a

²⁸⁸ Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* p.246

²⁸⁹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.1

²⁹⁰ Agatha Christie’s 1926 novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* had popularised the idea of the unreliable narrator, making the trope accessible for a middlebrow audience.

marker of genre. The latter, which usually arrives early in the narrative, helps inform an interpretation almost from the outset, and is less disruptive. So *Lady Into Fox* still separates the fantastic and non-fantastic either side of a crux, but by introducing the fantastic on the first page, this moment is incorporated almost immediately into the reader's receptive framework for interpreting and comprehending the novel. At the other end of the spectrum, *Lolly Willowes* doesn't concretely state the idea of witchcraft or Satan for the first two-thirds of the novel; Warner relies more heavily upon creating the basis of a domestic novel, before this is disrupted. When the fantastic is eventually and emphatically introduced, as a pivot-as-event which distorts the reading of the novel, it does so in language approaching the precision of a legal document: 'She, Laura Willowes, in England, in the year 1922, had entered into a compact with the Devil.'²⁹¹ However, despite being praised by Gillian Beer for the 'intransigent clarity of her language'²⁹², Warner's tone deliberately avoids clarity here. Though purporting to be a simple, biographical statement, the sentence falters through superfluous clauses and the precision of the statement melds with the imprecision of its syntax.

Until this transition, as one reviewer notes, *Lolly Willowes* has 'differed from other stories of frustrated women's lives only by the surety of its description and the purity of its style.'²⁹³ Ward writes of *Lolly Willowes* that '[s]uch unobtrusive skill and art have gone into the gradual preparation for the change that the passage from the one state to the other is as smooth as slipping from waking into sleep'.²⁹⁴ (Sleep, as shall be discussed in my conclusion, is a significant image of change running through

²⁹¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.169

²⁹² Beer, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner: "The Centrifugal Kick"' p.82

²⁹³ I.B. O'Malley, 'Women and Witches', *Women's Leader and Common Cause* (26/2/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

²⁹⁴ Ward, *The Nineteen-Twenties: Literature and Ideas in the Post-War Decade* p.135

domestic fantastic novels and, at least here, their criticism.) In this instance, however, it is not solely preparation which makes the transition smooth, but a genuine continuity. Warner (perhaps following the advice laid out in her ‘Mystery and Fantasy’ lecture) exemplifies a common trait of the domestic fantastic by not radically altering the tone, style, or pace used before the advent of the supernatural. There is a clear, thematic continuation of ‘frustrated women’s lives’, and one commentator wryly remarks that ‘the second half is almost more convincing than the first’.²⁹⁵ Edwin Muir considered it a ‘fundamental falsity’ that Warner

writes about occult things, but she gives them no significance other than she gives to ordinary things. When Laura is a witch she is not essentially different from what she was before the change happened.²⁹⁶

Yet this is, of course, precisely the intention of the domestic fantastic novel. The supernatural is recognised as supernatural, but treated as an extension or manipulation of the everyday. Similarly, the tone and nature of the fantastic intrusion may disrupt domestic equilibrium, but need not be antagonistic to it. Walter Scott’s view was that fantastic elements ‘ought to be rare, brief, indistinct, and such as may become a being to us so incomprehensible and so different from ourselves’, adding that the worst thing a supernatural creature can be is ‘as it is familiarly called, chatty’.²⁹⁷ This is both a middlebrow attribute and a middlebrow censure – and yet domestic fantastic novels act precisely against Scott’s dictum. The supernatural is not merely glimpsed, but produced and incorporated wholly into the maelstrom of middlebrow life – whether gradually or suddenly. In these novels the fantastic emerges and stays put – or, to use the imaginative metaphor chosen by Ward, ‘they have taken the naked

²⁹⁵ Eleanor Perényi, ‘The Good Witch of the West’ *New York Review of Books*, 32/12 (1985) 27-30, p.27

²⁹⁶ Edwin Muir, ‘Review of *Lolly Willowes*’ *The Nation & The Athenaeum*, 06/03/26 (1926) p.782

²⁹⁷ Scott, ‘On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman’ pp.62f

winged fairy and dressed him up in a morning-suit with spats before letting him loose among twentieth-century people.²⁹⁸

Many fantastic novels which do not open with the overtly fantastic do, though, play with harbingers beforehand, preparing the reader for the fantastic and psychologising them in advance. As part of *Lolly Willowes*' status as a model of continuity, Orlo Williams' review notes that '[t]here have been hints, it is true, but too deep for the unintuitive.'²⁹⁹ There is an early portent that she 'might grow up eccentric', and further foreshadowing later, when Laura proposes her scheme for moving to Great Mop to her brother:

[Henry] rallied Laura, supposing that when she lived at Great Mop she would start hunting for catnip again, and become the village witch.

"How lovely!" said Laura.

Henry was satisfied. Obviously Laura could not be in earnest.³⁰⁰

Henry's obtuseness and the irony of this final line (which is the strongest suggestion yet that Laura *could* be in earnest) act as signposts towards the fantastic – yet this excerpt would not be incongruous in that which Orlo Williams feared *Lolly Willowes* would become: 'one more study – though an unusually artistic one – of a frustrated woman's life and death.'³⁰¹ (Williams' silent allusion is presumably to May Sinclair's 1922 novel about spinsterhood, *Life and Death of Harriett Freen*.)

Incidentally, one of the reasons that that Rachel Ferguson's *The Brontës Went To Woolworths* hovers on the border between domestic fantastic and the simply surreal is

²⁹⁸ Ward, *The Nineteen-Twenties: Literature and Ideas in the Post-War Decade* p.132

²⁹⁹ Orlo Williams, 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*' *Times Literary Supplement*, 04/02/26 (1926) p.78

³⁰⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.17; p.97

³⁰¹ Williams, 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*' p.78

that it has no turning point, as such, and elements (such as the anthropomorphism of their dog and doll) which could have figured as harbingers of the fantastic (the Brontë sisters appear on their doorstep) have no basis of domestic reality with which to contrast. Where *Lolly Willowes* demonstrably borrows from an extant branch of middlebrow fiction, *The Brontës Went To Woolworths* deliberately divorces itself from the 'usual' and stereotypical, as exemplified by the knowing, almost meta, opening line: 'How I loathe that kind of novel which is about a lot of sisters.'³⁰² On one level this is precisely what the novel is about, but by foregrounding a resistance to this variety of literature, Ferguson's separation of the novel from the mainstream is self-fulfilling. Instead, Ferguson creates an exaggerated vision of what Humble terms the 'family as a profoundly eccentric organization'.³⁰³ The Carne family live in an imaginative world of make-believe which carries across to the narrative, where there is no linguistic division between fantastic and non-fantastic. Metaphor is destabilised as there is no clear distinction in the novel between imagery and language intended to establish fact:

I first saw and spoke to Lady Toddington two years ago, though I had known her intimately for nearly three years.³⁰⁴

This sentence acts as a kind of zeugma, attaching the imaginary and the (novelistically) factual to the same verbs. The novel does offer a skewed variant of a distinction between real and fantastic, by including occasional chapters focalised through the prosaic (and mystified) governess Miss Martin, and elsewhere Deirdre (the narrator) comments of one flight of fancy: 'That sort of tale we recognise as

³⁰² Ferguson, *The Brontës Went to Woolworths* p.7

³⁰³ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.149

³⁰⁴ Ferguson, *The Brontës Went to Woolworths* p.24

fantastic. We know how to be reasonable.’³⁰⁵ This line is unquantifiable, however, and impracticable in determining the potentially fantastic elements of the novel. Without the establishment of an assessable reality, there can be no fantastic, and precursors have nothing to point towards.

Precursors often take the form of imagery or parenthetical comments which later in the narrative becomes literal. For example, long before Judy metamorphoses into a plant in *Flower Phantoms*, ‘[s]he felt like a tender shoot that has come up in the snow and would have done better to stay underground.’³⁰⁶ (It is an intriguing simile, as regards her eventual metamorphosis, suggesting a pessimistic vision of change from the outset.) Olivia, in Bernadette Murphy’s time-travel novel *An Unexpected Guest*, makes repeated throwaway comments about ‘how amusing it would be to go back to the past as one is now’³⁰⁷ before precisely that occurs. These act as linguistic presentiments, and, while there is still a single pivotal point between real and fantastic in these narratives, these moments create a tonal harmony between the bisected halves. The turning points are still pivot-as-event, because they fundamentally change the way in which the characters are read and (by extension) their relationship with the environments they inhabit, but there is some linguistic preparation. Olivier reverses this conceit towards the end of *The Love-Child*, when David says to Clarissa:

“Clarissa, my love for you is all that I *am* now. I simply don’t exist except in my thoughts of you, my love for you.”³⁰⁸

Whilst this metaphor is false romantic rhetoric on David’s part, it does describe Clarissa’s dependence upon Agatha’s mind for her own existence – rather than

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p.94

³⁰⁶ Ronald Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1926) p.26

³⁰⁷ Bernadette Murphy, *An Unexpected Guest* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934) p.43

³⁰⁸ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.160

prefiguring the fantastic, it draws the image full circle, and exemplifies the interpretive possibilities when language must determine both fantastic and non-fantastic states and characters in the same novel.

These signposts do not solely act to prepare the path towards the intrusion of the fantastic. Their function is also to tease the reader who is likely to have pre-existent awareness of the novel's fantastic nature. Todorov suggests that re-reading the fantastic is a very different act from the initial reading, since 'identification is no longer possible, and the reading inevitably becomes a meta-reading, in the course of which we note the methods of the fantastic instead of falling under its spell.'³⁰⁹ This would be true only if the narratives existed in a receptive vacuum, since in one sense every reading is a 'meta-reading'. It is probable that readers would have foreknowledge of the fantastic derived through advertisements, reviews, and discussion with fellow readers – whether as word-of-mouth recommendations or through the broader community of middlebrow readers in media such as the Book Society newsletter. For example, the list of other novels published by Jonathan Cape at the end of Rachel Ferguson's *A Harp in Lowndes Square* advertises Ronald Fraser's *Flower Phantoms* as 'a strange tale of a girl's merging into the body and experience of a plant.'³¹⁰ Ferguson's novel, in turn, is both advertised and reviewed in the April 1936 *Book Society News*, and described as 'a strange, mysterious story incorporating a time-theory in terms of a house's atmosphere.'³¹¹ Prior awareness can come from paratextual sources, as well as those outside the book: *Lady Into Fox* announces its fantastic premise within the title – as do Ronald Fraser's *The Flying Draper* (1924) and Andre Maurois' *The Thought-Reading Machine* (1938) – and there

³⁰⁹ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* pp.89f

³¹⁰ Ferguson, *A Harp in Lowndes Square* [n.p.]

³¹¹ Anon., 'You May Also Like...' *Book Society News*, April (1936) p.16

is a subtle forewarning of Satan's arrival in the subtitle of *Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman*. These novels offer paradigmatic instances of pivot-as-framework.

The level of reader awareness, and thus expectation of the fantastic, cannot be deduced from the text alone (particularly for a middlebrow audience, with its own industry for dialogical recommendation) and there is no single receptive model for transitional moments in these narratives. Where there is the possibility of the fantastic being foreseen from before the outset of the novel, and thus acting latently throughout the normalised, realist opening section, authors can exploit the reader's anticipation by playing with false-starts. The fact that the novel can be categorised within the subgenre of the domestic fantastic may not surprise the reader, but the placement of the turning point might. For instance, the opening sentence of the second chapter of *The Love-Child*, 'Clarissa came back in the night',³¹² which might be interpreted as the moment where the fantastic is realised, is immediately attenuated by the amendment that this appearance takes place only in Agatha's dreams. The reader is conceivably (and ironically) more surprised by the absence of the fantastic at this point than by its arrival when Clarissa *does* appear later in the narrative.

The complicit reader and the style(s) of the fantastic

Rather than simply stretching the reader's credulity, domestic fantastic novels invite their complicity. Forster writes that when 'reading *The Ancient Mariner* we forget our astronomy and geography and daily ethics.'³¹³ These are willingly suspended, not passively forgotten. In the same way, engaging with fantastic novels, the reader

³¹² Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.19

³¹³ E.M. Forster, 'Anonymity: An Enquiry (1925)' *Two Cheers For Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1951b) 87-97, p.91

cannot dismiss his/her knowledge of natural laws and approach a narrative á la *tabula rasa*. Instead, they are foregrounded through the reader's complicit acceptance of their fictive negation – and anticipation of this negation. By preparing to suspend disbelief in this manner, the middlebrow reader permits identification with characters experiencing the fantastic, and, because of sharing the same world, identification is the primary readerly difference between the fantastic and Fantasy.

The concept of 'credulity' in relation to reading fiction is, of course, paradoxical – or rather it reveals the different planes of 'truth' within a fictional text. The reader plays a more complicit and active role in the sustenance of the fantastic than would be suggested by a binary division of credulity and incredulity, as demonstrated through contemporary reviews of fantastic novels. Gerald Gould's response to *Lady into Fox* exemplifies the manner in which impossible particulars are received:

To some narrow folk, Mr. Garnett's story, despite its sober veracity, will seem as improbable as the elaborate inventions of Mr. [E.C.] Vivian [the pseudonym of Fantasy novelist Charles Cannell]; but not to those susceptible to the charms of style. From beginning to end of 'Lady Into Fox,' there is not one false-note. The coherence and harmony are absolute. To apply the vulgar and impertinent test of probability is unthinkable.³¹⁴

Gould's words are, of course, ironic, instancing a willingness not only to be complicit in the construction of the fantastic, but to adopt a tone which embraces the worldview of the novel. The peculiarly middlebrow reprimand 'vulgar and impertinent' reinforces the idea of etiquette in fantastic writing and reception, and exemplifies the partisanship which accompanies the formation of one complicit group of readers against a presupposed set of 'narrow folk'. Middlebrow readers are not duped by the

³¹⁴ Gerald Gould, 'Review of *Lady Into Fox*' *The Saturday Review*, 27/01/23 (1923) p.116

presentiments of the fantastic into unknowingly accepting it, but instead cooperate with the psychology required for pivotal narrative moments.

Although Irwin theorises about the dominance of ‘rhetoric’ in fantastic novels, arguing that it needs to ‘persuade the reader through narrative that an invention contrary to known or presumed fact is existentially valid’,³¹⁵ it is important to acknowledge the various planes of ‘persuasion’ which inform the response to a fantastic fiction. Gould and his readers are obviously not swayed by the belief that a lady could turn into a fox, but instead Gould intends to draw attention to narrative ‘cohesion and harmony’ as the establishment of a different variety of credulity: the willing suspension of disbelief, or at least the suspension of vocalised disbelief. Reviews of this nature demonstrate how flexible concepts of belief and truth must be when actual (as opposed to implied) readers are considered, as these readers are simultaneously aware of the real world, the fictively possible world, the fictively impossible world, and their adopted role in observing all three. Agatha (in *The Love-Child*) is in some ways the paradigmatic reader of the domestic fantastic, engaged in the act of reading Clarissa’s appearance. She accepts the supernatural occurrence with the reader’s same suspended incredulity, and is described as being ‘wholeheartedly in the game’,³¹⁶ playing with Clarissa rather than performing an ontological analysis. She is also responsible for Clarissa’s continuing presence – in the same way that the collusive reader permits the successful continuation of the narrative. Conversely, the reader who does not give credence to the fantastic – who is one of the ‘narrow folk’ – kills its effect and its interrogation of the real.

³¹⁵ Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.60

³¹⁶ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.27

The style chosen for fantastic narratives (when they do depart from the normalised tone of the domestic novel, while remaining within a middlebrow remit)³¹⁷ often facilitates this balance of reader credulity and incredulity. These novels avoid an internal interplay between belief and disbelief by adopting a style which does not allow space for the misgivings of a narrator: a pseudo-biographical style. This may seem antagonistic to the fantastic in the same way that middlebrow commonsense is, but since it is the style of commonsense, as it were, it is a medium which, again, atones for the fantastic events within the narrative. C.S. Lewis distinguishes between ‘realism of presentation’ and ‘realism of content’;³¹⁸ for the faux-biographers, the former (style) can ‘atone’ for the excesses of the latter (setting and plot).

Lady Into Fox is the quintessential domestic fantastic novel in this mode, seldom straying from the straightforward – that which an early *TLS* review called the novel’s ‘extreme sobriety and exactness [...] every circumstance of matter-of-fact detail’,³¹⁹ in the same way that reviews of *The Love-Child* drew attention to the verisimilitude of prosaic events. Desmond MacCarthy used the same term, writing that Garnett’s ‘invention is fantastic, but his imagination is matter-of-fact.’³²⁰ In this criticism, MacCarthy praises Garnett’s peculiar simplicity as an observer and artist, but it is fairer to say that the way in which Garnett translates his invention is matter-of-fact, rather than the imagination which created it; the significance of *Lady Into Fox* runs deeper than its surface, even though it is determinedly presented as being all surface. This is made clear from the framing of the novel’s stark opening and the claim to

³¹⁷ Glen Cavaliero writes of *A Harp in Lowndes Square*, it demonstrates ‘how a supernatural element can be accommodated within what would otherwise be the characteristic naturalistic style of a light novelist.’ This isn’t entirely accurate for Ferguson’s novel, but was an option for domestic fantastic novelists. [Cavaliero, *The Supernatural and English Fiction* p.87]

³¹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) pp.57-9

³¹⁹ Anon., ‘Review of *Lady Into Fox*’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 02/11/22 (1922) p.709

³²⁰ MacCarthy, *Criticism* p.226

‘confine myself to an exact narrative of the event and all that followed on it.’³²¹

Garnett rarely incorporates introspection, and even passages which allude to emotions outside the parameters of the matter-of-fact do so sparsely and at a distance: ‘by now Mr. Tebrick had been through all the agonies of wounded self-esteem, disillusionment and despair that a man can suffer.’³²²

The protestation of reality is seen in several domestic fantastic novels, possibly influenced by the success of *Lady Into Fox*. Ronald Fraser’s *The Flying Draper*, published little more than a year after *Lady Into Fox*, opens with the dictum ‘to write, if possible, as if there were nothing strange about [the story]’,³²³ and, curiously late in the narrative, Norman (the narrator of *Miss Hargreaves*) addresses the reader to assure them ‘it is a very serious book [...] [a]nd remember it’s true; I haven’t made a thing up – except Miss Hargreaves in the first case.’³²⁴ (This breaking of the fourth wall is not so postmodern a technique as it would be elsewhere, since the context of a biographical tone permits such addresses.) These petitions for credulity rely again upon the complicity of the reader and their awareness of genre, and, since the narrator tends to be posited as another observer of the fantastic – a ‘reader’ of it themselves – the author can present stark sentences rather than complex frames of justification. Indeed, justification of this variety would belittle and compromise the contribution of the reader in cooperating with the fantastic.

A second, longer review of *Lady into Fox* in the *TLS* writes:

³²¹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.1

³²² Ibid. p.54

³²³ Ronald Fraser, *The Flying Draper* (Revised edn.; London: Jonathan Cape, 1924 repr.1931) p.19

³²⁴ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.76

That is one admitted way – to present fantasy as plainest fact. So, with dry circumstances, Swift introduces Gulliver. Bluff, of course, is too crude a word for the insinuating trick of it: but if there is no mystification there must be a sort of lucid confusion, and Mr. Garnett has begun that with the flavour of his words. They spread an eighteenth-century aroma, an atmosphere where all is sensible and lucid; and if a freakish thing can really wear that manner it is half-way to be a fact.³²⁵

‘Lucid’, used twice in this short excerpt, can apply both to sanity and comprehensibility – the spectre of madness threads through many domestic fantastic novels, but in Garnett’s novel it weaves alongside a purportedly truthful objectivity. The impulse for authenticity seen in Gothic fiction, which frequently relied upon framed narratives, discovered letters or manuscripts, and other concrete ‘proofs’, persists into this strand of the domestic fantastic. Yet it is not the Gothic novel which is referred to in McDowall’s review, but rather the grandiose eighteenth-century novel. Several reviews of *Lady Into Fox* make comparisons with eighteenth-century writers, but tend towards Defoe rather than Swift.³²⁶

Elinor Wylie plays upon the reputation of the eighteenth century for rationality by setting *The Venetian Glass Nephew* in that period:

To those desiring to achieve a better comprehension of the character of Peter Innocent Bon, cardinal priest and cardinal prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda, the historian recommends a careful study of his poetical writings (Venice, 1790) and his notes upon liturgical subjects (Parma, 1794).³²⁷

³²⁵ A.S. McDowall, 'A Candid Fantasy' *Times Literary Supplement*, 22/02/23 (1923) p.121

³²⁶ Lynd, 'New Novels' p.1184; Woolf, 'Mr. Garnett's Second' p.115. When Warner wrote to Garnett, saying she preferred *A Man in the Zoo* to *Lady Into Fox*, her reason was 'because I like your writing better than Defoe's' – although she was herself compared to both Defoe and Garnett by L.P. Hartley, and other letters between them often mention Defoe with approval verging on veneration. [Warner, Garnett, and Garnett, *Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner/Garnett Letters* p.7; p.141; p.164; L.P. Hartley, 'New Fiction' *The Saturday Review*, 06/02/26 (1926a) p.165]

³²⁷ Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew* p.10.

Choosing the eighteenth century as her setting allows Wylie not only this pseudo-historical stance, but permits more experimentation with style than would be otherwise accepted by the reader: she can write in that which one reviewer labelled a ‘decorative and agreeable manner’³²⁸ without forfeiting the assumed sense of level-headed authenticity. Bibliographical references are not the only pieces of biographical paraphernalia and ‘evidence’ used by novelists who choose this style. As with the photographs of Vita Sackville-West incorporated into *Orlando*, which introduce multi-layering of realities and problematise any impenetrable division between fantastic and real, Ray Garnett’s woodcuts in *Lady into Fox* are labelled ‘corroborative evidence’ by one reviewer.³²⁹ It is an extension of the diary format (and variety of life-writing) which suggests veracity at the centre of the Provincial Lady novels, even though these diaries are clearly not pieces of discovered evidence (and nor, of course, are the woodcuts) – but rather apparatus for the invitation of complicit credulity.

The first page of *Lady Into Fox* refers to the narrative being ‘so fully proved, and that not by one witness but by a dozen, all respectable, and with no possibility of collusion between them.’³³⁰ Garnett maintains this claim of authenticity to the final words of the novel: ‘[he] lived to be a great age, for that matter he is still alive.’³³¹ The first half of this final sentence is congruent with a mythological tale; the discordant second half pulls the tone away from fairy-tale, and extends to the reader a final token of

³²⁸ Edward Shanks, 'Fiction' *London Mercury*, May (1926) 91-93, p.92. On the other hand, L.P. Hartley wrote that the novel was ‘virtually all decoration, a frame without a picture.’ [L.P. Hartley, 'New Fiction' *The Saturday Review*, 24/04/26 (1926b) p.546]

³²⁹ Gould, 'Review of *Lady Into Fox*' p.116

³³⁰ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.1

³³¹ *Ibid.* p.91

credibility. The jolt in the sentence reflects back upon the wider meeting of mythology and authenticity within the domestic fantastic.

Woolf's *Orlando* is famously subtitled 'a biography'³³² but (as with many other ways in which this emphatically non-middlebrow novel incorporates myriad fantastic techniques) her style is not simply the clinically biographical. This is shown as early as the first line ('He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it –'³³³) wherein Woolf unsettles a traditional, *David Copperfield* manner of opening a *Bildungsroman* by stiling a simple sentence with ellipsis, and throwing the most basic biographical detail immediately into doubt – as will, of course, become fundamental to the fantastic impetus of the novel. The same shrouding of biographical tone in outlandish imagery and rich but obfuscatory narrative is seen throughout *Orlando*, but particularly at Orlando's transformation into a woman. After a linguistically complex scene involving the appearance of the Lady of Purity, the Lady of Chastity, and the Lady of Modesty, Woolf changes register to state: 'We have no choice left but confess – he was a woman'.³³⁴

Throughout *Orlando* Woolf plays with style and the ways in which it can mediate communication by juxtaposing styles. A vague, anecdotal statement is instantly transformed into biographical specificity ('One June morning – it was Saturday the 18th [...]'³³⁵) or the same sentiment is expressed twice, in opposing styles:

³³² Woolf was uneasy with the pragmatics of this decision, complaining that 'it will have to go to the Biography shelf. I doubt therefore we shall do more than cover expenses'. [Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume 3 (1925-30)*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin, 1980 repr.1982) p.198] Genres were not then so stratified as they have become, but the division between fiction and non-fiction already had, as Woolf notes, a spatial impact in a commercial environment.

³³³ Woolf, *Orlando* p.13

³³⁴ Ibid. p.132

³³⁵ Ibid. p.64

Has the finger of death to be laid on the tumult of life from time to time lest it rend us asunder? Are we so made that we have to take death in small doses daily or we could not go on with the business of living?³³⁶

An overly-poetical sentence is followed by one in a mundane, almost sardonic register, yet they have essentially identical meanings. Woolf demonstrates that facts are not neutral, but instead influenced by stylistic choices, and thereby exemplifies two common approaches for domestic fantastic fiction.

For, those domestic fantastic novels which are not framed either through the matter-of-fact faux-biographical or a recognisably domestic tone often chose what Angela Carter labelled an 'ornate, unnatural',³³⁷ imagery-focused style closer to that which Greer Gilman calls a 'a high Baroque frenzy'.³³⁸ Kathryn Hume writes that

Fantasy allows a dream-like overdetermination and condensation. The language of science (and, by extension, of realism) can achieve no such effect, for its whole thrust is to rely on a technical vocabulary in which a word stands for one universally acknowledged referent and no more. It aims to be unambiguous. Fantasy instead aims for richness, and often achieves a plethora of meanings.³³⁹

Hume overlooks the possibility of presenting supernatural events in unambiguous language, creating meanings that are not unstable but simply impossible. As Chanady writes, fantastic novels have 'the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text. Since neither can be accepted in the presence of the other, the apparently

³³⁶ Ibid. p.65

³³⁷ Angela Carter, cited in Ruth Parkin-Gounelas, 'The Other Side of the Looking-Glass: Woman's Fantasy Writing and Woolf's *Orlando*' *Gamma: Journal of Theory and Criticism*, 1 (1993) 137-153, p.143

³³⁸ Greer Gilman, 'The Languages of the Fantastic' in Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 134-146, p.138

³³⁹ Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* p.194

supernatural phenomenon remains inexplicable.³⁴⁰ The codes conflict and co-exist, but they do not necessarily result or resolve in overdetermination.

Some middlebrow fantastic authors do, however, aim at a presentation of the linguistic encapsulation of overdetermination which Hume seems to promote. It is in these attempts, it must be confessed, that some weaker domestic fantastic writers create the sub-Woolfean imitations wrongly considered almost universally middlebrow by Q.D. Leavis. Fraser's *Flower Phantoms*, for instance, opts for hazy, abstract images to attain a fantastic style, which partly clouds a translatable depiction of the fantastic: "When I am in that universe bounded by tinted glass, in an ether magical with light, warmth, my critical wits leave me."³⁴¹ Wiser writers of this subgenre recognise that, having taken liberties with fantastic events, they ought to remain within the remit of middlebrow stylistic parameters. (The attempt to create a fantastic language by looking outside the normative, rather than finding a method of representation within it, is more characteristic of post-war Fantasy novels. Even aside from Tolkien and his invented languages, there develops a tradition for archaic, elaborate registers for depicting worlds separate from the reader's own.)³⁴²

For middlebrow writers wishing to investigate the richness of language without losing coherence or ending up as flawed imitations of avant-garde styles, a variation of (and framework for) a fantastic style was provided by the popularisation of Freudianism

³⁴⁰ Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* p.12

³⁴¹ Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* p.34

³⁴² Greer Gilman describes how Fantasy literature uses (amongst others) hieratic, archaic, ecstatic, ironic, absurd, demotic language. [Gilman, 'The Languages of the Fantastic' p.140]. In the ironic category she includes David Garnett's and Elinor Wylie's 'elegant and unbedizened prose'. (p.140) Although Gilman makes no distinction between Fantasy and fantastic in this essay, her category of ironic style is notably different from the others, and the only one with a common non-fantastic counterpart.

and its semantics. Although middlebrow readers and writers were usually unconvinced by the theories of Freud and his proponents, which were first translated into English in 1910 and available in many popular guides from the end of that decade – even the Provincial Lady has ‘serious thoughts of [writing an] interesting article for any publication specialising in Psychology Made Easy’³⁴³ – his writings certainly influenced the thinking and received wisdom of middlebrow society in the interwar years, and the framing of certain fantastic narratives is helpfully informed by an examination of the ways in which a middlebrow audience received and used Freudianism. Todorov claims erroneously that ‘psychoanalysis has replaced (and thereby has made useless) the literature of the fantastic’.³⁴⁴ Rather, the advent of psychoanalysis may appear to have usurped the functions of the fantastic, but the latter is equally equipped to borrow from the former.

‘The Oedipus complex was a household word, the incest motive a commonplace of tea-time chat’:³⁴⁵ the middlebrow Freud and the fantastic language of psychoanalysis

In 1917 Dorothy Scarborough could still write that ‘Freud’s theory of dreams as the invariable result of past experiences or unconscious desires has not been stressed in fiction, though doubtless it will have its inning presently.’³⁴⁶ Its innings certainly came. Although Freudian semantics are not quite ubiquitous in the interwar period, it is almost rarer to read a middlebrow novel from these decades which does *not* allude at least briefly to Freudianism than one that does, and the topic is paramount in novels such as Rose Macaulay’s *Dangerous Ages* and Delafield’s *The Way Things Are*.

³⁴³ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime' p.492

³⁴⁴ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.160

³⁴⁵ D.H. Lawrence, 'Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (1923)' *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (London: Heinemann, 1961) 197-249, p.197

³⁴⁶ Dorothy Scarborough, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (New York; London.: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917) p.79

John Forrester describes Freud as a ‘transdiscursive’³⁴⁷ figure, acting as a symbol outside and beyond his own published corpus. For middlebrow readers, Freud was barely ‘discursive’ at all, side-stepping encounter with the written text to have Freud (in the famous words of Auden’s ‘In Memory of Sigmund Freud’) ‘no more a person / now but a whole climate of opinion’.³⁴⁸ Forster writes similarly:

Man is beginning to understand himself better and to explore his own contradictions. This exploration is conveniently connected with the awful name of Freud, but it is not so much in Freud as in the air.³⁴⁹

It is not evident for whose ‘convenience’ this connection occurs, nor does Forster make clear specifically why he considers Freud’s name to be ‘awful’,³⁵⁰ but it is noteworthy that any name – in itself, necessarily neutral – could become burdened with sufficient significance to warrant the censure. Middlebrow novelists play upon the unusual nature and foreignness of the name (it appears as ‘Frood’ in Rose Macaulay’s *Keeping Up Appearances*, where a character disparages his ‘pretty nasty book’³⁵¹), which helped concretise Freud’s status to most as a permeative name, rather than an individual figure.

The topic of psychoanalysis spread quickly to a wide audience – ‘any thinking literate person’,³⁵² according to a 1945 work by Frederick Hoffman – appealing as a

³⁴⁷ John Forrester, ‘“A Whole Climate of Opinion”: Rewriting the History of Psychoanalysis’ in Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter (eds.) *Discovering the History of Psychiatry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 174-190, p.180

³⁴⁸ W.H. Auden, ‘In Memory of Sigmund Freud (1939)’ in Hendrik Ruitenbeek (ed.) *Freud As We Knew Him* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1973) p.116

³⁴⁹ E.M. Forster, ‘English Prose between 1918 and 1939 (1944)’ *Two Cheers For Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1951a) 280-291, p.282

³⁵⁰ Even Auden’s poem is not wholly complimentary about Freud’s impact; less frequently quoted lines include ‘He wasn’t clever at all’, and those immediately preceding the famous excerpt; ‘often he was wrong and, at times, absurd’. [Auden, ‘In Memory of Sigmund Freud (1939)’ p.180]

³⁵¹ Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances* p.139

³⁵² Frederick John Hoffman, *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* (New York: Grove Press, 1945) p.70. It is unclear whether he would include a middlebrow audience amongst this number; they, in turn,

conversation-topic if not a lifestyle overhaul.³⁵³ This was particularly true (as it is today) with a selective emphasis within his work, focusing upon those aspects which concern sex. A 1921 *Saturday Review* claims that psychoanalysis ‘wallows in sex’, while in a 1931 *London Quarterly Review*, E.S. Waterhouse notes that ‘Freud’s unrestrained emphasis on sex was an offence to the traditional British reticence on such topics.’³⁵⁴ Yet it was largely the audience that chose to focus on these elements, even in satire, enjoying the cryptic nature of the sex complexes Freud named – in *Miss Hargreaves*, for instance, Norman consults the (fictitious) psychoanalytic book *The New and the Old Self* by Dr. Birinus Hals-Gruber and notes that there was ‘a lot about the *Sesame Impulse* and the *Agamemnon-Reflex*’,³⁵⁵ while the *TLS* asks, in a review of Macaulay’s *Dangerous Ages*, ‘what will the psycho-analysts say to the delicious fun she pokes at them? Her levity, we fear, will strike them as the sign of an abominable complex.’³⁵⁶

In concentrating on Freud’s theories about sex, middlebrow readers choose the element both most inherently domestic and least acceptable to discuss within the

certainly found the idea of lower-class familiarity with Freud amusing. *Mrs. Miniver*, for instance, includes a ‘comic’ passage where taxi-drivers with the supposed stigmata of their class (‘a bottle nose’ and ‘a rheumy eye’) say “‘They say it’s all a question of your subconscious mind.’” [Jan Struther, *Mrs. Miniver* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1939) p.86]

³⁵³ For example, a 1915 American article ‘Speaking of Psycho-Analysis’ has the subtitle ‘The New Boon for Dinner Table Conversationalists.’ [Floyd Dell, ‘Speaking of Psycho-Analysis’ *Vanity Fair*, 5 (1915) p.53]

³⁵⁴ Anon., ‘Psycho-Analysis a la Mode’ *The Saturday Review*, 12/02/21 (1921) 129-130, p.129; E.S. Waterhouse, ‘Psycho-Analysis: a Success or a Failure?’ *London Quarterly Review*, January (1931) 27-38, p.27. To be just to the middlebrow, higher echelons appear to have had the same focus: most of the ‘Short Communications’ in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* are about the castration complex – with topics as unlikely as the shingling of hair attributed to this neurosis. [M.D. Eder, ‘A Note on Shingling’ *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 6/3 (1925) 325-326]

³⁵⁵ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* pp.167f

³⁵⁶ Orlo Williams, ‘Review of *Dangerous Ages*’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 02/06/21 (1921) p.352. It should be noted that mockery of psychoanalysis was also not solely a middlebrow activity – it was performed both in private and print by the highbrow milieu. Lytton Strachey’s 1914 farce *According to Freud* is an early send-up of psychoanalysis’ adherents, while a 1924 letter from Virginia Woolf talks of the ‘gull-like imbecility’ of Freudians. [Lytton Strachey, ‘According to Freud (1914)’ in Paul Levy (ed.) *The Really Interesting Question and Other Papers* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972) 112-120; Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume 3 (1923-1928)* pp.134f]

home. Like the fantastic, Freud's theorising of sexuality is seen as a breach of etiquette – and repression, in the eyes of many middlebrow commentators, is nothing more than the veneer of good manners.³⁵⁷ Freudianism upsets the Ps and Qs of the middlebrow. It was not, however, solely Freud's teachings about sexual complexes that threatened to unravel the constructions used to prevent disorder and chaos in the home; the central tenet of the unconscious acted in the same manner. While more than one commentator opined that 'commonsense' disproved Freudianism,³⁵⁸ and the two most common words 1920s middlebrow reviewers used against these theories were 'extravagant' and 'exaggerated',³⁵⁹ Freudianism was nevertheless insidiously unsettling to a sense of observable and controllable order. Like the fantastic, it fulfilled a role that the Gothic had for earlier generations, by questioning the security and invulnerability of the home – but going further and transcending the spatial and physical, into the intangible and thus wholly inescapable. The idea that one's desires and impulses might be unknown to oneself, and that similar unpredictable predicaments existed in one's household (however much these views were satirised or dismissed), was partly responsible for the middlebrow dilemma of the unstable home.

The fantastic was used to respond to Freudianism as it was used to respond to other societal and domestic misgivings – that is, a controlled disruption of reality, to interrogate other, uncontrollable disruptions of that reality. Yet Freudianism contributes both to the anxiety and the response, by offering a language with which to

³⁵⁷ The Provincial Lady cynically notes that 'the deliberate stifling of any impulse' and the 'encouragement of [an] unhallowed impulse' are equally perilous, echoing Rose Macaulay's more solemn point that '[r]epression is damned, but unrepression is more damned'. [Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further' pp.161f; Rose Macaulay, *Staying With Relations* (London: Collins, 1930 repr.1969) p.215].

³⁵⁸ Anon., 'Psycho-Analysis a la Mode' p.130; Henry J. Watt, *The Common Sense of Dreams* (Worcester, MA: Clark University Press, 1929) p.xv.

³⁵⁹ Dean Rapp, 'The Reception of Freud By the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines 1920-1925' *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 24/April (1988) 191-201, p.195

describe the idea of non-surface reality and thus paradigms and a language for the fantastic; T.E. Apter even suggests that psychoanalytic theories ought themselves to be read as fantastic literature.³⁶⁰ The importance of boundaries and parameters (between reality and fantasy) in fantastic novels is reflected in the foregrounding Freudianism gives to an approachable line between phenomenal reality and deeper psychological reality – and a catalogue of instances can be collected of domestic and spatial metaphors in psychoanalytic discourse. (As well as Jung’s lengthier treatise on the psyche as a house, Barbara Low, author of the popular 1920 guide *Psycho-Analysis*, states that Freud’s work is ‘the provision of new keys by which we can now unlock doors in the human personality hitherto impassable, through which doors we may pass into areas formerly unguessed at’.³⁶¹ Freud himself writes in the first issue of *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* that ‘the Ego is not master in its own house’,³⁶² and his essay *Das Unheimliche* itself, of course, uses the ‘unhomely’ to depict the unsettling and strange.)

This practice find its reflection in the way middlebrow fantastic writers use Freudianism; not performing psychoanalytic readings, but rather borrowing the language of psychoanalysis. Where images of the home were used to delineate psychoanalytic theory, in turn the language of psychoanalysis was used to depict dynamics of the home, and the fantastic events taking place therein. The amused or concerned dismissal of many of Freud’s theories was accompanied by an increasing pervasiveness of the terminology he used – for instance, in the first three Provincial

³⁶⁰ Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* p.6

³⁶¹ Barbara Low, *Psycho-Analysis: A Brief Account of the Freudian Theory* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1920) pp.16f

³⁶² Sigmund Freud, 'One of the Difficulties of Psycho-Analysis' *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 1/1 (1920) 17-23, p.23

Lady novels, published in 1930, 1932, and 1934 respectively, the term ‘inferiority complex’ is used:

(Query: Is not the inferiority complex, about which so much is written and spoken, nowadays shifting from the child to the parent?)³⁶³

[Emma] adds that we ought to get on well together, as we have identical inferiority complexes. Red-haired lady and I look at one another with mutual hatred[.]³⁶⁴

Just as inferiority complex threatens to overwhelm me altogether[...]³⁶⁵

When the Provincial Lady initially introduces the term, it requires the distancing context of being a foreign concept to the middlebrow home, however widely discussed (in 1928, in Rose Macaulay’s *Keeping Up Appearances*, it is not yet even expressed as a collocative two-word concept, but instead ‘that complex which is called inferiority’.³⁶⁶) In the second Provincial Lady book, Freudianism is depicted as a lens through which to see social interaction, but is evidently still lexis from a foreign discourse as yet not embraced by (or anaesthetised for) the Provincial Lady – which, by 1934, it had been. The term is no longer given any fanfare, but is simply incorporated into the narrative, unannounced. This microcosm of psychoanalytic linguistic change reflects middlebrow society’s gradual incorporation of Freudian semantics.

Domestic fantastic novels do sometimes incorporate psychoanalytic language non-metaphorically – a character in Bernadette Murphy’s *An Unexpected Guest* remarks that her life has ‘not even one interesting complex’, and in *The Love-Child* David describes Agatha’s relationship with Clarissa with the words ‘something uncanny in

³⁶³ Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.38

³⁶⁴ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further' p.226

³⁶⁵ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in America' p.291

³⁶⁶ Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances* p.19

her power'³⁶⁷ – yet Freudianism and the fantastic rarely *overtly* coincide within the same novel. Humbert Wolfe, in a 1927 *Vogue*, even describes fantastic novels as ‘the flight from Freud’.³⁶⁸ They offer parallel, if not wholly equivalent, methods of presenting unreality: they inform one another, and overlap, yet would appear almost tautologous if they co-existed (although reviewers were not always so scrupulous in this division).³⁶⁹ Instead, the less jargonistic elements of Freudianism are used metaphorically to describe moments of the fantastic, or approaches to it. When trying to recall Clarissa in *The Love-Child*, Agatha describes the action being ‘on the threshold of her mind, on the doorstep, so real, and yet just out of reach.’³⁷⁰ This example is emblematic of the covert influence Freudianism has on this stylistic approach to the fantastic, in its elision of psychological terminology and domestic space. The idea of the mind having boundaries – and, more than that, violable boundaries – is indebted to Freud’s work, but also indicates the distance which had, by 1927, already been travelled from firsthand experience of his writing to thirdhand use of its principles.

An association between Freudianism and modernist techniques such as free indirect discourse and stream-of-consciousness (founded as they are in the idea of the permeable mind) has long been identified, and even in Nicola Beaman’s avowedly

³⁶⁷ Murphy, *An Unexpected Guest* pp.11f; Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.151. Other casual references can be seen in *A Harp in Lowndes Square* (‘G.P.s probably didn’t accept Freud, and indeed he must be an unprofitable line, compared with pills’) and *Flower Phantoms*, after the first floral metamorphosis where Judy ‘decided, on an empty stomach, to see a psycho-analyst. It was obvious, however, what any psycho-analyst would say.’ [Ferguson, *A Harp in Lowndes Square* pp.148f; Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* p.81]. Ferguson and Fraser respectively draw attention to the mercenary and somatic qualities of Freudianism, undermining its perceptive or scientific qualities while simultaneously begging greater credulity from their readers.

³⁶⁸ Humbert Wolfe, ‘The Growth of Fantasy in the Novel’ *Vogue*, Late July (1927) 45, 68, p.45

³⁶⁹ For example, Marjorie Cook writes of *The Love-Child* that the ‘lover of allegory and the disciple of Freud alike will find much to dispute in this fresh and spirited fable’. [Marjorie Grant Cook, ‘Review of *The Love-Child*’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 26/05/27 (1927) p.372]

³⁷⁰ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.16

middlebrow study *A Very Great Profession* the chapter on psychoanalysis is concerned mostly with the ways in which middlebrow writers use (in Irwin's words) 'explorations of the psyche in its apparently inchoate wanderings.'³⁷¹ Yet, though they could adopt and adapt these stylistic decisions, excerpts like that quoted above from *The Love-Child* exemplify a more middlebrow approach to a Freud-influenced style.

While the conscious and unconscious are equally factual entities for the true Freudian, middlebrow writers often transferred these concepts to reflect the planes of reality and unreality. Novelists can borrow from the scientists' semantic store, without the same strictures of scholastic responsibility. Throughout the stages of the portent, process, and concealment of the fantastic, *The Love-Child* frequently returns to the idea of the unconscious: the initial memory of Clarissa 'shot across [Agatha's] consciousness, like something suddenly alive'. Later, when Agatha must find an excuse for Clarissa's fantastic presence: "A love child." The phrase had surged up from her inner consciousness'.³⁷² While *The Love-Child* resists a psychoanalytic reading, since it would be too simplistic to see Clarissa merely as the result of sublimation, Freud's influence is evident in the treatment of the fantastic and, as will be seen in my fourth chapter, the ways in which this creation narrative builds upon the model of *Frankenstein*.

Falling between the clinically biographical and the elaborately ornate, the choice of a semantics influenced by psychoanalysis (which is not, of course, the same as a

³⁷¹ Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.35

³⁷² Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.13; p.68. Similarly, in *An Unexpected Guest*, time-travel is first hinted at with the words 'something struggled up from the depths of her unconsciousness'. [Murphy, *An Unexpected Guest* p.244]

psychoanalytic novel) offers a fantastic style which, perhaps unwittingly, acknowledged the ways in which Freudianism had opened the door for domestic fantastic literature – not just as an anxiety to which to respond, but a framework through which to do so. Fantasy theorists who have considered psychoanalytic readings of the fantastic (Rosemary Jackson, for instance, states that ‘[f]antasy in literature deals so blatantly and repeatedly with unconscious material that it seems rather absurd to try to understand its significance without some reference to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic readings of texts’³⁷³) have not allowed room for those who would use the language of Freud without considering themselves Freudians. Once more, concessions must be made instead to the commonsensical middlebrow identity. Todorov writes that ‘the themes of fantastic literature have become, literally, the very themes of the psychological investigations of the last fifty years’,³⁷⁴ but the association worked in both directions, and these ‘investigations’ gave access to discussions and portrayals of disrupted reality and layers of reality essential to the construction of a domestic fantastic novel and its continual interrogation of the everyday.

³⁷³ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.6

³⁷⁴ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.161

Chapter Three

‘My Vixen’: Marriage and Metamorphosis

Insofar as it is possible to posit an individual novel as the originator of an interwar fashion for the domestic fantastic, *Lady Into Fox* is that novel. It was published in 1922 to both critical praise and popular appeal, occupying (as discussed in my introduction) both sides of the permeable boundary between highbrow and middlebrow. H.G. Wells wrote of David Garnett’s ninety page novel:

It is quite a fresh thing. It is as astonishing and it is as entirely right and consistent as a new creation, a sort of new animal, let us say, suddenly running about in the world.³⁷⁵

Wells chooses his language aptly, suggesting that Garnett is responsible for a new genus (and thus genre) or species of novel, reflecting (of course) the animal-focus of *Lady Into Fox* (which, I will argue, was in part a codified way of discussing modern marriage). It is appropriate, then, that the form of the fantastic which Garnett chooses is metamorphosis, for he transformed and updated the ways in which the fantastic could be used for a middlebrow audience: one reviewer stated that the publication of *Lady Into Fox* as ‘mark[ed] a revival of the genuinely fantastic as legitimate thematic material for the literary artist.’³⁷⁶ The fantastic as ‘thematic material’ suggests a turn from figurative and abstract uses of fantasy towards the scenic and concrete, and a definite sense that the fantastic novel as a whole is invested with this choice of subgenre, rather than being viewed as an isolated impulse within a narrative. This reviewer introduces the idea of culture legitimacy in a manner akin to Bourdieusian theory – but since the *Weekly Dispatch* cannot be considered a highbrow paper, the

³⁷⁵ H.G. Wells, ‘Modern Reviewing’ *The Adelphi*, 1/2 (1923) 150-151, p.150

³⁷⁶ ‘A Modern Fabulist’, *Weekly Dispatch* (05/08/23), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/25 (Press Cuttings vol.23, 1922), University of Reading.

words ‘literary artist’ here encompass a wider remit than they might elsewhere.

Garnett is seen as taking the fantastic from a niche, unsophisticated market (perhaps short stories in lowbrow magazines) and creating a legitimate precedent for middlebrow authors to follow.³⁷⁷

Garnett did not influence only those novels of metamorphosis and animalised spouses in the period (such as *Flower Phantoms*, John Collier’s *His Monkey Wife*, and Garnett’s own *A Man in the Zoo*), but acted more widely as a benchmark for the domestic fantastic of the 1920s and 1930s. Where *Lady Into Fox*’s reviewers identified a deliberate stylistic affinity with Defoe and other eighteenth-century writers, Garnett himself became the go-to point of comparison for later interwar fantastic novelists; *Lolly Willows* is described as ‘Lady Into Witch’ by three reviewers, and ‘the first of his [Garnett’s] school to come to notice’ – a school to which Edith Olivier was also inducted by a reviewer.³⁷⁸ Frank Baker even obliquely refers to it in *Miss Hargreaves* when the heroine becomes a swan: ‘Hargreaves into

³⁷⁷ Comparisons with Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* are inevitable, but this 1915 work was not translated into English until 1937, and Garnett could not read German – nor would many middlebrow British readers have had access to *Metamorphosis*, so *Lady Into Fox* remains their precedent for metamorphosis fiction. When it was suggested to Kafka, by his friend Gustav Janouch, that Garnett had plagiarised his idea, he replied: ‘But no! He did not get that from me. It is a matter of the age. We both copied from that.’ [Gustav Janouch, *Conversations With Kafka*, trans. Goronwy Rees (London: Andre Deutsch, 1971) p.22, quoted in Ardon Lyon, ‘On Remaining the Same Person’ *Philosophy*, 55/212 (1980) 167-182, p.182]

³⁷⁸ Hartley, ‘New Fiction’ p.165; ‘Lady Into Witch’, *Liverpool Post and Mercury* (3/2/26); V.C. C-B, *Cambridge Review* (04/06/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading; ‘G.E.G’, ‘Lollypops’, *Granta* (12/2/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading; Anon., ‘Picaresque Crichton’ *Time*, 16/4 (1930b) 57. Olivier also notes, in diary, that Henry Newbolt tells her ‘You will be compared with David Garnett, but you mustn’t mind that, for good as he is, you are far better’. [Edith Olivier, ‘Diary (December 1925 - December 1927)’ Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier papers 982/57 (14/05/27).] Similarly, Olivier writes in her diary earlier that ‘Secker is the one who read my book & he was most optimistic about it & says it will be a success & likes it much better than “Lady into Fox”.’ While Garnett praised *The Love-Child*, commenting ‘I don’t think you could have improved on the story of your book’, Olivier did not record her own estimation of *Lady Into Fox*, though wrote of Garnett’s novel *Go She Must* that it was ‘a good piece of writing, but not much else.’ [Olivier, ‘Diary (December 1925 - December 1927)’ (17/02/27); (15/02/27); David Garnett, ‘Letter to Edith Olivier’ (27/05/27), Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers 982/94]

swan was the trick.’³⁷⁹ However innovative and fresh Garnett was initially considered, he soon became seen as the instigator of the fantastic subgenre.

Metamorphosis is potentially one of the broadest categories of the fantastic, since it is essentially the alteration of one form to another; the possibilities are effectively endless. Todorov terms metamorphosis ‘the collapse (which is also to say the illumination) of the limit between matter and mind [...] the transition from mind to matter has become possible’.³⁸⁰ The infinitude of the mind is transferred to the finitude of materiality – yet, though the scope is enormous, most novelists of the period who address metamorphosis choose either human-into-animal or human-into-plant. It is these metamorphoses, from human to another living creature, which permit the interrogation of identity – as Caroline Walker Bynum writes, ‘change is the test, the limit, of all denotations of the term “identity”’.³⁸¹ In raising the possibility of limitlessness, metamorphosis draws attention to the extant limits of identity. This most nebulous of entities was questioned through myriad modernist devices, but metamorphosis acts as a concretisation of literary devices. Rather than playing with narrative form, metamorphosis fiction plays with physical form, making quandaries about personal identity more concrete and immediate. While questions of middlebrow identity are usually corporate – on the level of family, geographical community, or as an alternative literary community within the ‘battle of the brows’ – metamorphosis affirms a determinedly personal identity. Physical change, with its fixed parameters, raises questions which are necessarily about the individual.

³⁷⁹ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.159

³⁸⁰ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.114

³⁸¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001) p.19

Metamorphosis is traditionally considered a narrative affliction, ‘morbid’ and ‘typically violent’.³⁸² Although change is an integral part of any aspiration or betterment, metamorphosis has, as Marina Warner writes, ‘within the Judaeo-Christian tradition [...] marked out heterodoxy, instability, perversity, unseemliness, [and] monstrosity.’³⁸³ In fiction it often has an unwilling and uncontrollable nature – or is at least beyond the control of the individual experiencing change – and G.K. Chesterton summarises that in mythological literature ‘black magic is that which blots out or disguises the true form of a thing; while white magic, in the good sense, restores it to its form and not another.’³⁸⁴ Change is seen as inherently fearsome and false, while restoration is inherently trustworthy and, as it were, reinstating a truth (a view challenged by narratives such as *Lolly Willowes*, which appears to use metamorphosis as an act of restoration.)

More fundamentally, change within a narrative is frequently motivated by concerns about change in the world outside the narrative – rather than the ‘sudden transformations [...] wrought by the most inadequate means’ which Walter Scott announced took place in the ‘fantastic mode of writing [...] without meaning or end further than the surprize of the moment.’³⁸⁵ As seen, *Lady Into Fox* gives no allowance to surprise, and no domestic fantastic novel of the period uses metamorphosis inconsequentially. Metamorphosis can either express dissatisfaction with the status quo, or conversely a fear of potential change – or, most commonly, a response to and reflection of an extant societal change. Having conceded that

³⁸² Irving Massey, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, 1976) p.2; p.17

³⁸³ Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp.35f

³⁸⁴ G.K. Chesterton, 'Magic and Fantasy in Fiction' *The Bookman*, December (1929) 161-163, p.161

³⁸⁵ Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman' p.72

metamorphosis interrogates individual selfhood, this balance is redressed by the focus put in *Lady Into Fox* upon the interdependence of identity, and how the wife's metamorphosis synergistically affects the husband. The shifting status of roles in marriage in the 1910s and '20s informs both the writing and reception of Garnett's novel, and this is evident even in the title. As Garnett writes, 'There can be very little doubt that the oddity of the title had a good deal to do with the immense success of the book.'³⁸⁶ This oddity is not evinced solely through paratextual announcement of the fantastic, but also the suggestive connotations of what it would mean for a lady to be a fox – or, in other words, a vixen – alluding towards contemporary discussions of women's sexuality and sexualisation. While several reviewers³⁸⁷ determined that there was no moral to *Lady Into Fox* – and Garnett's own account of its genesis is disingenuously superficial³⁸⁸ – Leonard Woolf identified a hint of deeper meaning (albeit an uncertain one):

But this second meaning, the parable which turns the fantasy into satire or something greater and deeper than satire, was never insisted upon; it remained a dim shadow in the book and, I suspect, even in the author's mind.³⁸⁹

Woolf uses the language of the unconscious to suggest a haziness in Garnett's intentionality, yet the 'dim shadow' extends to Woolf's critical expectations; it is not clear what he considers to be 'greater and deeper than satire', and there is a sense of genre hierarchy in Woolf's mind, as though *Lady Into Fox* can only warrant its praise if it coheres with a schematisation of pre-existing genre echelons. His equation of a

³⁸⁶ Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* p.246

³⁸⁷ Lynd, 'New Novels' p.1184; E. S. P. H. *New Witness* (08/12/22) p.359, Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/25 (Press Cuttings vol.23, 1922), University of Reading; *Daily News* (10/11/22), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/25 (Press Cuttings vol.23, 1922), University of Reading

³⁸⁸ Garnett's claims that the novel sprung from a chance comment to his wife that she might turn into a fox. [Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* pp.243f]

³⁸⁹ Woolf, 'Mr. Garnett's Second' p.115

deeper meaning with ‘parable’ indicates a desire for a framework through which to read the narrative. Woolf is hunting for a code which will allow for this cohesion.

Although it is unwise to pin down *Lady Into Fox* to a single interpretive model, and bearing in mind the novel’s ‘dim shadow’ in place of didacticism, reading the narrative – and other metamorphosis novels of the period – through the code of changing views of female sexuality offers a perspective on metamorphosis fiction which corresponds with the wider anxiety concerning the metamorphosis of the modern middlebrow marriage – and offers an interpretation which reaches beyond the assessment of these novels as simply either frivolous or morbid.

‘Hold her husband and share his ecstasy’: marriage and sexual knowledge

Amongst those reviewers willing to identify a parallel story beneath the surface of *Lady Into Fox*, the obvious slang use of vulpine imagery is common. Gerald Gould writes ironically that ‘Every English country gentleman has, of course, pondered long and seriously what he would do if his wife turned into a fox.’³⁹⁰ He draws attention to the absurdity of the plot, but also to the fear of adultery or, more broadly, of the wife undergoing a transformation which would alienate her from her husband – ‘the vixenhood of the lady’, as another reviewer points out, being usually ‘merely metaphorical, and mainly a matter of temper.’³⁹¹ Most explicitly, J.D. Symon in *Illustrated London News* writes:

Many novelists have shown us the sorrows of a man married to a vixen, but until Mr. Garnett came along no one had seized the obvious allegory.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Gould, ‘Review of *Lady Into Fox*’ p.116

³⁹¹ Archibald T. Strong, ‘A Strange Tale’, *Herald (Melbourne)* (16/12/22), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/25 (Press Cuttings vol.23, 1922), University of Reading

³⁹² J.D. Symon, ‘Books of the Day’ *Illustrated London News*, 03/03/23 (1923) p.334

This allegory is, however, resisted by *Lady Into Fox*. While I believe an interpretation founded upon sexual anxieties of the 1920s is practicable, Garnett does not castigate female promiscuity – indeed, Silvia Tebrick (the ‘Lady’ of the title) does not commit adultery until she is entirely transformed, at which point it is with a fellow fox. Her metamorphosis is certainly the result of previous ‘vixen’-like behaviour (in the sense defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘an ill-tempered, quarrelsome woman’, with use dating back to 1575; only 150 years after the first-documented example of ‘vixen’ to refer to a female fox.)³⁹³

In seeking an allegory or narrative reason for change in any metamorphosis novel, the relationship between the transformed person, pre- and post-metamorphosis, determines whether an instance of metamorphosis is (to use Theodore Ziolkowski’s terminology) metaphorical or metonymic. Ziolkowski defines these designations thus:

Metaphoric metamorphosis means, in narrative, the transformation of an individual into the object designated semiotically by his or her name [...]. Metonymic metamorphosis, in contrast, designates the process by which an individual is abruptly transformed into something with no semiotic connection to his or her [name or] character.³⁹⁴

Metonymic metamorphosis is, thus, a theft, removing the individual’s social identity. It is both a loss of individual rationality (that is, what might be expected to happen next in the individual’s life) and a loss of genealogy, severing the individual from the logical continuation of their family line, and removing the possibility of their own

³⁹³ "vixen, n. and adj.". OED Online, Oxford University Press <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/224224> (accessed September 16, 2013)

³⁹⁴ Theodore Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns* (London; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005) p.78

contribution to it. Metaphoric metamorphosis is, of course, still a disruption, but one with an internal logic which re-imagines the individual's identity, rather than removing it.

Lady Into Fox has elements of both. Silvia's maiden name is Fox, indicating a somewhat heavy-handed metaphoric transformation – but in the reading process, Silvia's maiden name is only revealed to the reader after her metamorphosis has taken place. Garnett disrupts the conventions of classical metamorphosis by undermining the traditional structures governing foreshadowing and the causality of change.

The 'obvious allegory' is further threatened by the narrator's insistence that

It is perhaps worth noting that there was nothing at all foxy or vixenish in her appearance. On the contrary, she was a more than ordinarily beautiful and agreeable woman.³⁹⁵

The cautious opening to this sentence, in the past tense, raises questions which will recur throughout *Lady Into Fox* about layers of observation: it is unclear whether the fact is worth noting by the narrator (who is doing so), or the reader (who may or may not do so.) Maintaining a model of suggesting, revoking, and reinstating readerly expectations, the narrator disingenuously adds (having dismissed any visual association with a fox) that Silvia's hair was 'dark, with a shade of red in it.'³⁹⁶

Turning points are not the only narrative moments which engage the reader's expectation and surprise; the reader is participating in an ongoing interpretive act and most domestic fantastic novelists play with this awareness. Although the metaphor made literal is a basis for much fantastic fiction, Garnett's response to 1920s sexuality

³⁹⁵ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.4

³⁹⁶ Ibid. p.4

is more complex than a 'vixen' turned into a literal vixen – an interpretation which would not encompass the wider impulse for metamorphosis fiction, nor that for anthropomorphising animals into human relationships (as seen in *His Monkey Wife* and G.E. Trevelyan's *Appius and Virginia*).

A corollary of the identity crises effected by metamorphosis is the transformation of the married couple. *Lady Into Fox* – unlike, say, *Flower Phantoms* – does not focus solely upon the individual in the process of change, but also on the response and reaction to this metamorphosis, and the corresponding (albeit figurative) metamorphosis of a marriage. Rather than a reflection of individual promiscuity, or an indictment of this trend, *Lady Into Fox* can be read as a response to the changing dynamics of marriage more generally. As John Woodrow Presley suggests, reference to Noah ('ur-couples') 'encourages us to regard this man and woman, of course, as archetypal.'³⁹⁷ Although Mr. and Mrs. Tebrick are not timelessly archetypal couples, they can be read as representing this archetypal marriage in the climate of the novel's contemporary reception, and Silvia's metamorphosis as an indication of change, and anxiety about change, in 1920s marriage norms.³⁹⁸

Silvia's metamorphosis is not depicted as the result of individual dissatisfaction - 'the marriage was a very happy one'³⁹⁹ – rather, it is an embodiment of this wider change, specifically the role of the wife in relation to sexuality, in both knowledge and

³⁹⁷ John Woodrow Presley, 'Fox, Vampire, Witch: Two Novels of Fantasy by Graves and Garnett' *Focus on Robert Graves and His Contemporaries*, 2/2 (1994) 26-30, p.26

³⁹⁸ It is worth noting that there seems to be no evidence, beyond Garnett's own bisexual relationships, that *Lady Into Fox* is covertly intended to portray homosexuality, or (in Wendy Faris' words) 'uses animals to figure unexpressed anger at the social norm of traditional heterosexual marriage'. While the fantastic is obviously used for this purpose in some narratives, such as Radclyffe Hall's 'Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself', in this instance Faris is a victim of over-eagerness to associate anything unusual with codified same-sex desire. [Wendy B. Faris, 'Bloomsbury's Beasts: The Presence of Animals in the Texts and Lives of Bloomsbury' *Yearbook of English Studies*, 37/1 (2007) 107-125, p.111]

³⁹⁹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.4

enjoyment of sex – far, I would argue, from D.B.D. Asker’s suggestion that it represents ‘a young bride’s disquiet at the trauma of love’.⁴⁰⁰ Set in 1880 to exaggerate the variance between a wife’s traditional role in marriage and its evolving ethos, *Lady Into Fox* contrasts the personae of lover and wife. ‘They were still at this time like lovers in their behaviour’, the narrator writes towards the beginning; Mr. Tebrick is described as ‘so much more like a lover than a husband’.⁴⁰¹ In both instances, ‘lover’ can be framed only through simile, as though it were incompatible with marriage – and as though, by being amorous, the Tebricks were destabilising the accepted codes of both their marriage, and marriage as a wider pattern of behaviour.

The disparity between their loving marriage and the variety depicted in the popular press is indicated by two differing glosses of the novel: in his foreword to a 1966 reprint, Garnett writes that the ‘subject was a *reductio ad absurdum* of marital fidelity’, whereas the same terminology had been used in a 1923 review which stated that ‘the theme [is], indeed, only a *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory of indissoluble marriage’.⁴⁰² The main distinction between ‘fidelity’ and ‘indissoluble marriage’ is the extent of the husband’s willing affection – that is, whether or not his actions are motivated by love. When Silvia-as-fox does later trick her husband, it is ironically seen as a reversion to stereotypical wifely behaviour which she had previously *not* exemplified: ‘he had never been deceived once by his wife in the course of their married life’; he was not ‘one of your stock ordinary husbands’.⁴⁰³ This ‘stock

⁴⁰⁰ D.B.D. Asker, ‘Vixens and Values: The Modern Metamorphoses of Garnett and Vercors’ *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 10/2 (1983) 182-191, p.184

⁴⁰¹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* pp.5f

⁴⁰² David Garnett, *Lady into Fox* (New York: Norton, 1922 repr.1966) [n.p.]; A.E. Randall, ‘New Novels’ *New Age*, 12/04/23 (1923) 389-391, p.390. Irwin suggests that David Garnett hoped the show the limits of fidelity far more than he wished to recommend extreme fidelity as a virtue’, but this focus is still on the concept of fidelity, rather than legal reform. [Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.27]

⁴⁰³ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.54; p.53

ordinary husband' is the figure resisted by Mr. Tebrick at the beginning of novel, and one disappearing from the middlebrow marriage – but is closer to the husband of 1924 spoof *Gentleman Into Goose* by Christopher Ward. Its full title, *Gentleman into Goose, Being the Exact and True Account of Mr. Timothy Teapot Gent., of Puddleditch, in Dorset, that was Changed to a great Grey Gander at the wish of his Wife. How, though a Gander, he wear Breeches and Smoak a Pipe. How he near lost his life to his Dog Tyger* satirically plays upon the eighteenth-century style of *Lady Into Fox*, but the subtlety in Garnett's use of metamorphosis is, naturally, omitted. Ward's Mr. and Mrs. Teapot are an unhappy couple, given to 'argument and bickering', and this is viewed as the common nature of all marriages.⁴⁰⁴ Mrs. Teapot keeps quiet about her husband's metamorphosis into a goose solely because 'this wishing of husbands into geese might become a popular sport with women and the supply of geese so much increased as to bring about a glut of feathers and a fall in the price thereof.'⁴⁰⁵ The sentimental framework of spousal response and adaptation in *Lady Into Fox* is overridden with an exaggeration of the domestic details of that novel, and a discussion of love becomes one of commerce.

The metamorphosis in *Gentleman Into Goose* is less interesting than Silvia Tebrick's, because it is not accompanied by an emotional or reflective change or coping process in the spouse – but, of course, its purpose is more limited: to lampoon Garnett's novel rather than reflect the world outside these works. Like Mrs. Tebrick, Mr. Teapot ends the novel by dying, but because his wife eats him. Although both *Lady Into Fox* and *Gentleman Into Goose* use the stock figures of the indifferent, passionless marriage,

⁴⁰⁴ Christopher Ward, *Gentleman into Goose, etc.* (London: T.W. Laurie, 1924) p.34

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.39

Ward endorses their existence, while Garnett uses a marriage which deviates from the supposed norm in order to demonstrate how the norm was itself, in fact, changing.

Lady Into Fox can be read as responding to the evolving nature of female sexuality within marriage – or, more specifically, women’s awareness of sexuality before making their marriage vows. Marie Stopes’ *Married Love* is the most remembered, if not the most radical, of the many contemporary marital guides aimed at unmarried women (selling 400,000 copies by 1923⁴⁰⁶), and the availability of this knowledge as a public discourse altered the expected dynamics of marital relations. Formerly, as Mary Scharlieb writes in 1915, it was ‘by no means uncommon for unfortunate brides to say that they had been shocked by learning *after marriage* the facts of married life’.⁴⁰⁷ Even as late as 1939, R. Edynbry could still caution that ‘sexual ignorance both in man and woman is probably the greatest of the ills that can wreck married happiness’⁴⁰⁸ – intriguingly not singling out women – but there was little excuse for it by this date. Sex had become a matter of public discussion; Scharlieb even suggests (with some hyperbole) as early as 1914 that ‘questions of free love, divorce, incest, and polygamy are constantly before us, and are discussed in a light-hearted manner’,⁴⁰⁹ reflecting the typical middlebrow response of levity towards potentially dangerous topics. The domestic sphere was opened up to the public forum, destabilising the boundaries of the traditional marriage, with neither the marriage vows nor the bedroom door acting any longer as the beginning of knowledge or the veil of privacy. Stopes’ significance lies largely in her status as a cultural symbol and

⁴⁰⁶ Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1988) p.3

⁴⁰⁷ Mary Scharlieb, *The Seven Ages of Woman* (London: Cassell & Co., 1915) pp.66f

⁴⁰⁸ R. Edynbry, *Real Life Problems and Their Solution* (London: Odhams Press, 1939) p.172

⁴⁰⁹ Mary Scharlieb, *What It Means to Marry or Young Women & Marriage* (London: Cassell & Co., 1914) p.48

byword for sexual openness in the period; Laura, in E.M. Delafield's 1927 novel about a woman tempted to commit adultery, *The Way Things Are*, hides 'a small volume of Dr Marie Stopes [...] beneath a pile of her more intimate underwear at the back of her chest of drawers.'⁴¹⁰ Her readership would instantly recognise allusion to *Married Love*, even without the title being given, and a sizeable portion would also empathise with the combination of a desire to read the book, and to conceal the fact of reading from one's family (the connotations of it being kept among Laura's 'more intimate underwear' are self-evident). Stopes' works were far from the only non-fiction books about sex being read in the interwar years, but she was perhaps the only author whose name acted as shorthand in quite this manner.

Although all guides to sexuality (by definition) encourage the advancement of sexual knowledge, this knowledge brought with it a transformation of the archetypal marriage which, though often welcomed, was also inherently unsettling. The wider availability of this information necessarily sexualised women – both as sexualised objects, and sexualised subjects. Women became increasingly self-sexualised subjects by their own knowledge, and approached marriage with some eagerness to 'hold her husband and share his ecstasy',⁴¹¹ rather than the reluctant compliance that had (as Maud Braby notes in 1919) previously been advised: 'maidens are now given tacitly to understand that the subject of sex is a repulsive one, wholly unfit for their consideration, and the functions of sex are loathsome, though necessary.'⁴¹² Once more, the term 'tacitly' demonstrates the clouded obscurity with which the topic had been addressed and Braby's scholastic or clinical terminology ('subject',

⁴¹⁰ E.M. Delafield, *The Way Things Are* (London: Virago, 1927 repr.1988) p.99. Quoted in Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.226

⁴¹¹ Edynbry, *Real Life Problems and Their Solution* p.194

⁴¹² Braby, *Modern Marriage and How To Bear It* p.101

‘consideration’, ‘functions’) emphasises both the absence of pleasure and the de-personalisation in the instruction received by these ‘maidens’. Works like Braby’s act to reverse this trend, producing sexualised subjects with a personal investment in their knowledge, discovering in their reading an ‘affirmation of women’s sexual subjectivity’.⁴¹³

Women were also becoming, however, sexualised *objects*, as men grew aware of their advancing knowledge and, thus, presumed carnality. The maturity of a woman was seen as a moment of metamorphosis, impelled by a man: ‘It has been said that a youth grows into a man almost spontaneously, but a girl has to be kissed into a woman.’⁴¹⁴ The illustration is akin to fairytale – the frog being kissed into a prince – and attempts to normalise this trope of indulgent myth. But girl-into-woman represented a wider metamorphosis, of woman’s accepted role before and during marriage. The conflicting impulses of passion and propriety seem aligned to the private and the public, but these divisions were no longer secure. Scharlieb advises ‘passion under reasonable control – the beneficent household fire, not the devastating lightning’⁴¹⁵ but, even with her homely metaphor, it is unclear whether she is advocating self-control, spousal control, or a fusion of the two.

The changing conventions of marriage inform a reading of *Lady Into Fox* in particular, but also provide a wider explanation for the choice of metamorphosis as a domestic fantastic form. It represents a fundamental change in the framework of the home, and when the human morphs into another living creature (whether animal or

⁴¹³ Karen Chow, ‘Popular Sexual Knowledges and Women’s Agency in 1920s England: Marie Stope’s *Married Love* and E.M. Hull’s *The Sheik*’ *Feminist Review*, 63 (1999) 64-87, p.64

⁴¹⁴ Edynbry, *Real Life Problems and Their Solution* p.176

⁴¹⁵ Scharlieb, *What It Means to Marry or Young Women & Marriage* p.129

plant) they have transformed into an entity which demonstrates no shame in sexual activity and reproduction, which becomes simply another function of life. While *Lady Into Fox* ought not to be read as an extended allegory, ignoring the surface events, and it is further removed from the social anxieties it responds to than creation narratives like *The Love-Child*, it remains influenced by these marital and societal issues, and the product of a certain period. In the wake of *Lady Into Fox*'s success, the transformation of personas in marriage also influences various other examples of metamorphosis and uncanny fiction; I shall examine the different narrative responses through the categories woman-as-animal, woman-as-plant, and non-fantastic depictions of marriage to an animal.

Woman-as-animal

Although Silvia does not correspond with the specific identification of wife-as-vixen, the sexualisation of women does bring the idea of the woman-as-animal into play. Within *Lady Into Fox*, Silvia's (human) sexual interest is addressed only covertly – besides the depiction of the pair as lovers – and in semantics which overlap with the animalistic, as well as continuing the novel's playfulness with perception and perspective:

Her old nurse said: "Miss Silvia was always a little wild at heart," though if this was true it was never seen by anyone else except her husband.⁴¹⁶

Garnett allows a coy sexual frisson to enter the biographical tone. In describing the genesis of the novel, Garnett explains that he was 'teasing and making love to [his

⁴¹⁶ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.4

wife] by telling her how like she was to a wild animal’;⁴¹⁷ this wildness corresponds with the crossing of social boundaries, including those delineated for the private sphere – it is not so much a breach of etiquette as an embrace of unbridled natural behaviour. Certainly, the idea of sexual progressiveness being animalistic was widespread (the ‘we’re all animals, really’ line of thought, which Stella Gibbons satirised retrospectively through the figure of Mr. Mybug in *Cold Comfort Farm*).⁴¹⁸ A justification for less rigid sexual mores, based on affinity with animals, is presented by Walter Gallichan arguing that, ‘[b]iologically, the human being is more erotic than the higher mammals’,⁴¹⁹ and taken to curious extremes by Floyd Dell, who uses the example of protozoa (which separated sex and reproduction) as an illustration of the ideal 1927 marriage.⁴²⁰

More specifically, Garnett had precedent for the fox as a sexual image, in Lawrence’s *The Fox*, serialised in *The Dial* between May and August 1922. The final instalment thus appeared three months before *Lady Into Fox* was published. Although Lawrence’s novel (or perhaps, as indeed Garnett’s could be labelled, novella) is not fantastic, his use of vulpine metaphor relies upon the sexualised energy of animalist imagery. The story opens with a real fox tormenting the spinster March; it ‘somehow dominated her unconsciousness’.⁴²¹ When Henry arrives,

to March he was the fox. Whether it was the thrusting forward of his head or the glisten of fine whitish hairs of the ruddy cheekbones, or the bright keen

⁴¹⁷ Garnett, *The Flowers of the Forest* p.244

⁴¹⁸ In another context, human-as-animal could be read as a reflection of the aftermath of brutality and slaughter in the First World War – it is not a metamorphosis model which can be aligned with a single interpretation - but the context of *Lady Into Fox* and 1920s writing on sex and marriage supports this reading.

⁴¹⁹ Walter Gallichan, *The Psychology of Marriage* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1917) p.81

⁴²⁰ Floyd Dell, *The Outline of Marriage* (London: The Richards Press, 1927) pp.31-8

⁴²¹ D.H. Lawrence, 'The Fox' *The Dial*, May (1922) 471-489, p.476

eyes, that can never be said – but the boy was to her the fox, and she could not see him otherwise.⁴²²

It does not take an avid Freudian to identify the sexual undertones of ‘the thrusting forward of his head’ and, although Garnett never goes this far, he is inevitably influenced by the animalism of sexual imagery in the 1920s. Freudian associations with this representation of sexuality are evident, and do not need emphasising; whether or not middlebrow readers agreed with Freudianism (and, as has been seen, they largely did not), they, like Garnett, could not avoid being affected in their interpretation of narratives which incorporate examinations of unusual marital relations.

Taking a step much further back than Lawrence, Garnett openly acknowledges his debt to Ovid in developing the title *Lady Into Fox* (originally suffixed ‘The Metamorphosis of Mrs. Tebrick’), but, as Sylvia Lynd points out in *Time and Tide*, ‘Garnett begins his story where Ovid would have ended.’⁴²³ Metamorphosis is not a solution or conclusion, but a catalyst, and Garnett studies the testing and unravelling of a marriage, rather than an Ovidian conflict between sexual predator and unwilling woman; Garnett domesticates Ovid. Asker suggests that Silvia is very similar to Ovid’s Daphne, metamorphosing to avoid sexual encounter.⁴²⁴ Yet Silvia clearly has sexual encounter after her metamorphosis, bearing the tangible result of this encounter in her litter of offspring. Her animality ironically distances her from accusations of carnality, since the sexual act holds no moral complexity for animals. The role of mother – identified soon after her transformation; ‘there was something very motherly

⁴²² Ibid. p.479

⁴²³ Lynd, 'New Novels' p.1184

⁴²⁴ Asker, 'Vixens and Values: The Modern Metamorphoses of Garnett and Vercors' p.184

in his vixen'⁴²⁵ – also precludes accusations to which the sexually willing 1920s wife was vulnerable, of temptress or nymphomaniac. Curiously, Silvia's metamorphosis brings her a role which is less threatening to the paradigm of the home. An Ovidian narrative, also from *Metamorphoses*, which proves more apt is that of Actaeon and Diana. Actaeon was turned into a stag and killed by his own dogs, for having seen Diana nude – Garnett seems to allude to this when Mr. Tebrick pre-emptively kills his dogs, and in Silvia's eventual death. Thematically, it is also closer: Actaeon is transformed as a punishment for excess sexuality, rather than (as with Daphne) to preserve celibacy.

Although *Orlando* is determinedly not middlebrow, it requires mention in a chapter on metamorphosis. While *Orlando* also, of course, uses the trope of metamorphosis to play with questions of sexual identity, and (as with *Lady Into Fox*) from an external perspective in the figure of the biographer, it is a localised concern within the framework of human gender roles. Orlando's fundamental humanity is not threatened. Woolf does, however, tease with an animalistic image when Archduchess Harriet appears:

For this lady resembled nothing so much as a hare; a hare startled, but obdurate; a hare whose timidity is overcome by an immense and foolish audacity; a hare that sits upright and glowers at its pursuer with great, bulging eyes; with ears erect but quivering, with nose pointed, but twitching. This hare, moreover, was six feet high.⁴²⁶

Scornful and unglamorous simile is transformed into metaphor at the beginning of the second sentence, as though the prolonged language of comparison (and thus difference) in simile had elided the object with its (her) comparative. The hare is

⁴²⁵ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.46

⁴²⁶ Woolf, *Orlando* p.109

overdetermined by repeated, cumulative descriptions, each seeming to return to the beginning of the sentence like so many false starts, in a sequence of descriptive defeat. This representation labours the falseness of appearances – and Harriet does, indeed, turn out to be a man in disguise. Woolf is perhaps hinting towards the tradition that witches metamorphosed into hares,⁴²⁷ and playfully uses conventions of fantastic fiction outside the actual fantastic events of the novel. This overdetermination, and Woolf's experimentation with fantastic stylistics and form, undermines the fanfare and significance which usually accompany examples of pivot-as-event. Harold Skulsky writes that

Orlando rebels against the tyranny of the real, the actual, and the stereotypical by casually trespassing on boundaries she comes to regard as artificial; her transformation is simply the temporal emblem of her multiple residence in universes that are held by common sense to be mutually inaccessible.⁴²⁸

This interpretation aligns *Orlando* more closely with magical realism (in which, as Chanady writes, 'nothing surprises the characters, since magic is the norm')⁴²⁹ since, in truly fantastic novels, the line between real/not-real is not artificial, but instead firm and obvious – albeit one which is crossed. Woolf's intentional linguistic instability between fantasy and reality – images hovering ever on the brink of metaphor, and never securely real – precludes the formal division between the two which is fundamental to the fantastic.

This formal division does not, however, imply binary states of identity. Despite referring to this category as woman-as-animal, in *Lady Into Fox* the transformation of

⁴²⁷ Margaret Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921) p.230

⁴²⁸ Harold Skulsky, *Metamorphosis: The Mind in Exile* (London; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) p.221

⁴²⁹ Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* pp.2f

Silvia into a fox is far from instantaneous. Although Irwin describes metamorphosis as a '[c]hange of form so crucial as to persuade the reader of the primacy of form in identity',⁴³⁰ and, elsewhere, that it is the 'most completely objective of the changes that can produce fantasy',⁴³¹ physical and psychological transformations are not in fact concurrent or even synergetic in *Lady Into Fox*, and 'form' is unstable as a marker of identity. The reaches of objective observation are curtailed by this divorce between form and persona. Initially Silvia's metamorphosis does not seem to affect the status quo of marital harmony; she may be an animal, but she is not yet animalistic. After the physical change, the narrative suggests, 'there began what was now to be their ordinary life together.'⁴³² Garnett's use of 'ordinary' reflects the dominance of the domestic in this fantastic narrative, and also the relativity of the term. It is a word which first appears on the second page of the novel, when the narrator (somewhat disingenuously) suggests that a gradual *physical* metamorphosis 'would not have been so difficult to reconcile to our ordinary conceptions'.⁴³³ Perhaps playing on the reproductive definition of 'ordinary conceptions', Garnett also leaves the same uncertainty attached to the idea of the 'ordinary' – a word which requires consensus of perspective, reiterated by 'our', and defuses the extraordinary fantastic events.

In terms of their marriage, the 'ordinary' initially seems to be a distorted version of accepted niceties. Silvia still engages in an almost iconical, borderline parodic, version of domesticity, dressing in a bed-jacket and drinking from a saucer:

⁴³⁰ Irwin, 'The Metamorphoses of David Garnett' p.386

⁴³¹ Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.104

⁴³² Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.12

⁴³³ *Ibid.* p.2

All this showed him, or so he thought, that his wife was still herself; there was so little wildness in her demeanour and so much delicacy and decency.⁴³⁴

While this contradicts the earlier assertion that Silvia has ‘some disposition to wildness’,⁴³⁵ it draws upon the contrast between the ideal wife of the Victorian period (delicate and decent – both nebulous attributes) and the sexualised wife emerging in the 1920s. Mr. Tebrick’s claim that Silvia ‘was still herself’ suggests that he considers selfhood to be entirely non-visual. In contrast to modern philosophical views, Mr. Tebrick believes (and it is fundamental to the ongoing narrative in *Lady Into Fox*) that personality is separable from form, which is also a central concept in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*: ‘animam sic semper eandem / esse, sed in varias doceo migrare figuras’ (“I teach that the spirit is always the same but migrates into constantly changing bodies”).⁴³⁶ This separation cannot, of course, be visual. Ardon Lyon addresses the philosophical difficulties of assessing the physical and psychological constituents of identity, when either are in a process of change:

One feature which leads to puzzlement about personal identity is that although the concept of a person, and hence of remaining the same person, is more closely tied to the mental characteristics of memory and personality than it is to the physical property of retaining the same body, it is a contingent feature of the world we live in that while a person remains alive the former are liable to change more drastically than the latter.⁴³⁷

It is significant that the parts of us which make these distinctions and create associations for identity are, of course, the ‘mental characteristics of memory and personality’; the body is estranged from the act of observation, being only an object of observation, not a participating observer – and so, when it becomes more significant in establishing identity (or it must be acknowledged as more capable of stasis than the

⁴³⁴ Ibid. p.9

⁴³⁵ Ibid. p.4

⁴³⁶ Quoted (with translation) in Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns* p.75

⁴³⁷ Lyon, 'On Remaining the Same Person' p.175

mind) then it interrupts a model which relies solely on the mind for both the establishment and the recognition of identity. Although Silvia is, obviously, an anomaly to the norm Lyon predicates, her physical change provokes less ontological confusion than the gradual metamorphosis of her character and humanity - because the latter is less measurable, since it is not a facet of selfhood which is empirically observable. Silvia (and Judy in *Flower Phantoms*, and Mr. Mannering in *Green Thoughts*) do not lose their mental characteristics with any immediacy, and thus it is far harder to quantify the pace at, or extent to which, this non-corporeal change takes place – echoing the unknowable rate of change of any broader, corporate evolution.

The imprecise measuring device for Silvia's elusive metamorphosis is, once again, the middlebrow barometer of etiquette. The fantastic, as discussed in my second chapter, is sometimes broadly depicted as a contravention of narrative etiquette; Massey sees this breach more particularly in 'the apparatus of metamorphosis [...]; as if the bounds of psychological propriety had been violated.'⁴³⁸ These boundaries are amorphous and unquantifiable, but the violation is no less significant for that. In *Lady Into Fox*, the barometer gauges the level of Silvia's propriety, and thus (by a middlebrow adjudication) her humanity. Arguably the novel's most significant metamorphosis is not the transition from lady to fox, but from anthropomorphic fox to animalistic fox. Silvia initially experiences 'vexation and distress' at seeing Mr. Tebrick perform housework inexpertly:

Then, forgetful of the decency and the decorum which she had at first imposed upon herself never to run upon all fours, she followed him everywhere, and if he did one thing wrong she stopped him and showed him the way of it.[...] This

⁴³⁸ Massey, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* p.28

womanliness in her never failed to delight him, for it showed she was still his wife, buried as it were in the carcase of a beast but with a woman's soul.⁴³⁹

Her agitation about correctly maintaining the house – about domestic propriety – is also that which occasions her first steps away from ‘decency and decorum’; yet it is this which reminds Mr. Tebrick of her ‘womanliness’, indicating that the public veneer of decorum does not equate absolutely with that which makes Silvia (in her husband's eyes) a woman. The incongruously carnal, even gory, image of Silvia being ‘buried [...] in the carcase of a beast’ exacerbates this path away from the decent, and the contrast of body and soul furthers an argument which could be presented in relation to the 1920s woman's combination of sexual and spiritual qualities, even without the literalisation of metamorphosis.

The first signs that the mental characteristics of the animal are overtaking the psychology of the woman are connected with table manners.⁴⁴⁰ At a pivotal moment, Silvia is discovered ‘crunching the very bones’ of chicken; ‘it may indeed be regretted that Mrs. Tebrick had been so exactly well-bred, and in particular that her table manners had always been so scrupulous.’⁴⁴¹ Even when contrasting her growing animalism with her previously perfect etiquette, the phrase ‘so exactly well-bred’ collocates with the sphere of animal husbandry as much as the finishing school. Although Silvia's human character had held little sign of latent bestiality (besides that ‘disposition to wildness’), the semantic choices Garnett makes to demonstrate contrast often, in fact, form a linguistic locus of the two.

⁴³⁹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.15

⁴⁴⁰ Even etiquette guides that purported to be ‘up to date’ in the 1920s still focused a thorough attention on table manners. Constance Burleigh's *Etiquette up to Date* contains such details as: ‘A spoon and fork will be laid for sweets, but when possible the fork only is used.’ [Constance Burleigh, *Etiquette Up To Date* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1925) p.52]

⁴⁴¹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.24

Having been caught trying to burrow away, Silvia ‘even fawned on him, but in a good-natured kind of way, as if she were a very good wife putting up wonderfully with her husband’s temper.’⁴⁴² Although mirroring the role advocated by the more traditional marriage guides for wives, Silvia’s wifeliness is presented now only as a simile. If metamorphosis is metaphor-made-literal, then it relegates other literal truths into the place of metaphor.

Woman-as-plant

The metaphor-made-literal is self-evident in Ronald Fraser’s *Flower Phantoms*, where Judy has already been fixated with the idea of being a plant:

Her skirt was too short to cover her knees, so she drew up a rug, turned over, hid her face in a cushion, and tried to imagine that she was a young plant.⁴⁴³

While the novel contains substantial metaphoric foreshadowing (as seen when Judy ‘felt like a tender shoot’⁴⁴⁴) in this instance she bypasses metaphor and imagines the metamorphosis itself, foreshortening the gap between imagery and actual event.

Although woman-as-plant is, like woman-as-animal, a subset of metamorphosis within the broader field of living organisms, they are competing ideas. Fraser does sexualise the image (the abbreviated skirt) but focuses upon the insentience of the plant throughout the novel. Neither fox nor flower can communicate (a hubris seen throughout metamorphosis fiction) but the fox *is* sentient. It is curious, then, that *Flower Phantoms* and John Collier’s short narrative (published as an individual monograph) with a similar metamorphosis, *Green Thoughts*, are focalised through the

⁴⁴² Ibid. p.49

⁴⁴³ Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* p.10

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. p.26

experiences of the metamorphosing human, rather than an observer, since this must incorporate the loss of communicative ability. At the point of transformation, Fraser tries to convey this passing into insentience:

“Be my body, seed of this flower,” she prayed, and the world faded. She was lost in a darkness, and strange and dark was the beginning of this experience.⁴⁴⁵

Judy’s metamorphosis does not result in the unravelling ontological confusion of *Lady Into Fox*, but instead an immediate severing of determined reality. In this sense, human-into-plant narratives reflect (in a way that human-into-animal narratives do not) Rosemary Jackson’s ideas about metamorphosis as equivalent to Freud’s ‘death drive’, which is not a desire to cease being but ‘a state of *entropy*, and the desire for undifferentiation he termed an *entropic pull*’.⁴⁴⁶ That is, the referential nature between all objects and experiences is blurred into a total lack of distinction. And yet Fraser cannot entirely sacrifice coherence for this portrayal. Definitions of sentience and insentience cease to be practicable, when translated through the formal requirements of focalised narrative. The absence of communicable reality can only be translated in vague, amorphous words, like ‘strange and ‘dark’.

Again, plant metamorphosis is treated with the semantics of sexuality, most overtly in references to ‘body’ and ‘seed’, and a moment of metamorphosis which is almost orgasmic in description. But, since Judy’s metamorphosis is in unmarried isolation – she is engaged, and virginal – it represents a personal sexual awakening, rather than Silvia’s embodiment of supposedly animalistic sexual awareness within marriage. Judy is closer than Silvia to mythological Daphne; she does use metamorphosis to

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. p.133

⁴⁴⁶ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.73

escape sexual encounter. She enjoys kisses, but worries about their permanence, and is an uncertain fiancée:

In the institution of marriage she now clearly perceived the whole gross-fingered incapacity of mankind for any subtlety in the manipulation of its affairs.⁴⁴⁷

With ‘green-fingered’ hiding behind this crude compound word, Judy is repelled by the sexual act itself; her disgust is not towards her fiancée personally, but regarding a broad ‘institution’, and ‘mankind’ as a whole. She identifies the act with the species, and retreats from both, into the world of flowers. Like Daphne, she takes on the form of an inanimate, living organism. Metamorphosis, for both Silvia and Judy, is an inadvertent response to the new marital role of women – whether through a failure to rise to it, or a recognition of its destabilising affect on the home.

John Collier treats the sexuality of plants more comically in *Green Thoughts*, relying upon a stock humorous version of the spinster and maintaining this figure’s characteristics post-metamorphosis: a bee fertilises ‘the maiden lip of Cousin Jane’.⁴⁴⁸ This cross-species sexual encounter is intended to be solely comic. In *Lady Into Fox* a (presumably) similar instance is depicted more obliquely, and without humorous intent. Some readers – both contemporary reviewers and subsequent critics – have identified no ambiguity in glossing the following passage as ‘drunken sodomy’ or ‘an entirely displeasing anamality [sic]’,⁴⁴⁹ but Garnett does not depict this overtly:

To what lengths he went then in that drunken humour I shall not offend my readers by relating, but shall only say that he was so drunk and sottish that he had a very imperfect recollection of what had passed when he woke the next

⁴⁴⁷ Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* p.66

⁴⁴⁸ John Collier, *Green Thoughts* (Furnival Books; London: W. Jackson, 1932) p.36

⁴⁴⁹ Irwin, ‘The Metamorphoses of David Garnett’ p.388; Clement K. Shorter, ‘A Literary Letter’ *The Sphere*, 18/08/23 (1923) p.ii

morning. There is no exception to the rule that if a man drink heavily at night the next morning will show the other side to his nature.⁴⁵⁰

Garnett uses the eighteenth-century style he has adopted to cloak the scene in vagueness, leaving the deed to the imagination of the reader (coercing them into some complicity, should they assume bestiality), and plays with the connotations of the word ‘nature’ in this unnatural union. Collier’s *His Monkey Wife* goes one step further, and closes the novel with a consummation scene between Mr. Fatigay and Emily the chimp, which is clearly intended as a positive resolution:

Under her long and scanty hair he caught glimpses of a plum-blue skin. Into the depths of those all-dark lustrous eyes, his spirit slid with no sound of splash. She uttered a few low words, rapidly, in her native tongue. The candle, guttering beside the bed, was strangled in the grasp of a prehensile foot, and darkness received, like a ripple in velvet, the final happy sigh.⁴⁵¹

Borrowing semantics from the vogue of exoticism spearheaded by E.M. Hull’s bestselling *The Sheik* (1919), Collier makes no reference to Emily’s species in this final paragraph, only that she is ‘native’. He teasingly references ‘prehensile’, a word often used in reference to monkeys but which actually means ‘able to grasp’ without any inherent simian specificity – and the word is applied by Collier to the interspecies ‘foot’, rather than ‘tail’. The scene could equally apply to a human relationship (perhaps it is not too fanciful to compare the ‘final happy sigh’ with the orgasmic conclusion of *Ulysses*, whether or not Collier intended such a reference) and Collier ends the novel drawing attention to the characters’ similarities, and only briefly alluding to that which makes the novel controversial.

⁴⁵⁰ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.36

⁴⁵¹ Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimp* p.274

Non-fantastic versions of metamorphosis

Complementary to *Lady Into Fox* are interwar novels, such as *His Monkey Wife*, which use the impulse for metamorphosis without crossing the line from metaphor to literality, and thus offering non-fantastic variants of metamorphosis. This definition could be extended almost infinitely – the characteristics noted in a review of *Lady Into Fox* by Arthur Waugh, ‘Woman into fox, man into wolf, both alike into the ferocity of the tiger’,⁴⁵² are metaphoric traits which dominate much romantic fiction of the period. Closer to the borderline are novels which use *Lady Into Fox*’s central trope of marriage to an animal, even if (as in the case of *His Monkey Wife*) the animal was never human, or (as with Garnett’s *A Man in the Zoo*) the spouse is put in the position of an animal, but never physically metamorphoses.

As shown above (and, paratextually, in the title) *His Monkey Wife* concerns the marriage between a man and a monkey – or, in fact, a chimpanzee – named Emily. In this way, Collier concretises the idea of partner-as-animal without recourse to the fantastic – perhaps explaining why, given the supposed affinity between the fantastic and improper etiquette, Osbert Sitwell congratulated him on ‘perfect literary manners’.⁴⁵³ Rather than demonstrating a lowering of Mr. Fatigay’s standard for an intellectual companion, Emily is, ironically, better educated and more civilised than Mr. Fatigay’s (human) fiancée Amy. Collier contrasts the anthropomorphised Emily with the animalistic woman; human qualities are removed from the human. Where Amy is selfish, rude, and wasteful, Emily is an ‘apt [...] pupil in even the subtlest

⁴⁵² Arthur Waugh, *Daily Telegraph* (16/1/23), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/25 (Press Cuttings vol.23, 1922), University of Reading

⁴⁵³ Osbert Sitwell, Introduction to Collier, *Green Thoughts* p.11

points of the etiquette',⁴⁵⁴ has her thoughts focalised through the highest register (never the broken 'Creole' English used in another anthropomorphic-simian narrative, discussed in the next chapter, G.E. Trevelyan's *Appius and Virginia*) and has so cultured a mind that she translates the domestic debris Amy rejects as unwanted into pieces belonging to an artistic inventory:

a dismembered bedstead and a chalky plaster cast suggested an excellent Chirico; [...] Van Gogh, in an early period, was represented by a pair of crumpled boots, sad upon a broken cane chair; Picasso, by a shattered mandoline and a dusty soda-water siphon disposed upon a sheet of newspaper in the fireplace.⁴⁵⁵

Emily acts as an art historian of the domestic (and at least one reviewer followed suit; Naomi Mitchison described the novel's 'opening *décor* of Gauguin-ish forest'⁴⁵⁶ in her complimentary *Time and Tide* review). In the anthropomorphic 'sad', and the graphically somatic 'dismembered', Collier demonstrates how Emily's viewpoint is not trammelled by orthodox adjectives; the fusing of species which has occurred in her own character is transferred to her observations of objects around her. She creates a cultural narrative from these items of junk, demonstrating the fundamentality of the observer in the act of interpretation, but also projecting her own cerebral transformation onto the objects, granting them a quasi-metamorphosis.

Yet, unlike *Appius and Virginia*, which (as shall be seen) treats a similar theme in a maternal, rather than romantic, light (and thus pertains more closely to anxieties about childlessness than those about marital sexuality), the focus in *His Monkey Wife* is not upon Emily's academic progress. This mental metamorphosis is achieved swiftly and, while she cannot communicate verbally, she is soon able to read fluently.

⁴⁵⁴ Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimp* p.59

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.109

⁴⁵⁶ Naomi Mitchison, 'New Fiction' *Time and Tide*, 13/12/30 (1930) p.1580

Although this could be considered a fantastic trait, Collier himself professes (in the unpublished review he wrote of his own novel) that ‘he very consistently avoids fantasy’.⁴⁵⁷ Instead of directing attention towards an evolutionary miracle, Collier’s narrative concentrates upon Emily’s love for Mr. Fatigay – a love which is exacerbated by reading his books:

She believed them all. The world that lay before her was irradiated by Tennyson and Bernard Shaw, by Georgian poetry and Michael Arlen, and, worse than all combined, by love.⁴⁵⁸

The middlebrow preoccupation with mimesis is taken to extremes, where Emily not only looks for a reflection of reality, but cannot imagine that anything else would be possible. She lives only in a world created by the assumption of mimesis and, in Irwin’s words, ‘betrays a well-meaning gaucherie’ caused by ‘unassimilated literary and moral culture’.⁴⁵⁹ Although there is no greatly extensive agreement between, say, *The Lady of Shalott* and *The Green Hat*, these authors all aggrandise and romanticise love – in contrast to Amy. She is influenced primarily by Freudian semantics, which is a language Mr. Fatigay shares, albeit in a fairly unscholarly and euphemistic vernacular. He wishes to consummate his engagement, complaining that “‘if *that* is unsatisfied everything else gets warped, and one’s nerves get upset, and everything’s spoilt.’” Amy’s retaliates on the battleground of Freudianism, advising Mr. Fatigay to ‘sublimate’.⁴⁶⁰ Emily represents both progressive and regressive traits of femininity,

⁴⁵⁷ Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimp* p.xvi

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid. p.14. Like other authors whose names were used as shorthand, Michael Arlen was something of a stock figure for over-the-top aestheticism to many middlebrow writers. Bruce Marshall’s satirical 1929 novel *High Brows* dismisses a section of the reading public with the words ‘For most of them a reference to the works of Michael Arlen was considered highbrow’, and one of Delafield’s comic sketches features somebody attempting to write ‘a kind of satire, really, rather like Evelyn Waugh and Michael Arlen mixed’. [Bruce Marshall, *High Brows: An Extravaganza of Manners - Mostly Bad* (London: Jarrolds, 1929) p.182; E.M. Delafield, *As Others Hear Us: A Miscellany* (London: Macmillan, 1937a), p.17]

⁴⁵⁹ Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.131

⁴⁶⁰ Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimp* p.150

seemingly evading any ‘complications’ brought about by the modernisation of marriage. She does not question the woman’s subordinate position, happily seeing Mr. Fatigay as an amalgam of man and master, yet she is also an embodiment of the reason Kafka gave for so many of his contemporaries writing about animals: ‘an expression of our longing for a free, natural life.’⁴⁶¹ Whilst there is nothing free about Gregor Samsa, Emily is free from fears about sexuality or anxieties over the wife’s various potential roles within modern marriage, instead creating one which is partly, indeed, ‘natural’ (her instinct) and partly borrowed from idealised fiction of the past, without qualms about the topicality of her emotions.

Like *Lady Into Fox* (and, indeed, *Green Thoughts*, which concludes with Mr. Mannering’s plant-self shrilly ‘voic[ing] its agony’⁴⁶²), *His Monkey Wife* ends on a primitive sound. But rather than a scream in the throes of death, the final sound is Emily’s sigh in the consummation scene quoted above, which is (as Paul Theroux writes) ‘a note of triumphant carnality.’⁴⁶³ Both Garnett and Collier choose to end their narratives on an emotive, almost elemental sound. These sounds do not distinguish between animal and human, but are vocal evocations of the overlapping ground between the two, in the primitive feelings of pleasure or pain.

Non-fantastic variants of metamorphosis can embody the various linguistic methods of describing change. *His Monkey Wife* and *Lady Into Fox* both portray the literalisation of animalism metaphors (associated with discussions of sexuality), with or without recourse to the fantastic. Garnett’s *A Man in the Zoo* uses neither the

⁴⁶¹ Janouch, *Conversations With Kafka* pp.43f, quoted in Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns* p.81

⁴⁶² Collier, *Green Thoughts* p.56

⁴⁶³ Paul Theroux, Introduction to Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimp* p.xiii

fantastic nor an actual animal in the relationship, but turns instead to surrealism (albeit a grounded surrealism) to depict spouse-as-animal.

Garnett manipulates the common trait of observing other humans; what Sylvia Townsend Warner described as her wish '[t]o watch them like animals'.⁴⁶⁴ Following foreshadowing slang from his fiancée ("You silly savage"; "You wild beast"⁴⁶⁵), John follows Josephine's angry suggestion that he "'ought to be shut up and exhibited here in the Zoo"⁴⁶⁶. By proffering himself, the passive voice of Josephine's proposal is rather defused; John is in an unusual position of combined power and powerlessness during his voluntary life in an observed cage. His internment is the result of a lovers' quarrel, because Josephine will not 'give herself' to John (the full extent of this gift is not made explicit). In refusing to, she labels him 'a tiger and not a human being', and compares him to 'a baboon or a bear',⁴⁶⁷ overdetermining his animalism and returning to the idea of sexuality as animal behaviour. Raymond Mortimer sees *A Man in the Zoo* as 'a contribution to the modern theory of love. [...] The book might have been called *Gentleman into Ape*. Love, Mr. Garnett says, makes beasts of us'.⁴⁶⁸ There could be no clearer affinity than that drawn by Josephine with her metaphor and similes; the rest of the novel is the practical outworking of these images. Once more, Garnett allows his title to prefigure the central event, so the dynamics of receptive surprise are not called upon, but the absence of the fantastic could, after the success of *Lady Into Fox*, be considered itself unexpected.

⁴⁶⁴ Morgan, *Writers at Work* p.30

⁴⁶⁵ David Garnett, 'A Man in the Zoo (1924)' *Lady Into Fox and A Man in the Zoo* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1928) 93-190, p.102; p.103

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p.103

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.101; p.103

⁴⁶⁸ Raymond Mortimer, 'New Novels' *The New Statesman*, 26/04/24 (1924) 68-69, p.69

The basis of many fantastic novels is the literalisation of metaphor, where the impossible expressed in language takes place in reality – the opposite of what Apter writes of the fantastic as ‘neither in the world of concrete images nor of abstractions, but a middle ground in which literal language has an unreliable and unruly figurative tendency.’⁴⁶⁹ Figurative language becomes literal in fantastic literature: ‘She’s a vixen’, for example, becomes the plot of *Lady into Fox*; ‘She’s a witch’ that of *Lolly Willowses*.

A Man in the Zoo is, on the other hand, effectively a literalisation of simile – that is, there remains a distance between the objects being compared; a man becomes an animal synecdochically, by taking on the same environment and restrictions, though not form. This distance is eroded in metamorphosis, which is why *Lady Into Fox* is akin to metaphor, retaining the impossibility inherent to metaphor, whereas *A Man in the Zoo* equates with simile, which does not verbalise the impossible but rather makes comparisons. Iain McGilchrist suggests that metaphor (meaning literally ‘to carry across’) exists to make up for the gaps created by language itself:

Metaphor is language’s cure for the ills entailed on us by language [...] If the separation exists at the level of language, it does not at the level of experience. At that level the two parts of a metaphor are not similar; they are the *same*.⁴⁷⁰

That is to say, the mental conception is the same for the object and subject of a metaphor, and metaphor is the way of circumnavigating the linguistic distinction between the two. Metamorphosis thus acts as the equivalent of metaphor because it makes up for the shortcomings of *physicality* – that which McGilchrist terms ‘experience’ (how something is conceived, felt, and recognised, beyond language) is

⁴⁶⁹ Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* p.132

⁴⁷⁰ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2010) p.116

the same, but corporeally there is difference; where metaphor closes this gap linguistically, so metamorphosis closes it physically. Lakoff and Johnson suggest, in *Metaphors We Live By*, that ‘our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature’, amongst which is the ‘ontological metaphor’ which gives ‘artificial boundaries’ and limits to concepts and ideas, so that they can be understood and discussed.⁴⁷¹ Metamorphosis is an extension of this impulse to create limits, to the extent of effecting physical boundaries, rather than conceptual ones.

Massey writes that:

Metamorphosis denies the primacy of language, which we are accustomed to think of as the source and the medium of all change; here form changes directly into another form, circumventing the process of conceptual translation that we usually think of as necessary for the grasping and the effecting of change.⁴⁷²

Although fictional physical metamorphosis evades the supposed supremacy of language as a novelistic tool for describing (and thus causing) change, it is however synergetically tied to language as the model which allows the communication of change. The metaphor exists as words, and though metamorphosis translates these words into physicality, this can, in turn, only be told through language. Contrary to a simile, there is nothing linguistically inherent in a metaphor to signal that it is not fact, which permits it to be the object of metamorphosis: metaphors (like the fantastic) depend upon perception, and a knowledge of natural laws.

⁴⁷¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003) p.3; p.25

⁴⁷² Massey, *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* p.51

Observer and observed

A Man in the Zoo, with its caged human and voyeuristic public, dramatises a wider concern of the fantastic – the dynamics of observation. The complexities of perspective are suggested as early as Ovid; the opening line of *Metamorphoses* being ‘In nova fert animus mutates dicere formas / corpora’ (‘My mind inspires me to speak of forms changed into new bodies’).⁴⁷³ By opening with the concept of the mind, and separating it from the changing bodies – physically placing ‘corpora’ on the second line, relying on enjambment – Ovid introduces the differing functions of mind and body and the distancing effect of relating a subjective viewpoint. Within metamorphosis novels, the varying outlooks of the transformed being, the observer, and the narrator create an interweaving framework of perspective, dependent upon the authorial choice of focalisation. These distinctions are clearest in *A Man in the Zoo*, where there is no question of loss of sentience or communication (as there are when a human transmutes into animal or plant):

At that moment he was engaged in walking up and down (which occupation, by the way, took up far more of his time than he ever suspected). [...] Back and forth he walked by the wire division, with his hands behind his back and his head bent slightly, until he reached the corner, when up went his head and he turned on his heel. His face was expressionless.⁴⁷⁴

John Cromartie is dehumanised when depicted from the observers’ viewpoint; his face is described as ‘expressionless’, which really means that those who rely on visual signs for elucidation (i.e. the crowd paying to see a man in the zoo) cannot form an interpretive response. John becomes on a par with the animals either side of him – perhaps worse, because a few pages later the narrator berates him for having

⁴⁷³ Quoted (with translation) in Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns* p.75

⁴⁷⁴ Garnett, ‘A Man in the Zoo (1924)’ p.125

‘neglected ordinary civilities’ to these neighbours.⁴⁷⁵ The narrator, however, can interpose in parenthesis, offering a discrepancy between his omniscience and John’s (lack of) self-awareness (‘more of his time than he ever suspected’). Observation, as subject and object, is a fundamental framework for the novel, and observation can be a cause of change itself – both in the sexualisation of women, and in documenting the non-fantastic metamorphosis undergone by Mr. Cromartie. Jackson’s idea that metamorphosis novels relate to ‘undifferentiation’ through a refusal of ‘difference, distinction, homogeneity, reduction, [and] discrete forms’⁴⁷⁶ is helpful for moments of metamorphic insentience, as discussed, but belied by novels which do not entirely eschew the formalities of narrative, and retain the dynamics of observer and observed. This is not always dramatised to the extent of *A Man in the Zoo*, but is present in the decision to focalise through either the metamorphosed individual, or a person witnessing metamorphosis.

Flower Phantoms and *Green Thoughts* are primarily depicted from the aspect of the human in metamorphosis. This permits the narrative to turn attention to questions of self-knowledge and, more broadly, what ‘self’ is. *Flower Phantoms* does broach ideas of hidden selfhood, as vocalised by Judy:

“It would be most interesting to find out what one meant, and what one wanted, and what one was really like inside. I’m sure one contains the most queer possibilities.”⁴⁷⁷

She phrases these philosophical and psychological questions in intentionally reductive semantics, which undermine the purported scientific rigour of Freudianism, but also demonstrates how fundamental these questions of identity are to the character. Judy

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. p.132

⁴⁷⁶ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.72

⁴⁷⁷ Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* p.18

experiments in ‘trying to see herself’,⁴⁷⁸ and her floral metamorphosis is an outworking and embodiment (as it were) of these self-examinations. Her metamorphosis is a blurring of consciousness and event: the act fulfils the thought, particularly so because her metamorphosis is metonymic and foreshadowed by imagery. As discussed above, Fraser depicts the insentience of Judy-as-plant through an imprecise and occasionally obfuscatory prose, which reflects an uncertainty about selfhood before and during metamorphosis which never comes to a linguistic crystallisation.

Middlebrow audiences are perhaps less preoccupied by philosophical discussions of selfhood than their highbrow counterparts – or, if this topic is approached, it is done so obliquely (in *Flower Phantoms*), corporately (as with *Lady Into Fox*’s focus on identity in marriage) or humorously, demonstrated by *Green Thoughts*:

A process analogous to the mutations of the embryo was being enacted here. At last the entity which was thus being rushed down an absurdly foreshortened vista of the ages arrived, slowing up, into the foreground. It became recognizable. The Seven Ages of Mr. Mannering were presented, as it were, in a series of close-ups, as in an educational film; his consciousness settled and cleared; the bud was mature, ready to open. At this point, I believe, Mr. Mannering’s state of mind was exactly that of a patient, who, struggling up from vague dreams, wakening from under an anaesthetic, asks plaintively, “Where am I?” Then the bud opened, and he knew.⁴⁷⁹

Collier plays on Mannering’s name with his Shakespearean reference, and clearly presents the awakening of his consciousness comically, but this section also exemplifies the complexities of perspective when depicting the transformation of the mind.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid. p.26

⁴⁷⁹ Collier, *Green Thoughts* p.31

Although Collier does not use the hazy distancing techniques favoured by Fraser, Mannering's evolving states of awareness are replicated and reflected by Collier's resistance of specificity until the final, short sentence of this excerpt. Similarly, the vagueness of 'entity' and the pronoun 'it' are eventually exchanged for 'he', as part (ironically) of the humanising process, as though the focalising camera were coming into focus. And that camera (introduced in the image 'as in an educational film') constructs the role of the observer. The dynamics of observation are first brought into this excerpt by the word 'recognizable', which requires a cognisant onlooker – and one willing to create a coherent narrative from the scene playing out in front of him. This narrator/onlooker is voyeuristic, almost a detective, in assembling this account, but not omniscient; a statement is qualified by 'I believe'. The image of the educational film concretises the idea of an observer, but this observing body, this audience, is implicitly broad and anonymous. The educational film is only incorporated as a simile, but it encourages the idea of an invested, but detached, act of observation. As Virginia Woolf wrote in 1926 of people depicted on film, 'we behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part of it.'⁴⁸⁰ Reality (Woolf suggests films are 'more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive in daily life'⁴⁸¹) is distorted, even metamorphosed, into referential recordings which remove the object from the subject – and thus the role of observer is distorted accordingly.

Film was also, in 1936 when *His Monkey Wife* was published, a medium undergoing change – capable, as H.D. wrote in 1930, of 'including not only all art but including

⁴⁸⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema (1926)' in Leonard Woolf (ed.) *Collected Essays: Volume Two* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972b) 268-272, p.269

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.269

all life',⁴⁸² which is precisely the process of Mr. Mannering's experience. H.D.'s words are written in a pamphlet that discusses Kenneth Macpherson's 1930 film *Borderline*. In turn, he describes his decision to make the film with 'a "subjective use of inference"': 'By this I meant that instead of the method of externalised observation, dealing with objects, I was going to take my film into the minds of the people in it', adding that this is 'like something seen through a window or keyhole'.⁴⁸³ Access to characters' minds, of course, is one of the tenets of modernist writing, and his image of eavesdropping is a familiar trope of domestic fiction, but by importing it to film, Macpherson destabilises the dynamics of observer and observed. By introducing *educational* film (which privileges the observer over the object, since the observer becomes also the object of education) to the amalgam of superimposed and overlapping imagery and levels of observation in his description of Mr. Mannering's metamorphosis, Collier further overdetermines the process of transformation, which cannot be pinned down as either a subjective or objective experience – that is, neither Mr. Mannering's nor the observer's perspectives can be resolved.

Although Desmond MacCarthy congratulates Garnett for 'following out, not only logically but emotionally, the minutest consequences of his preposterous fancy',⁴⁸⁴ *Lady Into Fox*, of course, prioritises the observer's emotions, rather than those of the creature undergoing the 'preposterous fancy'. This allows Garnett's narrator to presuppose and prioritise Mr. Tebrick's responses and sensibilities when

⁴⁸² H.D., 'Borderline: A POOL. film with Paul Robeson (1930)' in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (eds.) *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell, 1998) 221-236, p.232

⁴⁸³ Kenneth Macpherson, 'As Is (1930)' in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Jane Marcus (eds.) *Close Up 1927-1933* (London: Cassell, 1998) 236-238, p.236; p.238. This is a contrast to Woolf's anxiety, that cinema shows only the objects (Anna Karenina's 'teeth, her pearls and her velvet') rather than 'the inside of her mind, her charm, her passion, her despair'. [Woolf, 'The Cinema (1926)' p.270]

⁴⁸⁴ MacCarthy, *Criticism* p.225

contemplating Mrs. Tebrick as both fox and woman. That is, the gradually altering characteristics she demonstrates are detailed through an outsider's eyes, so that there is no exact analysis of the incremental change from lady to fox. Both sides of Mrs. Tebrick's development are documented with the partiality of a husband and the amateur conclusions of a man not specialised in biology. So, while Garnett was known to have researched the habits of foxes minutely,⁴⁸⁵ the observations which intrude into the report by the seemingly detached narrator are those of a husband clutching at straws for comprehension.

This narrator reports the husband's viewpoint – but treads a curious line between omniscience and the reverse. Despite relaying Mr. Tebrick's unspoken thoughts – 'One fancy came to him [...] that it was his fault'; 'Watching the two gave Mr. Tebrick great delight'⁴⁸⁶ – the narrator also refuses absolute omniscience: 'One point indeed I have not been able to ascertain and that is how they first became acquainted.'⁴⁸⁷ This moment of silence lends weight to the purported stance of biographer, despite not cohering with the narrator's otherwise psychic abilities. Although the narrative does describe the Tebricks as more like 'lovers' than spouses, the period in which they *were* lovers is undocumented. By obscuring their courtship in this way, Garnett denies the reader the opportunity of comparing the couple before and during marriage – a comparison which, more generally, some reviewers regarded as essential to an interpretation of the novel, and its presentation of the contrast between expectation and actuality in marriage:

⁴⁸⁵ Ann S. Johnson, 'Garnett's Amazon from Dahomey: Literary Debts in "The Sailor's Return"' *Contemporary Literature*, 14/2 (1973) 169-185, p.173

⁴⁸⁶ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.6; p.46

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p.3

You may say to yourself, “Why should I, a reasonable person, read such nonsense, which has nothing to do with real life?” But I wonder if it hasn’t something to do with real life. I seem to have heard of husbands who felt after their marriage that their wives had changed into something as different from the girls they married as a vixen is from a lady.⁴⁸⁸

By focusing upon the feelings and thoughts of man observing metamorphosis, Garnett offers a parallel for the husband bewildered by the woman they married – a bewilderment reflected by this reviewer’s vague use of ‘I wonder’, ‘I seem to have heard’, and ‘something as different’, rather than any precise parallels or statements. In the same way that Mr. Tebrick must rely upon documenting his wife’s physical transformation and the observable outworking of it, without access to her psychological metamorphosis, so spouses are never entirely comprehensible to their partner. Marriages between equals (as sexual progressiveness was gradually revealing spouses to be) encounter the obstruction of an inability to know all from mere visual scrutiny.

Where *Lady Into Fox* uses metamorphosis to enact this marital confusion, *A Man in the Zoo* uses the framework of metamorphosis, non-fantastically, as a *response* to discord in a relationship. In both cases, though, the transformation is not isolated. Metamorphosis creates a wider pattern of change; it is almost contagious. This is dramatised in *A Man in the Zoo*, where (from John Cromartie’s perspective), the ‘staring faces of a crowd [...] seemed to share all the qualities of those apes’.⁴⁸⁹ Observers and observed blend in animalistic imagery, dehumanising both sides of the viewing act, and creating a narrative microcosm of the model Todorov asserts for the

⁴⁸⁸ *Sunday Chronicle* (17/12/22), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/25 (Press Cuttings vol.23, 1922), University of Reading.

⁴⁸⁹ Garnett, 'A Man in the Zoo (1924)' p.146

critic (as opposed to the structuralist), changing to ‘constitute himself as [the] subject’ of the novel under examination.⁴⁹⁰

For Mr. Tebrick, examining Silvia and attempting to understand her metamorphosis gradually leads to his own de-evolution. As the narrative suggests:

We know her husband was always trying to bring her back to be a woman, or at any rate to get her to act like one, may she not have been hoping to get him to be like a beast himself or to act like one? May she not have thought it easier to change him thus than ever to change herself back into being a woman?⁴⁹¹

The distinction between *acting* and *being* encompasses the fantastic and non-fantastic transformations in the novel, and coheres with the middlebrow anxiety about ‘keeping up appearances’ (as portrayed in Rose Macaulay’s novel of that name, where Daisy Simpson adopts a sophisticated persona so completely that the narrative gives her two names: acting and being have overlapped.) By conflating the two, Garnett makes Mr. Tebrick’s de-humanisation equal with Silvia’s metamorphosis, even without complete physical change. His transformation is presaged early in the novel:

Indeed the extremity of his grief was such that it served him a very good turn, for he was so entirely unmanned by it that for some time he could do nothing but weep[.]⁴⁹²

With the metaphorical ‘unmanned’, *Lady Into Fox* begins the process of de-humanising Mr. Tebrick; the term suggests a form of reverse evolution, or unravelling of life. There is also the implication of emasculation, often attendant to interwar discussions of woman’s evolving sexuality⁴⁹³ – and also pertinent to a battle where

⁴⁹⁰ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.142

⁴⁹¹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.39

⁴⁹² Ibid. p.30

⁴⁹³ For example, Anthony Ludovici comes to the odd conclusion in *Lysistrata* (the title taken from a play by Aristophanes, in which Lysistrata encourages the withholding of sex from men, to end a war)

the wife is more successful in changing the husband than he reverting her. The linguistic encroachment upon Mr. Tebrick's humanity continues through metaphors which portray him as an animal – but, since common expressions, not jarringly so: he 'fell into a dog's sleep'; Mrs. Cork thinks the house is a 'pigstye' [sic].⁴⁹⁴ This coalesces into the framing of Mr. Tebrick as 'a beast', shortly before the potential bestiality incident:

He got up to catch her then and finding himself unsteady on his legs, he went down on to all fours. The long and short of it is that by drinking he drowned all his sorrow; and then would be a beast too like his wife[.]⁴⁹⁵

Mr. Tebrick's behaviour leads to a physical change, although not an irreversible one, whereby he takes on the posture of an animal (drunkenness also forms a parallel beast in *Green Thoughts*, when Mr. Mannering's inebriated nephew is 'a fiend in human shape').⁴⁹⁶ Garnett's unusual use of 'would be' suggests two possible interpretations; either a slightly jarring modal verb, which confuses the tense of the sentence (perhaps intended to reflect his drunkenness), or an archaic synonym for 'wanted to be', hinting at a subjunctive mode. This linguistic uncertainty around Mr. Tebrick's desires augments his increasing animalism, and thus the impenetrability of his intentions.

The epithet 'beast', to refer to sexual aggression or indecency, relates to the theme of sexualised men in 1920s *Sheik*-esque exoticised literature which is domesticated in these novels. It is seen again in *His Monkey Wife* when Amy accuses Mr. Fatigay of

that women will take over the world, and 'the female domain will steadily corrode and eat into the male, and soon men will cease to be employers altogether, and become the poorest-paid workers in an industry run entirely by women.' [Anthony M. Ludovici, *Lysistrata: or Woman's Future and Future Woman* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1924) p.86]

⁴⁹⁴ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.58; p.38

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid. pp.35f

⁴⁹⁶ Collier, *Green Thoughts* p.52

“behav[ing] like a brute beast”, adding, with a phrase almost identical to that used in Mr. Tebrick’s (possible) bestiality scene, that she “shall never forget the side of your nature you’ve shown me tonight”.⁴⁹⁷ Throughout both novels, the term ‘nature’ acts as a pivot for the characters’ transformations. Mr. Tebrick says that he has ‘as much natural obstinacy’ as Silvia, and the cubs she later bears ‘look on [Mr. Tebrick] as their natural companion.’⁴⁹⁸ Since these novels question what is natural and unnatural – both fantastically and maritally – the word takes on an ironic element, and is precluded from representing any absolute standard.

Paul Theroux comments of *His Monkey Wife* that ‘[i]t is the humans in the book who behave like monkeys, gibbering and indulging their frivolous passion for fancy dress.’⁴⁹⁹ This commensurately describes Amy’s character, but Mr. Fatigay is animalised in a less flippant fashion: he becomes destitute, gnawing at a cauliflower stump in a doorway, with ‘a monkey-chatter of teeth in his head.’⁵⁰⁰ This metaphor overtly places Mr. Fatigay on the same level as Emily, dehumanising him to her standing. Similarly, Mr. Tebrick gradually adopts the traits of an animal – or, more accurately, loses those of a civilised human. He ceases to wash, his ‘cheeks were sunk in, his eyes hollow but excessively brilliant’, and his ‘reason is gone’.⁵⁰¹ When in this state, he is returned to his wife, but taking on a role closer to beast than man:

Mr. Tebrick now could follow after them anywhere and keep up with them too, and could go through a wood as silently as a deer. He learnt to conceal himself if ever a labourer passed by so that he was rarely seen, and never but once in their company. But what was most strange of all, he had got a way of going

⁴⁹⁷ Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimpanzee* p.147

⁴⁹⁸ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.33; p.86

⁴⁹⁹ Theroux, Introduction to Collier, *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimpanzee* p.x

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.226

⁵⁰¹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.63

doubled up, often almost on all fours with his hands touching the ground every now and then, particularly when he went uphill.⁵⁰²

Silvia's fantastic metamorphosis has been replicated in Mr. Tebrick's physical, psychological, and social metamorphoses. This reflects the co-dependence of identity, whereby personal identity is subsumed by corporate identity, even (or especially) in the microcosm of marriage – when change in the status or mores of the wife engenders a transformation in the husband.

Silvia's eventual evolution in *Lady Into Fox*, alongside her immediate physical metamorphosis and gradual psychological metamorphosis, is the transition from tameness to wildness. As the last vestige of her humanity disappears, so her resistance to the house increases. Tameness and wildness, as well as being behavioural, are defined by the boundaries they inhabit: tameness belongs within and in accordance with domestic space, while wildness refuses to be restrained by these boundaries. Complicating this dichotomy, however, is the fact that the house itself, however, is not a static entity in *Lady Into Fox* – like Mr. Tebrick, it is affected by Silvia's metamorphosis.

Metamorphosis of the domestic

The standards of domestic propriety are, as discussed, shaken by the lady turning into a fox, but that is not the only domestic disturbance. The domestic fantastic always disrupts the space, and use of space, in which the strange occurs. Laura Willowes must leave the oppressive home of her brother and negotiate a relationship with the countryside cottage she rents; Leonard Eyles identifies the 'slow decay of the house'

⁵⁰² Ibid. pp.86f

in *Appius and Virginia*; Orlando experiments with living alongside gipsies and fancies of the rooms of her colossal house, ‘hundreds and thousands of times as she had seen them, they never looked the same twice’.⁵⁰³ These houses are all altered – naturally or supernaturally – by the presence of the fantastic.

Judy’s unusual nature (which leads to her metamorphosis) is compounded early in *Flower Phantoms* by her sitting alone on the landing; her brother asks “Why don’t you use rooms like ordinary people?”⁵⁰⁴ He later adds:

“Sensible people do not sit on landings gazing at ferns in a window. They sit in rooms. That is what rooms are for. Or, if it is summer, in gardens. That is what gardens are for.”⁵⁰⁵

The misuse of space is an affront to conventionality, and (by extension) an indication of the latent fantastic. Her metamorphosis (like that in *Green Thoughts*) takes place in the alternative space of the hot-house, liminally between house and nature – but belonging properly to neither. The situating of the fantastic often takes place in an alternative living space, as shall be explored in my conclusion, but Marina Warner suggests that it is particularly pertinent for ‘tales of metamorphosis’ which

often arose in spaces (temporal, geographical, and mental) that were crossroads, cross-cultural zones, points of interchange on the intricate connective tissue of communications between cultures.⁵⁰⁶

This universalisable concept finds its domestic microcosm in these novels and their use of alternative spaces – another facet which is heightened in *A Man in the Zoo*, with its faux-domestic scene and subversion of the traditional home.

⁵⁰³ Leonora Eyles, ‘Review of *Appius and Virginia*’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 07/07/32 (1932) p.496; Woolf, *Orlando* pp.301f

⁵⁰⁴ Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* p.11

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.28

⁵⁰⁶ Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* p.17

The vitiation of the home is signalled in *Lady Into Fox* when Silvia tears apart a rabbit: ‘Blood on the carpet, blood on the armchairs and antimacassars, even a little blood spurtled on to the wall’.⁵⁰⁷ The blood spattered around the room echoes a wider metamorphosis, as the house (and its concomitant values) are transformed; this gory destruction of décor is the visual manifestation of a fundamental shift. In this way it is the inverse equivalent of Silvia; her form changes, followed by the gradual unwinding of her nature; contrarily, the house’s dynamics alter immediately, and its physical cleanliness and order are gradually ruined. While Silvia besmirches the walls and destroys clothing and objects, Mr. Tebrick correspondingly starts to shut off rooms of the house – having initially lied about doing so to his neighbours – until the Tebricks are living in only ‘three or four’ increasingly ‘dirty and disorderly rooms’.⁵⁰⁸ These concrete spatial restrictions give the novel a growing claustrophobia, mirroring Silvia’s physical entrapment and increasing wildness, but through a lens with which the reader can identify.

As Silvia loses her tameness, so she begins to fight against this claustrophobia – by contravening the boundaries orchestrated within the house and garden. The home represents both security and entrapment. Silvia starts to explore the inaccessible (to Mr. Tebrick) by hiding under the table, or in the middle of a frozen pond. Eventually she resorts to burrowing under the fence, transgressing the essential domestic boundary and escaping to the wild – where Mr. Tebrick later joins her, far beyond the confines of the home. Ironically, in another of his personal reversals, at the end of the novel Mr. Tebrick himself makes many holes in the domestic boundaries, hacking

⁵⁰⁷ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.29

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p.9; p.22; p.74

at the hedge – intending that Silvia and her litter will escape *into* ‘the security of the garden’,⁵⁰⁹ and away from the hounds. Instead, it is in the garden that Silvia is killed. The home has metamorphosed from a site of security into a site of danger, and the essential qualities of the domestic are undermined. This is the final indication that the norms of home and marriage have been subverted.

In *Lady Into Fox*, it is the fantastic moment which causes narrative dilemmas – which, in turn, reveal similar complications in the world beyond the novel. Many domestic fantastic novels use the fantastic to dramatise a (would-be) solution to the social anxiety, however flawed. This is the format for *Lolly Willowes* and creation novels *The Love-Child* and *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, and even in those narratives which use metamorphosis as an attempt to escape – from Ovid’s Daphne to Ronald Fraser’s *Judy*. In reversing this relationship, Garnett avoids any sense that *Lady Into Fox* acts as wish-fulfilment or improvises an impossible panacea. By dismantling an ‘ordinary’ marriage, and witnessing the result of this escalating model of disruption, Garnett *dramatises* the act of societal crisis (if that is not too strong a word for the re-defining of roles in sex and marriage) rather than *answering* it.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid. p.88

Chapter Four

“Creative Thought Creates”:⁵¹⁰ Childlessness and Creation Narratives

The counterpart of changing constituents of reality through metamorphosis is identifying those elements which are absent, and creating them. Creation narratives are as old as narratives themselves, and the act of narration is, of course, itself one of creation. Any excursion into the fantastic must involve a further element of creation, since transgressing or adding to extant natural laws requires the construction of new (or renewed) possibilities. The creation of humans, however, produces a separate category of the fantastic; the manufacture of life responds to more fundamental emotional impetuses, and raises more complex philosophical and theological questions, than other manifestations of the creative force. Edith Olivier’s *The Love-Child*, Elinor Wylie’s *The Venetian Glass Nephew*,⁵¹¹ and (though with a different tone) Frank Baker’s *Miss Hargreaves* demonstrate a new, distinctly middlebrow, approach to the fantastic creation of humans, and the anxieties of childlessness and powerlessness this act of creation both responds to, and causes.

Fantasy theorists (even among those who present schemata of classifications) seldom designate a category for the fantastic creation of humans – although, with a broad view, *The Love-Child*, *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, and *Miss Hargreaves* correspond with Kathryn Hume’s category ‘literature of vision’: that which introduces new

⁵¹⁰ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.223

⁵¹¹ Olivier and Wylie were longstanding friends, and read each other’s creation narratives (Wylie told Olivier that *The Love-Child* was ‘beautifully done, & the idea is enchanting’, while Olivier described *The Venetian Glass Nephew* as ‘beautiful, brittle and tragic’) but there seems little evidence that they influenced one another in this regard. [Elinor Wylie, ‘Letter to Edith Olivier’ (18/06/27), Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers 982/94; Olivier, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* p.254]

realities, in order to draw contrasts between the work and the world.⁵¹² Even writers whose primary approach to fantasy theory depends upon dividing up elements of fantastic narratives, such as Peter Penzoldt, oddly avoid creation as a theme.⁵¹³ The creation narrative is, however, far from a twentieth-century invention. Genesis and other religious accounts notwithstanding, the sphere of myths and fairy-tales has long been fascinated with supernaturally creating people – from Pinocchio (created by Carlo Collodi in 1883) to the Russian fairy-tale ‘Snegurochka’ (The Snow Maiden’), available in the 1920s through Arthur Ransome’s retelling, ‘The Little Daughter of Snow’, in *Old Peter’s Russian Tales*.⁵¹⁴ (The influence of ‘The Snow Maiden’ can be seen as recently as 2012, in Eowyn Ivey’s novel *The Snow Child*. Ivey replays the narrative in a manner strikingly similar to *The Love-Child* – focusing on the pain of childlessness, and the emotions of a creator pseudo-parent: ‘It was fantastical and impossible, but Mable knew it was true – she and Jack had formed her of snow and birch boughs and frosty wild grass. The truth awed her. Not only was the child a miracle, but she was their creation. One does not create a life and then abandon it to the wilderness.’⁵¹⁵) Yet perhaps the most familiar creation fiction for a 1920s audience was still Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), by then also popularised through stage and screen.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² Since Hume does not distinguish between fantastic and non-fantastic texts, instead viewing all literature as composite of fantastic and mimetic impulses, it is necessarily imprecise to assign manifestations of the fantastic (such as creation narratives) to her four categories of literature (those of illusion, vision, revision and disillusion). [Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* p.55]

⁵¹³ Although Penzoldt has separate categories for werewolves, witches, ghosts etc., the novel of fantastic creation could only really be grouped in the vaguer classification he designates ‘The Psychological Ghost Story’. His definition doesn’t include anything particularly ghostlike, since the mere possibility of madness or even unreliable narration appears to be sufficient. ‘It replaces the traditional objective approach to the supernatural, in which the public has long ceased to believe, by a subjective approach, and thus prevents its complete disappearance from fiction.’ [Penzoldt, *The Supernatural in Fiction* p.56]

⁵¹⁴ Arthur Ransome, *Old Peter’s Russian Tales* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1916) 222-235.

⁵¹⁵ Eowyn Ivey, *The Snow Child* (London: Headline Review, 2012) p.90

⁵¹⁶ Although the famous 1931 film starring Boris Karloff was yet to be made, Peggy Webling’s play (from which the film was adapted) was performed in 1927, and the twentieth century had already seen

Frankenstein: the modern creation novel

Commonly seen as a founding novel of science-fiction, the central elements of *Frankenstein* can also be recognised in interwar novels which explore the creation of humans through *non*-scientific means. The popularity of *Frankenstein* is perhaps reflected in Roger Callois' description of creation as a category, in *Images, Images*: 'the statue, figure, suit of armour, or automaton that suddenly comes to life and acquires a deadly independence'.⁵¹⁷ Callois incorporates deadliness/terror into the definition, integrating a purportedly unalterable readerly response into the trope itself. Twentieth-century middlebrow examples play with this formula and, by doing so, repudiate it. While the struggle for independence remains prominent in *The Love-Child*, *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, and *Miss Hargreaves*, none of the creations follow Frankenstein's Monster's lead in turning murderous. As with the creaking Gothic mansion's metamorphosis into an innocuous country house, so the fearsome creature of uncanny terror becomes no less uncanny, but significantly less terrifying, in being domesticated.

Shelley recognised the placement of *Frankenstein* as a creation narrative within a chronology of gradually de-mythologised frameworks. By titling *Frankenstein* 'the modern Prometheus', she overtly compares a mythological creator⁵¹⁸ with the

two film adaptations of *Frankenstein*. Donawerth notes the influence of *Frankenstein* on other writers of the period: 'In the 1920s and 1930s, allusions to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* occur in Clare Winger Harris's "The Artificial Man" (1929), Sophie Wenzel Ellis's "Creatures of the Light" (1930); Kathleen Ludwick's "Dr. Immortelle" (1930) and L. Taylor Hansen's "The City on the Cloud" (1930).' [Jane Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (1st ed. edn.; Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997) p.xviii]

⁵¹⁷ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* pp.100f (Todorov is paraphrasing Callois' work, which has not itself been translated into English.)

⁵¹⁸ Although Prometheus is traditionally depicted as bringing fire to mankind, some versions of the myth (notably in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) establish him as the creator of man.

intelligent but otherwise quotidian figure of Frankenstein. In alluding to a shared classical heritage, Shelley pre-empts not only *Miss Hargreaves* (“Pygmalion couldn’t have done better”⁵¹⁹) and the middlebrow desire to respond to literary antecedents, but also Freud’s popularisation of classical figures, such as Oedipus and Electra, as modernised universal tropes. By bringing the power and significance of a Titan to an ordinary man, Shelley anticipates novels like Baker’s and Olivier’s, which posit the creation of humans in determinedly ordinary environments. Although the narratives in question do not overtly acknowledge their debt to Shelley, Olivier does literally domesticate *Frankenstein* elsewhere, criticising sprawling suburban houses as ‘a jungle of Frankenstein monsters compacted of bricks and mortar.’⁵²⁰ Rather than comparing her own novel to this archetype, she sees the suburbs as the twentieth-century equivalent, with the same associations of not only ugliness but danger and a lack of control.

Mary Shelley sets a precedent for several common traits of middlebrow creation narratives: fantastic events amongst the everyday; the humanisation and pathos of a creation (Rosemary Jackson calls *Frankenstein* the ‘first of many fantasies re-deploying a Faustian tale on a fully *human* level’⁵²¹), and an interactive relationship between creator and created. Where *Frankenstein* differs from the novels which inherit its legacy is in the meditation and mediation of creation itself. The creators’ methods of and motivations for acts of creation distance the domestic fantastic updating of *Frankenstein* from that text. Both method and motivation are instead informed and shaped largely by the interwar issue of spinsterhood and childlessness.

⁵¹⁹ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.58

⁵²⁰ Edith Olivier, *Country Moods and Tenses: A Non-Grammarian's Chapbook* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1941) p.21

⁵²¹ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.55

The statistic for unmarried women in Britain (although 1.75m according to the 1921 census⁵²²) was widely expressed, journalistically and otherwise, as two million ‘surplus women’. Although spinsterhood was scarcely a new phenomenon,⁵²³ it was treated almost as an epidemic: ‘we must for a time resign ourselves to a surplus female population’, as one commentator wrote in 1927.⁵²⁴ On the one hand, this phenomenon led to the cult of the flapper, feared by conservative contemporaries (in appalled works such as John MacArthur’s *Shall Flappers Rule?*) and often celebrated by feminist critics.⁵²⁵ But this is a skewed image of the single woman’s life, which was frequently not so much emancipated as socially emaciated. A large percentage of this ‘surplus female population’ were middle-class and middlebrow, or at least they suffered the accompanying restrictive lifestyle and stigmatization which went with being unmarried, where other classes might not. This is partly because, as well-documented, women of the middle-class were often brought up almost solely for marriage (novels including Delafield’s *Thank Heaven Fasting* and Rachel Ferguson’s *Alas, Poor Lady* demonstrate the insufficiency of middle-class girls’ upbringing for an unmarried future) and partly because the term ‘spinster’⁵²⁶ was self-perpetuating as a

⁵²² Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2007) p.xiii

⁵²³ Sheila Jeffreys notes that, of census years, it was actually 1911 which saw the ‘peak for the number of women in each age group from 25 upwards who remained single’. [Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1985) p.88]

⁵²⁴ Haldane, *Motherhood and its Enemies* p.136

⁵²⁵ John MacArthur, *Shall Flappers Rule? A Revolutionary Proposal, and its Dangers to Men* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1927), quoted in Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* p.32; see, for further discussion of the role of the flapper, Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* pp.1-40

⁵²⁶ Popularity of the term ‘spinster’ was, to some extent, changing in the period. Marjorie Hillis even suggested that ‘spinster’, as a label, was ‘rapidly becoming extinct – or, at least, being relegated to another period, like the bustle and reticule.’ It is unlikely that Hillis’ optimistic statement carried a great deal of generalisable truth in 1936 (when her book was published) and it certainly did not a decade earlier – although, Mary Scharlieb’s title *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* was chosen partly in recognition that amongst those she asked, ‘one or two ladies were very unwilling to accept the old-world appellation of “spinster”’. [Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It* pp.22f; Mary Scharlieb, *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1929) p.14]

word generally understood to refer only to the higher social classes, and their morality which required celibacy of the unmarried woman. As *Freewoman* magazine pointed out before the First World War, '[a]mong the very poor there is no spinster difficulty, because the very poor do not remain spinsters.'⁵²⁷ Contemporary opinion covered a spectrum from considering spinsters 'a large body of active, intelligent single women'⁵²⁸ to the 'barren sister, the withered tree',⁵²⁹ but whether considered positively or negatively, there is a sense that this 'two million' are a group set apart in some way. Their lives are viewed as being outside the peripheries of normal, natural reality;⁵³⁰ indeed, Rachel Ferguson claims of the spinster that 'no rudesby of a wind of reality has ever blown upon her or ever will'.⁵³¹ It is a logical step for authors to explore spinsters' own development of unreality; they are perfectly situated for the fantastic, and its kinship with those set apart and somehow either inaccessible or themselves unable to connect fully with non-fantastic life.

'A rather muddled magic': (lack of) method in the domestic fantastic

The principal difference between the creation process within *Frankenstein* and that in interwar middlebrow creation narratives is that the latter is no longer primarily scientific. When approaching his creative act, Frankenstein declares that 'natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry [...] became nearly my sole occupation.'⁵³²

This is, to some extent, the model used in the formation of Virginio – whose name obviously suggests purity – from glass in *The Venetian Glass Nephew* (although even

⁵²⁷ 'One', 'The Spinster' *The Freewoman*, 1/1 (1911) 10-11, pp.10f

⁵²⁸ Laura Hutton, *The Single Woman and Her Emotional Problems* (London: Ballière, Tindall & Cox, 1935) p.1

⁵²⁹ 'One', 'The Spinster' p.10

⁵³⁰ Charlotte Haldane classifies women into six categories, the first two of which are 'the sexually normal', and 'the originally normal, doomed to permanent virginity'. [Haldane, *Motherhood and its Enemies* p.157]

⁵³¹ Ferguson, *Passionate Kensington* p.68

⁵³² Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin, 1818 repr.2000) p.48

in this instance, a contemporary review labels it ‘a rather muddled magic’,⁵³³ which doesn’t mind too much about courting authenticity or reader’s credulity in the manner of Frankenstein’s laboured precision.) In *The Love-Child* and *Miss Hargreaves*, creation is not the result of an external, methodical experiment, but an accidental externalisation of the creator’s internal being, and in the case of *Miss Hargreaves*, this imaginative act is compared to various artistic endeavours (‘a composer or a poet or a painter’⁵³⁴) rather than a scientific undertaking. The connection between creativity and knowledge is replaced by that between creativity and artistry, spontaneity, and self. The semantics of science become those of desire and projection, avoiding the elaborate and esoteric mechanisms of science-fiction and remaining within the identifiable emotions of the middlebrow home.

As discussed earlier, both Clarissa’s existence, and the identification of her as Agatha’s ‘love child’, are described in semantics which owe a great deal to the parlance of Freudianism:

A name shot across her consciousness, like something suddenly alive –
Clarissa!⁵³⁵

“A love child.” The phrase had surged up from her inner consciousness[.]⁵³⁶

Agatha is an involuntary servant of her unconscious; she is the equivalent of a fantastic novelist within the narrative, creating the fantastic from the resources of her mind – but one following the analysis of T.E. Apter that fantastic literature ‘often

⁵³³ Sir John Knewstubb Maurice Rothenstein, ‘Review of *The Venetian Glass Nephew*’ *Times Literary Supplement*, 22/04/26 (1926) p.300

⁵³⁴ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.76

⁵³⁵ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.13

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.* p.68.

leaves the impression that the work has not been executed under conscious control'.⁵³⁷

Although there has been no dearth of Freudian readings of *Frankenstein*,⁵³⁸ these restrict themselves to Frankenstein's motivations and responses, rather than his *method* of generating life. Rather than creating unwittingly, Frankenstein is extremely conscious about his act of creation – even if not of its aftermath. The process is exhaustingly thorough, the very opposite of an unconscious accident:

Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.⁵³⁹

'Distinct and probable' describes the very antithesis of the process in *The Love-Child*, which is deliberately hazy in relation to Clarissa's appearance. Although power becomes a vital dynamic later in the narrative, as will be addressed, at the point of creation Agatha is powerless – that is to say, Agatha has no *conscious* power at this point – reflecting the (figurative and literal) disenfranchisement of spinsters in the 1920s, and more particularly the lack of control they could have over their inability to have children. This method of creation (or lack of method) is particularly appropriate

⁵³⁷ Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* p.4. The 'marks of unconscious processes' Apter identifies are 'timelessness, fragmentation, mutual contradiction, exaggeration, distortion, displacement, [and] condensation' (p.4). Shelley and Olivier give curiously similar accounts of their moments of creative epiphany; Shelley wrote that at night she had a 'waking dream': 'My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie', while Olivier also documents having sudden inspiration 'in the middle of the night [...] I wrote practically the whole of that first book during those feverish wakeful hours when the body is weary but the mind seems to let loose to work abnormally quickly.' [Mary Shelley, '1831 Preface' *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 19-25, p.21; Olivier, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* p.290]. It is ironic, given Frankenstein's methodical creation activity, that Shelley should describe her own creative process in a manner so prophetic of twentieth-century psychoanalytic discourses of the unconscious.

⁵³⁸ For example, Joseph Kestner, 'Narcissism as Symptom and Structure: The Case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' in Fred Botting (ed.) *Frankenstein* (New Casebooks; Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1995) 68-80; Richard Brockman, 'Freud, Frankenstein, and the Art of Loss' *The Psychoanalytic Review*, 97/5 (2010) 819-833

⁵³⁹ Shelley, *Frankenstein* p.50

in response to an anxiety about the loss of agency. Clarissa's appearance is, in some ways, a supernatural gift – but it is not one which grants the unwitting creator control.

The actual appearances of Clarissa and Miss Hargreaves, in their respective narratives, are not scheduled, nor do they in fact occur at the same instance as their unconscious and inadvertent creation. When Norman invents Miss Hargreaves, in an attempt to extricate himself from an awkward conversation, he is initially only semi-consciously aware of the act:

““A *lady*,” I corrected sharply. For one second I paused. Then, “Miss Hargreaves,” I said. “Miss – *Connie* Hargreaves,” I added.

It seemed to me there was a sort of stirring of air in the church, like – like what? Rather like someone opening a very old umbrella.⁵⁴⁰

The image of the umbrella is domestic and almost whimsical, but could scarcely be described as the climax of creation. It is not for some time (and some chapters) that Miss Hargreaves actually appears in person. In *The Love-Child*, Clarissa's eventual materialisation is not an immediate outworking of the unconscious, directly related to a moment of concentration or longing. Instead, she appears whilst Agatha is engaged in a different creative, domestic, and loosely religious task.

Then one day, when Agatha was quietly sitting on the white seat at the end of the green walk, darning a black woollen stocking to wear in church the next day, and for once more absorbed in darning than in dreaming – then, all of a sudden, Clarissa came and sat on the seat beside her.⁵⁴¹

Just as reading takes place for Delafield's Provincial Lady in the midst of everyday activities, so Clarissa's fantastic appearance is naturalised by interrupting a

⁵⁴⁰ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.17

⁵⁴¹ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.25

commonplace task. The environment is described with stark adjectives, blocking out the colour of the scene as though it were a Cubist painting, or (more aptly) a background waiting for a foreground image. The dichotomy between darning and dreaming – between the tediously everyday and the limitlessly imaginative – is drawn together neatly in the figure of Clarissa, who has aspects of both. As David Cecil writes in a later edition of *The Love-Child*, ‘She is like a real girl, but just a touch more elfin and elusive: there is no difficulty in believing that a stranger accepted her as a genuine human being.’⁵⁴² She is harmonious with the home, yet occupies the liminal space between real and not-real.

Blurring the line between creator and created

Clarissa’s genesis departs from the idea of a detached, external creation (in the mould of *Frankenstein*), and destabilises the dynamic of creator and created at opposite ends of a creation process. As a projection from Agatha’s consciousness, Clarissa is necessarily a product of Agatha’s self and her personality. Although they are physically discrete, the relationship between Agatha and Clarissa is comparable to the shifting relationship between Silvia’s human and fox psychological characteristics: Agatha and Clarissa are not psychologically separable, and there is no apparatus for quantifying where one ends and the other begins. Indeed, Agatha does not only create an ‘other’ from her self, she learns about aspects of her self from the qualities she has unwittingly granted Clarissa. For the woman with no concept of what motherhood is actually like, the situation of *The Love-Child* is an exaggerated version of an extant dream. Creation is both projection and idealisation, using the spinster’s fantasy of the

⁵⁴² David Cecil, Introduction to Edith Olivier, *The Love Child* (London: The Richards Press, 1927 repr.1951) 3-9, p.5. As a friend wrote to Olivier, ‘Clarissa is exactly what anyone created for “families” would be. Quite real – not a bit a ghost or a fairy, & yet never an ordinary human.’ [Morrison, ‘Letter to Edith Olivier’]

perfect mother/daughter relationship: that of two selves which both reflect and complement each other and fuse into one whole. Clarissa is greedy, and Agatha ‘remembered with some embarrassment that food had once been her own secret delight’;⁵⁴³ Clarissa can dance, where Agatha cannot; Clarissa reads books which Agatha had longed to read as a child:

But she sometimes thought that Clarissa was cleverer than she had been: indeed, she often seemed to excel just where Agatha herself had often failed.⁵⁴⁴

The personalities of creator and created are interwoven, and the lines of reflection are unclear: in some facets, Clarissa is Agatha’s complementary opposite; in others, she is the fulfilment of Agatha’s unrealised personality and her dissatisfaction with her own childhood. This is dramatised less precisely in *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, where the child is created from glass rather than from the unconscious and thus has a less obvious psychological connection with his creator. But Virginio is still envisioned by Peter Innocent as a ‘younger, fairer, [...] more perfect’ version of himself, hoping “‘that my dear nephew might find a conclusive felicity in the charitable embrace of the church, as I have done.’”⁵⁴⁵ Peter Innocent thus hopes his ‘offspring’ will be a better version of the person he is himself, without swaying far from the path he has travelled. His creation thesis is aspirational, and yet unimaginative and restrictive – and ultimately doomed not to succeed; with this aspiration, every development Virginio makes when alive is, effectively, an act of fading from this vision, like the basic building plans for a house which will inevitably be distorted when built.

⁵⁴³ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.31

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid. p.142; pp.53f; p.61

⁵⁴⁵ Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew* p.22; p.129

Like the dual Golyadkins in Dostoevsky's *The Double*, Agatha and Clarissa often have inversely proportional qualities – but whilst Dostoevsky's pairing is antagonistic, Olivier's are largely harmonious. The creation narrative is one of the ways in which the middlebrow manipulates the doubling subgenre, rather than a straightforward tale of doppelgangers.⁵⁴⁶ One of Olivier's friends, Lady Juliet Duff, wrote to her on publication of *The Love-Child* that it was 'very clever to make the lady herself so unattractive – all the beauty and grace that was in her having gone to the making of the child.'⁵⁴⁷ It is unlikely that this was entirely Olivier's intention (Agatha is, in some ways, 'attractive', and not the 'disagreeable women of advanced years',⁵⁴⁸ sardonically suggested by Rose Macaulay as the definition of a spinster) but Duff's letter indicates an early readerly awareness of Agatha and Clarissa's fused personalities, particularly in relation to intangible and unquantifiable qualities. Agatha's 'beauty and grace' – perhaps more accurately her liveliness – have not 'gone to' the moment of creation, but rather that creation illuminates the loss of personality she has already experienced over the years. On the first page, for instance, Olivier writes of Agatha that 'her hat was quite without character'.⁵⁴⁹ This is essentially a synecdochical portrait; Agatha is, by association, characterless, a vacuum waiting to be filled – thus leaving room for new character, and *a* new character.

The same vacuum is apparent in the space of the home. The absent child precludes the ideal household; the house is, by this absence, made strange. In *The Love-Child*,

⁵⁴⁶ Middlebrow narratives seldom use doppelgangers – instead, they incorporate secret dual identities (Rose Macaulay's *Keeping Up Appearances*; E.F. Benson's *Secret Lives*; Monica Dickens' *Joy and Josephine*) or similar tropes, to use the traits of doubling without reproducing Dostoevsky, Stevenson, or others who play with identity in this way.

⁵⁴⁷ Lady Juliet Duff, 'Letter to Edith Olivier' (27/07/27), Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers 982/94

⁵⁴⁸ Rose Macaulay, *A Casual Commentary* (London: Methuen, 1925) p.120

⁵⁴⁹ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.9

‘the presence of a child in the house was just what was wanted’.⁵⁵⁰ Although this is from the servants’ perspective, the passive voice expands the need to the whole house, as though the space itself had been seeking something extra – and, upon Clarissa’s arrival, ‘[her] bed and her niche in the house were waiting for her as if she had always lived there.’⁵⁵¹ The household which has no child becomes almost haunted by this absence, and by the ghosts of potential children; an image made literal in Rudyard Kipling’s story ‘They’, which Humbert Wolfe compared to *The Love-Child*.⁵⁵² Both narratives find a supernatural answer to childlessness, and are propelled by the same longing, as shown in Kipling’s 1904 story:

“They came because I loved them – because I needed them. I – I must have made them come.”⁵⁵³

In Kipling’s story the children are, in fact, ghosts visible only to bereaved parents – and also audible to one blind, childless woman who has longed to be a mother, and whose desire is forceful enough to bring them. Had the excerpt above ended without the final word, the attribution of causality could equally describe *The Love-Child*.

The domestic ‘rightness’ of Clarissa, fitting precisely into a gap which had prepared itself for her, is also echoed in her affinity with Agatha and the gap in (or loss from) Agatha’s character. Their life-giving relationship is synergetic. Agatha’s personality ironically has the capacity to create Clarissa, but Clarissa, even while she was only an imaginary friend, was ‘the only being who had every awoken her personality, and

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. pp.51f

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. p.52

⁵⁵² Wolfe, ‘The Growth of Fantasy in the Novel’ p.68.

⁵⁵³ Rudyard Kipling, ‘They’ *Traffics and Discoveries* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904) 339-375, p.374

made it responsive'.⁵⁵⁴ Paradoxically, Agatha gives life to that which is needed to give life back to her. The dormant absence at the centre of the home and the centre of Agatha is filled by the arrival of Clarissa, completing (at least temporarily) the construction of the ideal middlebrow home and animating her creator as a fantastic equivalent to (or replacement of) the way that a 1930s book about spinsterhood said that motherhood 'recreates the mother'.⁵⁵⁵

Creation, in these narratives as with metamorphosis narratives, never exerts repercussions in a single direction. The imaginative act always transforms the creator as well. Agatha ceases to live 'entirely without volition' as the 'passive tool' of her imposed routine.⁵⁵⁶ When Clarissa is brought to life by Agatha's desires, Agatha is herself brought to life by the fulfilment of these desires. More abstractly, in *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, once Virginio is moulded from glass, Peter Innocent immediately assumes some of the qualities of that unanimated glass which Virginio has left behind:

The boy smiled, bowed, and sipped with the most lifelike gestures of politeness; but Peter Innocent stood silent in a tranquillity like stone, bewitched and awed by his felicity, and gazing at his nephew with infinite love and wonder in his eyes.⁵⁵⁷

In this case, the effects of creation are not enlivening to the creator but the reverse. Three verbs in quick succession, 'smiled, bowed, and sipped', emphasise Virginio's activity and mobility, while Peter Innocent's immobility ('like stone', but equally like glass) is juxtaposed. Although ostensibly a happy scene, it is a harbinger of the struggle the 'uncle' and 'nephew' will face, which is often portrayed in the novel

⁵⁵⁴ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.15

⁵⁵⁵ Cowdroy, *Wasted Womanhood* p.91

⁵⁵⁶ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.42

⁵⁵⁷ Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew* p.58

through the language of malleability and stasis. Peter Innocent later wonders, for instance, whether he ‘might have preferred [...] a creature malleable and engaging to the affections’,⁵⁵⁸ and towards the end of the novel, when Virginio’s lover Rosalba meets Peter Innocent, she recognises a likeness between uncle and nephew – but it is Peter Innocent’s hand, rather than the glass one, that offers ‘unresponsive and chilly finger-tips.’⁵⁵⁹ Even when creation seems to follow a detached method closer to the model of *Frankenstein*, as it does in *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, the act still also recreates the self, and establishes a complex and symbiotic psychological relationship between creator and created.

These blurrings of the line between ‘self’ and ‘other’ necessarily complicate the division between ‘themes of the self’ and ‘themes of the other’ that Todorov posits of fantastic novels.⁵⁶⁰ He defines I/self fantasies as passive and not-I/other fantasies as active, because in the latter the protagonist ‘enters into a dynamic relation with other men’,⁵⁶¹ but this distinction is not practicable for creation narratives in this mould, which do not neatly separate into self and other. Todorov recognises the idea that ‘there is no longer any frontier between the object, with its shapes and colours, and the observer’,⁵⁶² echoing Rimbaud’s famous pronouncement ‘Je est un autre’, but suggests this is a trope solely for ‘themes of the self’, not recognising that this is always also a component of ‘themes of the other’: creators observing the fantastic are far from immune to the deconstruction of object and subject.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. p.21

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. p.132

⁵⁶⁰ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* pp.107-139, esp. p.120; pp.138f

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. p.139

⁵⁶² Ibid. p.117

The creative power of desire and the difficulty of identity

Todorov's stipulation that 'themes of the other' must relate to sexual desire⁵⁶³ is certainly at odds with a middlebrow sensibility, and there seems no reason why the impulse may not be – as the existence of Clarissa and Virginio suggests – the equally fundamental desire for parenthood. As Mary Scharlieb writes in *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* (1929):

It is quite a mistake to think that the majority of single women are ardently desirous of the completion of their nature by marriage. There is a want in their natures, but it is not this: very often the unfulfilled desire is for motherhood. There is an incessant aching longing for the fulfilment of that primary feminine instinct[.]⁵⁶⁴

The sexual longing which informs novels like Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is replaced, for the middlebrow author, with a desire for motherhood. Winifred Holtby argues against the association of spinsters with frustration – 'a comparatively modern notion'⁵⁶⁵ – but, when describing Agatha as 'agonisingly frustrated',⁵⁶⁶ David Cecil identifies simply another term for desire; again, for parenthood, not sex. The 'completion of their nature' which Scharlieb describes can only be performed through unnatural means in these novels, and the 'unfulfilled desire' for motherhood is the catalyst which permits creation and thus fulfilment.

For, to state explicitly what will have become clear, another way in which these 1920s creation narratives differ from *Frankenstein* is that the dialectics of knowledge are replaced by those of desire: rather than Frankenstein's 'almost supernatural

⁵⁶³ Ibid. p.138

⁵⁶⁴ Scharlieb, *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* p.54

⁵⁶⁵ Winifred Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane, 1934) p.127

⁵⁶⁶ David Cecil, Introduction to Olivier, *The Love Child* p.6

enthusiasm' for physiology,⁵⁶⁷ Agatha and Peter Innocent are driven primarily (consciously or unconsciously) by the desire for a child: their purpose is not to know more but to love more. Walter Scott praises *Frankenstein* because 'the miracle is not wrought for mere wonder',⁵⁶⁸ but Shelley responds to a general enquiry about the nature of life and creation, rather than the localised desire for offspring.

The premise for *The Love-Child* is that this absence does not only leave room for the fantastic, but itself propels the fantastic. Loneliness (considered by one commentator to be 'the source of [an unmarried woman's] unhappiness and restlessness'⁵⁶⁹ whether she recognises it or not) acts like nature in abhorring a vacuum, and fills it – and loneliness is certainly one of Agatha's predominant characteristics when *The Love-Child* opens:

[She felt] a loneliness that could not be broken, because it meant that she simply hadn't got the power of getting into touch with her fellow-creatures. Perhaps Agatha felt nothing. Certainly she could never tell what she felt, nor ask and receive sympathy⁵⁷⁰

Rather than simply being not 'in touch' with those around her, Olivier isolates Agatha still further, distancing her in turn from the narrator and herself. The word 'perhaps' indicates that the narrator has stepped away from omniscience, severing this source of solidarity, while the dual definitions of 'tell' (to communicate, and to comprehend) offer the reading that Agatha is not even in touch with herself: she cannot tell what she felt; she cannot comprehend her own feelings.

⁵⁶⁷ Shelley, *Frankenstein* p.49

⁵⁶⁸ Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman' p.72

⁵⁶⁹ Hutton, *The Single Woman and Her Emotional Problems* p.7

⁵⁷⁰ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.9

Desire becomes a powerful stimulant, almost a *Deus ex machina* – as it often does in fairytale. *Pinocchio* sets a precedent for creation narratives which centralise would-be parenthood as a motivation, and in its fusion of craftsmanship and paternal love is a model which is closely followed in *The Venetian Glass Nephew*. Although both these instances involve the transformation of inanimate materials into living creatures (as with Wylie’s novel), it is desire, rather than an alchemic sophistication, which propels the stories. Since desire has this power in fantastic narratives, childless spinsters are ideal wielders of this power – characters who reclaim and transform the archetypal images of the single, female magician as inevitably a witch.

Agatha’s role as spinster is self-evident. While Peter Innocent is of course male, his lament about lacking progeny relates equally to this zeitgeist, and the same emotions and questions catalyse the narrative – indeed, since his is a conscious decision, his motivations are clearer to read. It is described as ‘a small regret, an obscure discomfort [...] the recurrent thorn in the clean flesh of Peter Innocent; this was his cross: he had no nephew.’⁵⁷¹ Reference both to Christ’s cross and St. Paul’s thorn in the flesh are indicative of the magnitude of Peter Innocent’s plaint, even when presented in the understatement of the (supposed) biographer. Although bachelors did not attract the same interwar scrutiny as spinsters, the fundamental desire for children and the continuation of a genealogy is clearly not solely a female longing. It is propriety, perhaps, which grants Peter Innocent a nephew rather than a son, and the narrator’s biographical style retreats from omniscience when stating: ‘It is conceivable that he may have permitted himself a passing dream of parenthood –

⁵⁷¹ Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew* pp.19f

conceivable, but unlikely'.⁵⁷² Intentional play on the word 'conceivable' in the context of childbirth is, itself, conceivable, but it is the status of the spinster in the interwar period which was more prominent, and whose identity was most debated – but in the creation narrative, identity is a fraught and complex topic.

Having recognised that Clarissa and Virginia (and, indeed, Miss Hargreaves) are not independent, static creators, the question of identity becomes paramount (echoing the forfeiture of identity experienced by spinsters when, as Cicely Hamilton notes in *Marriage as a Trade*, they could not be defined in relation to a man: 'the spinster [is seen as] some man's wife that should have been – a damaged article, unfit for use, unsuitable. Therefore a negligible quantity.')⁵⁷³ It is unclear what level of personhood these characters can possess, being subsumed within their creators' identities, but also existing separately and disturbing any binary division between object and subject. Anxieties about selfhood caused by the unstable middlebrow home could, through the fantastic, be made concrete and dramatised as tangible figures.

The 'humanness' of the created beings is constantly in question. When Clarissa eventually disappears in equally as sudden a manner as the way in which she arrived, Agatha looks down at 'an empty space, which a second before had held that clearly defined little figure'.⁵⁷⁴ A play on the words 'clearly defined' draws attention to how *unclearly* she has been defined (with her clothes, particularly her fairylike 'white dress' usually taking the place of lengthier physical or ontological description) and poses the question: who defines her? She undergoes a constant series of interpretive

⁵⁷² Ibid. p.21

⁵⁷³ Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1909) p.6

⁵⁷⁴ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.164

examinations, however inconclusive, by other characters and by the reader. The man who seeks to woo her, David, attempts a form of genus-classification, using the same technique seen in the arsenal of many critics of the middlebrow and defining by negation:

What was she? Not a child, for she was seventeen, and taller than Kitty: not a girl, for she floated like a feather, and flew into trees like a bird; not a spirit – she was human to the touch.⁵⁷⁵

As with glassy Virginio, touch is an important factor in building an identity – yet a deficient one. Clarissa cannot be deduced empirically, even though she has a physical body, because this body does not accord with the laws of nature. She continually resists any form of definition.

While Virginio and Clarissa do not seem to question their own ontological standing, Miss Hargreaves does so through the poetry she writes:

I came, I go, I breathe, I move, I sleep,
 I talk, I eat, I drink, I laugh, I weep,
 I sing, I dance, I think, I dream, I see
 I fear, I love, I hate, I plot, I be.
 And yet –
 And yet –
 I sometimes feel that I am but a thought,
 A piece of thistledown, a thing of naught,
 Rocked in the cradle of a craftsman's story,
 And destined not for high angelic glory.
 And yet –
 And yet –
 I came, I go, I move, I breathe, I sleep,
 I talk, I eat, I drink, I laugh, I weep.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid. p.155

⁵⁷⁶ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.281

Her catalogue of verbs acts as an extension of Descartes' 'Cogito ergo sum', in a prolonged attempt to prove and rationalise her existence by listing her activities and movements. Where Frankenstein's Monster, when he begins to realise his contingent status, questions 'Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?',⁵⁷⁷ Miss Hargreaves instead speaks in simple statements. Again, the fantastic causes a disjunction between apparent empirical evidence and ontological or philosophical truth. Miss Hargreaves seeks to ascertain her identity through the actions she performs.

She does not list 'I write' amongst her attributes, but this is one of several poems she composes throughout *Miss Hargreaves*. The creativity of created beings has been used, more recently, within Kazuo Ishiguro's novel about cloning people to provide spare organs for harvesting, *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Again, the proof of identity is sought through the evidence of actions and activities: "We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all."⁵⁷⁸ The question of souls is sidelined as an 'unwarrantable supposition'⁵⁷⁹ in *Lady Into Fox*, but it is a crucial component of identity for Miss Hargreaves (and the characters in *Never Let Me Go*), and both of these novels introduce the idea of language and literary composition as evidence of thought and imaginative identity beyond the control of the creator.

The identity-conferring value of language recurs in these creation narratives – or rather, the absence of language is an indication that identity is incomplete or unquantifiable. Virginio doesn't talk at all during his first scene, while his status is

⁵⁷⁷ Shelley, *Frankenstein* p.124

⁵⁷⁸ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005) p.255

⁵⁷⁹ Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.23

still uncertain to both reader and ‘uncle’, while Olivier keeps Clarissa’s dialogue to a minimum throughout, noting in her diary: ‘I have made C. almost word-less – so as to keep her magic’.⁵⁸⁰ It is this consideration which makes her turn down an offer, sent via Cecil Beaton, to dramatise *The Love-Child*, as that would, naturally, involve significant dialogue for Clarissa. Language, to Olivier, is inevitably a form of elucidation, and so Clarissa’s relative silence keeps her on a fantastic plane.⁵⁸¹

Correspondingly, in *Miss Hargreaves* language is seen as being part of the creator’s apparatus, having its own transformative power:

“Well, certainly, the more I talked about Miss –”

“Don’t keep mentioning her name,” [Mr. Huntley] advised. “It’s dangerous. She might easily become immortal. Then where would you be?”

“All I was going to say was, the more I talked about her, the more real she seemed to become.”⁵⁸²

The speech act as a creative act – that which J.L. Austin terms a ‘performative utterance’⁵⁸³ – has antecedents as distant as Genesis, where God speaks creation into being. Language as creation relates to the act of writing, as well as speech. Although all fiction exists only through language, this is especially true for the fantastic, which accesses that which does not exist as a referent. As Todorov notes:

⁵⁸⁰ Olivier, ‘Diary (December 1925 - December 1927)’ (09/06/27)

⁵⁸¹ Olivier is not alone in this decision. In Bea Howe’s *A Fairy Leapt Upon My Knee* (1927), for instance, the eponymous fairy has no dialogue at all, and thus her presence interrogates the reality of the central characters without she being expected or able to offer explanation or enter into dialectics.

⁵⁸² Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.50. It is unclear whether Mr. Huntley, Norman’s father, follows his own advice or his natural absent-mindedness when addressing Miss Hargreaves, since he seldom gets her name right.

⁵⁸³ ‘The issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action.’ J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) p.6

The supernatural is born of language, it is both its consequence and its proof: not only do the devil and vampires exist only in words, but language alone enables us to conceive what is always absent: the supernatural.⁵⁸⁴

If mimetic fiction intends to reflect and describe lived reality, fantastic fiction provides, in words, that which cannot be achieved outside of language. Each fantastic description is in some senses a ‘performative utterance’, since it calls into being (at least conceptually) that which does not exist in reality.

One of the reasons that fantastic beings in creation narratives have problematic conceptions of identity is because, like a person undergoing metamorphosis, they are divorced from their genealogy. In being created, they have not simply had this genealogy stolen, but rather have no ancestors from whom to be removed. Miss Hargreaves’ list of verbs in her poem are all in the present tense – except for ‘I came’; the only linguistic frame of reference she has for her past is that she arrived, because she (like Clarissa and Virginio) has no past. Conversely, Agatha and Peter Innocent experience uneasy senses of identity because they have no future – or, rather, their lineage has no future. Northrop Frye suggests that ‘fantasy is the normal technique for fiction writers who do not believe in the permanence or continuity of the society they belong to.’⁵⁸⁵ His generalisation can be made specific in relation to Agatha and Peter Innocent, taken from the level of society to the microcosm of their lives: their own bloodlines have been discontinued, and they seek refuge in the fantastic to battle this impermanence.

⁵⁸⁴ Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.82

⁵⁸⁵ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1976) p.138, quoted in Cornwell, *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* p.211

This concern does not drive the narrative of *Miss Hargreaves* (perhaps because that novel was published in 1940, some years after the loudest outcry about widespread childlessness), but *The Love-Child* and *The Venetian Glass Nephew* are informed by the dislocation felt by those without descendants, and without the identity conferred by familiar connections (conferred, instead, by the role of creator.) Leonora Eyles writes in *Unmarried But Happy* that the single woman without children

has a problem unknown to the mother: she has loneliness and a sense of frustration; and, not having known motherhood and in many cases having steered clear of a physical love affair, she has the very human, regretful idea that the unknown must have some magic about it.⁵⁸⁶

The ‘unknown’ in these novels does not apply simply to sexual relationships and motherhood, but the identities conferred (or believed to be conferred) with these. The idea that these statuses have ‘some magic’ – an idea which, in plebeian contrast, Eyles describes as very human’ – is literalised in these fantastic narratives.

Adoption, agency, and non-fantastic creation

Any narrative which provides the childless with a child has an extant literal parallel with adoption. Equivalent psychological processes exist for Agatha and Rosamund Essex, a writer who retrospectively described her own experiences as an unmarried adoptive mother between the world wars, done in order to avoid becoming ‘an acidulated old spinster’.⁵⁸⁷ For both Essex and Agatha, the feeling of natural parenthood eventually takes over the unorthodox way in which they become mothers or mother figures. Essex writes that ‘[i]t was, from the beginning, almost an effort to

⁵⁸⁶ Eyles, *Unmarried But Happy* p.34

⁵⁸⁷ Rosamund Essex, *Woman in a Man's World* (London: Sheldon Press, 1977) p.15

remember that he was not my son by nature.’⁵⁸⁸ Similarly (although obviously involving a greater leap of imagination), Clarissa ‘seemed in every way perfectly normal, and Agatha herself often forgot that she wasn’t’.⁵⁸⁹ If memory of the past is the only way Agatha can separate the real from the fantastic (since it is this memory which is the sole evidence for Clarissa’s genesis) then, as their relationship becomes naturalised and normalised in Agatha’s mind, so the fantastic narrative becomes untethered from Agatha’s imagination.

Needing to disguise the fantastic, Agatha does indeed go through the process of adopting Clarissa and it is, in fact, this process which leads to Agatha’s outburst that Clarissa is her ‘love child’. In trying to formalise her relationship with Clarissa, Agatha must compromise her identity – formed of ‘[h]er position, her name, her character’⁵⁹⁰ – even though her main observers within the house, her servants, know that she cannot have had a child. (In *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, since framed through the mores of the eighteenth century rather than the twentieth, Peter Innocent does not appear to have to attempt any of the same processes. His act of creation comes without paperwork.) Adoption was still considered controversial by the period’s many writers of guides for spinsters (which covered all bases of constructive, commiserative, congratulatory, and condemnatory tones). Scharlieb is a rare voice amongst these guides in stating that adoption is ‘very often the thing that is needed to secure happiness and perfection of character’.⁵⁹¹ The advice given elsewhere concerning adoption is chiefly: ‘don’t’. Laura Hutton, for example, suggests that a ‘child adopted *because* the adopting mother’s affections are starved is [likely] to

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid. p.48

⁵⁸⁹ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.53

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid. p.68

⁵⁹¹ Scharlieb, *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* p.54

suffer serious psychic damage'.⁵⁹² In Agatha's case, Clarissa not only meets her starved affections, but is born of them.

Yet, whether or not a spinster considered adopting, they were often believed to inflict this sort of psychic damage on the nation as a whole, as though their loneliness were a taint which could prove contagious, leaving the unmarried woman somehow both tied to the home and an enemy of the home. For instance, Betsy Israel quotes an unnamed MP's speech from 1922:

A woman alone is an atrocity! An act against nature. Unmarried women pose a grave danger... our great civilization could decline... the larger health of the nation is at stake.⁵⁹³

Elsewhere, even when sympathetic to the plight of unmarried, childless women, many publications framed their discussions primarily in terms of the impact upon the wider public, as though the spinster's emotions alone were not worthy of consideration.⁵⁹⁴

Women without children were even portrayed as unpatriotic: in 1920 the author of *Sterile Marriages* asserted that 'it behoves all who can in any way assist in the replenishing of the diminished population of these islands to do so to the best of their ability'.⁵⁹⁵ Although adoption on the part of the unmarried woman would not increase the population, it was one potentially constructive response to the aftermath of the war

⁵⁹² Hutton, *The Single Woman and Her Emotional Problems* p.138. (Emphasis is Hutton's.) Leonora Eyles writes similarly: 'The child needs the natural interplay of emotions and temperaments in a normal home with mother and father, and may easily become the victim of the new mother's emotions and possessiveness where there is no man to tone down these emotions. [...] If an older woman, certain of spinsterhood, takes on a baby, she may be too set in her ideals and habits to take happily to the upheaval a child would bring to her life.' [Eyles, *Unmarried But Happy* p.33]

⁵⁹³ Cited in Betsy Israel, *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (London: Aurum Press, 2003) p.14. (Israel's ellipses.) Israel does not give the MP's name.

⁵⁹⁴ To quote two sources, from the 1920s and 1940s respectively: 'The whole subject is one of great importance to the welfare of the nation, not only to the unmarried women themselves, but also to their married sisters, their brethren, and the children of the nation.' ; '[A] nation which has amongst its citizens numbers of unhappy people is not a happy nation. So their problem becomes as much a matter of grave social concern as a personal and family one.' [Scharlieb, *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* p.9 ; Eyles, *Unmarried But Happy* p.11]

⁵⁹⁵ Joseph Dulberg, *Sterile Marriages* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1920) p.10

and the orphans war created – but was still considered psychologically unhealthy by some.

A (somewhat fanciful) alternative to adoption, and solution to the problem of childlessness, is presented in G.E. Trevelyan's novel *Appius and Virginia* (1933). The novel, like Collier's *His Monkey Wife*, plays uncertainly around the parameters of science fiction, the fantastic, and the non-fantastic. It could equally, indeed, be entitled *Her Monkey Son*, for (although more weight is given to Appius' slow academic progress than Emily's miraculous education in *His Monkey Wife*) it is this relationship which is privileged in the novel. Virginia tries – and partly succeeds – to train an ape as a human being. The allusion to John Webster's play gives the novel a literary precedent, but Trevelyan's inspiration is evidently Darwinian. Where Frankenstein experimented with the unreachable aspiration of scientifically creating humans, *Appius and Virginia* responds to an escalating belief in the latent humanity of apes, and refigures animal metamorphosis as a supposedly plausible scientific narrative.⁵⁹⁶

Appius and Virginia becomes a creation narrative, however, as Virginia's motivations and assumed role develop:

She knew obscurely, inarticulately, that if this experiment failed her existence would no longer be justified in her own sight. The newly awakened need of her being to create would be frustrated utterly. She would sink back into the nothingness out of which this enthusiasm had raised her.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁶ Perhaps these familiar discussions influence the few pages of *The Love-Child* where Clarissa adopts a monkey: an evolution narrative to contrast with Clarissa's genesis.

⁵⁹⁷ G.E. Trevelyan, *Appius and Virginia* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1933) pp.23f

Virginia ultimately views herself as a creator, rather than an observer or teacher. In describing the ‘need of her being to create’, Trevelyan introduces an almost sensually somatic image, enhanced by labelling it ‘frustrated’; a term frequently, as Holtby lamented, applied to spinsters. The motivation follows the same shift evident between *Frankenstein* and *The Love-Child*; that is, from scientific to maternal desire. Her experiment is eventually impelled by love rather than dispassionate research.

Appius’ development, even in attaining a relatively basic level of linguistic ability, arguably pushes the narrative into the fantastic – but it is Virginia’s delusions of maternity which transform the novel into a creation narrative. She begins to use the semantics of a parental relationship, ‘the intimacy of mother and son’,⁵⁹⁸ revealing the extent to which research has been supplanted by a desire for motherhood:

I was so lonely. I wanted you to grow up as my child. I wanted you to be human. I wanted you to be something even more than a child, something I’d made with my own brain out of nothing, and shaped as I wanted it, and watched grow.⁵⁹⁹

This is curiously at odds with the relationship between Appius and Virginia in Webster’s play, where Appius is sexually aggressive and Virginia is a chaste virgin (as her name implies). The relationship of sexual partners (however unrequited) becomes parental and filial – although in Webster’s play, as in Trevelyan’s novel, Virginia is eventually killed. Virginia’s desire to create *ex nihilo* would ostensibly have been met more fully by the creation narrative of *The Love-Child*, where Agatha does precisely make Clarissa ‘with my own brain out of nothing’. These desires are not met in the novel; since Appius’ mind is transformed, rather than created from

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid. p.174

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. p.224

Virginia's mind, her experiment is an act of metamorphosis – but her aspirations are certainly those of the creator. Virginia's supposed experiment is a failed stretch towards the fantastic, since it is not a scientific impulse to perform the logically impossible, nor to be so manipulative in the attempt.

Rather than primarily focalising through the simian character (as *His Monkey Wife* does), only a few chapters are shown through Appius' eyes – and his voice, which is a fragmented depiction of the language learner, and evinces a lack of sophisticated comprehension of his environment. Where Emily in *His Monkey Wife* constructed an artistic narrative from junk, Appius cannot even create a coherent translation of the objects surrounding him (for instance, the sky through the window becomes 'Something there; the pale blue stuff. Hard and cold.')

Instead, the reader is shown Virginia's anxieties and desires. Like Virginio, she has a name which connotes purity – but also, in a common twentieth-century portrayal of the virgin woman, a spate of unavoidable complexes. Winifred Holtby notes ironically that a woman's chastity leads to 'doubts cast not only upon her attractiveness or her common sense, but upon her decency, her normality, even her sanity.'⁶⁰¹ Texts written about spinsters often use a Freudian language to suggest the inescapable, psychologically horrifying results of thwarted desire, discussing 'repressed or dwarfed sex instinct'; 'unconscious jealousy', and 'fixations and [...] arrest in emotional growth', to cite three examples from many.⁶⁰² The fate Virginia

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. p.18

⁶⁰¹ Winifred Holtby, 'Notes on the Way' *Time and Tide*, 04/05/35 (1935) 647-648, p.647

⁶⁰² Cowdroy, *Wasted Womanhood* p.82; Ludovici, *Lysistrata: or Woman's Future and Future Woman* p.47; Hutton, *The Single Woman and Her Emotional Problems* pp.49f

wishes to avoid is one of the more pessimistic portraits of spinsterhood in interwar fiction:

She would go back to Earl's Court and her bed-sitting-room – gas fire and griller, separate meters; to her consumption of novels from the lending library; her bus rides to the confectioner's; her nightly sipping of conversation and coffee in the lounge: to middle-age in a ladies' residential club. Each year a little older, a little stouter or a little thinner, a little less quickly off the bus – “Come along there, please, come along,” and the struggle with umbrella and parcels through the ranks of inside passengers, and the half compassionate, half contemptuous hand of the conductor, grimy and none too gentle as she clammers down the swaying steps on to the sliding pavement. – Each year a little less bright in the after-dinner conversation; a little less able to remember the novels she has read; a little less able to find a listener; a little less able to live, yet no more ready for death.⁶⁰³

It is a decidedly middlebrow delineation of the spinster's life, particularly in her concern about ‘after-dinner conversation’, and the prosaic, rather than philosophical, elements which compose her vision of middle- and old-age. It is envisioned through domestic objects – the gas fire, the umbrella, the synecdochical hand of the conductor – which act as the stigmata of the aging spinster, and although it remains in the third-person, this excerpt is clearly intended to reveal the anxieties which obsess Virginia. The potential accomplishments of a female scientist are undermined by juxtaposition with the social and mental status awarded to the unmarried middle-class woman, regardless of her other qualities. Virginia's experiment, like Peter Innocent's, is presented as a talismanic response to the danger of loneliness, rather than considered primarily on its research merits. Although the novel itself does provide both of these impetuses – a spinster's loneliness and a scientific mind – it is the former which is ultimately prioritised, and emphasised by reviewers. Leonora Eyles, later to be author of *Unmarried But Happy*, describes Virginia in a review as ‘pathetic, ageing, starved

⁶⁰³ Trevelyan, *Appius and Virginia* p.24

of opportunities as a scientist, starved of human contacts by her own shyness'.⁶⁰⁴

This evaluation of Virginia is quoted (although without quotation marks, or any attribution) in dust jacket blurb of the American edition, silently incorporated into the physical book's paratexts as part of the reading experience.⁶⁰⁵

Any form of adoption, however, could offer autonomy to the unmarried woman – who might have chosen not to marry rather than been a victim of this fate, of course, but could not then choose to bear a child. For although Cicely Hamilton wrote as early as 1909 that 'motherhood does not appertain exclusively to the married state. There is such a thing as an illegitimate birth-rate',⁶⁰⁶ for the vast majority of middlebrow spinsters, prizing respectability as Agatha does, agency was forfeited in this area. Singleness meant childlessness – unless adoption offered potential autonomy. Fantastic literature goes further, reinstating choice and intentionality for childless people beyond that available through adoption.

A 1960s survey of elderly spinsters, many of whom would have been relinquishing the likelihood of marriage in the 1920s, revealed that two-thirds felt they had been 'deprived' or failed to 'fulfil themselves as women' by not having children.⁶⁰⁷ One respondent said:

⁶⁰⁴ Eyles, 'Review of *Appius and Virginia*' p.496

⁶⁰⁵ The same blurb (but not Eyles' review) makes overt reference to 'an unusual and fascinating genre' which might appeal to 'those who read David Garnett's "Lady Into Fox" and John Collier's "His Monkey Wife"'. While the popularity of spinster novels is subtly evoked, the fantastic element is identified through direct comparison. [Inside dustjacket blurb of *Trevelyan, Appius and Virginia* (n.p.)]

⁶⁰⁶ Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* p.257

⁶⁰⁷ Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* p.117

I'd have loved to have had a child. I think every woman should be allowed to have a child – married or not married. [...] I have a dream son who's very good to me.⁶⁰⁸

It is revealing that this imaginary son is active in the theoretical relationship, rather than being passively owned; the situation imagined by these unmarried women is not one in which they have ultimate agency, but instead an identity contingent upon the actions of the hypothetical child. It is precisely as a form of 'dream daughter' (connoting the imaginary and the ideal) that Clarissa's existence begins, before becoming active and independent herself.

“I hate her and I love her and – I'm half afraid of her”⁶⁰⁹: power struggles

After the act of creation, however, these novels do not settle into a portrait of the ideal home, with a fantastic panacea having stabilised any instability present at the outset of the narrative. Although power is not a compelling force behind creation for these middlebrow characters, it cannot be entirely extricated from the dynamics of desire, and each novel eventually involves some variety of power struggle.

Even at first, Clarissa does not conform entirely to the idealised 'dream' daughter Agatha has projected. When she appears she is 'smaller even than Agatha had imagined her',⁶¹⁰ exemplifying a disharmony from the outset between the controlled projection of Agatha's imagination, and Clarissa's own independence. Yet 'on her feet were the little red shoes which Agatha knew she had always worn':⁶¹¹ there is compromise between the externalisation of Agatha's need for a child and the

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid. p.118

⁶⁰⁹ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.109

⁶¹⁰ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.25

⁶¹¹ Ibid. p.25

autonomy gradually developing in Clarissa. (Similarly, Miss Hargreaves arrives with various attendant objects, but as Norman loses control over her, ‘all the appendages, such as whistle, pencil-on-chain, lorgnettes, with which I had first endowed her, had long ago been discarded.’⁶¹²) These ‘appendages’, and the clothes the characters wear, are like props in the theatre of self-realisation, and issues of control over these seemingly innocuous objects act as a microcosm of a wider power struggle.

The dynamics of dependency are not solely one-way. While Agatha feels that ‘she possessed all in possessing Clarissa’,⁶¹³ elsewhere in the novel a chapter ends with the words ‘Agatha was Clarissa’s only toy, and she was Agatha’s’.⁶¹⁴ The blurring of the line between creator and created, seen in the fusing selfhoods and elision of ‘self’ and ‘other’, also establishes a relationship of equal contingency in both directions. To be each other’s ‘toy’ is a playful image, and a depiction of domestic harmony, but also indicates a level of mastery or agency over the other.

In *The Love-Child* and *Miss Hargreaves* creation is not a single, static event, but an ongoing issue of sustainment, depicted in the former novel through scientific analogy. While the method of Clarissa’s creation is affirmably not a scientific experiment, their resultant affinity is explored through the metaphor of interplanetary physics – discovered by Agatha in the essay ‘Attractive Powers of Bodies’ from *Sturm’s Reflections*. Agatha and Clarissa read this together, ‘entranced by it’,⁶¹⁵ a term suggestive of a fairy-tale, rather than a treatise. The following excerpt is quoted in *The Love-Child*, with Olivier’s own ellipses:

⁶¹² Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.275

⁶¹³ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.116

⁶¹⁴ Ibid. p.48

⁶¹⁵ Ibid. p.55

We often see two bodies approach each other without being impelled by any external force. The cause which produces this effect is called Attraction, or that principle whereby the minuter particles of matter tend towards each other... By this is most satisfactorily explained the motions of the Heavenly Bodies... These spheres, separated from each other by immense intervals, are united by some secret bond.⁶¹⁶

Agatha instantly aligns this image with the interconnection between herself and Clarissa: ‘it was the attraction exercised by her own body which had drawn Clarissa to her, and had given her life.’⁶¹⁷ The heritage she identifies is not *Frankenstein* or fairy-tale, but a peculiar meeting point of science and theology where the ultimate creator is neither planet but rather God. *Sturm’s Reflections* contains dozens of essays on a wide range of topics, and it is noteworthy that Olivier chose this particular one for her metaphor. Even one of the essays preceding it, on spring as a sign both of life and ‘the inconstancy of terrestrial things’, would have been equally fitting for her topic, and (literally) rather closer to home, in concerning everyday, earthly matters. ‘Spring an Emblem of the Frailty of Human Life, and an Image of Death’ could even prophecy the conclusion of *The Love-Child*, when speaking of lost youth:

We remember those happy days no more, but as the illusion of a dream, or as some pleasing phantasy that plays upon the imagination, and suddenly leaves us in all the consciousness of a weary existence.⁶¹⁸

This is almost exactly what does happen at the end of the narrative. Olivier’s choice of ‘Attractive Powers of Bodies’ includes no such foreshadowing of Clarissa’s eventual vanishment, nor the apposite words ‘phantasy’ and ‘illusion’. Perhaps

⁶¹⁶ Ibid. p.55 (See also: C.C. Sturm, *Sturm’s Reflections on The Works of God and of His Providence Throughout All Nature*, 2 vols. (1; London: J.F. Dove, 1824) p.245)

⁶¹⁷ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.57

⁶¹⁸ Sturm, *Sturm’s Reflections on The Works of God and of His Providence Throughout All Nature* p.242

Olivier intends them to be purposefully avoided in Agatha's selection, to demonstrate the character's blindness to this fate.

The sense of magnitude which accompanies comparison with the planets (rather than, more mundanely, flowers) does proffer greater contrast when compared with Agatha's own quotidian life. The grounding of the fantastic is made obvious by this extravagant metaphor, showing how domesticated the otherworldly has become. This contrast is explicitly demonstrated when Agatha and Clarissa enact an intragalactic bond:

“You must go round and round in the middle of the lawn, and I shall go round and round the outside. We can make a thread of your blue silk into the secret bond. That would be perfectly invisible. But if I get too far away, it will break, and I shall go out.”⁶¹⁹

This, the first sign of Clarissa's eventual quest for independence, is also a domestication of an immense image. As well as drawing attention to the potential fragility of their bond, the blue silk links back to the darning Agatha was engaged in when Clarissa first appeared. This moment of domesticity is threaded through the images which follow the intrusion of the fantastic.

Clarissa eventually disappears when she has, metaphorically, strayed too far from Agatha's orbit, and the creative act comes full circle in destruction: this cyclicity is emphasised in the opening of the penultimate chapter, 'Clarissa was gone', echoing the first words of the second chapter, 'Clarissa came back'.⁶²⁰ Their interdependence is an essential part of the blurring of their selfhoods, and '[Agatha] could not

⁶¹⁹ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.58

⁶²⁰ Ibid. p.164; p.19

altogether banish from her mind the uneasy feeling that Clarissa's existence depended on her own immediate presence – that if you happened to find the child alone, you just wouldn't find her at all.'⁶²¹ Reflecting Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (along with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a form of ur-text for fantastic novels of the period) and Tweedledum's assertion that, should the Red King wake up, ““You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!””⁶²² – when Agatha faints, Clarissa does indeed briefly disappear. Clarissa's own account of her disappearance is that she has been ‘in the dark’,⁶²³ exemplifying the frequent comparison between darkness and the unexplained in fantastic fiction (and in the English language more generally). She states that ““The noise didn't touch me [...b]ut it must have hurt the ladder””.⁶²⁴ The combined synaesthetic (eliding ‘noise’ and ‘touch’) and anthropomorphic interpretations of the event demonstrate Clarissa's lack of access to normal analytical structures.

The eventual catalyst for the power struggle between these characters is, however, the arrival of David, who is romantically interested in Clarissa. Instability enters a narrative when characters themselves try to alter the genre of the text from within. Any establishment of a creation narrative is simultaneously the establishment of a *Bildungsroman* – by both the author and the creator character – which runs alongside the subgenre structure of the fantastic. When the genre (or subgenre, or impulse) of

⁶²¹ Ibid. p.53

⁶²² Lewis Carroll and Martin Gardner, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1960) p.263. It should be noted that *Alice* is, ultimately, not a fantastic novel – since Alice's adventures turn out to have been dreamt. A.A. Milne was one of many to protest against this ending, labelling it ‘wrong’ and ‘stupid’. While doing so, he constructs an imaginary, fantastic conflict between Lewis Carroll and Charles Dodgson, mirroring Edith Olivier's own statement that, when writing late at night “one is quite another person to one's ordinary everyday self” [A.A. Milne, *Year In, Year Out* (London: Methuen, 1952) pp.13-15; Olivier, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* p.290]

⁶²³ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.72

⁶²⁴ Ibid. p.72

romance enters the novel, as David attempts, there is a crisis of genre which unsettles the extant, interdependent dynamic of creator and creation.

Similarly in *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, Rosalba and Virginio fall in love: ‘a brief and iridescent cloud of unreality had enveloped them for a time in silence’.⁶²⁵ The real eighteenth-century Venetian writer Carlo Gozzi, incorporated by Wylie as a character, proclaims: ‘it will be an extremely charming little romance, a fairy-tale come true’.⁶²⁶ Presenting romance in the fantastic framework of ‘unreality’ and ‘fairy-tale’ gives the novel some semantic consistency, but the structures of genre are shifted. Peter Innocent’s intended *Bildungsroman* for Virginio – and, consequently, metamorphosis of himself from childless priest to pseudo-parent – becomes instead a romance narrative, which in turn becomes Rosalba’s metamorphosis narrative when she opts to be transformed into glass.⁶²⁷ The creation narrative unravels; a starkly simple sentence, almost at the end of the novel, exemplifies the cyclicity of the creator’s experience: ‘Peter Innocent was very lonely.’⁶²⁸ Loneliness is intrinsic to the creator’s role in these novels, since it is their inducement and their problem to solve. It is also the counterpart of possessiveness, if the creator is a deviser of binary fantastic affiliations which splinter and collapse. Having constructed an exclusive, two-person relationship, loneliness is the inevitable result if, in expanding to include another person, this relationship falls apart.

⁶²⁵ Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew* p.80

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.* p.97

⁶²⁷ Although contemporary reviewers broadly gave equal weight to Virginio’s creation and Rosalba’s metamorphosis, later commentators have focused primarily upon Rosalba’s transformation – mostly because Rosalba is considered Wylie’s autobiographical portrait. [see Evelyn Helmick Hively, *A Private Madness: The Genius of Elinor Wylie* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002) p.142; Judith Farr, *The Life and Art of Elinor Wylie* (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983) p.103; p.110]

⁶²⁸ Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew* p.176. Similarly, Clarissa disappears in *The Love-Child* – the first words of chapter fourteen, ‘Clarissa was gone’, echoing the first words of chapter two: ‘Clarissa came back in the night.’ [Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.164; p.19]

While Peter Innocent willingly sacrifices his projected creation/fatherhood framework when Virginio asks for his blessing, Agatha is reluctant to concede to Clarissa's romance narrative. A power struggle develops when David, tries to intercept the binary bind between Agatha and her progeny.

Keeping David and Clarissa apart became a mania with her, and it was a terrible strain. Every two or three days she pretended to have headaches, and thus kept Clarissa to herself. These days were the breathing spaces which enabled her to live.⁶²⁹

The vitality of imagination and unreality in the novel becomes tainted with its equivalent in subterfuge and falsity. In this battle, Agatha also falsely claims to love boating, castles, and tennis. Pretence, heretofore an enlivening activity, becomes instead defensive and destructive – and destructive not only to Clarissa, but to Agatha's mental wellbeing, as 'mania' suggests.

The conflict between romance and the fantastic comes to its climax in a scene which takes place in Agatha's garden (and which culminates in Clarissa's disappearance) where David declares his love to Clarissa. Olivier recognised that her intentional battle between genres in *The Love-Child* could inadvertently lapse into the romantic clichés she was undermining: 'I am trying to make it very trance-like & magic my fear is that it will be pretty & cloying.'⁶³⁰ She also admitted that this scene was the most difficult to write – perhaps understandably, as a spinster herself⁶³¹ – and

⁶²⁹ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.126

⁶³⁰ Olivier, 'Diary (December 1925 - December 1927)' (12/01/27)

⁶³¹ A rather tactless friend noticed a similarity between Agatha and *her* creator, the author: 'Clarissa, if encouraged, & if your life were as empty as Miss Bodenham's, would soon become as much to you!' [Judith [surname not known], letter to Edith Olivier (20/05/27), Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Century, Edith Olivier Papers 982/94]. The accuracy of this comparison is unclear; Olivier was unmarried and childless, but her life was not 'empty'. Cecil Beaton described hers as 'a life of

corresponded with the popular American novelist Anne Sedgwick who suggested reshaping David's proclamation, considering the original 'hum-drum & commonplace & unworthy'.⁶³² Sedgwick concentrates her assessment upon the realism of David's passion for Clarissa:

I feel that when you leave the centre of Clarissa you don't give quite enough consideration to the circumference, as it were: & in this chapter David's psychology makes me pause: gives me a sense of arrest & negation that really spoils the end of the story. You have indicated a profound passion in him; a deep, overwhelming love. Could he, when he gets her finally to himself, gets her to come down to him in the moonlight, - adjourn his declaration? Wouldn't it burst forth at once? [...David is] like a boy just beginning to be in love, rather than a boy who has reached the climax of love & resolution?⁶³³

Sedgwick frames her discussion in relation to the circles of distance from Clarissa – the 'centre' and the 'circumference' – similar to the planetary metaphor used in the novel. Despite positing Clarissa as the centre of this psychological framework, Sedgwick also recognises that Clarissa has been 'strange, silent, ghost-like through the chapter – drawing her being from David, as it were, until, with the final yielding, the kiss, she snaps her link with living reality.'⁶³⁴ Here, romance is again figured as unreality, yet antagonistic to the sustained existence of Clarissa as an un-real creation; because she has been so fully absorbed into the everyday. Sedgwick views the romantic influence within *The Love-Child* as its most un-real element: to her mind, Clarissa's genesis can be naturalised, but David's romantic overtures must be the opposite of 'hum-drum & commonplace'.

Victorian conventionality' – but one with 'unlimited energy, vitality and zest for life'. [Cecil Beaton, *Ashcombe: The Story of a Fifteen-Year Lease* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1949) p.1; p.40]

⁶³² Olivier, 'Diary (December 1925 - December 1927)' (10/01/27)

⁶³³ Anne Sedgwick, 'Letter to Edith Olivier' (08/01/27), Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers 982/94

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

The bond between Agatha and Clarissa, although it is compared to the galaxies, is spatially confined to the home environment, particularly the garden. Agatha is ‘ill at ease’⁶³⁵ even while travelling to the hotel where she takes Clarissa when she first appears; after three months there she is ‘homesick [...and] longed to be with Clarissa in her own home, and in the garden where her eyes had first rested on that beloved little form.’⁶³⁶ The longing for home which is characteristic of many interwar domestic novelists is propelled by an equal longing to situate Clarissa in felicitous surroundings. It is apt, then, that in trying to break their interdependency (which he sees as the result of ‘something uncanny in [Agatha’s] power’, labelling her a ‘vampire’, a common term for possessive mothers in the period),⁶³⁷ David introduces Clarissa to motoring. Unlike Peter Innocent’s ‘rival’ Rosalba, who changes herself to become more like Virginio, David seeks to undermine their bond by pulling Clarissa away from her home and into being more like *him*.

Agatha’s spatial security relies upon inviolable rings of domestic space; David and his car transport Clarissa away from this domain, and away from the reaches of Agatha’s control. The experience effects metamorphoses in both Agatha and Clarissa:

When Agatha and Clarissa met at luncheon, it was easy to see that their drive had affected them in very different ways. Agatha’s face was the colour of sand, and her usually neat hair was dragged and untidy. She looked shattered – exhausted – broken. Clarissa, on the other hand, had more colour than she had ever had in her life.’⁶³⁸

⁶³⁵ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.38

⁶³⁶ Ibid. p.49

⁶³⁷ Ibid. p.151; Nicola Beauman cites a correspondent in *The Times* (12th May 1914) on the topic of possessive mothers: ‘Every day a host of human vampires drain the life-blood of those who are their nearest and should be their dearest.’ [Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman’s Novel 1914-39* p.75]

⁶³⁸ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.97

Both are marked physically by motoring. While Agatha's appearance is distorted and disordered, Clarissa, who had been 'very pale'⁶³⁹ on her arrival, is now flushed with colour. The loss of her translucence brings her closer to reality and further from Agatha's remit as fantastic creator. David has 'opened for her the gate to the Kingdom of Reality, and she looked past him into a new world.'⁶⁴⁰ Even phrased in this mythological manner, the introduction of the car represents a departure from the fantastic, and the beginning of an escape from Agatha. Nicola Beauman cites Virginia Woolf's diary entries from 1927:

We talk of nothing but cars... This is a great opening up in our lives... the motor is turning out the joy of our lives, an additional life, free & mobile & airy[.]⁶⁴¹

Beauman elides two separate entries, and omits this from the first: '[It will] expand that curious thing, the map of the world in ones [sic] mind. It will I think demolish loneliness'.⁶⁴² Woolf's term 'an additional life' corresponds with both psychological lexes and the plot of the creative narrative – yet, though the car offers this further life for Clarissa, for Agatha, rather than demolishing loneliness, automobiles threaten the new refuge from loneliness which she has found.

Miss Hargreaves, madness, and the God complex

The battle for power becomes most overt in the novel which starts most flippantly. Miss Hargreaves and Norman share a bond which permits only one of them to be in control: 'Power ebbed from me and rose in her. It would always be so; always. If I relinquished my power over her, she would seize it and exert it over me. What I had

⁶³⁹ Ibid. p.25

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid. p.108

⁶⁴¹ Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39* p.321. (Ellipses are Beauman's.)

⁶⁴² Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume 3 (1925-30)* p.147

made was becoming too strong for me.’⁶⁴³ Their relationship is damagingly synergetic. The idea of a created being psychically overpowering the creator has its antecedent in *Frankenstein*, but Miss Hargreaves’ strength is psychical, rather than physical. Like Agatha Bodenham, Norman uses resources from within himself in the act of creation, even if this is only his imagination rather than fundamental desires.⁶⁴⁴ If Agatha is like a fantastic novelist crafting the narrative of her character, Norman is akin to the novelist or artist who is subsumed by their creativity: ‘that was just why I wanted to get rid of her; she was too powerful an influence over me.’⁶⁴⁵

Imaginative creation, in this novel, no longer relates closely to the desire for a child - firstly because Norman has no wish at all for the being he inadvertently creates, and secondly because she is an octogenarian. By the end of the interwar period, more pressing concerns were dominating public attention, and the spectre of the two million spinsters had ceased to preoccupy quite so many people; Cicely Hamilton wrote in the year that *Miss Hargreaves* was published that ‘the once traditional contempt for the spinster is [now] thoroughly a thing of the past.’⁶⁴⁶ As war began again, and it was once more real children (rather than hypothetical children) who were collectively mourned, the creation narrative changed tack, and questions of mortality and the afterlife are eventually addressed in *Miss Hargreaves*, and the contest for agency does not solely concern existence in *this* world. Miss Hargreaves’ anxiety concerns whether or not, to quote her poem again, she is ‘destined [...] for high angelic glory’; in the play version of *Miss Hargreaves* (adapted by Baker in 1952) her determination

⁶⁴³ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.238

⁶⁴⁴ Baker does, however, resist a metaphysical reading of *Miss Hargreaves*. When Miss Hargreaves disappears, Norman has a vision of her struggling down a dark tunnel. What could be an esoteric scene is shown later to be simply a corridor within a church: Baker is flippant with the high-flown.

⁶⁴⁵ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.101

⁶⁴⁶ Cicely Hamilton, *The Englishwoman* (London: Longmans, 1940) p.27, quoted in Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39* p.88

is made more overt: ‘Well, hold your head high, Hargreaves! Stake out your claim for immortality while there is yet time!’⁶⁴⁷ Throughout the play, although nothing of great significance is changed (and much of that which is changed is done for practical reasons; for instance, Miss Hargreaves arrives at the Huntleys’ house rather than the railway station), some subtlety is lost in relation to Miss Hargreaves’ genesis. Or, rather, Baker responds to the physicality and tangibility of the stage by investing the props as creative resources. Rather than simply coming to his imagination, and formed in it arbitrarily, Miss Hargreaves and her appendages are inspired by seeing beforehand (in the house Miss Hargreaves will occupy): ‘the old harp – with the moonlight slanting across the broken springs’.⁶⁴⁸ Domestic objects concretise the imaginative process, in a manner appropriate for a play which (in turn) concretises the narrative of a novel.

To return to the novel; Miss Hargreaves regains some power, but Norman plays the role of God in the novel, from speaking her into existence in a way comparable to creation accounts in Genesis, to eventually speaking her out of existence in the same way: just as ‘Creative thought Creates’ is a motto at the start of Miss Hargreaves’ existence, ‘Destructive thought Destroys’ is the mantra to which Norman turns at the end.⁶⁴⁹ His equivalent of longing for a child is longing to be, more abstractly, a creator. Although other creation narratives incorporate baptism scenes (these appear in *The Love-Child*, *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, and *Appius and Virginia*, as well as *Lady Into Fox*; the act of baptism, like the initial creation, is a tangible act embodying

⁶⁴⁷ Frank Baker, 'Miss Hargreaves: A Play' London, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Plays 1952/36 p.49

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid. p.9

⁶⁴⁹ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.223

intangible forces⁶⁵⁰) theistic connotations are most strongly brought out in *Miss Hargreaves*. Norman Huntley, as the narrator, makes a tentative comparison with God himself:

Everything, it seemed to me, was just within my grasp. (Yes, I know it was all a horrible blasphemy, but there it is.) For that moment I accepted Miss Hargreaves without question or complaint. [...] If she was still a little out of control – well, don't *all* created things get out of control before long? Well, I mean, look at us... God thought we were a very good job. And *look* at us...⁶⁵¹

Although he mentions blasphemy, it is confessions such as this which prevent Norman from *being* blasphemous, simply by considering the role of God as the ontological starting point in a chain of creators. Although Norman considers the potential gamut of his power, he does not arrogate himself above the ultimate Creator. Yet when Miss Hargreaves herself has a dawning realisation of her status as a created being, she refers to 'my maker',⁶⁵² choosing the one appellation for God which emphasises God-as-creator, and which applies to Norman. Earlier in the novel, her reference to 'my Maker'⁶⁵³ uses a capitalised 'M', indicating that, by the end of the novel, she has recognised the non-divine nature of her creator.

The self-awareness which proves the undoing of Frankenstein's Monster (but which never seems truly to affect Clarissa or Virginio) here has eternal consequences. The sanctity of life is approached differently in *The Venetian Glass Nephew*: it is 'murderous' metamorphosis, rather than 'the vivification of a few handfuls of

⁶⁵⁰ As a friend wrote to Olivier, 'the ceremony of baptism portrays more forcibly than would pages of description the perplexity involving Agatha as to the possession by Clarissa of an immortal soul.' [Morrison, 'Letter to Edith Olivier']

⁶⁵¹ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.176

⁶⁵² Ibid. p.292

⁶⁵³ Ibid. p.180

harmless Murano sand and a pipkin of holy water'⁶⁵⁴ which is considered the possible affront to God, because one creates from the inanimate, and the other distorts that which God has already created.

One of the weapons in Miss Hargreaves' arsenal, before she capitulates, is to question her creator's sanity:

“Norman’ – and her tone was almost pitying – “there can be no doubt. No further doubt. Your brain is rapidly becoming affected.”⁶⁵⁵

The idea of the created being questioning the stability of their creator is a new variant of the ‘deadly independence’ Callois considered a predicate for the creation narrative; rather than going on a murderous rampage like Frankenstein’s Monster, Miss Hargreaves instead turns upon the security of his mind.

Madness, as a discourse, is never distant from fantastic narratives. The permeable line between reality and fantasy (and the inability to separate subject and object) is both a trope of the fantastic and a trait of the psychotic. And, like the fantastic, the language used to discuss madness often borrows from the semantics of the home, boundaries, and rooms; in May Sinclair’s 1923 short story ‘The Flaw in the Crystal’, for instance, insanity is described as initially ‘a question of borders and of thresholds [...but] they had passed all that. He had gone clean over; he was in the dreadful interior’.⁶⁵⁶ Rabkin describes madness as ‘an interior escape’, and, like the fantastic, a response to the inadequacy of the real: ‘a flight directly away from some

⁶⁵⁴ Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew* p.152

⁶⁵⁵ Baker, *Miss Hargreaves* p.239

⁶⁵⁶ May Sinclair, *Uncanny Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1923 repr.2006) p.67

apprehended reality that the individual finds intolerable'.⁶⁵⁷ It thus finds affinity with novels such as *The Love-Child* which start from a basis of wish-fulfilment, even if this is later distorted. Madness and the supernatural can both be considered potential, though invariably flawed, escapes from middlebrow discontent.

Although 'madness' means little in a Fantasy novel, where natural laws do not exist and thus standards of normative sanity are also non-existent, in fantastic novels it can remain as a parallel narrative; that is, a potential explanation for the strange events of the novel which is coexistent with the fantastic hypothesis. As an interpretive process, madness and the fantastic often *do* run parallel (particularly in novels like *Miss Hargreaves* and *The Love-Child* which already presuppose a psychological involvement from the characters) with neither explanation entirely accounting for the narrative. It is another instance where popular opinion of unmarried women's characteristics makes a spinster the perfect character to host the fantastic. Spinsters of the period are often portrayed not only as isolated and possibly damaging to the nation's mental health, but themselves destined for 'eccentricities (to call them no worse), and sometimes [...] the madhouse.'⁶⁵⁸ In *Flower Phantoms*, Hubert tells his sister that "[a] woman isn't sane until she's married",⁶⁵⁹ while Winifred Holtby recognises (but does not endorse) 'the current superstition that madness or bitterness lie in wait for virgins.'⁶⁶⁰ Her term 'superstition' effectively dismisses any sort of scientific ratification, and equates this pseudo-Freudian warning with an old wives'

⁶⁵⁷ Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* p.194

⁶⁵⁸ Cowdroy, *Wasted Womanhood* p.86. Maud Churton Braby brazenly states that it is 'a well-known physiological fact that numbers of women become insane in middle life who would not have done so if they had enjoyed the ordinary duties, pleasures and preoccupations of matrimony'. The contrast between the vagueness of 'insane' and the pseudo-science of 'well-known physiological fact' demonstrates the confident inaccuracies attacking unmarried women in the period. [Braby, *Modern Marriage and How To Bear It* p.50]

⁶⁵⁹ Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* p.85

⁶⁶⁰ Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilisation* p.133

tale. Apter writes that ‘there is no method for distinguishing perceptions which register common agreement from those which register an idiosyncratic and possibly insane vision’,⁶⁶¹ and this is shown in two scenes from *The Love-Child* which differ chiefly in the way perspective is used. The novel ends with Agatha chasing a non-existent Clarissa; a servant does not intervene, for ‘when she looked at Agatha’s mindless face, she saw that it was quite happy.’⁶⁶² David Cecil suggests that the ‘whole last quarter of the story is chilled by a stealthy waft of uncanny terror, the terror that is inseparable from madness.’⁶⁶³ But this scene is almost identical to one earlier in the novel, shortly after Clarissa’s first appearance:

She went into the house, hoping that neither of the servants had seen her racing madly about the garden, pursuing someone whom she realized had not been there at all. They would have thought her mad. And would they be right or wrong?⁶⁶⁴

The only difference between these scenes is in narrative focalisation. While earlier the reader views Clarissa through Agatha’s perspective, later it is through the servants’, with their ongoing concerns about Agatha’s ‘very unnatural state’⁶⁶⁵ – ‘unnatural’ bridging the various categories of madness, childlessness, and the fantastic. Anna Koenen writes that madness ‘is always a definition from the outside, from an objectifying distance, never from the inside.’⁶⁶⁶ This point, though intended to pertain to psychological definitions which Koenen considers hegemonic, is equally applicable to narratives. The framework of madness is dependent upon focalisation, and the contrast between Agatha’s viewpoint and the servants’ viewpoint (though all

⁶⁶¹ Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* p.67

⁶⁶² Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.174

⁶⁶³ Cecil, 'Introduction' p.7

⁶⁶⁴ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.28

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid. p.37

⁶⁶⁶ Anna Koenen, *Visions of Doom, Plots of Power: The Fantastic in Anglo-American Women's Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1999) p.12

are given in the third person) brings with it the suggestion of insanity. Agatha's servants have proved both astute and flawed observers in *The Love-Child*; they know she cannot have given birth to Clarissa, but elsewhere Helen (the maid) misreads Agatha's conversation with Clarissa as a 'paroxysm of sorrow' upon her mother's death.⁶⁶⁷ Olivier does not intend the reader to come to a definite verdict concerning Agatha's sanity, but by introducing madness into the second of two replicated scenes, Olivier disturbs any neat conclusions about Clarissa's corporeality or eventual absence.

Despite Glen Cavaliero's suggestion that the popularity of fantastic novels can be attributed to their 'preoccupation with the potential power of imaginative creation',⁶⁶⁸ Olivier, Wylie, and Baker cannot be considered the fictive equivalent of Hillis' cheerful *Live Alone And Like It* and its ilk because these novels obviously do not provide practicable solutions to childlessness. Even within the narratives themselves, the fantastic does not act as an infallible answer to the desire for a child, leading, as they do, to power conflicts, loss, and even the spectre of madness. Yet these novels do offer what Rabkin calls 'a message of psychological consolation [...] for its audience, psychologically useful'⁶⁶⁹ by exploring the ways in which the middlebrow fantastic can offer new perspectives and revitalise debate within a subgenre which was growing tired: the 'spinster novel'. Middlebrow novels which use the fantastic often do so as a way of expanding not only possibility but permissibility. These creation narratives, particularly Olivier's, use – and update – an ancient trope to address a contemporary anxiety, modernising this branch of the fantastic, and tying it inextricably and empathetically to the lived reality of the middlebrow audience.

⁶⁶⁷ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.75; p.17

⁶⁶⁸ Cavaliero, *The Supernatural and English Fiction* p.187

⁶⁶⁹ Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* p.73

Chapter Five

‘She can touch nothing without delicately transforming it’⁶⁷⁰ : Re-creating Self in *Lolly Willowes*

Despite being a novel about witchcraft, which might thus be expected solely to favour the atavistic and backward-looking, Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowes* (1926) directly concerns what *Punch* described as the 1920s ‘burning question, what to do with our supernumerary spinsters’,⁶⁷¹ although not the topic of childlessness; Laura Willowes (like her author⁶⁷²) voices no desire for children. Instead, *Lolly Willowes* addresses the question of spatial dependency and spatial autonomy for spinsters, through the fantastic lens of witchcraft, which Laura chooses in preference to her status as a dependent relative.

Laura’s transformation into a witch has aspects of both metamorphosis narrative and creation narrative, acting as a meeting point of the two, in an act of self-(re)creation. The distinction between metamorphosis and self-creation is not absolute; a review of *The Love-Child* attempts to set up a dichotomy between metamorphosis and creation by stating that ‘[i]n “Lady Into Fox” something is changed by the imagination; in “The Love-Child” something is created.’⁶⁷³ Change and creation cannot be entirely separated, though. Both facets are present in *Lolly Willowes*, but the novel is not (as it is often read) ultimately triumphalist: neither creation nor metamorphosis is permitted to reach fulfilment and images of quasi-metamorphosis (where transformation is

⁶⁷⁰ Oliver Warner, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner' *The Bookman*, October (1929) 8-9, p.8

⁶⁷¹ *Punch* (14/4/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁶⁷² Warner wrote in her 1937 diary that ‘bearing children reduces women to extremes of potential nobility or potential baseness in anything like a crisis. But robs them of the impulse to behave with reason and decency.’ [Sylvia Townsend Warner and Claire Harman, *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994) p.102]

⁶⁷³ Harry Salpeter, 'The First Reader' *News*, 26/08/27 (1927) [n.p.]

begun but not completed) are iterated throughout the novel. Throughout these stages, Laura Willowes' evolving identity is tied inextricably to questions about space and the ownership of it, and the parallel evolution these matters take.

'A sort of extra wheel'⁶⁷⁴: Laura and the Willowes' home

As the novel opens, Laura is moving into the house belonging to her older brother Henry, upon the death of her father; like many contemporary spinsters, she has little volition in the matter. Spatial independence was a growing concern for unmarried women in the interwar period, seen throughout the social and cultural scale, from Marjorie Hillis' *Live Alone and Like It* to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Although by 1947 Leonora Eyles suggests that a 'single woman can, in most cases, choose to live where she likes', this was far from true in the 1920s: the Mass Observation diarist Nella Last recalls, also in 1947, that 'When I was a girl, for a woman to live alone, even if she had money to do it, which was rare, it would have been unthinkable.'⁶⁷⁵ The broader post-war concern about housing, dislocation, and ownership of one's own home was focused more closely in the period's changing expectations and aspirations for an unmarried woman's control over her domestic space. The home could, in turn, exert an effect on the inhabitant, acting in *Lolly Willowes* both through the combined force of its occupants and, somehow, with its own agency. As Warner writes in her diary: 'Every house I passed was a story';⁶⁷⁶ her metaphor bypasses the more common idea that each house *has* a story, thus

⁶⁷⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.46

⁶⁷⁵ Eyles, *Unmarried But Happy* p.96; Nella Last, Patricia E. Malcolmson, and Robert W. Malcolmson, *Nella Last's Peace: The Post-War Diaries of Housewife*, 49 (London: Profile, 2008) p.151. Virginia Nicholson does note that, in 1930, 'various utopian bodies, like the Women's Pioneer Housing Company, did look out for their needs and started a programme of converting old houses into groups of apartments for independent singles'. [Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* p.143]

⁶⁷⁶ Warner and Harman, *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* p.17

granting the house an independent powerfulness. As Briganti and Mezei note, ‘both novel and house are dwelling places and spaces whose deep structures demonstrate anatomical, psychological and descriptive equivalences.’⁶⁷⁷ This trope is well-documented, but in *Lolly Willowes* the power of houses means that the story they represent and assert can overwhelm Laura’s personal narrative; this is the situation as the novel opens, where Laura is passed from one male relative to another as though she were an inherited item of furniture. Indeed, the conversation in the first pages of the novel concerns Laura’s ability to ‘fit in’ to ‘the small spare-room’, if various articles of furniture are moved or taken from Laura.⁶⁷⁸ The Willowes family ‘took it for granted that she should be absorbed into the household’, depersonalising Laura, who feels ‘rather as if she were a piece of family property forgotten in the will’.⁶⁷⁹ She is not expected to alter the essential domestic dynamics, but instead act as a passive addition to an extant organism.

Yet already this opening to the novel problematises the popular idea that Laura is the victim of possessive, oppressive men, and that *Lolly Willowes* documents ‘her escape from imperfect patriarchy’, ‘the fantastical version of a feminist manifesto’ or is ‘crypto-lesbian’ (as Gan sagely points out in response to this theory put forward by Jane Garrity, ‘sometimes a spinster is simply a spinster’.)⁶⁸⁰ Some have railed against

⁶⁷⁷ Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* p.18

⁶⁷⁸ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* pp.1f

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid. p.6. The idea of Laura as a domestic object was noted by some contemporary commentators, such as Oliver Warner’s description of Laura as ‘a beloved pincushion to an exhausting number of relations.’ [Warner, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner’ p.8]

⁶⁸⁰ Nesbitt, ‘Footsteps of Red Ink: Body and Landscape in *Lolly Willowes*’ p.449; Frances Bingham, ‘The Practice of the Presence of Valentine: Ackland in Warner’s Work’ in Gill Davies, David Malcolm, and John Simons (eds.) *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006) 29-44, p.41; Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* p.172; Wendy Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p.167

these interpretations,⁶⁸¹ but Laura as the figure of the witch has frequently been treated as shorthand for masculine oppression and female emancipation.⁶⁸² (Indeed, the supernatural nature of the novel has often been sidelined altogether, as being of only metaphoric significance, but it ought not to be forgotten that Warner determinedly chose the fantastic, telling a journalist: ‘Dozens of people have written to me asking me whether I meant that she became a witch only symbolically [...] I meant quite literally that she became a witch.’)⁶⁸³ Yet the dynamics of the family and the way they are introduced to the narrative unsettles this male/female dichotomy. Henry’s name is not mentioned until after Laura’s sisters-in-law Caroline and Sibyl have been introduced as antagonistic, and it is Caroline who is most vehemently keen to subjugate Laura in the house, while Sybil is the figure who battles with Laura for power, arguing that it ‘seemed proper that she should take Laura’s place as mistress of the household [...] and assume the responsibilities of housekeeping.’⁶⁸⁴ Laura’s *raison d’être* is removed, and it is the women of the Willowes family who challenge and remove her standing, compacting her status as superfluous spinster. Whereas Laura’s sympathetic father had ‘greatly desired a daughter’⁶⁸⁵ and leaves her £500 a year⁶⁸⁶ (precisely the amount Woolf later asserts as necessary for women, in *A Room*

⁶⁸¹ For instance, Eleanor Perényi wrote that ‘[*Lolly Willowes* and *The True Heart* have been] published for a feminist audience. I doubt if [Warner] would have minded this, but I must say that I do. To read in a preface to *Lolly Willowes* that “with chilling immediacy this book speaks today, as it did in 1925, for women” is to encounter the dreariest feminist rubbish.’ [Perényi, ‘The Good Witch of the West’ p.28] The preface Perényi quotes is Anita Miller’s. [Anita Miller, Introduction to *Lolly Willowes, or, the Loving Huntsman* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1926 repr.1978).]

⁶⁸² Diane Purkiss identifies the same simplification in many critical examinations of (real) medieval witch trials; that is, that all the ‘witches’ were wholly innocent women, and the ‘hunters’ wholly evil. ‘It is a story about how perfect our lives would be – how perfect we women would be, patient, kind, self-sufficient – if it were not for patriarchy and its violence. [...] The witch offers opportunities for both identification and elaborate fantasy’. [Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996) pp.8ff]

⁶⁸³ ‘The Modern Witch’, *Newcastle Daily Journal & North Star* (26/6/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁶⁸⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.35

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.12

⁶⁸⁶ It is also true, of course, that this money is mismanaged by her brother (reinforcing Marjorie Hillis’ advice that ‘[w]hen it comes to investing, in general, it’s a good idea for the average none-too-

of *One's Own*), the female members of the Willowes family are unflinchingly domineering and oppressive.

Although Laura's often-cited speech to Satan at the end of the novel does suggest that she has become a witch as a means of female emancipation,⁶⁸⁷ there is incongruity between these impassioned words and Laura's tone in the rest of the novel. Before she moves to Great Mop, she announces that 'Nothing is impracticable for a single, middle-aged woman with an income of her own.'⁶⁸⁸ Although Warner doubtless intends this statement to demonstrate something of Laura's naivety, since many things were of course still impracticable, it does suggest that Laura's motivations are not initially a protest at her place *as* a woman, but rather as a dependent *person*, derogated by the Willowes family and their home collectively – as William Maxwell wrote to an enquirer; 'I am inclined to feel that much more than spinsterhood what occupied [Warner's] mind during the course of her life was people who were misused or exploited.'⁶⁸⁹

Laura's inferiority within the home is imposed by a family, not simply the male members of that family. There is little functional distinction between the Willowes' space and the Willowes family in the first stage of the novel, either from Laura's

businesslike woman not to do it with relatives or even old friends' and showing how Laura cannot completely escape her family), but one brother ought not to be extrapolated out to an entire schema of patriarchal oppression. [Hillis, *Live Alone and Like It* pp.116f]

⁶⁸⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* pp.234-9, including 'When I think of witches, I seem to see all over England, all over Europe, women living and growing old, as common as blackberries, and unregarded.' (p.234)

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid. p.102. (By a transition to the fantastic, the novel does, indeed, make the impracticable practicable.) Despite evidence to the contrary, this sentiment was expressed from the beginning of the century – in 1901 Myrtle Reed wrote in her (admittedly satirical) *The Spinster Book* that 'The chains of love may be sweet bondage, but freedom is hardly less dear. The spinster, like the wind, may go where she listeth, and there is no one to say her nay'. [Myrtle Reed, *The Spinster Book* (London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1901) p.211]

⁶⁸⁹ William Maxwell, letter to Mr. Field (06/03/81), Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive (H(L)/37/7), Dorset County Museum

perspective or theirs, and this is established linguistically. In a passage which also exhibits the distinct codes of social behaviour required of an enclosed family – as opposed to a meeting with outsiders – the Willowes’ dominance is demonstrated:

They fell into silence. At an ordinary dinner party Caroline would have felt this silence to be a token that the dinner party was a failure. But this was a family affair, there was no disgrace in having nothing to say. They were all Willoweses and the silence was a seemly Willowes silence.⁶⁹⁰

Significantly, on this and other occasions, ‘Willowes’s’ (or ‘Willowes’’) is indicated without use of the possessive apostrophe. This ‘silence’ (for instance) does not merely belong to the Willowes family as a characteristic, but has somehow become absorbed into their being and stamped with their identity. They patent their attributes, refusing them autonomy (in a close mirroring of Laura’s relationship to the house). The legacy of the family history, as well as the tenacious pride of the immediate family, gives them an indomitable domestic control. The Willowes’ absorption of others extends beyond their familial affinities to encompass their possessions: Sibyl, Laura’s other sister-in-law, ‘professed herself enchanted by the Willowes walnut and mahogany’.⁶⁹¹ Again, this furniture is not ‘Willowes’ walnut’, but ‘Willowes walnut’, enveloped into the Willowes’ colonising and repressive identity.

Laura is not simply repressed, however, by her brother’s house and her placement within it. Rather, she has an unhealthily dependent relationship with the house:

They had seen her at home, where animation brought colour into her cheeks and spirit into her bearing. Abroad, and in company, she was not animated.⁶⁹²

⁶⁹⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.91

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.35

⁶⁹² *Ibid.* p.25

This house is a life-giving force, in the same way that in *The Love-Child* Clarissa enlivens Agatha, putting ‘colour in her cheeks’ so that she ‘almost looked animated’.⁶⁹³ The same image of subverted enlivening physically marking the woman is attributed to Laura’s relationship with the home, but this bond is equally a restrictive one. Laura’s selfhood is eroded; she also requires ‘animation’, and without it she is left passive and inert outside the narrow parameters of the home. The term ‘animation’ itself suggests a creative hand elsewhere, removing the agency of the person being given life. The dichotomy of public/private shapes her personality, whether she wills it or not:

[S]he had become two persons, each different. One was Aunt Lolly, a middle-aged lady, light-footed upon stairs, and indispensable for Christmas Eve and birthday preparations. The other was Miss Willowes, “my sister-in-law Miss Willowes,” whom Caroline would introduce, and abandon to a feeling of being neither light-footed nor indispensable. But Laura was put away.⁶⁹⁴

The primary distinction is not between Laura’s inner and outer lives, her thoughts and her actions, as one might expect. Neither of these ‘persons’ is, in fact, Laura. Rather, they are the manifestations of an assumed (or foisted) personality, dependent upon whether she is within the home, or elsewhere – and when elsewhere she is still introduced to others in terms of her affiliation with the house and position in it. Even the supposed virtue of feeling ‘light-footed upon stairs’, although a delicate gentlewomanly version of a Homeric epithet, is also an image of domestic uneasiness. She is depicted as constantly in a state of unsettlement, moving between floors rather than remaining static or resolved. The familial division between public and private is not stable or even possible for Laura, who is never ‘at home’ with the family. As Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes, ‘family privacy, an aggregate privacy [...] does not

⁶⁹³ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.15

⁶⁹⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.61

insure – indeed, it prevents – individual privacy.⁶⁹⁵ Laura's separation from the public does not automatically imply the private; such a space does not exist for her.⁶⁹⁶

Like an unwanted item of furniture, the name (and attached personality) 'Laura' is 'put away' – perhaps even from Laura herself:

Caroline did not know what the children would do without their Aunt Lolly. Every one spoke of her as Aunt Lolly, till in the course of time she had almost forgotten her baptismal name.⁶⁹⁷

The iterated speech act which works fantastically in *The Love-Child* and *Miss Hargreaves* here enacts an enforced metamorphosis upon Laura's identity. In this excerpt 'she', in the midst of a narrative focalised through Caroline's thoughts, is ambiguous. It is not clear whether it is Caroline or Laura herself who is forgetting the name Laura; an ambiguity which furthers the dislocation of Laura's selfhood. Rather than a masculine imposition, though, the name 'Lolly' is attributed by a niece⁶⁹⁸ – and Warner is paratextually complicit, in giving the novel its title (while still referring to 'Laura' in the narrative.) Nor is Laura the only member of the Willowes household to have an enforced appellation: Titus is called Tito by his mother.⁶⁹⁹ Garrity's comment that women are 'exiled from linguistic self-definition'⁷⁰⁰ cannot be solely applied to women in *Lolly Willowes*. Both Laura/Lolly and Titus/Tito are defined by who is speaking to them or conceiving of them, and domestic conversation becomes an act of placement, but one where 'insider' and 'outsider' are not necessarily aligned

⁶⁹⁵ Quoted in Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* p.5

⁶⁹⁶ Wendy Gan writes astutely about the role of privacy in the novel, recognising that Laura has 'privacy at the core of her new identity', and argues for the primacy of this motivation in her escapes both from urbanity and, later, from nephew Titus. However, Gan sees the novel as ultimately triumphant; a reading which sidelines the limitations of Laura's 'escape'. [Ibid. p.83]

⁶⁹⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.60

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid. p.59

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid. p.156

⁷⁰⁰ Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* p.159

with positive and negative. Names which seem intended to demarcate the insider actually ascribe a personality and a role.

Later in the novel, the linguistic metamorphosis of these parallel names reflects Laura's dual identities of relative and witch:

If she had been called upon to decide in cold blood between being an aunt and being a witch, she might have been overawed by habit and the cowardice of compunction. But in the moment of election, under the stress and turmoil of the hunted Lolly as under a covering of darkness, the true Laura had settled it all unerringly.⁷⁰¹

This excerpt incorporates various contesting linguistic frameworks, to indicate the myriad personalities and assigned traits competing at this point. The language of Freudianism here hovers close to that of schizophrenia, where 'Laura' has taken unconscious actions unbeknownst to 'Lolly'. Yet the moment is given both a religious, vocational construction ('called upon'; 'moment of election') and legal terminology which echoes the contract Laura has made with Satan. And throughout, the spectre of the Gothic remains, in the depiction of a hunted woman in darkness. The language of settlement (and the passage is also suggestive of the settling of a property or estate) is, ironically, unsettled and unsettling.

The roles she exchanges are, however, not woman and witch, or even spinster and witch, but aunt and witch. It is the divesting of the persona of aunt, with its attendant responsibilities and dependencies, which is the process of almost unconscious self-recreation taken by Laura.

⁷⁰¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.175

‘One of these floating aunts’⁷⁰²

In her position as aunt, Laura exists only in relation to others. She is not dependent on the Willows family simply for room and board, but for the framework of her identity. The house and family lend a legitimacy to the spinster, enabling (or forcing) her to be part of a functioning machine. This was a position held by many of those ‘two million spinsters’ identified by reviewers as the ideal readers of this novel: ‘How many spinster ladies, living, perhaps, unwelcome guests with well-meaning relatives, will not sympathise with Lolly Willows?’⁷⁰³ a reviewer for *The Queen* asks, while that of the *Evening Standard* notes (with perhaps rather unsuitable allusion to Matthew 18:20) that *Lolly Willows* ‘is discussed with rapture where two or three modern spinsters are gathered together’.⁷⁰⁴ Reference to ‘modern spinsters’ does not connote the emancipated and progressive, but instead those for whom emancipation and progression had begun to seem a possibility. Laura Willows is emphatically typical in her middle-class situation – ‘so usual a person; she is to be met with in every village in the country’⁷⁰⁵ – and *Lolly Willows* is, indeed, the only one of Warner’s seven novels to be set in twentieth-century Britain, given Warner’s usual ‘persuasion that I was best at home in times past’.⁷⁰⁶ The metaphor she chooses here is particularly pertinent, since it is precisely the feeling of being (or not being) ‘at home’ which pervades *Lolly Willows*, with the ideal home connoting not only comfort but a sense of belonging and an untroubled reflection of the inhabitant’s chosen identity, rather than that foisted upon her by her relatives.

⁷⁰² Eyles, *Unmarried But Happy* p.75

⁷⁰³ *The Queen* (17/2/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁷⁰⁴ *Evening Standard* (27/12/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading. The reference is to “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” (Authorised Version)

⁷⁰⁵ C.H.W., ‘Review of *Lolly Willows*’ p.327

⁷⁰⁶ Sylvia Townsend Warner, Sylvia Townsend Warner Archives (F(right)/66/6), Dorset Country Museum

Laura is unwelcome to her sister-in-law, but Caroline fools herself that ‘Laura too was loved, and Laura was necessary. Caroline did not know what the children would do without their Aunt Lolly.’⁷⁰⁷ Repetition of ‘Laura’ here, for two quite disparate qualities, is further indication of her divided selfhood. Both attributes are, in fact, determined from outside: love and requirement are familial and mechanical respectively, but both define Laura through the actions and emotions of others. Privileging the role of aunt over that of sister or sister-in-law, Laura is seemingly placed in a relationship with her niece and nephew, but in the interwar years ‘aunt’ often acted as an abbreviation for a job description extending beyond the remit of the children, as exemplified in Scharlieb’s *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems*:

Is she not the one human being above all others on whom we can rely and count, just the one not too much involved in her own joys, sorrows, inevitable duties and engagements, to be able, indeed delighted, to come forward to give a helping hand and a sympathizing glance in all the trials and perplexities of the world?⁷⁰⁸

Is she not, Scharlieb implies, devoid of personal identity, and ready to have one formed for her? (It is determinedly ‘her’ and ‘she’ in this passage, rather than ‘we’ or ‘us’: the aunt is unequivocally an ‘other’.) Just as Laura has an unhealthy dependent relationship with the confines of the house, so the household is dependent upon her, while promoting the image of Laura as dependent relative. They have a symbiotic interdependence, but one which permits Henry, Caroline, Titus, and Fancy (Laura’s niece) to be ‘at home’ and to have the parallel independence which is forbidden to Laura. To use a spatial model suggested by Lefebvre :

⁷⁰⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* pp.59f

⁷⁰⁸ Scharlieb, *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* pp.76f

Social space contains - and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to - (1) the *social relations of reproduction*, i.e. the bio-physiological relations between the sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organization of the family; and (2) the *relations of production*, i.e. the division of labour and its organization in the form of hierarchical social functions.⁷⁰⁹

The space of the Willowes house uncertainly offers and denies both these ‘relations’ to Laura. She is simultaneously within the family and outside it; a labourer and unrecognised as a labourer. If Lefebvre’s models offer the organic and the mechanical in turn, Laura cannot claim either for herself. Her identity is overdetermined but undervalued, and her escape from the Willowes’ house is chiefly an escape from a space where her identity is myriad but not under her control. In a 1927 article, Warner suggested that there was a ‘moral and metaphorical tincture’⁷¹⁰ to choosing a house; Laura has this choice taken from her, and with this the concomitant opportunity to choose an identity. Inhabiting a home is an act of self-creation, but by living with relatives Laura is at the mercy of the identity her family – effectively her creators – determine for her.

Also in 1927 Winifred Holtby observed that the Wollstonecraftian treatise

“A Vindication of the Rights of Aunts” remains yet unwritten. Perhaps one day the creator of Miss Laura Willowes, who understood so well the arduous and endurances of her position, will pass from the tale of the individual revolt to the general position of aunts in society.⁷¹¹

For the figure of the aunt held not simply private, individual positions within homes, but existed as a generalised and identifiable concept with its own role in the organisation of society. L.P. Hartley writes that Laura ‘had become a Professional

⁷⁰⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974 trans.1991) p.32

⁷¹⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'On Choosing a Country Residence' *Time and Tide*, 17/06/27 (1927) 568-569, p.568

⁷¹¹ Winifred Holtby, 'The Truth About Aunts' *Time and Tide*, 03/06/27 (1927) 520-521, p.520

Aunt',⁷¹² reminiscent of the Universal Aunt company which was established in 1921 and took on many roles – 'anything for anyone at any time'⁷¹³ – which were otherwise assumed by financially dependent relatives. These included governess, dressmaker, and companion, but when Warner herself describes the company – in a 1950 article – she fancifully includes 'meet[ing] the pet, though rather excitable hyæna at the railway terminus' and finding 'a suitable wedding present for a K.C.'⁷¹⁴ A professional company took on this familial name in order to make the inclusion of strangers in one's home seem less alien, but there is an equal effect in the other direction, whereby the aunt takes on the distancing connotations of the institutional adjunct.

As well as this institutionalised figure of the spinster aunt, she existed as a shorthand stereotype defined angrily by Holtby as 'timid, ineffective and oppressed, at best a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles of affection'.⁷¹⁵ These are the qualities Henry and Caroline falsely identify in Laura: 'they felt no need to question her, since they could be sure that she would do nothing unsuitable or extravagant.'⁷¹⁶ Their responses to her departure are incredulity and discouragement, while any indications of witchcraft are wholly ignored as too socially transgressive to be believed possible in the docile relative they have conceived of (and, in doing so, created). Laura is representative of the public and private faces of the 1920s aunt in being *thought* to be unshocking and compliant,⁷¹⁷ but only acknowledged with the sanctioning structure of the family; the

⁷¹² Hartley, 'New Fiction' p.165

⁷¹³ <http://www.universalaunts.co.uk/history.html> (Accessed 5th September 2013)

⁷¹⁴ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Something About Aunts' in Peter Tolhurst (ed.) *With The Hunted: Selected Writings* (Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012) 369-372, p.371

⁷¹⁵ Holtby, 'The Truth About Aunts' p.520

⁷¹⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* pp.78f

⁷¹⁷ In 1950 Warner would suggest that aunts in literature 'have shed their benignity and become increasingly macabre', but this was far from true in 1926. [Warner, 'Something About Aunts' p.371]

‘femme sole and self supporting,’ as Warner writes in protest at being asked to attend the Labour Exchange in 1944, has ‘no more claim to consideration than a biscuit.’⁷¹⁸

Without the legitimisation of the family unit (however much this trammels the aunt’s identity) the single woman is empirically not analysable or placeable for the wider public.

‘Family’, of course, shares an etymological root with ‘familiarity’ (and reappears later, subverted, as the witch’s ‘familiar’). Familiarity tends to correspond with the comfortable, settled, and harmless – yet, ensconced in the family home, Laura experiences a reversal of the ‘unheimlich’: her fear is not the familiar being made unfamiliar, but rather the familiar becoming over-familiar. These are her thoughts when she first moves to her brother’s house:

She would become an inmate of the tall house in Apsley Terrace where hitherto she had only been a country sister-in-law on a visit. She would recognise a special something in the physiognomy of the house-front which would enable her to stop certainly before it without glancing at the number of the door-knocker. Within it, she would know unhesitatingly which of the polished brown doors was which, and become quite indifferent to the position of the cistern, which had baffled her one night when she lay awake trying to assemble the house inside the box of its outer walls.⁷¹⁹

Laura initially has a fractured understanding of the house, and undergoes an analytical process, trying to comprehend the way in which it coheres – either as a product (for ‘assembl[ing] the house inside the box’ is redolent of a manufactured dollhouse) or, as the word ‘physiognomy’ connotes, recognising the house as a person. Yet she recognises that the matching of the interior and exterior of the house is not only achievable but inevitable and inescapable. Unlike the Gothic houses which played

⁷¹⁸ Sylvia Townsend Warner and William Maxwell, *Letters* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982) p.84

⁷¹⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* pp.3f

tricks with misleading architecture (also seen in David Lindsay's 1922 fantastic novel *The Haunted Woman*, where the house expands and contracts inside without altering its external structure, including a disappearing and re-appearing staircase leading to an alternative world, instantly forgotten on return), the Willowes' house is ineluctably stable and sensible. Laura's fears are thus that the house is *too* knowable; that, as an 'inmate' – a word with a self-evident negative connotation, which notably accompanies the transition from sister-in-law to aunt – she will have no choice but to become familiar with every aspect of the geography of the house.

Even in *Great Mop*, in her initial ill-fated attempt to learn and memorise the countryside as she has learnt the layout of the house, this over-familiarity threatens to ruin her potential haven:

She walked slowly, for she felt the weight of her chains. Once more they had been fastened upon her. She had worn them for many years, acquiescently, scarcely feeling their weight. Now she felt it. And, with their weight, she felt their familiarity, and the familiarity was worst of all.⁷²⁰

The metaphor of chains is obvious, yet here the metaphor threatens to become real. The projected image is already affecting her physically, and stiling the way she walks, rather than existing only in her mind. The fantastic is also inherently an antidote to familiarity, offering the unexpected and unpredictable; the destruction of the familiar structures of the domestic novel is also the destruction of Laura's burdensome domestic familiarity.

It is not only the architecture and organised space of the home that influence Laura's identity, but the domestic objects within it. As Rosemary Sykes notes, it is 'the

⁷²⁰ Ibid. p.154

contents of the Willowes['] houses (especially the furniture and the books) that regulate the Willowes['] traditions'.⁷²¹ These objects echo the stasis of the layout of the house, inflexible to the changing humans within and creating their own linear Willowes history; Laura, having already been treated as furniture, is expected to be similarly static once she has been put in her place. A similar house circumscribes the spinster protagonist in F.M. Mayor's *The Rector's Daughter*: 'Not a new piece of furniture had been bought in the house within Mary's memory, not a room had been papered or painted'.⁷²² The lack of excitement or growth in the unmarried daughter is reflected in the décor and furnishings which surround her. Only the arrival or final departure of an inhabitant permits any change in the physical arrangement of objects. At Laura's aptly-named childhood home Lady Place, after their mother's funeral her brother James 'did a thing so unprecedented in the annals of the family that it could only be explained by the extreme exaltation of mind which possessed him: for without consulting any one, he altered the furniture, transferring a mirror and an almond-green brocade settee from his mother's room to his own.'⁷²³ Since the 'annals of the family' are arbitrated by the furniture, this act disrupts the Willowes' tradition, and is in turn considered to reflect a disruption of James' sanity, however temporary.

An anxiety about the placement of domestic objects is seen through middlebrow fiction; it preoccupies the Provincial Lady from the opening page of her diaries, where she worries about indoor bulbs occupying a chair (and which are later transferred from cellar to attic, emblematising the anxiety about domestic flux.) Similarly, in Macaulay's *Crewe Train*, Denham is alienated from upper-middleclass society by their predilection for arranging furniture and ornaments: 'She felt listless, and did not

⁷²¹ Sykes, 'The Willowes Pattern' p.1

⁷²² F.M. Mayor, *The Rector's Daughter* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924) p.7

⁷²³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.21

care whether the bureau stood against the window wall or the opposite one, or whether the Cézanne looked its best over the fireplace or elsewhere'.⁷²⁴ In these novels without the determined stasis of the Willows family, furniture can be moved, but always with the sense that there is a 'correct' and final place for it, as though rearranging pieces of a dollhouse to assemble the ideal home.

Domestic objects can also be revelatory about their owners. In 'Property of a Lady' Warner writes of the lady that 'all things belonging to her must look like the property of a lady, it was their doom and hers', and Warner wrote to a friend that 'An old teapot, used daily, can tell me more of my past than anything I recorded of it.'⁷²⁵ The possibility of being analysed by one's objects, even when one is not present, is an invasive element of inhabiting a domesticated space, and these objects semiotically designate their owners and users, acting (like Miss Hargreaves' appendages and Clarissa's clothes) like props representing and establishing character. The relationship between owner, object, and observer is further destabilised when (as in Laura's case) the house is not one's own. Daniel Miller suggests that possessions are haunted by personalities and personal histories; '[t]he very durability and physicality of things make them liable to represent attributes which were not those that an individual desired them to convey'.⁷²⁶ Miller uses an essentially Freudian model of conscious and unconscious, the former being concretised into tangible commodities. (Freud's own room, ironically, was described as being 'cluttered with objects'.)⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴ Macaulay, *Crewe Train* p.248

⁷²⁵ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'The Property of a Lady' *The New Statesman and Nation*, 14/08/33 (1933) 444-445, p.444; Warner and Harman, *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* p.vi. For further discussion of the ways in which possessions are haunted by people/relationships/personal history, see Daniel Miller, 'Possessions' in Daniel Miller (ed.) *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) 107-121

⁷²⁶ Miller, 'Possessions' p.120

⁷²⁷ Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms That Shaped Them* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004) p.78

This trope is taken to fantastic extremes in *Harriet Hume*, subverting domestic iconography. The eponymous heroine of *Harriet Hume* can hear the thoughts of others, principally her would-be lover Arnold Condorex. The novel is ambivalently on the edge of the middlebrow, sidelined by the Provincial Lady:

Am asked what I think of *Harriet Hume* but am unable to say, as I have not read it. Have a depressed feeling that this is going to be another case of *Orlando* about which I was perfectly able to talk most intelligently until I read it, and found myself unfortunately unable to understand any of it.⁷²⁸

As with Leavis' 'Ethel M. Dell', and Priestley's 'wolf', the 'case of *Orlando*' acts as symbolic shorthand – and in this phraseology, effectively a diagnosis. The shorthand is explained: the 'case' is of a difficult novel that she is unable to discuss (the cardinal sin of middlebrow literary reception), at least once she has read it. It is unclear whether the difficulty lies in the fantastic content of *Orlando* and *Harriet Hume* or the experimental manner in which it is presented in these novels; actual receptive engagement is lost in the layers of disingenuousness, self-effacement, and humour which Delafield casts over the 'confession'. In either case, it is evident that these novels are not considered the property of the middlebrow, nor a point of shared identification (except in amused rejection). Yet *Harriet Hume* still engages with the trope of the organisation of domestic objects, which has currency in both middlebrow and highbrow literature – Humble notes that 'domestic space is described in obsessive, coded detail'⁷²⁹ in middlebrow novels between the 1920s and 1950s, and this is one of the more obvious places where middlebrow and modernism overlap.

⁷²⁸ Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.5

⁷²⁹ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.108

Harriet's domestic possessions are not only a representation of herself (as Warner and Miller suggest everyone's possessions must be), but also the representation of her psychic ability. The second occasion of Harriet's telepathy revolves around Condorex's thoughts about a 'box on the mantelshelf [...] a very nice piece of Early Victorian foolishness, lacquered papier-mâché sprayed with mother-of-pearl flowers and golden leaves.'⁷³⁰ He assesses and systematises her life from this microcosm – 'the little things in her house were all so much better than the big' – and tries to gage her class from her objects, faltering at her empty bookshelf. It is this scene which Harriet has witnessed, telepathically, at a distance: "'I was in your mind.'"⁷³¹ Briganti and Mezei suggest that domestic objects are 'an archive of memory';⁷³² here they are more than that. The box becomes the loci for their minds, an archive for all mental engagement, and his non-fantastic investigation is paralleled in her fantastic telepathy.

West uses this innocuous object to demonstrate, even in telepathy, the subjectivity of individual analysis, and the limitation of semiotics: Condorex's detailed, somewhat patronising inspection of the article is reflected as 'my pretty box' in Harriet's account. (In his memory, when the event is faultily recalled, Condorex borrows the same vague adjective: "'that very pretty day.'"⁷³³ His extensive, invasive reading of Harriet's furnishings heightens them, and imbues these objects with talismanic significance; he makes an unbreakable association between the woman and her possessions. His reading cannot be authorially condemned, since West twists the scene around to perform the same association: the box itself incorporates materials disguised as flowers and leaves, uncannily pretending to be natural in the same way

⁷³⁰ West, *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* p.15

⁷³¹ *Ibid.* p.27

⁷³² Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* p.51

⁷³³ West, *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* p.94

that Harriet cloaks a supernatural ability within a natural frame. *Harriet Hume* undermines the safety of the home, not merely through questioning the inviolability of boundaries (spatial and psychological) but by elevating the significance of domestic articles beyond their geography. A middlebrow emphasis upon furnishings is thus subverted to an uneasy overdetermination; there are, as Warner writes in her diary, ‘[n]o possible counter-sallies against the inanimate’.⁷³⁴ they expose the owner to scrutiny, or impel the observer to an automatic analytical process, with little room for defence or volition.

These objects are not simply revelatory, but can act transformatively. Laura Willowes’ sensitivity to environment means that she is aware that an alteration in domestic surroundings is akin to a change in self: ‘sleeping in a smart brass bedstead instead of her old and rather pompous four-poster, wearing unaccustomed clothes and performing unaccustomed duties, she seemed to herself to have become a different person.’⁷³⁵ She is preternaturally aware that surroundings and the presence of objects are not passive, but affect and reflect the personality, and have a personality of their own. A bed is anthropomorphised as ‘pompous’, and the adjective ‘unaccustomed’ could (syntactically) refer equally to Laura’s unfamiliarity with the clothes and duties, or the clothes’ and duties’ own inexperience, animating these inanimate quantities.⁷³⁶

Laura is also physically marked by the house. She gets chilblains, and while embroidering, ‘[e]ach time that a strand of silk rasped against her fingers she

⁷³⁴ Warner and Harman, *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* p.71

⁷³⁵ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.61

⁷³⁶ Clothes also play a significant role in Orlando’s transformation, with the narrative of *Orlando* putting forward the idea that ‘it is clothes that wear us and not we them’, and also the contrasting view that ‘[c]lothes are but a symbol of something hid deep beneath.’ [Woolf, *Orlando* p.180] In Laura’s case, the clothes cannot eradicate that which is ‘deep beneath’ the surface – in terms of independence, rather than gender – but they do mask and, at this point, subsume it.

shuddered inwardly.⁷³⁷ This marking by the house and household duties foreshadows the mark believed to be found on the body of a witch, as noted by Margaret Murray in *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*: ‘The ceremony concluded by giving the witch a mark or ‘flesh-brand’ on some part of the body.’⁷³⁸

‘A Constant Flux’:⁷³⁹ the quasi-metamorphosis of Laura Willowes

The branding of Laura by the house is one example of an iterated trope in the novel, writ large in the novel’s overall transition from a traditional domestic novel (often compared to Jane Austen)⁷⁴⁰ into the fantastic: that of quasi-metamorphosis. Just as Laura becomes a witch but remains, in many essentials, the same character, so the *leitmotif* of combined changing and not-changing recurs throughout. Quasi-metamorphosis is not the static image of the partial or fragmented, rather it is an incomplete process – one that is begun, but stalls before reaching the point of absolute metamorphosis; Laura is a changing entity, but never a fully-changed one. Warner writes in ‘Women as Writers’ of

[...] bi-location. It is well known that a woman can be in two places at once; at her desk and at her washing-machine. [...] Her mind is so extensive that it can simultaneously follow a train of thought, remember what it was she had to tell the electrician, answer the telephone, keep an eye on the time, and not forget about the potatoes.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.45; p.46. Chilblains as a form of marking is noted by Nesbitt, ‘Footsteps of Red Ink: Body and Landscape in *Lolly Willowes*’ p.457

⁷³⁸ Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* p.76

⁷³⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.193

⁷⁴⁰ Contemporary reviewers noted that Warner had ‘a Jane Austen kind of humour’, an Austenesque ‘sly and almost subdued comedy’ and ‘exquisite poise’, and ‘a irony as subtle as Jane Austen’s’. [Christopher Morley, *Saturday Review of Literature* (6/2/26); Edwin Clark, ‘Perfect Portrait of a Maiden Aunt’, *New York Times* (7/2/26); *The Times* (N.Y.) (27/6/26); M.S.P., *Dublin Review* (July-Sept 1926), all Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading] Warner herself called Austen ‘a completely worldly artist’. [Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Jane Austen’, in *The British Council and The National Book League* (eds.), (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1951) p.7]

⁷⁴¹ Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘Women as Writers (1959)’ in Bonnie Kine Scott (ed.) *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington; Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990) 538-546, p.540. Garrity borrows the term ‘bi-location’ in her chapter ‘Encoding Bi-location: Sylvia

Warner starts by discussing multiple activities, but transfers these ‘locations’ into the mind, emphasising the elasticity of its boundaries. The examples Warner chooses would not be out of place in Delafield’s *Provincial Lady* books, and refer to examples which, if not exclusively middlebrow, certainly resonate with that audience. For Laura, moments of bi-location prefigure her eventual quasi-metamorphosis into witch, occurring most significantly in the florist where she first decides to move to the countryside, where iteration of ‘she forgot’ demonstrates the extent to which place and placement are mental constructs for Laura, vulnerable to imaginative manipulation:

As Laura stood waiting she felt a great longing. It weighed upon her like the load of ripened fruit upon a tree. She forgot the shop, the other customers, her own errand. She forgot the winter air outside, the people going by on the wet pavements. She forgot that she was in London, she forgot the whole of her London life. She seemed to be standing alone in a darkening orchard, her feet in the grass, her arms stretched up to the pattern of leaves and fruit, her fingers seeking the rounded ovals of the fruit among the pointed ovals of the leaves.⁷⁴²

Laura creates a projected ideal, having started with the innocuous jars, devising (like Woolf’s ‘The Mark on the Wall’) the narrative behind a simple object, and imagines herself to be the ‘solitary old woman’ who may have picked the fruit that filled the jars, ‘standing with arms among her fruit trees as though she were a tree herself’.⁷⁴³

Images of (potential) arboreal metamorphoses also recur in Warner’s poetry. In her first volume, *The Espalier*, ‘Wish in Spring’ includes the line towards the end: ‘To-

Townsend Warner and the Primitive Erotics of Sapphic Dissimulation’, but understands it slightly differently from my interpretation, ultimately using it to allege the significance of lesbianism in *Lolly Willowes*. [Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* p.149; p.144]

⁷⁴² Warner, *Lolly Willowes* pp.83f

⁷⁴³ Ibid. p.83

day I wish that I were a tree / and not myself',⁷⁴⁴ while in *Time Importuned*, a woman appears to fall in love with a tree in 'The Espousal': '[...] looked up into the throng / Of boughs as looking up into a husband's face.'⁷⁴⁵ Warner treats all these images as the logical outcome of an affinity with nature, but these illustrations of metamorphosis are always incomplete, being foreshortened by the marks of simile ('as though'), imagination ('seemed to be'), or aspiration ('I wish'). Alongside the quasi-metamorphoses is the image of Eve and her fatal reaching for the apple, thus foreshadowing the eventual entrance of Satan in the novel. Laura later makes the comparison with Eve herself, because Mr. Saunter reminds her of Adam.⁷⁴⁶ The image of the apple recurs throughout the novel, associated with the displaced Aunt Emmy returning from India ('Emmy picked up the windfall apples and ate them with the greed of the exile') and acquisitive Titus ('how greedily he was eating that apple').⁷⁴⁷ It acts like a domestic possession, exposing the qualities of the possessor.

The bi-location of the scene is, of course, the dual locations of shop and orchard, overlaid as competing environments, and yet both are individually liminal spaces, offering alternatives to the home: the shop is dressed like a home, but is not one; the orchard is obviously not an inherently domestic place, but it is treated as one through Laura's project version of it. The 'pattern of leaves and fruit', with its neatly interspersed 'rounded ovals' and 'pointed ovals' is suggestive of a wooden carving or a recurring pattern in a tapestry; an imitation rather than the actual thing. The wildness and wilderness which some critics identify in Laura's escape to the

⁷⁴⁴ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Espalier* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1925) p.6

⁷⁴⁵ Warner, *Time Importuned* p.13

⁷⁴⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.132. David Garnett extends this image to the novel as a whole, writing 'I have just read *Lolly Willowes* – and I like it so much that I feel it almost indelicate to tell you how much – an embarrassment which Adam may have felt in thanking God for Eve.' [Warner, Garnett, and Garnett, *Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner/Garnett Letters* p.26]

⁷⁴⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.27; p.91

countryside is actually regulated by the ordered and domesticated version of the natural which impels Laura's move. This pattern both echoes and replaces the systemised tradition in which she has been encumbered; Laura is abandoning one pattern and creating a new one.

'The bugaboo surmises of the public':⁷⁴⁸ subverting stereotypes of the witch

Although the ongoing thread of houses and spatial dependencies frames Laura's motivation for inviting the fantastic, the most significant moment in the metamorphosis/creation narrative is Laura's transformation into a witch. This takes place (notably) nine months after she has moved to the village of Great Mop. If moving was a form of conceiving her new life, becoming a witch is the eventual birth. It is the quintessential quasi-metamorphosis in *Lolly Willowes*, shown by the latent indications of Laura's 'witchiness' which are carried across the fantastic divide into her new realisation of self. 'Even in the old days of Lady Place the impulse had stirred in her.'⁷⁴⁹ For instance, Laura has a 'hook nose' and 'sharp chin', writes a book recommending herbs medicinally, and has 'inherited a fancy for brewing.'⁷⁵⁰ Playing with the witch-with-cauldron image, which later in the novel Warner resists and subverts, she identifies the overlap between witchcraft and the spinster who is simply interested in nature.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid. p.175

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid. p.176

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid. p.59; p.31

⁷⁵¹ Warner herself had a similar interest in herbs, listing sixteen she considered essential in an article on countryside living – Oliver Warner described her as 'essentially a rebel', but one with a paradoxical 'knowledge of the domestic crafts – of herbs and cookery.' [Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'I Cook On Oil' in J.W. Robertson Scott (ed.) *The Countryman Book* (London: Odhams Press, 1948) 136-138; Warner, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner' p.9]

The cultural image of the witch may be subverted in *Lolly Willowes*, but it is always present *as* a stereotype to distort. L.P. Hartley writes that ‘Miss Willowes ought to have been either more or less a witch. She has the temperament, critical, wayward, unsociable, without the credentials. She is not eldritch enough.’⁷⁵² His demand for an eldritch witch reflects the preponderance of the witch-figure in cultural and popular knowledge. *Lolly Willowes* itself mentions the image of ‘the witch, who lived alone in the wood, her cottage window all grown over with brambles’.⁷⁵³ (It is unclear, at this point, whether this is observed by the narrator or part of Laura’s indirect discourse.) This presentation of the witch is certainly that which predominates in other witchcraft novels of the interwar period. Stella Benson’s *Living Alone* is humorous, rather than ‘eldritch’, but her witches have broomsticks and reincarnate, and the author’s note proudly (if facetiously) states that ‘This is not a real book. It does not deal with real people, nor should it be read by real people.’⁷⁵⁴ The title, *Living Alone*, initially appears to suggest some similarities with Warner’s treatment of the spatiality of the spinster aunt, but ‘Living Alone’ is, in fact, the name of a somewhat eccentric boarding house for witches – a community with fiercely resists community: ‘guests must spend at least eighteen hours out of the twenty-four entirely alone. No guest may entertain or be entertained except under special licence’.⁷⁵⁵ The novel is too peculiar and satirical to present a genuine call for spatial independence.

Glen Cavaliero lists other practitioners of novels about witchcraft in the 1920s and ‘30s, describing Benfield’s *Bachelor’s Knap* (1935) as ‘torrid’, Frances Carmichael’s *The Witch of Brent* (1934) as ‘restrained’, and noting that Charlotte M. Peake’s 1923

⁷⁵² Hartley, ‘New Fiction’ p.165

⁷⁵³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.147

⁷⁵⁴ Stella Benson, *Living Alone* (Gloucester: Dodo Press, 1919 repr.2007) p.8; p.11; p.[i]

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.14

novel *Pagan Corner* ‘focuse[s] on the psychology of witchcraft’, but not with any great literary success.⁷⁵⁶ Kate Macdonald similarly identifies a ‘significant cultural phase [...for] works dealing with witchcraft’⁷⁵⁷ in the 1920s, noting works by ten other authors, and arguing that the neglect of these works – and the critical focus upon Warner’s other novels – is because ‘witches are not generally academically respectable.’⁷⁵⁸ It is also probable that other contemporary novelists were simply not as (re)inventive with their witch characters, and left less for later critical analysis, because the witch (unlike the fantastic creator) was so firmly established as a recognisable cultural referent. As such, the witch is found often in encyclopaedic delineations of the fantastic. Penzoldt writes, ‘[m]ore than all other supernatural figures, the witch has been transformed and idealised in literature.’⁷⁵⁹ As one reviewer noted at the time of publication,

[t]he orthodox witch of fiction is – or was – a specimen of one of two distinct types: either the hairy, hideous hag, moustached and nut-crackered, bearing the outward signs of her evil trafficking for all to see, or else a handsome, black-haired, green-eyed sinister beauty, whose loveliness was that of some fair but poisonous flower.⁷⁶⁰

He adds that Laura Willowes is, instead, ‘simply a quite delightful aunt’. Although Warner resists these caricatures of the bewitching woman (in both senses of ‘bewitching’), the qualities Hartley anticipates from the archetypal witch (of a ‘critical, wayward, unsociable’ temperament) are also those commonly associated

⁷⁵⁶ Glen Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1977) p.40. Peake’s novel concentrates on the rural influence upon witchcraft and, like Laura, its heroine Polly is initially called by Nature: ‘The earth herself sets her mark on some, and she can call and guard her own.’ [C.M.A. Peake, *Pagan Corner* (London: Methuen, 1923) p.27]

⁷⁵⁷ Kate Macdonald, ‘Witchcraft and Non-conformity in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowes* (1926) and John Buchan’s *Witch Wood* (1927)’ *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 23/2 (2012) 215-238, p.215

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p.219

⁷⁵⁹ Penzoldt, *The Supernatural in Fiction* pp.43f

⁷⁶⁰ ‘An Apology for Witchcraft’, *Bolton Evening News* (18/5/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

with the figure of the spinster aunt. The idea of spinster-as-outsider (even within her own home, should she live with relatives) is taken to its extreme in the witch, and a linguistic overlap for the commonalities between spinster and witch, to which the narrative often returns, is the word ‘odd’.

‘Odd’ indicates both the strange and the superfluous, and there are many similarities between Laura Willowes and ‘the very odd creature’⁷⁶¹ Miss Ogilvy, of Radclyffe Hall’s ‘Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself’, which was written shortly after *Lolly Willowes* though not published until 1934. Miss Ogilvy decides on a whim (“‘I’m off!’” she announced abruptly one day’) to go to an island off Devon.⁷⁶² Like Warner, Hall constructs her narrative around a metamorphosis inspired by the pre-modern – Miss Ogilvy morphs into a caveman – but, unlike Warner, Hall’s metamorphosis is accompanied by an alteration of the period in which the story is set, to prehistoric time, rather than an atavistic transformation taking place alongside contemporary society. While ‘Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself’ is clearly a coded depiction of lesbianism, *Lolly Willowes* uses ‘oddness’ to connote and discuss a wider subset of unmarried women and, when she moves to Great Mop, is pleased that the fellow witches ‘do not mind if you are a little odd in your ways’.⁷⁶³

Yet, Laura’s seeming victory is only partly due to being surrounded by others equally odd (thus altering the localised concept of normality). Chiefly it is indifference (foreshadowing the final line of the novel, regarding Satan’s ‘satisfied but profoundly

⁷⁶¹ Radclyffe Hall, ‘Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself’ *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself* (London: William Heinemann, 1934) 3-34, p.8

⁷⁶² *Ibid.* p.17

⁷⁶³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.246

indifferent ownership')⁷⁶⁴ which leads to Laura's freedom in this area. Unlike *The Corner That Held Them* or *Summer Will Show*, *Lolly Willowes* is a novel wherein, as Bruce Knoll points out, 'Warner allows Laura no community of any kind',⁷⁶⁵ and there cannot be said to be any sort of utopian feminist sisterhood: it must be remembered that the sorority of witches is also a fraternity of warlocks (even if Laura 'can't take warlocks so seriously',⁷⁶⁶), and Mr. Saunter is as close a companion as any of the women Laura encounters in the village.

Lolly Willowes addresses the spinster-as-witch conceit overtly:

"Think of Miss Carloe! She's a typical witch, people would say. Really she's the typical genteel spinster who's spent herself being useful to people who didn't want her."⁷⁶⁷

The metamorphosis of self at the centre of *Lolly Willowes* is undermined by the idea that Laura was already of the witch species. As aforementioned, G.K. Chesterton argues in an essay on 'Magic and Fantasy in Fiction' that 'black magic is that which blots out or disguises the true form of a thing; while white magic, in the good sense, restores it to its own form and not another.'⁷⁶⁸ In Laura's case, the distinctions of white and black magic which Chesterton borrows from fairy-tale and myth are not applicable. Transformation paradoxically acts as a restoration – or, more accurately, the uncovering and fulfilling – of her personality. Her physical form does not change, but the more complex and subtle sphere of Laura's identity can be revived. Having

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid. p.247

⁷⁶⁵ Bruce Knoll, "'An Existence Doled Out': Passive Resistance as a Dead End in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*' *Twentieth Century Literature*, 39/3 (1993) 344-363, p.361

⁷⁶⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.134

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid. p.239. Similarly, in Edith Olivier's memoir of her sister *Mildred*, she writes '[b]uilt into the garden wall was a tiny cottage, and in this cottage lived an old woman who looked like a witch' and Mildred and her friends played 'pretending they saw her fly off her broomstick every night.' [Edith Olivier, 'Mildred Olivier' *Mildred* (Shaftesbury: High House Press, 1926) 1-18, pp.13f]

⁷⁶⁸ Chesterton, 'Magic and Fantasy in Fiction' p.161

previously been determined by set patterns, transformation allows her to follow a new pattern of living, but one closer to her innate personality (albeit not patterns which ultimately allow her absolute freedom).

Within *Lolly Willowes*, Laura considers witchcraft almost inevitable for those spinsters who have been considered entirely unshocking, and subjugated to an imposed stereotype:

[F]or so many, what can there be but witchcraft? That strikes them real. Even if other people still find them quite safe and usual, and go on poking with them, they know in their hearts how dangerous, how incalculable, how extraordinary they are.⁷⁶⁹

As John Lucas notes, Warner writes ‘strikes them real’ rather than the more collocative ‘strikes them as real’, labelling this a ‘refusal of simile’.⁷⁷⁰ Laura has made the transition from a world of imagery to that where the real has been infiltrated by the fantastic. It is the inability to be assessed by an outsider – to be ‘incalculable’ – which Laura argues makes the spinster fitted to be a witch. Ironically, the failure to recognise danger in unmarried women is reflected in reception of *Lolly Willowes* itself. Warner wrote to David Garnett (who saw ‘such a passion, a storm’⁷⁷¹ in Laura’s actions) that:

Other people who have seen *Lolly* have told me that it was charming, that it was distinguished, and my mother said it was almost as good as Galsworthy. And my heart sank lower and lower, I felt as though I had tried to make a sword only to be told what a pretty pattern was on the blade. But you have sent me a drop of blood.⁷⁷²

⁷⁶⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.237

⁷⁷⁰ John Lucas, 'From Realism to Radicalism: Sylvia Townsend Warner, Patrick Hamilton and Henry Green in the 1920s' in Lynne Hapgood and Nancy L. Paxton (eds.) *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel 1900-1930* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000) p.208

⁷⁷¹ Warner, Garnett, and Garnett, *Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner/Garnett Letters* p.26

⁷⁷² *Ibid.* p.26

Her image is tellingly close to the witch's familiar in *Lolly Willowes*, the kitten which Laura imagines 'sucked, not milk, but blood'.⁷⁷³ Although in initial reviews she is more frequently compared to Austen or Walter de la Mare than Galsworthy, and most of all compared to David Garnett himself, contemporary readers and reviewers did indeed assert *Lolly Willowes* 'charming', a 'short, happy novel', and 'a demure, rather audacious joke'.⁷⁷⁴ Hartley dismisses any idea that Warner 'set out to make your flesh creep', while another reviewer criticises Chatto & Windus' advertising campaign for 'mak[ing] out that this first novel is a sensational story of a witch who "walked with Satan"' when it is in fact, yes – 'charming'.⁷⁷⁵ Although Hartley is right that *Lolly Willowes* does not belong in a tradition of chilling horror narratives, some reviewers failed to find any category between Gothic horror and the 'charming' domestic novel. Warner's frustration is that, being clearly outside the remit of the former, reviewers instantly place her amongst the latter.

Garnett also wrote (to Warner's American publishers) that she was the 'first woman to reveal the spiritual side of the witch-cult [...] the psychological craving for witchcraft'.⁷⁷⁶ Just as the hypothetical 'Miss Carloe' is said to have 'spent herself' – as though her identity were a currency which has run out – Laura explains the lack of autonomy felt by unmarried women, and the domestic drudgery, which leads them towards witchcraft:

It is we witches who count. We have more need of you. Women have such vivid imaginations, and lead such dull lives. Their pleasure in life is so soon

⁷⁷³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.171

⁷⁷⁴ Williams, 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*' p.78; C.H.W., 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*' p.326; Naomi Royde-Smith, 'By The Same Author' *Time and Tide*, 03/06/27 (1927) 523-524, p.523

⁷⁷⁵ Hartley, 'New Fiction' p.165; 'Amiable Witch and Agreeable Devil', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (9/4/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁷⁷⁶ Warner, Garnett, and Garnett, *Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner/Garnett Letters* pp.27f

over; they are so dependent upon others, and their dependence so soon becomes a nuisance.⁷⁷⁷

Although, as discussed, the novel is not an unswerving attack on patriarchy (here again, the dependency is on ‘others’ rather than on men), it is telling that Laura uses the pronoun ‘we’ for witches and ‘their’ for women; by taking on the identity of the witch, Laura seemingly relinquished the role of woman and its attached identity.

Whether the nuisance to which Laura refers is suffered by the women or those upon whom they are dependent – or both – is not clear, but the word ‘nuisance’ is particularly middlebrow in its understatement: it is hardly a word which seems likely to provoke eternal questions of the soul. Yet Winifred Holtby writes similarly, about women at the time of the Reformation, echoing the same language of domestic dependency despite the obvious cultural differences between the 1920s and the sixteenth century:

In an age where women were almost entirely relegated to domestic activity, [...] the unmarried girl was inevitably “odd man out.” Independence being almost unheard of, she had to live in some other woman’s house, and to remain subject to the will of mother, aunt or sister. [...] [S]he might, seeking illicitly for pleasures lawfully denied her, join the tragic fellowship of witches.⁷⁷⁸

The phrase ‘odd man out’ masculinises the unmarried girl, and again, becoming a witch seems to be a denial of the feminine, or the refuge for one who has already been denied a feminine role. It is striking that Holtby comments upon the imperious will of ‘mother, aunt or sister’ and the confines of ‘some other woman’s house’, rather than a man’s, reflecting the domestic tyranny Laura feels at the hands of her sisters-in-law. It is, indeed, the absence of men which Holtby identifies as a catalyst. She suggests

⁷⁷⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.234

⁷⁷⁸ Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilisation* p.128

that these women were seeking ‘ecstasy, power and devotion – which for most of her companions were provided by their marital experience.’⁷⁷⁹ In substituting the devil as a husband figure, Holtby goes further than Warner. There is no suggestion that Laura and Satan have any carnal relationship. Barbara Brothers has even suggested the interesting idea that Satan is more aptly akin to a psychologist, listening to Laura’s ‘long reveries’.⁷⁸⁰ Yet Warner does comment on those tried as witches, referencing Margaret Murray’s *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, that ‘these witches were witches for love; that witchcraft was more than Miss Murray’s Dianic cult; it was the romance of their hard lives, their release from dull futures’.⁷⁸¹ Warner uses ‘romance’ in a broad sense; the injection of excitement into their lives, and the opportunity to be passionate, rather than necessarily amorous. In *Lolly Willowes*, Warner creates a character whose life is restrictive rather than ‘hard’, and who never lacks the creativity of imagination. Her transformation is not the result of a paucity of romance in her character, but the overflow of a creative impulse which resents its spatially-defined confines.

Warner’s use of Margaret Murray’s 1921 text reflects her wider use of source material, and her focus upon historiography rather than literature (such as *Faustus*, which is never mentioned). Unlike *Lady Into Fox* and its whimsical allusions to facts about the traits of foxes ‘well confirmed by Æsop’,⁷⁸² *Lolly Willowes* is determinedly detached from literary precedent, and Warner documents research using solely

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid. p.128

⁷⁸⁰ Barbara Brothers, ‘Flying the Nets at Forty: *Lolly Willowes* as Female Bildungsroman’ in Laura L. Doan (ed.) *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 195-212, p.209

⁷⁸¹ Quoted in Claire Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989) p.59

⁷⁸² Garnett, *Lady into Fox* p.13, p.53

(purported) non-fiction. She recounts her early interest in witchcraft, in a magazine coincidentally called *Eve*:

I was about ten years old, and had begun to find reading a pleasure, when I happened on a book called "Mackay's Popular Delusions." [...] It was very Victorian, rationalistic and superior, and it had a respectable, fusty smell. [...] The writer felt contempt for the witches, but his contempt was qualified by pity'.⁷⁸³

Warner's article (though largely in jest; she professes to be a witch herself, and advocates the use of vacuum cleaners instead of broomsticks) is somewhat unfair in its critique of Mackay: his contempt is largely reserved for the witch-hunters, and 'pity' understates his lament that 'thousands upon thousands of unhappy persons fell victims to this cruel and absurd delusion'.⁷⁸⁴ Yet, in the same way that twentieth-century creation narratives domesticate the conceit in *Frankenstein*, Warner uses accounts of medieval witchcraft and transfers them to the ordinary and commonplace houses of the middlebrow audience.

While Mackay descried the activities of witch-hunters against innocent women, Murray discusses women of past centuries who openly confessed to being witches (but does not consider any period more recent.) Murray also became aware of the use of her book, receiving a copy of *Lolly Willowes* from Chatto & Windus, at the advice of David Garnett,⁷⁸⁵ and she wrote to Warner appreciatively, calling the novel 'one of the finest & most human presentations of a witch that I know.' Her only qualm was

⁷⁸³ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'Modern Witches' *Eve*, 18/08/26 (1926) 331; 366, p.331

⁷⁸⁴ Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (Boston: L.C. Page, 1841 repr.1986) p.463

⁷⁸⁵ Warner and Maxwell, *Letters* p.9

that the devil in *Lolly Willowes* 'is not the devil of the witches but the devil of the Christians'.⁷⁸⁶

'You are too lifelike to be natural':⁷⁸⁷ Laura's Satan

Later critics have called Warner's Satan 'sensibly unorthodox rather than satanic' and 'a wise, understanding, and gentle protector: not at all the evil creature depicted in Christian scriptures.'⁷⁸⁸ Murray is, however, right to suggest that Satan in *Lolly Willowes* is that shown in the Bible. Warner's Satan is not depicted as cartoonishly evil, but then neither is he in Scripture. When Satan does appear in human form in the Bible, tempting Jesus in the desert, his guise is precisely the persuasive, wise, and sympathetic figure used in *Lolly Willowes*.⁷⁸⁹ In replicating this figure, Warner's fantastic pivot is quietly integrated into the scene of the domestic novel, and when Laura suggests he is 'too lifelike to be natural', she recognises Satan's hyperreality in the narrative, making him an uncanny figure simply because he refutes the anticipated distinction between familiar and unfamiliar which usually accompanies the entrance of the supernatural.

⁷⁸⁶ Margaret Murray, letter to Warner (03/02/26), Sylvia Townsend Warner Archives (Q(LBL)/1/M/26), Dorset County Museum. Murray particularly objected to the sentence which commented on the 'success of his [Satan's] recent battle in Flanders'. Her own view of the witches' devil was that he 'was God, manifest and incarnate [...] and there are indications that, like many another god, he was sacrificed for the good of his people.' [Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* p.28]

⁷⁸⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* pp.234f

⁷⁸⁸ Wendy Rowland, 'Paperbacks' *Literary Review*, December (1993) 13-15, p.15; Knoll, "'An Existence Doled Out': Passive Resistance as a Dead End in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*' p.355

⁷⁸⁹ In another fantastic novel published the same year, Helen Beauclerk's *The Green Lacquer Pavilion*, a character states that "'Satan is a great and a noble spirit [...] and the foolish monster whom men call the devil has naught to do with him.'" As a depiction, it was unsettling but not unique in the 1920s. [Helen Beauclerk, *The Green Lacquer Pavilion* (London: Penguin, 1926 repr.1937) p.30]

Warner's Satan does, however, continue the theme of concealed and changing identities in the novel. The first man Laura thinks is the devil is, in fact, simply a man in a mask that (in ironic contrast to the fluidity of Satan's identity) renders him 'alert and immobile'.⁷⁹⁰ When she does encounter Satan, she initially mistakes him for the gardener, as Mary mistook Jesus shortly after His resurrection. As well as this subtle Biblical allusion, the conflation of Satan and gardener alludes to the affinity he has with nature in the novel:

It was a though the grass were in league with him, faithfully playing-up to his pose of being a quite everyday phenomenon.⁷⁹¹

His disguise is to appear 'everyday', in 'gaiters and a corduroy coat'⁷⁹² – fittingly, since Murray notes that in accounts of the 'devil' appearing in previous centuries, 'in ordinary clothes he was indistinguishable from any other man of his own rank or age'.⁷⁹³ Unlike other depictions of the devil in 1920s fiction, he is resolutely human in appearance and manner – traits seen later in Dougal Douglas, Muriel Spark's devil-character in *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*.⁷⁹⁴ As with Warner's quotidian presentation of the witch, her commonplace devil met with some protest from reviewers. Edwin Muir writes that her 'conception of the devil' is 'disappointing. To her, we feel, he is the devil in much the same sense as Mr. Smith is Mr. Smith. In other words, he is a person with a name.'⁷⁹⁵ Naming is far from an innocuous activity in *Lolly Willowes*,

⁷⁹⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.200. The idea of the mask may have come from Murray's book. [Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* p.62]

⁷⁹¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.244

⁷⁹² Ibid. p.204

⁷⁹³ Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* p.31

⁷⁹⁴ Although Dougal is not overtly Satan, he has the marks of 'horns' on his forehead, and wreaks evil in a community. Other portrayals of the devil in the 1920s include Richard Hughes' story 'The Stranger' in *A Moment of Time* – reviewed alongside *Lolly Willowes* in *The Nation & Athenaeum*. His devil is, conversely, 'a grotesque thing, with misshapen ears and a broad, flat nose' who sits on coals and is pained by touching the Bible. [Muriel Spark, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (London: Macmillan, 1960); Richard Hughes, *A Moment of Time* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926) p.60]

⁷⁹⁵ Muir, 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*' p.782

and Satan is not, in fact, given a name. His identity is not tied down in this manner – rather, he complements the uncertain and changing identity of Laura. While presenting these fluid selfhoods in human form, Satan paradoxically also represents the unalterable. He comments “[o]nce a wood, always a wood”,⁷⁹⁶ ignoring the lopped trees, since he is impervious to change from his eternal perspective. Nature may appear ‘in league’ with him, but he is insensitive to its flexibilities: an indication of the limitations of his sympathies.

For, contrary to many interpretations, Satan does not represent a triumphant solution to Laura’s troubles. As he says to Laura:

“[Y]ou are in my power. No servant of mine can feel remorse, or doubt, or surprise. You may be quite easy, Laura: you will never escape me, for you can never wish to.”⁷⁹⁷

His shifting identity is reflected in his imprecise use of words: ‘you can never wish to’ could be interpreted as either ‘you would never wish to’ or ‘you may never wish to’. The former indicates that her situation will be too pleasant to wish to change; the latter suggests that, no matter how unpleasant, she cannot escape. This interpretation seems more probable; it is certainly more connotative with ‘power’ and ‘servant’. The published novel ends with Satan’s ‘undesiring and unjudging gaze, his satisfied but profoundly indifferent ownership.’⁷⁹⁸ The limits of Laura’s supposed freedom are emphasised by having ‘ownership’ as the final word of the novel. Although he does not desire or judge her, it is difficult to assert ‘indifferent’ as a positive quality, when in conjunction with ownership. Had a male *relative* restricted her emotions in this manner, without even affection, the critical consensus of *Lolly Willowes* would

⁷⁹⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.230

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid. p.233

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid. p.247

doubtless steer sharply away from its current avowal of a feminist manifesto. It is rather astonishing that Jane Marcus can quote the novel's final line and immediately add that Laura is 'a free woman'; that Gerd Bjørhovde considers her an 'autonomous subject', even while using the term 'Master', and that Barbara Brothers can surmise that Laura is 'vowing to serve her own desires and not those of a man'.⁷⁹⁹ Satan is the ultimate power-hungry man, 'the most arrogantly chauvinist of all power figures', as Eleanor Perényi puts it.⁸⁰⁰ Murray's *Witch-Cult in Western Europe* relates that the devil sometimes appeared as a woman; this option was open to Warner, and she chose not to take it.⁸⁰¹ The maleness of Laura's ultimate captor cannot be sidelined to make a simpler reading of the novel.

Laura is not even free from the social mores of the middlebrow world she escapes, since these so fixedly characterise the dynamics of *Great Mop*. Warner described herself as having 'always been interested in the supernatural in its social aspects'.⁸⁰² The far-reaching effects of Laura's social milieu are demonstrated in the middlebrow translation of witchcraft in the novel. Instead of voodoo dolls, Laura makes voodoo scones, 'cut[ting] the dough into the likenesses of the village people',⁸⁰³ and by domesticating the occult, does not sever links with the domestic. In her humorous

⁷⁹⁹ Jane Marcus, 'A Wilderness of One's Own': Feminist Fantasy Novels of the Twenties: Rebecca West and Sylvia Townsend Warner' in Susan Merrill Squier (ed.) *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984) 134-160, p.157; Gerd Bjørhovde, 'Transformation and Subversion as Narrative Strategies in Two Fantasy Novels of the 1920s' in Peter Bilton et al. (eds.) *Essays in Honour of Kristian Smidt* (Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo, 1986) 213-224, pp.216f; Brothers, 'Flying the Nets at Forty: *Lolly Willowes* as Female Bildungsroman' p.199

⁸⁰⁰ Perényi, 'The Good Witch of the West' p.30

⁸⁰¹ Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* p.31. Brothers writes that Satan's 'maleness is an attribute ascribed by the [faith] Warner attacks rather than of the character she presents', but it is difficult to agree with this, given Warner's other liberties; Satan simply *is* male in the novel; his maleness is an awkward fact that some critics of the novel wish wasn't there. [Brothers, 'Flying the Nets at Forty: *Lolly Willowes* as Female Bildungsroman' p.209]

⁸⁰² Warner, Warner, and Schmidt, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner in Conversation' p.36

⁸⁰³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.142

Eve article, Warner describes the triumphs of witchcraft in a manner redolent of middlebrow women's magazines:

Why are some women so successful in all they do? They grow the largest sweet peas, they have the neatest sandwiches, their complexions are so permanent, the backs of their necks are so small; their children always have measles at school and never at home, and everyone enjoys their dinner parties.⁸⁰⁴

A more domiciliary roll call of successes could scarcely be imagined. One newspaper responded to *Lolly Willowes* on such a domestic level that 'ever since I read Sylvia Townsend Warner's amazing book "Lolly Willowes" I've been bitten by the desire to try my hand at cordials. The result has been loganberry vinegar[...]', and proceeded to give the recipe.⁸⁰⁵ Even the most uncanny aspects of witchcraft in *Lolly Willowes* are tied to the domestic commonplaces of Laura's previous existence, through the imagery Warner uses. The music of the witches, for instance, is 'something like mosquitoes in a hot bedroom'.⁸⁰⁶ This particular image is one of annoyance and stuffiness, rather than emancipation, and the claustrophobia of the hostile home persists into this new sphere.

The scene in *Lolly Willowes* most reflective of middlebrow society is, in fact, the Witches' Sabbath. As well as exemplifying the novel's theme of change and fluidity ('The etiquette of a Sabbath appeared to consist of one rule only: to do nothing for long. Partners came and went, figures and conformations were in a constant flux')⁸⁰⁷ Warner makes overt comparisons between this event and a social dance – wondering 'whether at length Mrs. Leak would come, like a chaperone from the supper-room,

⁸⁰⁴ Warner, 'Modern Witches' p.331

⁸⁰⁵ 'Mirror Cookery Book', *The Daily Mirror* (15/7/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁸⁰⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.194

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.193

and say: “Well, my dear, I really must take you home””.⁸⁰⁸ This imagined scenario and dialogue are quintessentially and cloyingly part of the social apparatus she has longed to escape, and reference to a ‘chaperone’ underlines the drawbacks of her status as an unmarried woman. The unsuccessful Sabbath is the first indication that the witch is not a wholly triumphant symbol. Laura cannot escape from the restrictions of social awkwardness:

Their dance was short, she supposed she had not acquitted herself to her partner’s satisfaction, for after a few turns he released her, and left her standing by the hedge. Not a word had passed between them. Laura felt that she ought to say something, but she could not think of a suitable opening. It was scarcely possible to praise the floor.

A familiar discouragement began to settle upon her spirits. In spite of her hopes she was not going to enjoy herself. Even as a witch, it seemed, she was doomed to social failure, and her first Sabbath was not going to open livelier vistas than were opened by her first ball.⁸⁰⁹

The kinetic activity of the ‘turns’ (reflecting her own initiated metamorphosis) swiftly becomes the mundane stasis of ‘standing by the hedge’; Laura’s change of self is equally abruptly halted, and tied to her previous hubris. Again, the word ‘familiar’ comes back to haunt her. Laura is disappointed not to escape the pitfalls of her previous experiences with society, even (sardonically) lamenting the inadequacy of grass as a dance floor, rather than revelling in the natural world. Significantly, there is no indication in Murray’s *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* that Sabbaths (described by Murray as ‘joyous gaiety’)⁸¹⁰ included dances with partners – instead the ‘two principal forms of the dance were the ring-dance and the follow-my-leader

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid. pp.197f

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid. pp.190f

⁸¹⁰ Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* p.97

dance⁸¹¹. Warner herself introduces the partner dance, to reinforce the limitations of Laura's quest for freedom.

'She smiled at the thought of having the house all to herself'⁸¹² : Laura's independent space

The sole triumph of Laura's recourse to the fantastic – which is not community or personal autonomy – is her securement of spatial autonomy; it is ultimately this which she believes has become 'inviolable' after her compact with the devil.⁸¹³ Yet her affiliation with her new home is not uncomplicated; her arrival in the countryside does not immediately guarantee a new and healthy relationship with space. At first the instinct for patterns, inculcated by the Willowes family and prefigured by the decorative images in the shop/orchard, dominates the way in which Laura tries to engage with Great Mop, primarily through maps.

When inspired to move to Great Mop, she buys a 'small guide-book to the Chilterns' and seeks a map that 'must, she explained, be very detailed, and give as many names and footpaths as possible.'⁸¹⁴ Again, this is reflected in Radclyffe Hall's 'Miss Ogilvy Loses Her Way': 'Miss Ogilvy had chosen this place quite at random, it was marked on her map by scarcely more than a dot, but somehow she had liked the look of that dot and had set forth alone to explore it.'⁸¹⁵ But where Miss Ogilvy is drawn to the ambiguity of a dot, Laura initially desires a thorough and precise organisation of space, complete with fixed naming (so fluid in her own identity). Her faith in her map and guide-book is absolute and unquestioning:

⁸¹¹ Ibid. p.132

⁸¹² Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.166

⁸¹³ Ibid. p.174

⁸¹⁴ Ibid. p.86

⁸¹⁵ Hall, 'Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself' pp.17f

“It does seem almost too good to be true. But it is. I’ve read it in a guide-book, and seen it on a map.”⁸¹⁶

Warner herself ‘liked maps [...] and the picture-making technique of map-reading.’⁸¹⁷ She thus identifies an interpretive gap between signifier and signified – between that on the map and that in actuality – which Laura fails to do. When the promised ‘Inn’ fails to materialise, Warner cheerfully stayed at a farmhouse with a Mrs. May (who provided inspiration for Laura’s landlady Mrs. Leak⁸¹⁸); Laura considers that the map has ‘defrauded’ her by displaying a wood which had since been cut down. She decides to abandon the map and ‘know no more of [Great Mop] than did its own children.’⁸¹⁹ It is a gesture of belonging, by refusing to let her independent space be governed by a code which resists change and cannot keep track of the constant flux of the countryside. As Lefebvre writes: ‘How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents?’⁸²⁰ Laura had relied upon one inflexible map to act as an arbiter of space, and comes to recognise that static representation and multifaceted reality cannot be elided. She abandons this need for an ordered arrangement, and discards the map and guidebook in a well:

About this time she did an odd thing. In her wanderings she had found a disused well. It was sunk at the side of a green lane, and grass and bushes had grown up around its low rim, almost to conceal it, the wooden frame was broken and mouldered, ropes and pulleys had long ago been taken away, and the water was sunk far down[.]⁸²¹

⁸¹⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.95

⁸¹⁷ Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘The Way By Which I Have Come (4)’ *The Countryman*, 19/2 (1939) 472-486, p.476

⁸¹⁸ Sylvia Townsend Warner, Sylvia Townsend Warner Archives (F(right)/66/4), Dorset Country Museum

⁸¹⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.216; p.128

⁸²⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* p.85

⁸²¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* pp.127f

Although this scene is usually read as the rejection of the masculine, in favour of nature, the well is itself an example of the trammelling of nature for man's purposes. The inherent fluidity and freedom of water is kept contained and accessible. Since the well is disused and overgrown, it also represents the retaliation of nature, but the qualifying 'almost' (and that the well remains at all) shows the irreversibility of man's impact on the countryside. It is a quasi-metamorphosis between manmade and natural, refusing a simple dichotomy between the two – as well as another instance of the word 'odd' delineating Laura.

While she discards the map, Laura remains keen to domesticate the countryside. Her relationship with the natural landscape, and her impulse for nature, should be considered chiefly as an extension of her impulse for space, particularly for mediated levels of space; a mantra later crystallised in Woolf's famous 1929 essay as 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction'.⁸²² She does not opt, as Jane Marcus suggests in an essay of the name, for 'a wilderness of one's own'⁸²³ – or at least not an *absolute* wilderness – but for the inhabited and defined perimeters of a village, and even within this she insists upon further imposing of boundaries, reading images of the home within nature. Rather than separating domestic and natural space, Laura 'fancied herself at home' when lost in a field.⁸²⁴ She could be interpreted as delusionally believing herself to be at home, or imagining what it would be like if the field were her home, or (given the power of imagination

⁸²² In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf considers past accounts of 'a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils' an indication of 'lost novelist(s)'; for Woolf, as for Laura, witchcraft is an act of creation. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own (1929) and Three Guineas (1938)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p.4, p.85. Incidentally, Marcus suggests that Warner's 1959 lecture 'Women as Writers' 'revived interest in Woolf's then forgotten text, *A Room of One's Own*.' [Jane Marcus, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978)' in Bonnie Kine Scott (ed.) *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington; Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990) 531-538, p.535]

⁸²³ Marcus, "A Wilderness of One's Own": Feminist Fantasy Novels of the Twenties: Rebecca West and Sylvia Townsend Warner' *passim*

⁸²⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.202

and projection in the novel) even forming a home in the field through a creative act of fancifulness. Earlier in the novel:

Laura had spent the afternoon in a field, a field of unusual form, for it was triangular. On two sides it was enclosed by woodland, and because of this it was already darkening into a premature twilight, as though it were a room.⁸²⁵

Motifs of enclosure persist, domesticating the natural, but here Laura can determine the image: it is ‘as though it were a room’, but it is more malleable than a room. The similarity is not static, and the space can flux between room and field. Bachelard suggests that, when contented, ‘an imaginary room rises up around our bodies’;⁸²⁶ for him, images of home are synonymous with images of peace. For Laura, it is the ability to control these domestic tropes independently which represents spatial triumph.

Laura’s privileged moments of spatial control are compromises between room and wilderness. They take place on peripheries, both inside and outside. Laura laments the lot of most women:

Doing, doing, doing, till mere habit scolds at them like a housewife, and rouses them up – when they might sit in their doorways and think – to be doing still!⁸²⁷

Similarly, when she first inhabits her room, she leans out of the window:

For a long time she continued to lean out of the window, forgetting where she was and how she had come there, so unearthly was her contentment.⁸²⁸

⁸²⁵ Ibid. p.153

⁸²⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* p.137

⁸²⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.236

⁸²⁸ Ibid. p.110

In both cases, it is the occupation of a peripheral, liminal place – the doorway, the open window – which most delights Laura, and which constitutes her concept of utopia. These spaces are uncircumscribed, offering both choice and a refusal to be pinned down to a single model or epithet, echoing the flexibility of selfhood Laura desires. In her view, once the former is secured, the latter is also achieved.

The image of the garden recurs in domestic fantastic novels, offering a space ideally situated between the (supposed) fixity of the home and the infinitude of nature; the garden is, indeed, the domestication of limitlessness. Although Briganti and Mezei suggest that ‘modernity, the metropolis and the home, whether bucolic or urban, replaced the pastoral idyll as a site for the emerging feminine self’,⁸²⁹ middlebrow fantastic novelists create their own version of the pastoral in these controlled, in-between spaces. When Clarissa first appears in *The Love-Child*, ‘walks in the garden were the times when Clarissa was most real.’⁸³⁰ The idea of reality existing as a non-binary quantity (that is, that someone may exist between ‘real’ and ‘not-real’) reasserts the garden as a liminal space. For Agatha, the garden (echoing the Garden of Eden) is a site of creation and of sustained vitality; Olivier literalises the idea she writes elsewhere that ‘Gardening is Creation. It is taking part in the activity of the Creator of the world[.]’⁸³¹ (Leonora Eyles even considers the garden itself as a ‘child and friend’.⁸³²) While Agatha wishes to keep Clarissa inside the house, it is in the garden where she appears for both the first and last times; *Lady Into Fox* similarly ends in the garden (albeit tragically). Anna Koenen argues that fantasy is an escape ‘to fantastic landscapes that are wide open, and that offer freedom and promise

⁸²⁹ Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* p.4

⁸³⁰ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.24

⁸³¹ Olivier, *Country Moods and Tenses: A Non-Grammarian's Chapbook* p.101

⁸³² Eyles, *Unmarried But Happy* p.78

wholeness',⁸³³ but for the middlebrow fantastic it is *contained* spaces which offer this promise, and limitless spaces are intentionally abbreviated (that is, domesticated) by the heroines who host the fantastic, into an amalgam of room and not-room.

Ultimately, although it is seemingly nature with which Laura makes her first pact,⁸³⁴ an updated version of the pastoral is not sufficient for Laura and her quest for spatial autonomy. If it were, she would not have needed to take recourse to a pact with Satan. Warner herself had no romantic illusions about the countryside, being later party to Valentine Ackland's exposure of the inadequacies and insanitary nature of working-class rural life, published in 1936 as *County Conditions*. Views of the countryside tended to two extremes in the early twentieth century. Mary Jacobs writes that it represented both conservatism, 'imbued with patriotism, spirituality and authenticity',⁸³⁵ and radicalism; these elements combine in the atavism which Warner exploits for both its pre-modern and its subversive qualities. Similarly, Gan notes the paradoxical identities of the countryside, as both 'whimsical place of escape, a nostalgic refuge', and a site of 'harsh county realities', either acknowledged or ignored.⁸³⁶ This paradox was recognised by some in the 1920s. Barrington Gates writes in *The Nation & the Athenaeum*, regarding incompatible representations of the countryside in contemporary fiction, that it was 'irritating to be tossed about so furiously between Arcadia and the dunghill'. His article discusses his inclination to

⁸³³ Koenen (1999) p.270

⁸³⁴ It is made 'in the middle of a field' and 'the woods seemed to say, "No! We will not let you go."' L.P. Hartley interpreted her pledge as a sexualised act, describing it as 'a communion with nature so ecstatic as to be hardly decent'. Although perhaps a fanciful view, elsewhere Warner records a view of the countryside as 'sensuous and heathen and wicked'; nature is not an amoral quantity. [Warner, *Lolly Willows* p.165; Hartley, 'New Fiction' p.165; Warner and Harman, *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* p.40]

⁸³⁵ Mary Jacobs, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Politics of the English Pastoral 1925-1934' in Gill Davies, David Malcolm, and John Simons (eds.) *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006) 61-82, pp.62f

⁸³⁶ Gan, *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* p.77

write a book about the countryside, until reading *Lolly Willowes* he discovers himself guilty of ‘Titusitis’ – that is, an inappropriate and uninformed love of the countryside.⁸³⁷

His reference is to Warner’s nephew Titus, now a grown man and a visitor to Great Mop. The Willowes-possessive makes another appearance (without apostrophe, enveloping the object into its identity) when Titus loves Great Mop ‘with all the deep Willowes love for country sights and smells’, and ‘would stop and illustrate the landscape with possessive gestures’.⁸³⁸ As is much-quoted, he ‘loved the countryside as though it were a body’⁸³⁹ – a somatic comparison of which Laura is not innocent, since from her perspective ‘the hills folded themselves round her like the fingers of a hand.’⁸⁴⁰ In her image, of course, nature is the dominant protector, which presumably is not the intended implication in Titus’ love of the countryside.

But it is not simply Titus’ sexualisation of the countryside which makes his arrival unwelcome to Laura. Brothers identifies his ‘threatened transformation of the villagers and their environs into quaintness.’⁸⁴¹ In so doing, Titus reinstates a Willowes code which places Great Mop in relation to the conceptions of London and the Willowes’ home, understood solely by its difference from those locations. He is like the tourists who visit the picturesque cottage which is at the opening of Warner’s long poem *Opus 7*, which has ‘all things such as glad / the hearts of those who dwell

⁸³⁷ Barrington Gates, ‘On Great Mop and Other Places’, *Nation & the Athenaeum* (14/9/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁸³⁸ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.160; p.214

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.* p.160

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.127

⁸⁴¹ Brothers, ‘Flying the Nets at Forty: *Lolly Willowes* as Female Bildungsroman’ p.206

in town but would / spend weekends in the country'.⁸⁴² His tourist gaze brings back the attitudes and patterns of the restrictive house she has left and, crucially, challenges her identity as, under Titus' perspective, 'Great Mop would be a place, a pastoral landscape where an aunt walked out with her nephew'.⁸⁴³ While opposing a traditional reading of the landscape, Laura is more significantly combating the aunt classification which this pastoral context would bestow upon her, as she originally came 'to be in the country, and to escape being an aunt'.⁸⁴⁴ In her gradual antagonism towards Titus, Laura fears the strictures of reductive epithets rather than Titus' power (for it must be remembered that he intends to be sympathetic).

In ridding herself of her status as aunt, Laura can concentrate on her relationship with space. Although she does not fall in love with the house itself (in the way, for instance, whimsically suggested by David Garnett in a letter to Warner⁸⁴⁵), Laura certainly values the opportunity to inhabit what she thinks of as 'her new domain',⁸⁴⁶ a word used several times in the novel. Lefebvre notes that 'terms of everyday discourse' used to denote sections of space, such as room, corner, and marketplace, 'serve to distinguish, but not to isolate, particular spaces, and in general to describe a social space. They correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute.'⁸⁴⁷ The term 'domain' is not, then, an insignificant choice. It isn't clear who produces or authorises the term – Laura, or the

⁸⁴² Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Opus 7* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931) p.1

⁸⁴³ Warner, *Lolly Willowses* p.162

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid. p.231

⁸⁴⁵ 'Such excitements, my dear, have been happening to me. It's not a person, but a – no, not an animal – but a house that I have fallen in love with this time. And I feel as I did when I was twenty, that it was irretrievable, irrevocable – that if I cannot live in that house I shall / never live in any other – that if I am lucky I shall never be unfaithful even in thought to its bedrooms, though all the hotels in Europe shamelessly solicit me.' [Warner, Garnett, and Garnett, *Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner/Garnett Letters* pp.8f]

⁸⁴⁶ Warner, *Lolly Willowses* p.108

⁸⁴⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* p.16

narrator – but it gives Laura control over the space, and overlaps with the mythic semantics of the fantastic and fairy-tale. This control is exemplified in the practicalities and arrangements of her new house:

The fireplace had caught Laura's fancy when she first looked at the rooms. She had stipulated with Mrs. Leak that, should she so wish, she might cook on it.⁸⁴⁸

Although she has a landlady – so even this independent space is not wholly independent; freedoms are always curtailed in the novel – Laura's wishes are paramount in this space. Modal verbs and contingencies are under Laura's jurisdiction; she has power over a space and the activities therein, and thus greater power over her own life, without that rigidity of routine certainties which circumscribes another character inspired by primitivism, Denham in Rose Macaulay's *Crewe Train*.⁸⁴⁹ Where Denham's lifestyle is imposed upon her by a female relative, Laura realises that the Willowes family 'could not drive her out, or enslave her spirit any more, nor shake her possession of the place she had chosen.'⁸⁵⁰ This latter certainty comes not simply from moving to the countryside, but by becoming a witch – it is only this, Laura believes, which will enable her to maintain sanctuary in her rented house. By recourse to the fantastic, Laura has changed the rules, as it were. Ordinary familial interactions and invasions are no longer possible, for Laura has played with the normative structures of reality and expected actions.

⁸⁴⁸ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.108

⁸⁴⁹ *Crewe Train* concludes with Denham's mother-in-law advising that she have 'some kind of scheme mapped out for the day', appropriating the word 'map' from her – for Denham is fascinated by maps – and using it against her. [Macaulay, *Crewe Train* p.255]

⁸⁵⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.174

Gaining control over this space is also an ongoing act of creation. Lefebvre describes space as ‘a product to be used, [...but] also a means of production’.⁸⁵¹ Laura uses the dynamics of her new home to contribute towards her transformation; this space not only provides the context for her creative transformation, but permits it. Severed from the household which unhealthily restricted her, she develops an altered personality and forms new abilities. In the first few pages it is stated:

Even in 1902 there were some forward spirits who wondered why that Miss Willowes, who was quite well off, and not likely to marry, did not make a home for herself and take up something artistic or emancipated.⁸⁵²

The irony is that Laura does *not* take up anything artistic, in the traditional understanding of the word. Her escape has been prophesied since the turn of the century – but this version of escape plays in too neatly with society’s view of spinsters outside the home. It is, indeed, the sort of environment where visiting relatives are expected, as an outpost of the family home, with the same restrictions and expectations. Laura chooses a different route, and a fantastic version of the artistic.

While there is a sense that Laura becomes the created object of Satan, this creative relationship is symbiotic. When Laura says that women ‘have more need of you’,⁸⁵³ it is their need which animates Satan, and is itself a creative force. By presenting their need, they give him purpose. He is desired and incorporated into a familial spectrum – if not as the eligible bachelor, as he is often figured in Murray’s accounts, then as the patriarch who permits action. Yet Laura’s change is a self-creation too. It follows

⁸⁵¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* p.85, quoted by Nesbitt, 'Footsteps of Red Ink: Body and Landscape in *Lolly Willowes*' p.452

⁸⁵² Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.6

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.* p.234

a series of choices she makes independently, and it is her choice to awaken the latent 'witchy' aspects of her spinsterhood. Bruce Knoll writes that Laura 'learns how to let nature claim her – not a totally passive act, for by opening herself up to nature, whose influence reached her even in London, she allowed herself to be transformed'.⁸⁵⁴

Similarly, opening oneself up to a psychological metamorphosis brings a complicity which is a form of self-creation. Bjørhovde notes that, as the novel progresses,

Lolly Willowes has moved from an omniscient, fairly objective point of view to a subjective one, with an ending partly in direct speech, partly inside Laura's consciousness. Gone is the ironical viewpoint of a narrator at a distance; instead Laura herself is the controlling consciousness of the text.⁸⁵⁵

The changing dynamic of narrator and character, skewed as narrative objectivity is focalised into subjectivity, is seen also in the relationship between creator and created; roles which coincide and then merge. While mental projection in *The Love-Child* destabilises Todorov's idea of fantasies of the self and those of the other, *Lolly Willowes* removes the distinction completely, performing both at once. Kate Macdonald writes that witches 'have a peculiar position in the panoply of fantastical creatures, since they are essentially humans trying to have commerce with the supernatural, rather than being supernatural themselves.'⁸⁵⁶ This distinction is helpful to a point, but Laura is not a passive instrument of the fantastic (in the way that Silvia Tebrick initially is). Instead, although not inherently a fantastic being, she organises and inaugurates the fantastic. Laura simultaneously causes change and experiences change in a relationship which is never finalised because the creation never reaches completion, just as the narrative never evolves entirely into the first person, but rests

⁸⁵⁴ Knoll, "'An Existence Doled Out': Passive Resistance as a Dead End in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*' p.362

⁸⁵⁵ Bjørhovde, 'Transformation and Subversion as Narrative Strategies in Two Fantasy Novels of the 1920s' p.218

⁸⁵⁶ Macdonald, 'Witchcraft and Non-conformity in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926) and John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927)' p.224

at the halfway point of indirect discourse. This telescoping of perspective, from the broad to the narrow, does not give the novel a claustrophobic atmosphere, but rather demonstrates the positive counterpart of claustrophobia, where enclosure and boundaries are chosen and welcomed.

This satisfactory organisation of space is illustrated when Laura reflects upon the ‘rings of fortification’ protecting her newly-won independent space:

She felt herself inhabiting the empty house. Through the unrevealing square of the window her mind looked at the view. About the empty house was the village, and about the village the hills, neighbourly under their covering of night. Room, house, village, hills encircled her like the rings of a fortification. This was her domain, and it was to keep this inviolate that she had made her compact with the Devil.⁸⁵⁷

Various layers of space have become firmly controlled, and the anxious interaction between self and environment has reached a moment of stillness and balance. Laura is at the centre of the new pattern which has been established. The passage reflects an earlier depiction of a domestic structure, in the Willowes’ home:

The tables and chairs and cabinets stood in the same relation to each other as before; the pictures hung in the same order though on new walls; and the Dorset hills were still to be seen from the windows, though now from windows facing south instead of from windows facing north.⁸⁵⁸

Rather than items of furniture sat in implacable bonds, Laura’s ‘domain’ extends beyond the house to the anthropomorphised (‘neighbourly’) hills and the environment around her.

⁸⁵⁷ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.174

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p.11

Yet even this illustration of spatial harmony is not permitted to be an unadulterated triumph. It appears before the unsuccessful Sabbath and before Titus invades the village – even before she has actually met Satan. It is an image of settlement which is immediately unsettled in the narrative, and even the passage itself is, on closer examination, unsettling. While the hills could be seen through the Willoweses' windows, here Laura's 'mind looked at the view'; empirical evidence is replaced by the psychical and uncertain. Similarly, her occupation of space is unstably overdetermined in the idea that she 'felt herself inhabiting the empty house' (it is apparently empty, despite her presence). The physical boundaries of this site are elided with her mental horizons. The fixed, widening stronghold in which Laura has fought to centre herself brings with it a less fixed mental state.

The irony central to *Lolly Willowes*, of course, is that geographical invulnerability is accompanied with the sacrifice of all that is not physical – by selling her soul to Satan. Even this spatial security is left uncertain, and the end of the novel has been read as implying Laura's death – indeed, Warner's publisher Charles Prentice requested an altered, extended ending to the novel, suggesting that what she had written *was* 'too strong an intimation of death'.⁸⁵⁹ The original version ended a page after this excerpt, with the following paragraph:

She got up in her turn, and began to shake the dust off her skirt. Then she prodded a hole for the bag which held the pears, and buried it tidily, smoothing the earth over the hole. This took a little time to do, and when she looked round for Satan, to say Goodbye, he was out of sight.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁹ Harman, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* p.62

⁸⁶⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner, 'The Original Ending of *Lolly Willowes*' *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2001 (2001) 32-34, p.34. The published novel's equivalent paragraph is almost identical, but substitutes 'apples' for 'pears', continuing the theme of apples which casts Laura as Adam or Eve.

Although Warner made the requested alterations, and the published version includes more about Laura's future as a witch, it also removes any further direct speech from Satan, and the exclamation 'Dead!' is the final line of dialogue he is given in the published novel.⁸⁶¹ Other indications of Laura's death – from her asking “‘Is it time?’” to ‘the sun had gone down, sliding abruptly behind the hills’⁸⁶² – suggest the potential for a cyclicity to the novel, which opens with Mr. Willowes' death.

The eternal dependence Laura has chosen, to the dominating, masculine figure of Satan, reveals an underlying metamorphosis in *Lolly Willowes* which is not connected to witchcraft: the metamorphosis of Laura's ambitions. These morph from a longing for complete escape to an acceptance of partial escape. She claims to choose witchcraft ‘to have a life of one's own, not an existence doled out to you by others’,⁸⁶³ but this is only true in a limited sense. As Updike writes, ‘Freedom, in daily things, is what Lolly Willowes likes about her condition.’⁸⁶⁴ She negotiates with her ambitions, and settles upon the primacy of the everyday, and the spaces of everyday use.

Although more than one critic has called *Lolly Willowes* a fable or parable, and two contemporary reviewers conclude that Laura will live ‘happily ever after’,⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.243. In the original version, his final speech is: “In a few minutes, Laura, you will leave this hill-top and get into the bus. You will then begin another life. The bus will be hot, crowded, and dusty. In fact it will be rather like hell. When you reach Barleighs you will get out of the bus and begin another life of walking home through the fields. It will be cool, sweet-smelling, and peaceful. You will listen to the trees and look up without disquiet at the stars. Your thoughts will be slow and loving and it will be rather like heaven.” Although this has obvious allusions to the afterlife, offering a prosaic and domesticated version of Purgatory, it also softens the impact of Satan's exclamation of ‘Death’. [Warner, ‘The Original Ending of *Lolly Willowes*’ p.33]

⁸⁶² Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.243; p.246

⁸⁶³ Ibid. p.239

⁸⁶⁴ John Updike, *Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism* (London: Penguin, 1983) p.306

⁸⁶⁵ ‘Fable’ in Penelope Fitzgerald, ‘Keeping Warm’ *London Review of Books*, (1982) 22-23, p.22, Sylvia Lynd, ‘Review of *Lolly Willowes*’ *Time and Tide*, 19/03/26 (1926) 271-272, p.271, and Robert L. Caserio, *The Novel in England, 1900-1950* (New York: Twayne, 1999) p.226; ‘Parable’ in Gill Davies, ‘The Corners That Held Her: The Importance of Place in Sylvia Townsend Warner's Writing’ in Gill Davies, David Malcolm, and John Simons (eds.) *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English*

Warner's novel is not constructed on the lines of a fairy-tale or a simple narrative with a clear moral or message, as would be expected from fable and parable. Warner is much less reductive than those who posit *Lolly Willowes* as a simple feminist manifesto would allow. Those who do see only the triumph of the emancipated woman to some extent quietly agree with the reading offered by one of *Lolly Willowes*' contemporary reviewers:

And we may be tempted to wonder whether Miss Warner could not have developed what seems, after all, to be her main theme in a manner less fantastic, making less demand upon the reader's credulity (or shall we say imaginative sympathy?), with gain rather than loss to the value of her ultimate achievements. For at the bottom the tale of Laura Willowes is the tale of an old maid's revolt against uselessness, dependence, and conventional respectability.⁸⁶⁶

Lolly Willowes is decidedly not a simple tale of freedom regained, and the fantastic is not incidental. Laura's motivations are indeed those this reviewer identifies, but by using a fantastic framework (however late it arrives in the narrative) Warner can say more about the ultimate complexity of these struggles, and the absence of any neat conclusions. As Bjørhovde notes, 'the subversiveness of *Lolly Willowes* chiefly rests on the openness of its ending and its refusal to provide the reader with neatly wrapped packages of definitions, whether they concern womanhood or sexuality, selfhood or reality.'⁸⁶⁷ To this list could be added concepts of space and home, which Warner plays with throughout, yet refuses to treat as a binary entity between absolute dependence and absolute independence.

Novelist 1893-1978 (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006) 1-10, p.5 and Janet Montefiore, *Arguments of Heart and Mind: Selected Essays 1977-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p.156; 'Happy ever after' in *Daily News* (23/2/26) and *Nation & the Athenaeum* (14/9/26) Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁸⁶⁶ 'The Making of a Witch', *Birmingham Post* (29/1/26), Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

⁸⁶⁷ Bjørhovde, 'Transformation and Subversion as Narrative Strategies in Two Fantasy Novels of the 1920s' p.217

In the *Book Society Newsletter* Sylvia Lynd writes that *Lolly Willowes* ‘contrived to express the dissatisfaction which we all feel more or less intensely, and at one time or another, with the ordered conventional life of civilisation.’⁸⁶⁸ Although Warner’s target may be narrower than the whole sphere of conventionality, by writing a novel about witchcraft, she fits into a longer narrative about women’s responses to anxieties: Diana Purkiss traces the history of ‘many people, especially women, who had invented, reinvented and retold stories of witches which affirmed and denied their own problematic identities, allowing them to express and manage desires, fears, and anxieties.’⁸⁶⁹ This is precisely what Warner does – but, as with many articulations of ‘desires, fears, and anxieties’, does not offer a flawless solution. Laura’s hubris is the foreshortening of her metamorphoses, and her incomplete acts of self-creation. Warner consistently rebuts absolutes, whether connected to gender and patriarchy, nature as a wilderness, or houses as entirely repressive or entirely freeing, and Laura’s own transformation into a witch is continually tethered to her previous existence as ‘a thing out of common speech [...] *Spinster*’.⁸⁷⁰

⁸⁶⁸ Sylvia Lynd, 'The Art of Fiction' *Book Society News*, November (1931b) 11-12, p.11

⁸⁶⁹ Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* p.2

⁸⁷⁰ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.61

Conclusion

“Is this really a part of the house, or are we dreaming?”⁸⁷¹: Fantastic Novels as Alternative Spaces

The domestic shift central to *Lolly Willowes* is also an exemplar for a fundamental shift throughout middlebrow fantastic fiction. That is, there is invariably some variety of domestic upheaval in these novels, whether this takes place before or during the narrative. When it takes place before the opening of the novel in question, it is usually a restructuring of statuses in the home: *The Love-Child*, *Lolly Willowes*, and David Lindsay’s *The Haunted Woman* all open with death, for example, which necessarily causes a reorganisation of the home and the roles within it. Whether or not the novel opens with a scene of domestic unsettlement, the arrival of the fantastic always requires the rearrangement of, hiding within, or protection of the house. Whatever else is concomitant with the fantastic, the arrangement of space and the ordinary procedures of the home cannot remain settled or unaffected.

In some instances, this upheaval is performed as dramatically and overtly on a spatial level as it is in *Lolly Willowes*, with its negotiation of furniture developing into a quest for autonomous space and removal to the countryside. The same elaborate navigation of space is central to *The Haunted Woman*, where space literally shifts, and

[e]very morning, for a week on end, a flight of stairs used to appear to him in that room, leading up out of a blank wall. He avers that he not only saw them, but used to go up them, but he hasn’t the vaguest recollection of what took place on top.⁸⁷²

⁸⁷¹ Lindsay, *The Haunted Woman* p.84

⁸⁷² *Ibid.* p.11

Lindsay's novel has often been read in partnership with his more famous Fantasy novel *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920) as a treatise on metaphysics and the nature of reality,⁸⁷³ but its central conceit has a more general application away from this field. The space to which the hero and heroine go, and remember nothing from once they have returned, is emblematic of the wider search for space in the domestic fantastic – which, in turn, echoes the concerns about placement which (as discussed) dominate discussions about the middlebrow and their cultural and societal marks of distinction. But, more than this, it is a paradigm for the uneasiness and segregation of the spaces where the fantastic takes place, and their apparent normality. When Isbel observes the staircase which leads to the chimerical rooms for the first time, '[i]t did not strike her that there was anything odd about these stairs; they were quite prosaic and real'.⁸⁷⁴ As she ascends them, they 'were too solid and tangible to conjure up the very faintest suspicion of anything supernatural.'⁸⁷⁵ The four adjectives 'prosaic', 'real', 'solid', and 'tangible' are almost tautologous in their overdetermination of that which would usually be taken for granted in the home; 'real', particularly, is a description which can only draw attention to the possibility of unreality. Yet Lindsay is keen to make clear that the staircase is visually an ordinary part of the house's architecture (echoing the decidedly normal homes of Agatha Bodenham, the Tebricks, and others) while the rooms are equally emphatically separate from it. While their separation is fantastically implemented, the spaces of fantastic novels are often more prosaically set apart – whether by being the homes of lonely spinsters, or in the countryside, or by other means.

⁸⁷³ For example, Colin Wilson suggests it is 'a novel about the contrast between the reality that mystics and great artists glimpse, and the messy, muddy, confused world most of us live in'. [Colin Wilson, 'Lindsay as Novelist and Mystic' in J.B. Pick, Colin Wilson, and E.H. Visiak (eds.) *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay* (London: John Baker, 1970) 35-91, pp.66f]

⁸⁷⁴ Lindsay, *The Haunted Woman* p.46

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid. p.47

Few novels have a space as clearly liminal as Lindsay's supernatural rooms, but even without this aspect, the fixation upon a staircase (as one of Lindsay's admirers, Bernard Sellin, notes, 'the staircase has long been one of the principal features of the fantasy world'⁸⁷⁶) would introduce a form of liminal space, ideal as a place both set apart and in-between. These spaces, and the manipulation of settled areas of (or near) the home, are seen throughout fantastic narratives.

As has been seen, Mr. Tebrick shuts off rooms in *Lady Into Fox*, and Agatha and Clarissa initially travel to the domestic hinterland of a hotel; a quintessential example of the meeting of home and not-home, or homely and unhomely. The metamorphoses in *Flower Phantoms* and *Green Thoughts* take place in greenhouses, while Clarissa's appearance and Silvia Tebrick's metamorphosis occur in gardens. In other fantastic novels which this thesis has not had space to consider in depth, the moment of supernatural intrusion also takes place in similarly in-between spaces: time-travel in Bernadette Murphy's *An Unexpected Guest* (1934) is accompanied by fantastic travel, as Olivia is transferred from her carefully arranged living room, not to the 'old house at the top of the hill' where the rest of the novel takes place, but rather to 'the road that led to it, twisting and turning in the sunlight'.⁸⁷⁷ A path leading to a house is also the scene of the overlap of timescapes in Frank Baker's *Before I Go Hence* (1945),⁸⁷⁸ while Ronald Fraser's *The Flying Draper* (1924) first flies from the edge of a cliff (and longs to land 'in the shadows at the wood's edge'⁸⁷⁹). 'Simultaneous time... the

⁸⁷⁶ Bernard Sellin, *The Life and Works of David Lindsay*, trans. Kenneth Gunnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p.199

⁸⁷⁷ Murphy, *An Unexpected Guest* p.50.

⁸⁷⁸ 'The gate opened. The first man was coming up the garden-path'. [Frank Baker, *Before I Go Hence: Fantasia on a Novel* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1945) p.5]

⁸⁷⁹ Fraser, *The Flying Draper* p.51

past co-existing with the present and the future'⁸⁸⁰ is observed on another stairway in Rachel Ferguson's *A Harp in Lowndes Square* (1936), and the fantastic in Helen Beauclerk's *The Green Lacquer Pavilion* (1926) takes place, as the title suggests, in a pavilion. In all these instances, however significant a role the home plays in the preparation for, and development of, the fantastic, the actual moment of change takes place outside of the home (or, as with the stairway, in a liminal space within the home). Peripheries are privileged places.

These alternative spaces often mimic or approach the home, or are domesticated without being enclosed; they are not separate from the conception of the home, or forming antagonisms to it, but they do resist the sense of completion and wholeness – what Bachelard terms its 'powers of integration'⁸⁸¹ – which are inevitable, if false, connotations of domestic space. The idealised home was recognised as false, and undermined by the myriad societal factors discussed in this thesis (from Freudianism to sexuality, servants to spinsterhood), but these novels map that undermining into a spatial unsettling of the home as unified centre. It is changed neither from within or without, but from the alternative space which is both inside *and* outside the sphere of the domestic – on the peripheries, or in imitative spaces.

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, middlebrow readers threatened the taxonomic processes required by highbrow critics by forming a broad and effectively anonymous 'alternative community' with no fixed location. This was exemplified by the Book Society, and by representative texts like the *Provincial Lady* novels which anticipated a united identification across its readership ('this communality', as

⁸⁸⁰ Ferguson, *A Harp in Lowndes Square* p.8

⁸⁸¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* p.6

Humble notes, is ‘a key part of the way in which the women’s middlebrow novel conceives of its readers’)⁸⁸² but permitted this readership to remain dispersed and private. In the same way, fantastic novels seek and provide an alternative space. This is demonstrated in the greenhouses, pathways, gardens, and boundaries which play significant roles in domestic fantastic novels, but is true of the subgenre itself more broadly; that, in following the rules which set the fantastic apart from the realistic, these narratives inhabit their own separate and exclusive space in a schema of narratives. However many links and similarities they have with traditional domestic fiction, including each author’s own output in this line, novels which incorporate the supernatural and strange provide the reader with a separate sphere, and thus (like the rooms in *The Haunted Woman*) a separate exegetical space for engagement and response.

Why the fantastic?

Having established that an alternative generic space is created by these novels, there remains the question of the motivations for the author choosing this space, and the reader entering it. Manifestations of the fantastic have, throughout this thesis, been associated with various societal factors, but it is worth taking a step back from these interconnections and searching for a more general incentive or impulse for the fantastic. The motivations for reading suggested by the author for the implied reader may not, of course, be those experienced by each individual reader, or even the aggregate reader, and it is always worth bearing in mind that identifying a single motivation is necessarily a simplification. Theorists and critics who have done so for the fantastic, or even for a substrata of the fantastic, ignore the complexity of the

⁸⁸² Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.46

subgenre and the multiplicity of potential responses. Particularly widespread is the claim that engaging with the fantastic is simply an act of escapism.

The label of escapism was often applied to the middlebrow as a whole during the interwar period, whether this was an accusation levelled or a commendation reclaimed and praised. Q. D. Leavis' wrote that all non-realist fiction was escapist, seeming to incorporate almost all novels into this category and certainly all romance, adventure, and other examples of hyperbolic fiction, adding that 'a habit of fantasying will lead to maladjustment in actual life'.⁸⁸³ Conversely, W. Somerset Maugham defensively suggested, in an address to the National Book League in 1951, that 'all literature is escapist. In fact that is its charm.'⁸⁸⁴ His claim is too reductive to be of much practical help, since it reduces the idea of 'escapism' to that of 'fiction', but it does introduce the recognition that 'escapism' is not the preserve of the middlebrow, nor does it necessarily connote inferior writing.⁸⁸⁵

The implication often intended by the word 'escapism' is that the book in question is inferior, and essentially an escape from thought or effort on the part of the reader; the Provincial Lady tacitly agrees with this intimation. She is told by an acquaintance 'J.L.' that 'the Greeks provide him with escapist literature. Plato.' Her unspoken response is that she '[s]hould not at all wish him to know *The Fairchild Family*

⁸⁸³ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* pp.53f. Other writers acknowledge a greater disparity within non-realistic novels, particularly between 'fantasying' and the fantastic; C. S. Lewis even suggests that these facets are actually antagonistic, and the 'unliterary [who] will accept stories which we judge to be grossly improbable' – 'monstrous psychology and preposterous coincidence' – 'will not accept admitted impossibilities and preternaturals.' [Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* p.49; p.55]

⁸⁸⁴ W. Somerset Maugham, *The Writer's Point of View* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1951) pp.9f, cited in Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.23

⁸⁸⁵ In Lewis' discussion of escapism, for example, he includes works by Shakespeare, Chaucer, Sidney, Spenser, and Coleridge, concluding that '[e]scape, then, is common to many good and bad kinds of reading.' [Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* pp.68f]

performs the same service for me'.⁸⁸⁶ *The Fairchild Family*, a series of three novels written by Mary Martha Sherwood and published between 1818 and 1847, is a curious choice for the Provincial Lady. Although it is another example of the middlebrow reader's love of 'old and well-tried favourites',⁸⁸⁷ these children's books are famously didactic; essentially evangelical Christian tracts. The Provincial Lady appears to feel ashamed of favouring these novels⁸⁸⁸ – or at least anticipates being looked down upon by 'J.L.' – but they could hardly be considered frivolous, or the variety of lightweight, unlikely romances despised by Leavis and characterised euphemistically by a lower-middle-class reader in Macaulay's *Keeping Up Appearances* as 'something out of the way' (in opposition to 'one of those realistic, everyday books').⁸⁸⁹ Elsewhere in the *Provincial Lady* books, the heroine has similarly unusual (to 21st-century audiences) feelings of reading shame – choosing *Our Mutual Friend* for an air raid shelter ('Shakespeare much more impressive but cannot rise to it')⁸⁹⁰ and, as mentioned in my first chapter, opting for Dickens, Charlotte M. Yonge, and Charlotte Brontë over Keats and Austen, whom she 'cannot compass'.⁸⁹¹ It is clear the escapism is a subjective concept, and individual novels cannot easily be labelled objective examples of escapist literature.

⁸⁸⁶ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime' p.412

⁸⁸⁷ Gordon, 'Holiday Reading' p.11

⁸⁸⁸ The thought which immediately follows is 'remember with shame that E.M. Forster, in admirable wireless talk, has told us *not* to be ashamed of our taste in reading.' [Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime' p.412]. There is a curious layering of shame here; shame of her reading choices, and (in turn) shame *about* that shame. It is, for this quintessential middlebrow reader, an apparently inescapable trap – but by writing about it in this manner, Delafield anticipates collusion from her audience.

⁸⁸⁹ Macaulay, *Keeping Up Appearances* p.46. The book in question is by Edgar Wallace, so the reader was doubtless satisfied. Incidentally, when asked to contribute to series called "If I Could Live My Life Again", in the *Daily Mail*, Macaulay 'said she would learn to write with both hands simultaneously, so that she could be as prolific as pulp writer Edgar Wallace.' Although doubtless speaking flippantly, there is a certain respect for the practicalities of writing which is often present for the middlebrow author. [Patrick Collier, *Modernism on Fleet Street* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006) p.158]

⁸⁹⁰ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime' p.418

⁸⁹¹ Delafield, 'Diary of a Provincial Lady' p.86

Yet the subgenre of the fantastic, as a whole, has been seen as offering a more obvious schema of escapism. Principally this is because the fantastic is believed to offer wish-fulfilment (the novel acting in the way Freudianism argued dreams work) and thereby effectively a heightening of pleasure or gratification in reading. Eric Rabkin, for instance, suggests that the fantastic should be categorised alongside pornography, westerns, adventure stories, and detective novels as ‘much-needed psychological escape’,⁸⁹² although his conflation of the various pleasures intended by these discourses is rather simplistic. The pleasure of reading a detective novel is, one presumes, somewhat different from that of ‘reading’ pornography. But it is true that middlebrow readers (unlike their highbrow counterparts) happily admitted ‘reading just for the pleasure of the thing’,⁸⁹³ as one reviewer writes of *Lady Into Fox*.

Reading was recognised by the middlebrow public, as Humble notes, as ‘a life-enhancing, joyous experience’;⁸⁹⁴ Hilary Radner even suggests that the ‘division of narratives into popular culture and literature corresponds to two distinct, rhetorically inscribed regimes of pleasure’, the former being ‘hysterical’ (pleasure in the act of reading itself) and the latter ‘obsessional’ (pleasure from the intellectual text, relating to the result of reading, rather than the act).⁸⁹⁵ Although this division is perhaps too restrictive, it certainly appears to be true that middlebrow readers rarely felt guilt at the broader concept of enjoyment in literature.

To look at the other end of the spectrum from wish-fulfilment, another often-cited basis for the label of escapism is the fear caused by fantastic literature (and thus a fear which can be neatly compartmentalised). Fear and pleasure are not, of course,

⁸⁹² Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* p.42

⁸⁹³ McDowall, 'A Candid Fantasy' p.121

⁸⁹⁴ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* p.9

⁸⁹⁵ Radner, 'Extra-Curricular Activities: Women Writers and the Readerly Text' p.253

mutually exclusive. A chill down the spine was the hallmark of Gothic fiction, and even in 1917, when war was bringing fear and pain to more ‘ordinary’ families than it had for generations, Dorothy Scarborough noted that ‘humanity finds fear one of the most pleasurable of emotions and truly enjoys vicarious horrors’.⁸⁹⁶ The operative word here is ‘vicarious’. In a period where fear was no longer vicarious but immediate, to distance it into a novel can be seen as an art of catharsis.

Looked at more closely, the fantastic does not provide either variety of escape – wish-fulfilment or vicarious fear – for either characters or reader. As has been discussed, *Lolly Willowes* initially seems like the ‘successful escape’, Gillian Beer identifies (despite the shortfalls in Laura’s escape), adding that ‘[i]n her other novels of the late Twenties and Thirties, escape is investigated rather than celebrated.’⁸⁹⁷ This, as I have argued, is precisely what happens in *Lolly Willowes* also; escape is attempted and explored, but ultimately not achieved – or, rather, a compromise is achieved instead. This pattern is repeated time and again throughout domestic fantastic novels, where, even when wish-fulfilment propels the fantastic moment (as it does in *The Love-Child* and *The Venetian Glass Nephew*) it is not maintained. As has been seen, almost every fantastic narrative concludes with the loss, failure, or corruption of the supernatural element, and either a return to the troubling circumstances which invited the fantastic, or an equally unsettled alternative. Clarissa disappears, Virginio leaves Peter Innocent, Miss Hargreaves is destroyed. Silvia (in *Lady Into Fox*), Mr. Mannering (in *Green Thoughts*), and Virginia (in *Appius and Virginia*) all die. G.K. Chesterton writes in 1929 that it ‘is really remarkable’ that ‘in an age accused of

⁸⁹⁶ Scarborough, *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* p.18

⁸⁹⁷ Beer, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner: "The Centrifugal Kick"' p.77

frivolity [...], the only popular sort of fantasy is the unhappy fantasy.'⁸⁹⁸ The contribution of playfulness and whimsy to the tone of the middlebrow fantastic must not be discounted, but tone and plot need not display equal amounts of Chesterton's 'happiness', and playfulness does not necessarily equate with a successful escape. (One of the few exceptions is *Orlando*, which grows steadily less fantastic as the narrative progresses, and ends almost prosaically; the character has essentially escaped from the fantastic as history progresses.⁸⁹⁹)

Yet, having recognised the absence of wish-fulfilment, the reading of these novels cannot be dismissed as the escapism of vicarious horror. The fantastic as a simple source of horror was dated long before the First World War, at least outside lowbrow penny-dreadfuls, and several theorists have dismissed fear as the primary effect of the fantastic.⁹⁰⁰ The oral terror-tale of old offered an oddly unterrifying thrill when only superstition could turn it into genuine unease, and Walter Scott's 1827 claim that the primary purpose of the fantastic was to instil 'terror and veneration'⁹⁰¹ was no longer the case. Upheaval and worry replace horror (which is easily categorisable, and thus rendered harmless), relying instead on rational anxieties, belief in which is not superstitious but sane. Indeed, the language of fear is often described through the language of movement or displacement. Fear is 'unsettling'; victims of fear are

⁸⁹⁸ Chesterton, 'Magic and Fantasy in Fiction' p.162

⁸⁹⁹ Julia Briggs suggests that 'Orlando's fantasy attributes give place to Vita's more familiar roles as wife, mother and prize-winning poet', while John Graham argues convincingly that balance moves away from the fantastic, comparing the surreal frozen bumboat woman of the Great Frost with the un-fantastic eighteenth-century prostitutes. [Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2005) p.206; John Graham, 'The "Caricature Value" of Parody and Fantasy in Orlando' *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 30 (1961) 345-366, pp.359ff] Ironically, the unnamed house becomes an increasingly fantastic concept, the more quotidian the surrounding plot and characters become. While lavish Elizabethan Orlando befits the vast home, humbler 1920s Orlando's occupancy underlines the house's almost mystical largeness.

⁹⁰⁰ See, for example, Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* p.35; Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* p.9

⁹⁰¹ Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman' p.63

‘disturbed’. Middlebrow fantastic novels domesticate these tropes of fear into actual acts of unsettlement and displacement. Since these reflect the real dilemmas and worries experienced by the period’s readers, there is never a sense of total detachment, and the vicarious is replaced by the mimetic, however distorted that reflection between reader and character might be.

Escape suggests not only movement from one thing to another (or from one place to another), but a severing of connections. True escape brings with it the ability to cease being affected by that which went before. This is demonstrably not the case within domestic fantastic novels, and the same unfulfilled escape occurs for the reader; they do not lose connection with either the rest of their reading or the rest of their lives. Escape is inherently permanent, whereas the act of reading is necessarily temporary; there is (of course) no such thing as the eternal book or the eternal reading process. The real world is not left behind while reading, either diegetically or extradiegetically (we are reminded, again, of the Provincial Lady reading in the maelstrom of the everyday – ‘I pack frantically in the intervals of reading *Vice Versa* aloud’⁹⁰² – without compartmentalising the two activities.) When George Orwell writes about escapist novels in ‘Good Bad Books’ (1945), he suggests that they

form pleasant patches in one’s memory, quiet corners where the mind can browse at odd moments, but they hardly pretend to have anything to do with real life.⁹⁰³

His choice of the word ‘corners’ (which Bachelard devotes a chapter to in *The Poetics of Space*, as exemplifying ‘a symbol of solitude for the imagination’⁹⁰⁴) has associations both with domestic geography and the language of psychoanalysis, thus

⁹⁰² Delafield, ‘The Provincial Lady in America’ p.280

⁹⁰³ George Orwell, *Critical Essays*, ed. George Packer (London: Harvill Secker, 2009a) p.249

⁹⁰⁴ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* p.136

offering the conflicting ideas of cosiness and the repressed. Yet both comfort and repression are necessarily linked to reality; corners must be joined to something. Orwell's image, ironically, shows how assuredly such novels *do* 'have anything to do with real life'. A corner exists in relation to the wider space; the genre-space of the fantastic novel similarly is not detached from all other narratives, but exists in relationship with them – and, more importantly, exists in relationship with reality. As Rosemary Jackson writes, the fantastic 're-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real.'⁹⁰⁵ Similarly, A.J. Apter argues, the fantastic 'must be understood not as an escape from reality but as an investigation of it.'⁹⁰⁶ Both theorists deny the primacy of 'escape' – and even the notion of escape is, in fact, self-defeating, since 'escape' can only exist in relation to the place of departure, which is thus never lost.

Isbel asks Judge in *The Haunted Woman*, when they are in the chimerical room, "“Tell me – is this really a part of the house, or are we dreaming?”"⁹⁰⁷ The separate, unusual, or peripheral area of the house is compared to the dream world, a similarly nebulous entity, but also to the relationship between reality and an imaginary narrative. The fantastic narrative relates to reality much as dreams relate to wakeful experience – not in terms of wish-fulfilment, but structurally, as two interrelated modes or structures of being. My thesis title refers to the 'dark, mysterious, and undocumented';⁹⁰⁸ a quotation from *Orlando* which actually (in context) refers to his protracted period of sleep, rather than the moment of gender metamorphosis.

Appropriately, 'dark' can be applied to fantastic novels not as a marker of terror or the

⁹⁰⁵ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.20

⁹⁰⁶ Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* p.2

⁹⁰⁷ Lindsay, *The Haunted Woman* p.84

⁹⁰⁸ Woolf, *Orlando* p.63

macabre, but in the sense which corresponds to sleep; a lack of awareness or agency, and immersion in the inexplicable and strange. Instances of sleeping recur in these novels, as processes of transformation. Laura Willowes sleeps ‘for days and days’⁹⁰⁹ after arriving in Great Mop, shortly before changing her attitude towards the countryside (by abandoning her map); Clarissa initially comes back to Agatha in a dream and (as Agatha describes it to herself) ‘she woke me up’;⁹¹⁰ as *Flower Phantoms* opens Judy is in ‘a condition beautifully comatose, a state resembling sleep’ during which ‘she seemed once or twice about to fall into some unfamiliar night.’⁹¹¹ Sleep is not an escape from reality, but a parallel and temporary version of it. In the same way, the reading of a domestic fantastic novel is not an abandonment of reality, but a parallel immersion in a space contiguous to it. Even if the unconsciousness of sleeping is discounted, and daydreaming is considered instead, a useful parallel is offered. Bachelard suggests the ‘chief benefit of the house’ is that it ‘shelters daydreaming’⁹¹² – which, in the interwar period, was a fraught state, often seen as a wasteful indulgence. T.S. Eliot called it ‘a disease of society’,⁹¹³ while the Provincial Lady anxiously refers to an article about daydreaming in *Time and Tide*, which (though she does not give its title) is ‘Day-Dreamers All’ by L.A.G. Strong. Strong attributes this ‘imagined self-fulfilment’ to ‘an extension of the childish faculty of story-telling, harmless as long as it remains irrelevant to life itself.’⁹¹⁴ An alternative space for daydreaming (for the creation of the fantastic; for ‘story-telling’) epitomises the relationship between the fantastic and reality, precisely because it cannot ‘remain irrelevant to life itself’. Rather than an extraneous indulgence, it is a

⁹⁰⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes* p.113

⁹¹⁰ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.15

⁹¹¹ Fraser, *Flower Phantoms* p.10

⁹¹² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* p.6

⁹¹³ T.S. Eliot, 'A Commentary' *The Criterion*, July (1932) 676-683, p.679

⁹¹⁴ Delafield, 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further' p.251; L.A.G. Strong, 'Day-Dreamers All' *Time and Tide*, 09/07/32 (1932) 764-765

commentary. As Jackson and Apter observe, reality is intentionally retained, to be manipulated, turned around, and examined – kept at a distance, but kept on a tether.

The fantastic as investigation

This relationship with reality (for the author) is manipulative, but need not be subversive. Rosemary Jackson is primarily concerned with the fantastic as an act of subversion: ‘on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems.’⁹¹⁵ She writes that the fantastic is not inherently transgressive, but acts as such in its cultural context.⁹¹⁶ I believe that the opposite is true. The fantastic is, by definition, inherently subversive on an internal, thematic level (in the basic sense that it ‘subverts’ – that is, changes – reality) but not necessarily on an ideological or contextualised level. Similarly, W.R. Irwin describes ‘a conspiracy of intellectual subversiveness’⁹¹⁷ between writer and reader, referring to the way in which the fantastic alters the silently acknowledged narrative rules between these parties, rather than an ideological subversion. Once it is presumed that the fantastic is consistently subversive in accordance with any single ideological agenda (either Jackson’s left-wing agenda, or any other), then ‘subversion’ becomes impracticable as a term upon which to pin the whole subgenre, either in theory or in practice.

Instead, the space of the fantastic permits distortion primarily for the act of investigation – both for the author (introducing topics which might otherwise be too painful, awkward, inappropriate, or even too dull, to approach, but in a disguise which

⁹¹⁵ Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* p.4

⁹¹⁶ Ibid. p.175

⁹¹⁷ Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.9

is not too heavy for discernment)⁹¹⁸ and for the self-analytical reader. The narrative need not necessarily be either tragic or whimsical, but instead investigative. This may sound simply like a repetition of the definition of the fantastic – that it takes place in a recognisable world – but the spatiality of this image is more complex. The fantastic narrative does not only occur in the ‘real world’, it exists alongside it, interweaves with it, and both reflects and changes it. The fantastic exists in a fourth dimension, as it were, neither separable from the real nor condensable with it. This is one of the reasons that (as Irwin notes)⁹¹⁹ there are so seldom subplots in fantastic narratives. This multiplicity requires a single momentum and single focus, because any entirely non-fantastic subplot within the novel would disrupt the linearity of the plot and its attachment to a particular social grievance.

Whether addressing the concerns of childlessness, sexuality, independent space, or any other matter, the fantastic enables (in the reader) a division of self, in the same way that Agatha and Clarissa in *The Love-Child* are constructed from a single selfhood. Alongside this division of self is the ability to see self/reality at a distance, becoming both observer and observed. The relationship between Agatha and Clarissa, again, exemplifies this: ‘Clarissa loved these wide spaces; she sat silent, staring. Agatha just watched her, she wanted no more distant horizon.’⁹²⁰ As a fantastic creation, Clarissa’s worldview is boundless; as the creator, Agatha has determined limits to the world she wishes to see. This could be seen as a model of

⁹¹⁸ Elinor Wylie quotes the novelist and humorist Christopher Morley, adding ‘this is excellent and exact’, when he writes that the ‘recourse of those who feel that they have something to say, but desire to avoid the bitterness of being understood, has been (ever since Aesop) the fable or fantasy.’ It would be truer to say that the author wishes to avoid the ‘bitterness of being straightforward’, for the fantastic – and, moreso, fable – must always ultimately be discernable and interpretable, otherwise it is simply surrealist or absurd. [Quoted in Hively, *A Private Madness: The Genius of Elinor Wylie* p.145]

⁹¹⁹ Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* pp.72f

⁹²⁰ Olivier, *The Love-Child* p.129

author and reader (Agatha, the author figure, imposes a precisely-calculated diegetic framework to the infinitude the reader/Clarissa is willing to see) but it also illustrates the relationship between the fantastic and the real, where the reader is both Agatha and Clarissa – looking into unknown expanses, but also examining this act of observation. Everyday life can be analysed at the same time as it is experienced.

The space of the fantastic is thus from the same mould as the ‘asides’ which recur in the *Provincial Lady* diaries, where she takes a step back from everyday life to make a parenthesised ‘Query’. These narratives are set in the everyday, but still engage with and interrogate it. It is comprehension, rather than liberation, which is seen the keynote of the domestic fantastic. The alternative space of the fantastic is not a dreamscape of idealism, but often a process of self-analysis and self-development; Laura Willowes (as the exemplar of partial escape) does not achieve unalloyed freedom, but understands better which select freedoms she most prizes. The fantastic, as Anna Koenen argues, is ‘a mode used to articulate a desire for control’.⁹²¹ In a sense it offers this control, by resisting the pretence that the middlebrow home is stable while also controlling the images of instability. The fantastic is thus a way of imposing order on disorder – or, at least, introducing a partially ordered disorder – in the same way that Briganti and Mezei identify ‘in fiction and everyday life, the house itself is material evidence of the human endeavor to control nature and the physical environment’.⁹²² But it is ‘endeavor’ rather than success which is made palpable.

Apter correctly notes that the fantastic ‘is not a means of consolation and recovery but

⁹²¹ Koenen, *Visions of Doom, Plots of Power: The Fantastic in Anglo-American Women's Literature* p.3. Koenen is writing particularly about women’s fiction. I would suggest, although much of my thesis has concerned issues primarily effecting women, that this articulation of a desire for control could equally apply to male writers, characters, and readers – as it does, say, in *Miss Hargreaves*.

⁹²² Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* p.19

of registering losses and fears'.⁹²³ This explains why domestic fantastic novels portray unsuccessful escapes and unfulfilled desires, including the hubris which denies the availability of a panacea, even in a fantastic world. Offering a complete and triumphant change in a novel would undermine the need for change in society, and Laura's flawed transformation, Peter Innocent's loneliness, Agatha's apparent insanity, and so forth, demonstrate the middlebrow fantastic novel's refusal to turn a blind eye to the undercurrent of reality enduring both for characters and readers.

Although Irwin recognises that works do not qualify as fantastic if they 'promote reverie, not intellectual play', he ultimately (and, I believe, wrongly) surmises that '[n]othing is immune from fantasy, but nothing of any conceptual validity is destroyed or overturned by it.'⁹²⁴ The reason he gives for this conclusion is that the

propositions against which a fantasist makes counterdemonstration are not stereotypes of limited duration [...], but rather general truths and conventions of understanding reality so widely accepted as to be suprahistorical.⁹²⁵

The example he gives is that a lady turning into a fox will always be fantastic, regardless of the period in which *Lady Into Fox* is set, or when it was published. Irwin, however, is conflating conceit and catalyst. The manifestation of the fantastic may be 'suprahistorical' (this, indeed, is one of the aspects which distinguishes fantastic fiction from science fiction) but the extradiegetic reasons for the author writing the work, and the audience reading it, can be of limited duration. As these change, so the varieties of narrative responses change. Without the shifting status of female sexuality in the 1920s, *Lady Into Fox* might not have been written in the way it was.

⁹²³ Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* p.6

⁹²⁴ Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.9; p.183

⁹²⁵ Ibid. p.189

After the Second World War

Discussing the ‘interwar period’ is not simply a convenient shorthand for the middle of the twentieth century; the World Wars did, of course, begin and end a great number of discourses. The popularity of the domestic fantastic did, indeed, pall by the end of the 1930s, and this was partly due to the Second World War. The magnitude of conflict, and the many disquietudes which came in its wake, did turn attention away from a large number of the anxieties which had preoccupied middlebrow writers and the middlebrow public in the 1920s and 1930s, catalysed narratives, and been codified in metamorphosis, creation, or other manifestations of the fantastic. Although issues of unmarried women, childlessness, and female sexuality were not, of course, entirely and suddenly resolved in 1939 (or 1945), they no longer transfixed the nation in the same way, and the gradual discomfort of these concerns was replaced by the sudden shocks of bomb damage, domestic displacement, and fatalities. Similarly, the vogue for Freudianism which had helped create intellectual space for the fantastic had died down by the late 1940s – perhaps owing as much to familiarity breeding contempt as to the war; Leonora Eyles writes in 1947 that ‘ill-instructed folk [...] seized on this mode of psychology in the nineteen-twenties, when we were all psychologically astray after our first taste of world war’, adding ‘I am sure it was unwise for so many uninstructed young people like myself in the early nineteen-twenties to gobble Freud hook, line and sinker as we did, and not digest him very well’.⁹²⁶ Once more, the somatic qualities of reading are introduced, in this case suggesting that a form of literary indigestion had prompted experimentation with various comprehensions of reality, and that one of the side-effects of war was a medication to cure this.

⁹²⁶ Eyles, *Unmarried But Happy* p.90; p.93

But if it were only dwindling fascination with various societal ills which had changed, then others would have replaced them as focal points for fantastic exploration. Irwin suggests that there have been few fantastic novels since ‘about 1957’ because that year was an approximate inauguration of an ‘age of panic’, rather than the ‘Age of Anxiety’ described by Auden, and that readers require something more urgent and immediate than the codifications of the fantastic.⁹²⁷ Although Auden’s poem was published more than two decades after the peak of the interest in fantastic fiction, Irwin is (of course) correct in identifying the correlation between anxieties and recourse to the fantastic. However, the diminishing number of domestic fantastic novels is due less to this evolving ‘spirit of the age’, I would argue, than the developing use of the fantastic in the twentieth-century novel.

This development is essentially an extension of that alternative space which readers sought and authors created. This alternative space was initially carved as a subsection of the middlebrow novel, both in terms of an author’s output (their fantastic novel[s] appearing alongside their domestic novels in the marketplace) and the ways in which domestic fantastic novels were advertised and read. Increasingly, this space was professionalised and specialised. Steven Fischer writes that:

subgenres that had first emerged in the nineteenth century, such as the criminal or science-fiction novel, ramified in the second half of the twentieth: the history crimi, the gothic crimi, the sport crimi; or the space-travel sci-fi, the time-travel sci-fi, and now the computer sci-fi.⁹²⁸

Fischer’s examples can, of course, be extended to fantastic and Fantasy novels. It became increasingly impossible to write a novel with fantastic elements which was

⁹²⁷ Irwin, *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* p.184

⁹²⁸ Fischer, *A History of Reading* p.301

not immediately and conclusively categorised by publisher, bookshop, and public. The space of the bookshop became organised by genre, and a literary facet which in the 1920s could be added to develop or enhance a narrative served instead, in the post-war (or, perhaps more accurately, the post-Tolkien) era, to ghettoize it. Tolkien's success certainly left a legacy for Fantasy novels, rather than the fantastic, but these lines were increasingly blurred. Rather than the fantastic being seen as occupying a space on the peripheries of the domestic novel, it transferred (in the minds of most publishers and readers) to occupying similar peripheries of the Fantasy novel.

Although there remain, unsurprisingly, some post-war novels which use the fantastic without becoming Fantasy narratives, these often include the fantastic as an incidental impulse or element, rather than permitting it to be the pivot of the novel or the dominant focus of the character's development. As an example, both Barbara Comyns' *The Vet's Daughter* (1959) and Barbara Trapido's *Juggling* (1994) incorporate scenes where characters supernaturally levitate, but these moments are treated as 'extras', augmenting the narrative rather than crystallising it. Writers who turn to the surreal (such as Muriel Spark, in the creation of Dougal Douglas and elsewhere) once more have treated these facets as subplots or impulses with a supporting role, rather than the unitary focus shown in the interwar domestic fantastic novel.

More work can (and should) be done on the post-war British middlebrow, and middlebrow literature of the 21st century which has to some extent – in an age with near-universal literacy and, yet, a decline in the celebration of literary intelligentsia

and meles like the Bloomsbury Group – subsumed both the lowbrow and the highbrow, particularly as regards novels. As Stan Persky writes, that which he labels the ‘serious novel’ has, in the 21st century, ‘a reduced status in cultural conversation, a more ambiguous role in intellectual life, and a diminished readership.’⁹²⁹ There is no longer the pervasive sense of defining the middlebrow through an anti-criteria or in relation to a dominant avant-garde; the avant-garde is now more likely to be defined in relation to the mainstream (and even the Booker Prize, purportedly finding the best novel in any given year, has been declared ‘resolutely middlebrow’).⁹³⁰

Characteristics which aided a definition of a middlebrow readership persist, in evolving ways. The Book Society has its equivalent in the Richard and Judy Book Club, or (in America) the Oprah Book Club; mass, anonymous reading still takes place, and the importance of identification amongst this number is still present. The middlebrow joy of playing with literary antecedents has probably never been more popular, although more institutionalised than within the pages of the *Provincial Lady* diaries, with examples ranging from *Pride and Prejudice* reinterpreted as YouTube video blogging in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* to the Dickens World theme park in Kent. The intangible middlebrow communities set up in the form of the Book Society and the assumed readership of novels like Delafield’s were, in principle, the precursor to the online community. But, while these characteristics of the middlebrow endure into the present day, the fashion for the domestic fantastic – once described as the ‘new tendency in the novel’, and ‘the mode of the moment’⁹³¹ – was short-lived, and

⁹²⁹ Stan Persky, *Reading the 21st Century: Books of the Decade 2000-2009* (London; Montreal & Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011 repr.2012) p.11

⁹³⁰ Andrew Gallix, ‘The Booker Steps Away From Being Its Own Genre’, *Guardian* <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/28/booker-prize-longlist>>, accessed 20 September 2013

⁹³¹ Wolfe, ‘The Growth of Fantasy in the Novel’ p.45; R.C.W., ‘In the Mode of the Moment’ *Daily Herald* (21/04/26) Chatto & Windus Archive CW C/34 (Press Cuttings vol.31, 1926), University of Reading

could only exist at one stage of the development of fantastic literature. During that interwar time, when assessments of British society were being widely recalibrated, it was a subgenre which produced a select but significant range of novels which (whether playful or poignant, hopeful or tragic, nostalgic or progressive) provided the means for both author and reader to interrogate and comment upon the most pervading middle-class social anxieties of the period, in unusual and revitalising ways.

Bibliography

Archives

(Unless cited elsewhere in the bibliography)

Chatto & Windus Archive, University of Reading.

Edith Olivier Papers, Chippenham, Wiltshire & Swindon Record Centre.

John Johnson Collection of Ephemera, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive, Dorset County Museum.

Primary fiction

Baker, Frank (1940 repr.2009), *Miss Hargreaves* (London: Bloomsbury).

--- (1945), *Before I Go Hence: Fantasia on a Novel* (London: Andrew Dakers).

--- (1952), 'Miss Hargreaves: A Play', London, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Plays.

Beauclerk, Helen (1926 repr.1937), *The Green Lacquer Pavilion* (London: Penguin).

Benson, Stella (1919 repr.2007), *Living Alone* (Gloucester: Dodo Press).

Carroll, Lewis and Gardner, Martin (1960), *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass* (New York: C.N. Potter).

Collier, John (1930 repr.1994), *His Monkey Wife: or, Married to a Chimp* (London: Robin Clark).

--- (1932), *Green Thoughts* (Furnival Books; London: W. Jackson).

Cooper, Lettice (1936 repr.2004), *The New House* (London: Persephone Books).

Delafield, E.M. (1927 repr.1988), *The Way Things Are* (London: Virago).

--- (1930 repr.1947), 'Diary of a Provincial Lady', *The Provincial Lady* (London: Macmillan), 1-121.

--- (1932 repr.1947), 'The Provincial Lady Goes Further', *The Provincial Lady* (London: Macmillan), 123-260.

--- (1934 repr.1947), 'The Provincial Lady in America', *The Provincial Lady* (London: Macmillan), 262-370.

--- (1937a), *As Others Hear Us: A Miscellany* (London: Macmillan).

--- (1940 repr.1947), 'The Provincial Lady in Wartime', *The Provincial Lady* (London: Macmillan), 371-529.

Ferguson, Rachel (1931), *The Brontës Went to Woolworths* (London: Ernest Benn).

--- (1936), *A Harp in Lowndes Square* (London: Jonathan Cape).

--- (1937), *Alas, Poor Lady* (London: Jonathan Cape).

Forster, E.M. (1910 repr.2000), *Howards End* (London: Penguin Books).

Fraser, Ronald (1924 repr.1931), *The Flying Draper* (Revised edn.; London: Jonathan Cape).

--- (1926), *Flower Phantoms* (London: Jonathan Cape).

Garnett, David (1922 repr.1928), *Lady into Fox* (London: Chatto & Windus).

--- (1922 repr.1966), *Lady into Fox* (New York: Norton).

--- (1928), 'A Man in the Zoo (1924)', *Lady Into Fox and A Man in the Zoo* (London: Chatto & Windus), 93-190.

Hall, Radclyffe (1934), 'Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself', *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself* (London: William Heinemann), 3-34.

Howe, Bea (1927), *A Fairy Leapt Upon My Knee* (London: Chatto & Windus).

Hughes, Richard (1926), *A Moment of Time* (London: Chatto & Windus).

Ishiguro, Kazuo (2005), *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber & Faber).

- Ivey, Eowyn (2012), *The Snow Child* (London: Headline Review).
- Kipling, Rudyard (1904), *Traffics and Discoveries* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 339-375.
- Lawrence, D.H. (1922), 'The Fox', *The Dial*, May, 471-489.
- Lindsay, David (1922 repr.1987), *The Haunted Woman* (Edinburgh: Canon).
- Macaulay, Rose (1926 repr.1985), *Crewe Train* (London: Methuen).
- (1928 repr.1986), *Keeping Up Appearances* (London: Methuen).
- (1930 repr.1969), *Staying With Relations* (London: Collins).
- Marshall, Bruce (1929), *High Brows: An Extravaganza of Manners - Mostly Bad* (London: Jarrolds).
- Mayor, F.M. (1924), *The Rector's Daughter* (London: Hogarth Press).
- Murphy, Bernadette (1934), *An Unexpected Guest* (London: Jonathan Cape).
- Olivier, Edith (1927), *The Love-Child* (London: Martin Secker).
- (1927 repr.1951), *The Love Child* (London: The Richards Press).
- (1928), *The Underground River* (London; Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack).
- Peake, C.M.A. (1923), *Pagan Corner* (London: Methuen).
- Pendered, Mary Lucy (1927), *The Uncanny House* (London: Hutchinson).
- Ransome, Arthur (1916), *Old Peter's Russian Tales* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack).
- Read, Herbert (1935 repr.2010), *The Green Child* (London: Capuchin Classics).
- Sackville-West, Vita (1922 repr.2008), *The Heir* (London: Hesperus Press).
- Shelley, Mary (1818 repr.2000), *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin).
- Sinclair, May (1923 repr.2006), *Uncanny Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions).
- Spark, Muriel (1960), *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* (London: Macmillan).
- Struther, Jan (1939), *Mrs. Miniver* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Taylor, Elizabeth (1951 repr.1985), *A Game of Hide and Seek* (London: Virago).
- Trevelyan, G.E. (1933), *Appius and Virginia* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons).
- Ward, Christopher (1924), *Gentleman into Goose, etc.* (London: T.W. Laurie).
- Warner, Sylvia Townsend (1925), *The Espalier* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- (1926 repr.1978), *Lolly Willowes, or, the Loving Hunstman* (Chicago: Academy Chicago).
- (1926 repr.2007), *Lolly Willowes* (London: Virago).
- (1928), *Time Importuned* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- (1931), *Opus 7* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- West, Rebecca (1929 repr.1980), *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (London: Virago).
- Whipple, Dorothy (1939), *The Priory* (New York: Macmillan).
- Woolf, Virginia (1925 repr.2009), *Mrs. Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- (1928 repr.2008), *Orlando* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Wylie, Elinor (1926), *The Venetian Glass Nephew* (London: William Heinemann).

Primary non-fiction

- 'One' (1911), 'The Spinster', *The Freewoman*, 1 (1), 10-11.
- Anon. (1921), 'Psycho-Analysis a la Mode', *The Saturday Review*, 12/02/21, 129-130.
- (1922), 'Review of *Lady Into Fox*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 02/11/22, p.709.
- (1930a), 'Review of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*', *Time and Tide*, 20/12/30, 1609-1610.
- (1930b), 'Picaresque Crichton', *Time*, 16 (4), 57.
- (1936), 'You May Also Like...', *Book Society News*, April, p.16.
- (1937), 'Mostly About Authors', *Book Society News*, April, 16-17.

- Armstrong, Anne (1932), 'Review of *The Provincial Lady Goes Further*', *The Saturday Review*, 05/11/32, p.481.
- Arrowsmith, J.E. (1931), 'Review of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*', *London Mercury*, February, p.385.
- Auden, W.H. (1973), 'In Memory of Sigmund Freud (1939)', in Hendrik Ruitenbeek (ed.), *Freud As We Knew Him* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press), p.116.
- Beaton, Cecil (1949), *Ashcombe: The Story of a Fifteen-Year Lease* (London: B.T. Batsford).
- Bechhofer Roberts, C.E. (1934), 'Review of *The Provincial Lady in America*', *Time and Tide*, 22/09/34, p.1167.
- Bell, Clive (1929), *Civilization: An Essay* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Benson, E.F. (1928), 'Two Types of Modern Fiction', *London Mercury*, February, 418-427.
- Bertram, Anthony (1938), 'New Novels', *Times Literary Supplement*, 02/07/38, p.447.
- Book Club (1939[?]), 'Prospectus'.
 --- ([undated]), 'Additional Books'.
 Book Society (193[?]), 'Some Privileges of Membership'.
 --- (1929), 'The Books You Read'.
 --- (1932), 'A Letter', November.
 --- (1934), 'Prospectus'.
 --- (1939[?]), 'Exclusive Privileges of Membership'.
- Bowen, Elizabeth (1950), *Collected Impressions* (London: Longmans).
- Braby, Maud Churton (1919), *Modern Marriage and How To Bear It* (London: T. Werner Laurie).
- Burleigh, Constance (1925), *Etiquette Up To Date* (London: T. Werner Laurie).
- C.H.W. (1926), 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*', *The Bookman*, March, 326-327.
- Cecil, David (1951), 'Introduction', *The Love-Child* (London: The Richards Press), 3-8.
- Chesterton, G.K. (1929), 'Magic and Fantasy in Fiction', *The Bookman*, December, 161-163.
- Cook, Marjorie Grant (1927), 'Review of *The Love-Child*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 26/05/27, p.372.
 --- (1930), 'Review of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18/12/30, p.1084.
- Dane, Clemence (1937), 'Review of *Busman's Honeymoon*', *Book Society News*, June, p.6.
- Delafield, E.M. (1930a), 'The Sincerest Form...', *Time and Tide*, 30/12/30, p.1605.
 --- (1930b), 'The Diary of a Provincial Lady', *Time and Tide*, 13/12/30.
 --- (1932a), 'The Provincial Lady at the "Time and Tide" Party', *Time and Tide*, 25/06/32, 711-712.
 --- (1932b), 'Review of *Black Mischief*', *Time and Tide*, 15/08/32, 1109-1110.
 --- (1937b), 'The Diary of a Provincial Lady', in Denys Kilham Roberts (ed.), *Titles to Fame* (London: Thomas Nelson & Son), 121-138.
- Dell, Floyd (1915), 'Speaking of Psycho-Analysis', *Vanity Fair*, 5, p.53.
 --- (1927), *The Outline of Marriage* (London: The Richards Press).
- Duff, Lady Juliet (1927), 'Letter to Edith Olivier', Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers.
- Dulberg, Joseph (1920), *Sterile Marriages* (London: T. Werner Laurie).

- Eder, M.D. (1925), 'A Note on Shingling', *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 6 (3), 325-326.
- Edynbry, R. (1939), *Real Life Problems and Their Solution* (London: Odhams Press).
- Eliot, T.S. (1932), 'A Commentary', *The Criterion*, July, 676-683.
- (1948), *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber).
- Eyles, Leonora (1932), 'Review of *Appius and Virginia*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 07/07/32, p.496.
- Ferguson, Rachel (1939), *Passionate Kensington* (London: Jonathan Cape).
- Firth, Violet (1925), *The Psychology of the Servant Problem* (London: C.W. Daniel).
- Forster, E.M. (1951a), 'English Prose between 1918 and 1939 (1944)', *Two Cheers For Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold & Co.), 280-291.
- (1951b), 'Anonymity: An Enquiry (1925)', *Two Cheers For Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold & Co.), 87-97.
- (1951c), 'Mrs. Miniver (1939)', *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold & Co.), 305-308.
- Freud, Sigmund (1920), 'One of the Difficulties of Psycho-Analysis', *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 1 (1), 17-23.
- (1985), 'The 'Uncanny' (1919)', in Albert Dickson (ed.), *Art and Literature* (Penguin Freud Library, 14; London: Penguin), 339-376.
- Gallichan, Walter (1917), *The Psychology of Marriage* (London: T. Werner Laurie).
- Garnett, David (1927), 'Letter to Edith Olivier', Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers.
- (1955), *The Flowers of the Forest* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Gordon, George (1931), 'Holiday Reading', *Book Society News*, August, p.11.
- Gould, Gerald (1923), 'Review of *Lady Into Fox*', *The Saturday Review*, 27/01/23, p.116.
- H.D. (1998), 'Borderline: A POOL. film with Paul Robeson (1930)', in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (eds.), *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (London: Cassell), 221-236.
- Haldane, Charlotte (1927), *Motherhood and its Enemies* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Hamilton, Cicely (1909), *Marriage as a Trade* (London: Chapman & Hall).
- (1940), *The Englishwoman* (London: Longmans).
- Hartley, L.P. (1926a), 'New Fiction', *The Saturday Review*, 06/02/26, p.165.
- (1926b), 'New Fiction', *The Saturday Review*, 24/04/26, p.546.
- Harwood, H.C. (1926), 'Review of *Lolly Willowses*', *The Outlook*, 06/02/26.
- Hillis, Marjorie (1936), *Live Alone and Like It* (London: Duckworth).
- Holtby, Winifred (1927), 'The Truth About Aunts', *Time and Tide*, 03/06/27, 520-521.
- (1934), *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (London: John Lane).
- (1935), 'Notes on the Way', *Time and Tide*, 04/05/35, 647-648.
- Howard, Elizabeth Jane (1985) Introduction to Taylor, Elizabeth (1951 repr.1985), *A Game of Hide and Seek* (London: Virago).
- Hutton, Laura (1935), *The Single Woman and Her Emotional Problems* (London: Ballière, Tindall & Cox).
- Huxley, Julian (1936), 'Review of *The Thinking Reed*', *Book Society News*, April, p.7.
- Iles, Francis (1932), 'New Fiction', *Time and Tide*, 12/11/32, 1253-1254.
- Jameson, Storm (1929), *The Georgian Novel and Mr. Robinson* (London: William Heinemann).
- Jeffreys, Sheila (1985), *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora).

- Jentsch, Ernst and Sellars (trans.), Roy (1906 (trans. 1996)), 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny', *Angelaki*, 2, 7-15.
- Lawrence, D.H. (1961), 'Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (1923)', *Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* (London: Heinemann), 197-249.
- Lawrence, D.H. and Moore, H.T. (1962), *Collected Letters*, 2 vols. (2; London: Heinemann).
- Leavis, F.R. (1930), *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (Minority Pamphlets; Cambridge: The Minority Press).
- Leavis, Q.D. (1932 repr.2000), *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Pimlico).
- (1937), 'The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers', *Scrutiny*, VI, 334-340.
- Low, Barbara (1920), *Psycho-Analysis: A Brief Account of the Freudian Theory* (London: George Allen & Unwin).
- Ludovici, Anthony M. (1924), *Lysistrata: or Woman's Future and Future Woman* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.).
- Lynd, Sylvia (1922), 'New Novels', *Time and Tide*, 08/12/22, 1184-1185.
- (1926), 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*', *Time and Tide*, 19/03/26, 271-272.
- (1931a), 'Review of *The Waves*', *Book Society News*, November, p.5.
- (1931b), 'The Art of Fiction', *Book Society News*, November, 11-12.
- Lyon, Ardon (1980), 'On Remaining the Same Person', *Philosophy*, 55 (212), 167-182.
- Lyon, Ursula Mary (1927), *Etiquette: A Guide to Public and Social Life* (London: Cassell & Co.).
- MacArthur, John (1927), *Shall Flappers Rule? A Revolutionary Proposal, and its Dangers to Men* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co.).
- Macaulay, Rose (1925), *A Casual Commentary* (London: Methuen).
- MacCarthy, Desmond (1932), *Criticism* (London: Putnam).
- (1935), *Experience* (London: Putnam).
- Mackay, Charles (1841 repr.1986), *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (Boston: L.C. Page).
- Macpherson, Kenneth (1998), 'As Is (1930)', in James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Jane Marcus (eds.), *Close Up 1927-1933* (London: Cassell), 236-238.
- Maugham, W. Somerset (1951), *The Writer's Point of View* (London: Cambridge University Press).
- McDowall, A.S. (1923), 'A Candid Fantasy', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22/02/23, p.121.
- Milne, A.A. (1952), *Year In, Year Out* (London: Methuen).
- Mitchison, Naomi (1930), 'New Fiction', *Time and Tide*, 13/12/30, p.1580.
- Moran, Helen (1932), 'Review of *The Provincial Lady Goes Further*', *London Mercury*, XXVII, 170-171.
- Morgan, Louise (1931), *Writers at Work* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Morrison, Mary (1927), 'Letter to Edith Olivier', Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers.
- Mortimer, Raymond (1924), 'New Novels', *The New Statesman*, 26/04/24, 68-69.
- Muir, Edwin (1926), 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*', *The Nation & The Athenaeum*, 06/03/26, p.782.
- Olivier, Edith (1925-1927), 'Diary (December 1925 - December 1927)', Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier papers.
- (1926), 'Mildred Olivier', *Mildred* (Shaftesbury: High House Press), 1-18.

- (1938), *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley: Personal Memories* (London: Faber & Faber).
- (1941), *Country Moods and Tenses: A Non-Grammarians's Chapbook* (London: B.T. Batsford).
- Orwell, George (2009a), *Critical Essays*, ed. George Packer (London: Harvill Secker).
- (2009b), *Narrative Essays*, ed. George Packer (London: Harvill Secker).
- Perényi, Eleanor (1985), 'The Good Witch of the West', *New York Review of Books*, 32 (12), 27-30.
- Pont and Delafield, E.M. (1938), *The British Character Studied and Revealed* (London: Collins).
- Priestley, J.B. (1923), 'Review of *Lady Into Fox*', *London Mercury*, February, 436-437.
- (1926), 'High, Low, Broad', *The Saturday Review*, 20/02/26, 222-223.
- (1931), 'Brute Cult', *Book Society News*, October, 8-9.
- (1932), 'Some Reflections of a Popular Novelist', *London Mercury*, XXVII (158), 135-142.
- (1934), *English Journey* (London: William Heinemann).
- Randall, A.E. (1923), 'New Novels', *New Age*, 12/04/23, 389-391.
- Rothenstein, Sir John Knewstubb Maurice (1926), 'Review of *The Venetian Glass Nephew*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 22/04/26, p.300.
- Rowland, Wendy (1993), 'Paperbacks', *Literary Review*, December, 13-15.
- Royde-Smith, Erica J. (1940), 'Willed But Unwanted', *Times Literary Supplement*, 26/10/40, p.545.
- Royde-Smith, Naomi (1927), 'By The Same Author', *Time and Tide*, 03/06/27, 523-524.
- Salpeter, Harry (1927), 'The First Reader', *News*, 26/08/27.
- Scharlieb, Mary (1914), *What It Means to Marry or Young Women & Marriage* (London: Cassell & Co.).
- (1915), *The Seven Ages of Woman* (London: Cassell & Co.).
- (1929), *The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems* (London: Williams & Norgate).
- Scott, Walter (1827), 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and Particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffman', *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1 (1), 60-98.
- Sedgwick, Anne (1927), 'Letter to Edith Olivier', Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers.
- Shanks, Edward (1926), 'Fiction', *London Mercury*, May, 91-93.
- Shelley, Mary (1831 repr.2000), '1831 Preface', *Frankenstein* (London: Penguin Books), 19-25.
- Shorter, Clement K. (1923), 'A Literary Letter', *The Sphere*, 18/08/23, p.ii.
- Strachey, Lytton (1972), 'According to Freud (1914)', in Paul Levy (ed.), *The Really Interesting Question and Other Papers* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), 112-120.
- Strong, L.A.G. (1932), 'Day-Dreamers All', *Time and Tide*, 09/07/32, 764-765.
- Sturm, C.C. (1824), *Sturm's Reflections on The Works of God and of His Providence Throughout All Nature*, 2 vols. (1; London: J.F. Dove).
- Symon, J.D. (1923), 'Books of the Day', *Illustrated London News*, 03/03/23, p.334.
- Walpole, Hugh (1931), 'Review of *Festival*', *Book Society News*, November, 1-2.
- (1937), 'Review of *And So - Victoria*', *Book Society News*, May, p.5.
- Warner, Oliver (1929), 'Sylvia Townsend Warner', *The Bookman*, October, 8-9.

- Warner, Sylvia Townsend (1926), 'Modern Witches', *Eve*, 18/08/26, 331; 366.
- (1927), 'On Choosing a Country Residence', *Time and Tide*, 17/06/27, 568-569.
- (1933), 'The Property of a Lady', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 14/08/33, 444-445.
- (1939), 'The Way By Which I Have Come (4)', *The Countryman*, 19 (2), 472-486.
- (1948), 'I Cook On Oil', in J.W. Robertson Scott (ed.), *The Countryman Book* (London: Odhams Press), 136-138.
- (1950 repr.2012), 'Something About Aunts', in Peter Tolhurst (ed.), *With The Hunted: Selected Writings* (Norwich: Black Dog Books), 369-372.
- (1951), 'Jane Austen', in The British Council and The National Book League (eds.), (London: Longmans, Green & Co.).
- (1959 repr.1990), 'Women as Writers', in Bonnie Kine Scott (ed.), *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington; Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press), 538-546.
- (2001), 'The Original Ending of *Lolly Willowes*', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2001, 32-34.
- Warner, Sylvia Townsend, Warner, Val, and Schmidt, Michael (1981), 'Sylvia Townsend Warner in Conversation', *PN Review*, 8 (3), 35-37.
- Warner, Sylvia Townsend and Maxwell, William (1982), *Letters* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Warner, Sylvia Townsend, Garnett, David, and Garnett, Richard (1994), *Sylvia and David: The Townsend Warner/Garnett Letters* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson).
- Warner, Sylvia Townsend and Harman, Claire (1994), *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Warner, Sylvia Townsend, Maxwell, William, and Steinman, Michael (2001), *The Element of Lavishness: Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner & William Maxwell* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint).
- Waterhouse, E.S. (1931), 'Psycho-Analysis: a Success or a Failure?', *London Quarterly Review*, January 27-38.
- Watt, Henry J. (1929), *The Common Sense of Dreams* (Worcester, MA: Clark University Press).
- Welby, T. Earle (1927), 'Review of *The Love-Child*', *The Saturday Review*, 28/05/27, p.835.
- Wells, H.G. (1923), 'Modern Reviewing', *The Adelphi*, 1 (2), 150-151.
- (1934), *Seven Famous Novels* (New York: Alfred Knopf).
- Williams, Orlo (1921), 'Review of *Dangerous Ages*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 02/06/21, p.352.
- (1926), 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 04/02/26, p.78.
- Wolfe, Humbert (1927), 'The Growth of Fantasy in the Novel', *Vogue*, Late July, 45, 68.
- Woolf, Leonard (1924), 'Mr. Garnett's Second', *The Nation & The Athenaeum*, 26/04/24, p.115.
- (1927), *Hunting the Highbrow* (Hogarth Essays: Second Series; London: Hogarth Press).
- Woolf, Virginia (1939), *Reviewing* (Hogarth Sixpenny Pamphlets; London: Hogarth Press).
- (1966), 'Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown (1924)', in Leonard Woolf (ed.), *Collected Essays* (1; London: Chatto & Windus), 319-337.
- (1972a), 'Middlebrow (1942)', in Leonard Woolf (ed.), *Collected Essays: Volume Two* (London: Chatto & Windus), 196-203.

- (1972b), 'The Cinema (1926)', in Leonard Woolf (ed.), *Collected Essays: Volume Two* (London: Chatto & Windus), 268-272.
- (1975a), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume 3 (1923-1928)*, eds Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).
- (1975b), *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Volume 4 (1929-1931)*, eds Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann Banks (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).
- (1980 repr.1982), *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume 3 (1925-30)*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin).
- (1982 repr.1983), *The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume 4 (1931-35)*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin).
- (2008), *A Room of One's Own (1929) and Three Guineas (1938)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Wylie, Elinor (1927), 'Letter to Edith Olivier', Chippenham, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Edith Olivier Papers.

Secondary sources

- Apter, T.E. (1982), *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).
- Asker, D.B.D. (1983), 'Vixens and Values: The Modern Metamorphoses of Garnett and Vercors', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 10 (2), 182-191.
- Austin, J.L. (1975), *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Bachelard, Gaston (1958 repr.1994), *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, MA: Beacon Press).
- Beauman, Nicola (1983 repr.2008), *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39* (London: Persephone Books).
- (1999), 'Persephone Quarterly 2', (London: Persephone Books).
- Beddoe, Deirdre (1989), *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1918-1939* (London: Pandora).
- Beer, Gillian (1999), 'Sylvia Townsend Warner: "The Centrifugal Kick"', in Maroula Joannou (ed.), *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 76-86.
- Bingham, Frances (2006), 'The Practice of the Presence of Valentine: Ackland in Warner's Work', in Gill Davies, David Malcolm, and John Simons (eds.), *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press), 29-44.
- Bjørhovde, Gerd (1986), 'Transformation and Subversion as Narrative Strategies in Two Fantasy Novels of the 1920s', in Peter Bilton, et al. (eds.), *Essays in Honour of Kristian Smidt* (Oslo, Norway: University of Oslo), 213-224.
- Bloom, Harold (1982), *AGON: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Booth, Wayne (1961), *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press).
- Borges, Jorge Luis, Yates, Donald A., and Irby, James East (1972), *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).

- Bracco, Rosa Maria (1990), *Betwixt and Between: Middlebrow Fiction and English Society in the Twenties and Thirties* (Melbourne, Victoria: University of Melbourne).
- (1993), *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Providence, RI; Oxford: Berg).
- Braun, Hugh (1940), *The Story of the English House* (London: B.T. Batsford).
- Braybrooke, Patrick (1927), *Some Goddesses of the Pen* (London: The C.W. Daniel Company).
- Briganti, Chiara and Mezei, Kathy (2006), *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and E.H. Young* (Hampshire: Ashgate).
- Briggs, Julia (2005), *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* (London: Allen Lane).
- Brockman, Richard (2010), 'Freud, Frankenstein, and the Art of Loss', *The Psychoanalytic Review*, 97 (5), 819-833.
- Brooke-Rose, Christine (1981), *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Brothers, Barbara (1991), 'Flying the Nets at Forty: *Lolly Willowes* as Female Bildungsroman', in Laura L. Doan (ed.), *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 195-212.
- Brown, Erica (2012), *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel: Elizabeth von Arnim and Elizabeth Taylor* (London: Pickering & Chatto).
- Brown, Erica and Grover, Mary (2012), 'Introduction', in Erica Brown and Mary Grover (eds.), *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960* (Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire), 1-21.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker (2001), *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books).
- Carey, John (1992), *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939* (London: Faber & Faber).
- Caserio, Robert L. (1999), *The Novel in England, 1900-1950* (New York: Twayne).
- Casey, Janet Galligani (2012), 'Middlebrow Reading and Undergraduate Teaching: The Place of the Middlebrow in the Academy', in Erica Brown and Mary Grover (eds.), *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: the Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan), 25-36.
- Cavaliero, Glen (1977), *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900-1939* (London: Macmillan).
- (1995), *The Supernatural and English Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Chanady, Amaryll Beatrice (1985), *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antinomy* (New York: Garland).
- Chow, Karen (1999), 'Popular Sexual Knowledges and Women's Agency in 1920s England: Marie Stope's *Married Love* and E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*', *Feminist Review*, 63, 64-87.
- Clarke, Alison J. (2001), 'The Aesthetics of Social Aspiration', in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Home Possessions: Material Culture behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg), 23-45.
- Collier, Patrick (2006), *Modernism on Fleet Street* (Hampshire: Ashgate).
- Cornwell, Neil (1990), *The Literary Fantastic: From Gothic to Postmodernism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf).
- Cowdroy, Charlotte (1933), *Wasted Womanhood* (London: George Allen & Unwin).

- Cuddy-Keane, Melba (2003), *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual, and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Culler, Jonathan (1975), *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul).
- Davies, Gill (2006), 'The Corners That Held Her: The Importance of Place in Sylvia Townsend Warner's Writing', in Gill Davies, David Malcolm, and John Simons (eds.), *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press), 1-10.
- Deen, Stella (2002), *Challenging Modernism: New Readings in Literature and Culture 1914-45* (Hampshire: Ashgate).
- Donawerth, Jane (1997), *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (1st ed. edn.; Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press).
- Essex, Rosamund (1977), *Woman in a Man's World* (London: Sheldon Press).
- (1947), *Unmarried But Happy* (London: Victor Gollancz).
- Faris, Wendy B. (2007), 'Bloomsbury's Beasts: The Presence of Animals in the Texts and Lives of Bloomsbury', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 37 (1), 107-125.
- Farr, Judith (1983), *The Life and Art of Elinor Wylie* (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press).
- Felski, Rita (1994), 'Modernism and Modernity: Engendering Literary History', *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, 191-208.
- Fischer, Steven (2003), *A History of Reading* (London: Reaktion Books).
- Fish, Stanley (1980), *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Fitzgerald, Penelope (1982), 'Keeping Warm', *London Review of Books*, 22-23.
- Forrester, John (1994), '"A Whole Climate of Opinion": Rewriting the History of Psychoanalysis', in Mark S. Micale and Roy Porter (eds.), *Discovering the History of Psychiatry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 174-190.
- Forster, E.M. (1927 repr.1962), *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Pelican).
- Frye, Northrop (1957), *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- (1976), *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press).
- Fuss, Diana (2004), *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms That Shaped Them* (New York; London: Routledge).
- Gallix, Andrew (2013), 'The Booker Steps Away From Being Its Own Genre', *Guardian* <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/28/booker-prize-longlist>>, accessed 20 September.
- Gan, Wendy (2009), *Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Garrity, Jane (2003), *Step-daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- Gilman, Greer (2012), 'The Languages of the Fantastic', in Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 134-146.
- Graham, John (1961), 'The "Caricature Value" of Parody and Fantasy in Orlando', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 30, 345-366.
- Graves, Robert and Hodge, Alan (1940), *The Long Week-end: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (London: Faber & Faber).
- Guillory, John (1993), *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press).

- Hanson, Clare (2000), *Hysterical Fictions: The "Woman's Novel" in the Twentieth Century* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Hapgood, Lynne and Paxton, Nancy L. (2000), *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel 1900-1930* (Hampshire: Macmillan).
- Harman, Claire (1989), *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Hart-Davis, Rupert (1952), *Hugh Walpole: A Biography* (London: Macmillan).
- Hartley, Jenny (2001), *Reading Groups* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hively, Evelyn Helmick (2002), *A Private Madness: The Genius of Elinor Wylie* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press).
- Hoffman, Frederick John (1945), *Freudianism and the Literary Mind* (New York: Grove Press).
- Humble, Nicola (2001 repr.2007), *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hume, Kathryn (1984), *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen).
- Irwin, W.R. (1958), 'The Metamorphoses of David Garnett', *PMLA: Publication of the Modern Language Association*, 73 (4), 386-392.
- (1976), *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press).
- Israel, Betsy (2003), *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (London: Aurum Press).
- Jackson, Rosemary (1981), *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen).
- Jacobs, Mary (2006), 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Politics of the English Pastoral 1925-1934', in Gill Davies, David Malcolm, and John Simons (eds.), *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press), 61-82.
- Janouch, Gustav (1971), *Conversations With Kafka*, trans. Goronwy Rees (London: Andre Deutsch).
- Johnson, Ann S. (1973), 'Garnett's Amazon from Dahomey: Literary Debts in "The Sailor's Return"', *Contemporary Literature*, 14 (2), 169-185.
- Kestner, Joseph (1995), 'Narcissism as Symptom and Structure: The Case of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*', in Fred Botting (ed.), *Frankenstein* (New Casebooks; Hampshire and London: Macmillan), 68-80.
- Knoll, Bruce (1993), "'An Existence Doled Out': Passive Resistance as a Dead End in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowses*", *Twentieth Century Literature*, 39 (3), 344-363.
- Koenen, Anna (1999), *Visions of Doom, Plots of Power: The Fantastic in Anglo-American Women's Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag).
- Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark (2003), *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL; London: University of Chicago Press).
- Last, Nella, Malcolmson, Patricia E., and Malcolmson, Robert W. (2008), *Nella Last's Peace: The Post-War Diaries of Housewife*, 49 (London: Profile).
- Lefebvre, Henri (1974 trans.1991), *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Lewis, C.S. (1961), *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Light, Alison (1991), *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge).

- Lucas, John (2000), 'From Realism to Radicalism: Sylvia Townsend Warner, Patrick Hamilton and Henry Green in the 1920s', in Lynne Hapgood and Nancy L. Paxton (eds.), *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel 1900-1930* (Hampshire: Macmillan).
- Macdonald, Dwight (1960), 'Masscult and Midcult II', *Partisan Review*, 27 (Fall), 589-631.
- Macdonald, Kate (2011), *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr. Miniver Read* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- (2012), 'Witchcraft and Non-conformity in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willows* (1926) and John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927)', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 23 (2), 215-238.
- Marcus, Jane (1984), 'A Wilderness of One's Own': Feminist Fantasy Novels of the Twenties: Rebecca West and Sylvia Townsend Warner', in Susan Merrill Squier (ed.), *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press), 134-160.
- (1990), 'Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978)', in Bonnie Kine Scott (ed.), *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington; Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press), 531-538.
- (1992), 'Bluebeard's Daughters: Pretexts for Pre-Texts', in Alice A. Parker and Elizabeth A. Meese (eds.), *Feminist Critical Negotiations* (Philadelphia: John Betjamins Publishing Company), 19-32.
- Massey, Irving (1976), *The Gaping Pig: Literature and Metamorphosis* (Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press).
- Mather, Rachel R. (1996), *The Heirs of Jane Austen: Twentieth-Century Writers of the Comedy of Manners* (New York: P. Lang).
- McGilchrist, Iain (2010), *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press).
- Melman, Billie (1988), *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Hampshire: Macmillan).
- Mendlesohn, Farah (2008), *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press).
- Miller, Daniel (2001), 'Possessions', in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Home Possessions: Material Culture Behind Closed Doors* (Oxford: Berg), 107-121.
- Miller, Anita (1978), Introduction to Warner, Sylvia Townsend (1926 repr. 1978), *Lolly Willows, or, the Loving Huntsman* (Chicago: Academy Chicago).
- Montefiore, Janet (2002), *Arguments of Heart and Mind: Selected Essays 1977-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- Mulford, Wendy (1988), *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics 1930-1951* (London: Pandora).
- Murray, Margaret (1921), *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Nesbitt, Jennifer Poulos (2003), 'Footsteps of Red Ink: Body and Landscape in *Lolly Willows*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49 (4), 449-471.
- Nicholson, Virginia (2007), *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* (London: Penguin).
- Parkin-Gounélas, Ruth (1993), 'The Other Side of the Looking-Glass: Woman's Fantasy Writing and Woolf's *Orlando*', *Gamma: Journal of Theory and Criticism*, 1, 137-153.
- Penzoldt, Peter (1952), *The Supernatural in Fiction* (London: Peter Nevill).

- Persky, Stan (2011 repr.2012), *Reading the 21st Century: Books of the Decade 2000-2009* (London; Montreal & Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press).
- Presley, John Woodrow (1994), 'Fox, Vampire, Witch: Two Novels of Fantasy by Graves and Garnett', *Focus on Robert Graves and His Contemporaries*, 2 (2), 26-30.
- Propp, Vladimir, Pirkova-Jakobson, Svatava, and Scott, Laurence (1958), *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society).
- Purkiss, Diane (1996), *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge).
- Rabkin, Eric S. (1976), *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Radner, Hilary (1989), 'Extra-Curricular Activities: Women Writers and the Readerly Text', in Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (eds.), *Women's Writing in Exile* (London & Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press), 251-267.
- Radway, Janice A. (1997), *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press).
- Rapp, Dean (1988), 'The Reception of Freud By the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines 1920-1925', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 24 (April), 191-201.
- Reed, Myrtle (1901), *The Spinster Book* (London: The Knickerbocker Press).
- Rubin, Joan Shelley (1992), *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (London; Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press).
- Scarborough, Dorothy (1917), *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (New York; London,: G.P. Putnam's Sons).
- Sellin, Bernard (1981), *The Life and Works of David Lindsay*, trans. Kenneth Gunnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Skulsky, Harold (1981), *Metamorphosis: The Mind in Exile* (London; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Sullivan, Melissa (2010), 'The Middlebrows of the Hogarth Press: Rose Macaulay, E.M. Delafield and Cultural Hierarchies in Interwar Britain', in Helen Southworth (ed.), *Leonard and Virginia Woolf, The Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 52-73.
- Sykes, Rosemary (2001), 'The Willows Pattern', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2001, 1-17.
- Todd, Anthea (1998), *Women's Writing in English: Britain 1900-1945* (London: Longman).
- Todorov, Tzvetan (1975), *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cornell Paperbacks; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).
- Updike, John (1983), *Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism* (London: Penguin).
- Wachman, Gay (2001), *Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties* (London; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press).
- Ward, A.C. (1930), *The Nineteen-Twenties: Literature and Ideas in the Post-War Decade* (London: Methuen).
- Warner, Marina (2002), *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Wilson, Colin (1970), 'Lindsay as Novelist and Mystic', in J.B. Pick, Colin Wilson, and E.H. Visiak (eds.), *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay* (London: John Baker), 35-91.

Ziolkowski, Theodore (2005), *Ovid and the Moderns* (London; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).