

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Fashioning Feminist Aestheticism in the Early Twentieth-Century Novel: Lucas Malet, Netta Syrett, Dorothy Richardson, and Fin-de-Siècle Culture

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8064s5w9>

Author

Rainwater, Crescent

Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Fashioning Feminist Aestheticism in the Early Twentieth-Century Novel:

Lucas Malet, Netta Syrett, Dorothy Richardson,

and Fin-de-Siècle Culture

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Crescent Spring Rainwater

2019

© Copyright by
Crescent Spring Rainwater
2019

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Fashioning Feminist Aestheticism in the Early Twentieth-Century Novel:

Lucas Malet, Netta Syrett, Dorothy Richardson,
and Fin-de-Siècle Culture

by

Crescent Spring Rainwater

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Joseph E. Bristow, Chair

This dissertation investigates the early twentieth-century works of three British women authors who concentrated on the crucial role of fin-de-siècle culture in shaping modern womanhood. The writers in question are Lucas Malet (the pen name of Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison) (1852-1931), Netta Syrett (1865-1943), and Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957): three authors whose oeuvres, to varying degrees, remain on the margins of scholarship. Taken together, this body of fiction represents an overlooked enclave of women's writing that refashions the English novel in order to forge new narratives for rebellious women characters. Malet, Syrett, and Richardson share a fascination with investigating the ways in which not only aestheticism (the late nineteenth-century cultural movement that championed "art for art's sake") but also decadence (the subsequent movement that flouted moral conventions) could provide them with resources for imagining new forms of modern femininity. Moreover, all three writers are in dialogue with the cultural and literary figure that stood for insubordinate

womanhood at the fin de siècle: the New Woman. This dissertation demonstrates the divergent ways in which Malet, Syrett, and Richardson critically engage with the audacious artistic and sexual advances that developed from aestheticism, decadence, and the New Woman, in order to affirm women's dissident desires, autonomous self-fashioning, and professional ambitions.

The present study reassesses a span of neglected novels that Malet, Syrett, and Richardson produced between 1896 and 1919. The three substantial chapters explore the works of each of these writers in turn. Existing scholarship about Malet, Syrett, and Richardson has tended to associate each author's oeuvre with separate literary movements, and therefore critics have seldom considered these novelists' works in relation to one another. Malet's fictions are narrated in lush, evocative prose, and have proved to be of particular critical interest to students of literary aestheticism. By comparison, Syrett's novels are narrated in a middlebrow realist style that has primarily been associated with New Woman fiction. Meanwhile, Richardson fashioned an innovative narrative technique that scholars associate with early developments in English modernism. By juxtaposing these authors, the present study enables us to recognize that these writers converge upon the idea that transgressive forms of womanhood emerged in the period most closely associated with aestheticism and decadence. This dissertation therefore offers an alternative to more traditional ways of grouping women's fiction written between 1890 and 1920 according to more overt markers of style. Moreover, the history of decadence that I chart here runs counter to a pervasive understanding of the movement as one that was adverse to women, and it also diverges from the way in which certain male contemporaries such as Holbrook Jackson, Richard Le Gallienne, and Osbert Burdett, reflected in the 1910s and 1920s on decadence as having terminated at the turn of the century. This dissertation thus remaps a history of women's writing, the form of the novel, and art for art's sake after the turn of the twentieth century through a detailed consideration of several respective novels that Malet, Syrett, and Richardson produced during these decades.

The dissertation of Crescent Spring Rainwater is approved.

Louise E. J. Hornby

Sarah Tindal Kareem

Laure Murat

Joseph E. Bristow, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of figures	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
Vita	x
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Lucas Malet's Later Aesthetic Novels, 1901-1919: Looking Back on the Woman's Plot in English Fiction	32
Chapter Two: Netta Syrett, the Middlebrow Woman Aesthete, and English Fiction, 1896-1916	134
Chapter Three: Dorothy Richardson's <i>Pigrimage</i> : Women's Fiction, Aestheticism, and the Early Twentieth-Century English Novel	137
Coda	320
Bibliography	328

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. George Du Maurier, <i>Nincompoopiana.—The Mutual Admiration Society</i> , <i>Punch</i> , 1880.	17
Figure 2. Aubrey Beardsley, title page for Netta Syrett, <i>Nobody's Fault</i> , 1896.	154
Figure 3. Aubrey Beardsley, <i>The Wagnerites</i> , <i>Yellow Book</i> , 1894.	155
Figure 4. “Books Published This Week,” <i>Athenæum</i> , 1915.	238
Figure 5. Albert George Morrow, Poster for Sydney Grundy’s play <i>The New Woman</i> , London, 1894.	288

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been incredibly lucky to have a community of academics, friends, and family who have all played an integral part in seeing me through to the completion of this dissertation. My tremendous gratitude goes first to Joseph Bristow; this work could not have been written without his inexhaustible support. Joe's brilliance as a scholar is matched by his excellence as an advisor. His remarkable generosity with his time, rigorous feedback, and guidance throughout every stage of this process has facilitated my endless growth as a scholar. I am eternally grateful to have had this opportunity to work with him. Another portion of my thanks must go to Louise Hornby, who always enables me to see my ideas afresh, and whose encouragement has sustained me intellectually as well as emotionally. Her mentorship has enriched me as an academic, and as a human being. I am also extremely grateful to Sarah Kareem, a wellspring of insight, who is able not only to see the elusive stakes of a project, but also to provide practical guidance for fashioning a piece of writing that makes those stakes clear.

I also must thank the professor whose enthusiasm in the classroom and love of literature solidified my desire to embark on this long journey toward the PhD. Cassandra Van Zandt, you radiated the joy of teaching, and inspired me to want to study literature in a way that was both intellectually rigorous and honored the power of fiction to delight and to transform. Your example has encouraged me to keep pressing forward even through the most daunting aspects of pursuing this degree.

My gratitude also goes to the friends with whom I have been lucky enough to share this graduate school journey. Alexandra Verini, our weekly get togethers sustained me through many challenges, and this past year without you in LA has made all the more evident how many shadows your light dispelled. Jennifer MacGregor, to be in your presence is to be at peace with the world. The years that we spent together in LA I will always cherish. Ellen Truxaw, the Other Victorianist: you are the friend I imagined one day I would find—someone with whom I could

not only share a passion for this wonderful literature that we call Victorian, but also with whom I could share my interiority. Angelina Del Balzo, a brilliant cultural critic and constant advocate of my work, whose company I have been privileged to share in some of the greatest places in LA (particularly the Wellesbourne, the opera, and the theatre). I must also express my gratitude to Vanessa Febo, Cailey Hall, Greg Toy, Alethia Shih, Lindsay Wilhelm, Mike Vignola, and Anna Sarigianis (an “honorary grad student” who could not be a more delightful friend, or a more wonderful cat sitter).

My gratitude also goes to the friends with whom I have been lucky enough to share this graduate school journey. Alexandra Verini, our weekly get togethers sustained me through many challenges, and this past year without you in LA has made all the more evident how many shadows your light dispelled. Jennifer MacGregor, to be in your presence is to be at peace with the world. The years that we spent together in LA I will always cherish. Ellen Truxaw, the Other Victorianist: you are the friend I imagined one day I would find—someone with whom I could not only share a passion for this wonderful literature that we call Victorian, but also with whom I could share my interiority. Angelina Del Balzo, a brilliant cultural critic and constant advocate of my work, whose company I have been privileged to share in some of the greatest places in LA (particularly the Wellesbourne, the opera, and the theatre). I must also express my gratitude to Vanessa Febo, Cailey Hall, Greg Toy, Alethia Shih, Lindsay Wilhelm, Mike Vignola, and Anna Sarigianis (an “honorary grad student” who could not be a more delightful friend, or a more wonderful cat sitter).

And finally, I must express my boundless gratitude to my parents, Candy and Eric Rainwater, who have unfailingly supported my academic goals, and have provided an inexhaustible source of encouragement throughout this process. Thank you for urging me to do what I love, and believing that I have the ability to do it. And to Shiloh, who is not only the best of brothers, but a true friend.

A portion of Chapter 1 has appeared previously as “The Authorial Ambition of *Deadham Hard*: Reimagining Womanhood, Profession, and Desire.” In *Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays*, edited by Jane Ford and Alexandra Gray, 127-44. New York: Routledge, 2019.

CRESCENT SPRING RAINWATER

Curriculum Vitae

Education

- (In progress) PhD English. University of California, Los Angeles.
Expected Graduation: June 13, 2019
- MA Gender, Sexuality, and Culture. University College Dublin. 2010
- BA English. Summa Cum Laude. Biola University. 2008

Publications

“The Authorial Ambition of Lucas Malet’s *Deadham Hard*: Reimagining Womanhood, Profession, and Desire.” In *Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays*. Edited by Jane Ford and Alexandra Gray. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Biographical entry on Netta Syrett. *Companion to Victorian Popular Fiction*. Edited by Kevin Morrison. Jefferson, MC: McFarland, 2018.

Conference Papers

“*The Far Horizon* and The Lady of the Windswept Dust: Lucas Malet’s Secular Madonna and Modern Womanhood.” International Center for Victorian Women Writer’s Conference. Canterbury Christ Church University, July 10-11, 2017.

“*Nobody’s Fault* and the Negotiation of Form: the ‘New Woman’ and Aestheticism in Netta Syrett’s Rewriting of the Woman’s Narrative.” International Center for Victorian Women Writer’s Conference. Canterbury Christ Church University, July 25-26, 2016.

“‘I am weary of this sterile rest that is no rest’: George Egerton and the Gender of Writing for *The Yellow Book*.” Thinking Gender Conference. UCLA, April 7-8, 2016.

Teaching Experience

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013-2019

Instructor of Record

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| English Composition: Composition, Rhetoric, and Language | Spring 2019 |
| Critical Reading and Writing: “Forms of Desire, Forms of the Self” | Fall 2016 |
| Critical Reading and Writing: “Literature and Aesthetics” | Summer 2015 |
| Critical Reading and Writing: “Gender, Sexuality, and the Body” | Fall 2014, Winter 2015 |

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Literatures in English from 1850 to the Present	Spring 2017
The American Novel	Winter 2017
Shakespeare—Later Plays	Summer 2016
Literature in English to 1700	Spring 2015
Victorian and Edwardian Children’s Literature	Spring 2014
Jane Austen and Her Peers	Winter 2014
Nineteenth-Century Critical Prose	Fall 2013

Honors and Awards

UCLA Graduate Division Dissertation Year Fellowship	Fall 2018 – Spring 2019
Mellon Summer Internship Award	Summer 2018
English Department Dissertation Fellowship	Fall 2017 – Spring 2018
Grace M. Hunt English Reading Room Research Award	Summer 2016
Mellon Graduate Fellowship	Fall 2015 - Spring 2016
UCLA Graduate Summer Research Mentorship	Summer 2014
Summer Language Study Grant	Summer 2013
Mellon Graduate Fellowship	Fall 2012 - Spring 2013

Introduction

This dissertation explores three British women authors who developed much of their most significant fiction after the turn of the twentieth century through a series of works that put under scrutiny the vital role of fin-de-siècle culture in shaping modern femininity. The writers I have chosen to discuss are Lucas Malet (the pen name of Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison) (1852-1931), Netta Syrett (1865-1943), and Dorothy Richardson (1873-1957). I have juxtaposed these authors because together they represent an overlooked enclave of women's writing that is invested in refashioning the form of the English novel in order to construct new narrative possibilities for women protagonists. The leading female characters in their fictions often resist marriage, pursue artistic and professional aspirations, and lay claim to their own authority and desires. Moreover, all three authors are interested in exploring the ways in which aestheticism—the late nineteenth-century cultural movement that championed “art for art's sake”—could provide resources, both thematically and stylistically, for their distinct projects of reimagining modern womanhood. Their fascination with this initially controversial movement, which was often associated with sexually transgressive works such as A. C. Swinburne's early poetry, also reaches into the development of literary decadence in Britain during the 1890s. It was in this period, too, that one of the most sexually defiant figures, the New Woman, generated controversy in the press. Each of these three distinguished women novelists engages with the bold artistic and sexual advances that emerged from aestheticism, decadence, and the New Woman, and throughout my discussion I show why these cultural phenomena attracted the interests of Malet, Syrett, and Richardson to differing degrees in their female-centered fictions.

Despite the fact that each of these writers maintained a considerable amount of critical respect in their own time, it is fair to say that literary scholars have accorded them very uneven amounts of attention. In the case of Malet, her career spanned the turn of the century from 1882 to 1924. Her novels are psychologically complex, narrated in lush, evocative prose, and explore

transgressive subjects. In the following passage from *Deadham Hard* (1919), for example, we can observe the vivid details of Malet's style, which here records a moment of blossoming female autonomy: "the push of awakening womanhood giving new colour and richness to [Damaris's] conception of life—nature cried out for a certain extravagance in heroism, in largeness of action of aspiration. She was athirst for noble horizons, in love with beauty, with the magnificence of things, seen and unseen alike."¹ Here, the narrator's prose reflects the passionate spirit of the novel's protagonist, delighting in vibrant adjectives and gentle alliteration. Although Malet's contemporary critics compared her favorably with George Eliot, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Henry James, she was virtually forgotten until, in the early 2000s, a revival of interest in Victorian women aesthetes brought her impressive oeuvre back to light.² Malet's writing has subsequently proved to be of particular critical interest to students of literary aestheticism.

By comparison, Syrett had an impressively long professional life from 1890 to 1940. Her publication of three stories in the *Yellow Book* (1894-1897)—the avant-garde periodical produced by The Bodley Head—solidified her association with an impressive artistic circle that included Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, and Henry Harland. In the late 1990s, a reinvestigation of late-Victorian women authors ushered her fiction once again into critical view. By attending primarily to her realist narration and her emphasis on defiant women characters, scholars have largely associated Syrett's novels with the New Woman—the late nineteenth-century cultural figure who stood for women's efforts at expansion into the public sphere and the professions. A characteristic example of Syrett's straightforward style is found in the following assertion made by Bridget, the protagonist of Syrett's first novel, *Nobody's Fault* (1896): "I was thinking how hard things are for women. I mean, it takes such a lot of struggling and fighting before we can get to the point at which men—or most of them—begin."³ In such a

¹ Lucas Malet, *Deadham Hard* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1919), 93.

² See Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

statement we discover the feminist energies that underlie the innovative plots that Syrett develops for her women characters. Her dedication to aestheticism, however, has been largely overlooked, in part because Syrett explores art for art's sake in a plain realist manner that does not feature the stylistic characteristics most often associated with aesthetic writing, such as archaic language, esoteric allusions, and elaborate descriptions of luxury objects. In a passage such as the following, however, we discover the vital centrality of art to Syrett's plots of female rebellion. Here, the titular protagonist of Syrett's 1916 novel, *Rose Cottingham Married*, attends a gathering of aesthetes and her artistic, which had been squelched by her marriage and her work on behalf of socialism, is restored: "with defiant recklessness [Rose] acknowledged to herself that she cared more for books, for pictures, for music, for amusing, stimulating talk with her equals than for any socialistic theories in the world."⁴ Such scenes in which female characters experience a reinvigoration of their assertive subjectivity in response to encounters with art for art's sake abound in Syrett's novels.

Of these three writers, Richardson's name is arguably the most familiar to students of modern fiction. Literary historians have long acknowledged her innovations within early twentieth-century modernism. Her unprecedented formal experimentation occasioned the earliest application of the term "stream of consciousness" to fiction.⁵ Richardson published her first novel, *Pointed Roofs*, in 1915: the initial installment of her thirteen-volume roman-fleuve *Pilgrimage* (1915-1967). The first five parts of this ambitious project focus on the protagonist Miriam Henderson's experience as a young woman in the 1890s. What is surprising, given that Richardson's contemporaries recognized her startling avant-garde style, is that *Pilgrimage* in many ways still remains on the margins of the modernist canon. Moreover, Richardson's focused retrospective on the fin de siècle has scarcely been the subject of any scholarly inquiry,

³ Netta Syrett, *Nobody's Fault* (London: John Lane, 1896), 129-30.

⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1916), 337.

⁵ May Sinclair, "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson," *Egoist* (April 1918): 58.

and Miriam's investment in aestheticism has seldom received critical comment. Throughout *Pilgrimage*, however, in addition to Miriam's profound encounters with forms of art for art's sake, her aesthetic approach to everyday life is abundantly evident, such as in the following section of *Honeycomb* (1917): "Now she knew what she wanted. Bright mornings, beautiful bright rooms, a wilderness of beauty all round her all the time—at any cost. Any life that had not these things she would refuse. . . . Roses in her blood and gold in her hair . . . it was something belonging to them, something that made them gleam. It was her right; even if they gleamed only for her."⁶ Here, we can see not only the way in which the narrative places the reader inside Miriam's consciousness so that we are aware of her thoughts at the pace that they unfold (note the ellipses); we can also tell that Miriam's obsession with beauty directly occasions her assertion of what is her right. Miriam's increasingly independent pursuits throughout *Pilgrimage* are fueled by her conviction that she should lay claim to a lifestyle that provides her the means and autonomy by which to surround herself with loveliness.

In this introduction, I explain the main critical questions that this dissertation addresses in relation to these three very different women writers' shared investment in the fin de siècle. I then proceed to an overview of the late nineteenth-century cultural movements that inform the novels by Malet, Syrett, and Richardson that I have chosen to discuss. I then outline the bodies of scholarship that inform my research, and into which I am making a critical intervention. Subsequently, I provide concise accounts of each of my chapters, all of which address the most important extant scholarship that relates to each author in turn.

Main Research Questions and Interventions

This dissertation arose out of an inquiry that kept presenting itself to me as I researched a range of fictions by British women that appeared from 1880 to 1920: Why is it that their

⁶ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* (New York: Knopf, 1938), 1:403.

writings are so preoccupied with the relevance of the fin de siècle to their distinctly modern women characters? This question is not one that has been fully addressed by interventions into literary histories of this period. And the omission of this area of debate means that scholars have not adequately recognized the way in which 1890s culture, and especially aestheticism, continued to play a critical role in feminist innovations in the early twentieth-century novel. As I read more widely in my primary sources and the existing critical body of material on these writers, I began to see two things in particular. One is that these authors do not readily fit into the established canons of aesthetic, decadent, and modernist writing. Each one has different kinds of affiliations with all three of these movements, and therefore these writers are quite difficult to affix firmly to either one or another category. Secondly, it became clear to me that the difficulty of placing these authors within these specific genres undoubtedly has contributed to the limited amount of critical interest in them. Malet is an aesthetic writer who is committed to psychological realism. Syrett expresses great dedication to aestheticism and writes in what I will discuss as a middlebrow style. Richardson, as we have seen, is an innovative modernist. By examining these authors together, this present study enables us to make connections across the divergent genres in which these writers operate in a way that allows us to understand the reason why they were preoccupied with the development of aestheticism and decadence.

This dissertation, to some degree, is a recuperative critical project that thoroughly reassesses a span of neglected novels that Malet, Syrett, and Richardson produced between 1896 and 1919. Not only do I address several overlooked novels in their respective corpuses, but also return attention to their women protagonists, whose rebellious narratives are enabled through their encounters with art and beauty. In part, the value of this recuperation is to be found in the feminist interventions that these authors made into debates about aestheticism and decadence. To recognize their contributions is to acknowledge a literary history that runs counter to the way in which certain of their male contemporaries were reflecting on decadence in particular as having definitively ended with the start of the new century. Beginning with Holbrook Jackson's

The Eighteen-Nineties (1913) and followed by such studies as Richard Le Gallienne's *The Romantic '90s* (1925) and Osbert Burdett's *The Beardsley Period* (1925), decadence was represented as belonging to an intriguing past that was sealed within the fin de siècle. Jackson writes about it as "a definite phase of artistic consciousness."⁷ Le Gallienne emphasizes that decadence was only one of several movements in "those many-coloured energetic years," but as his title indicates, he discusses it as limited to a distinct decade.⁸ And Burdett associates decadence with "a conscience that is still sensitive," an attitude which he says is "out of date."⁹

The early deaths of several of the movement's male figureheads was one reason that decadence appeared to have come to an end. Aubrey Beardsley died in 1898 when he was only twenty-five, Oscar Wilde and the poet Ernest Dowson both followed in 1900, and then the poet Lionel Johnson in 1902. W. B. Yeats, who had belonged to the circle associated with the Rhymers' Club along with Dowson, Johnson, and other avant-garde poets, memorably called these decadents "the tragic generation" since they "all were poor men" who "came to tragic ends."¹⁰ Taken together with Yeats's essay, the studies of the 1890s by Jackson, Le Gallienne, and Burdett fall into a category that Kristin Mahoney has labeled "post-Victorian decadence." By this she means writers and artists who, in the first few decades of the 1900s, were intrigued by this late-Victorian movement, which had been so significant that they spent a large amount of energy in "reinvigorating [this] past aesthetic."¹¹ Moreover, Mahoney notes that these post-Victorian decadents "carefully positioned themselves as separate from the energies and

⁷ Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), 67.

⁸ Richard Le Gallienne, *The Romantic '90s* (New York: Doubleday, 1925), 162.

⁹ Osbert Burdett, *The Beardsley Period: An Essay in Perspective* (London: John Lane, 1925), 290.

¹⁰ W. B. Yeats, *The Trembling of the Veil* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1922), 177.

¹¹ Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

appetites of the twentieth century.”¹² In other words, they saw this past aesthetic, whose history they were dedicated to preserving, as distinct from the present that they inhabited.

When we look the fiction of Malet, Syrett, and Richardson, however, we see that for these writers there is no sense of reviving or preserving something from the past: for them, there was no break between aestheticism and decadence, on the one hand, and the twentieth century, on the other. The reason that these authors offer such a different perspective is directly connected with the role that they accord to women in their fiction. The developments toward women’s greater autonomy that were taking shape at the end of the nineteenth century continued to advance in the first decades of the twentieth. Malet’s, Syrett’s, and Richardson’s respective investments in fashioning new forms of womanhood remained the central preoccupation of their novels, and at the same time they continued to draw on the resources of fin-de-siècle culture in order to envision these alternative styles of femininity. This is why their literary projects are neither ones of nostalgia, nor ones that are anachronistic: they are not investigating a female identity that had already formed and solidified during the 1890s, but rather one that remained in the process of finding means for its actualization in the early 1900s. In this regard, the fictions that Malet, Syrett, and Richardson set in the early part of the new century make it especially apparent that they are constructing forms of femininity that are relevant to their contemporary moment. To take one example, in Malet’s 1911 novel *Adrian Savage*, a principal female character is Gabrielle St. Leger, who is called “The Madonna of the Future,” and is said to embody “Modernity.”¹³ Key to this designation is her “militant feminis[m].”¹⁴ At the same time, Gabrielle is a woman who believes in the transcendent power of art, enjoys the life of the senses, and is passionate about aestheticism. As a symbol of modernity, there is nothing antiquated about Gabrielle and her engagement with art for art’s sake. My overarching point is that the

¹² Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence*, 4.

¹³ Malet, *Adrian Savage* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911), 171.

¹⁴ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 18.

immense value that these women writers accorded to art was placed in the service of championing the advancement of women's mental, emotional, and physical autonomy.

In similar ways, Malet, Syrett, and Richardson do not align with the modernist assertion of a definitive break with the Victorian period, a break that is insisted upon in several foundational texts of modernism. Wyndham Lewis, to give a well-known example, stressed a violent separation from the artistic modes of the nineteenth century with his 1914 "Manifesto" for a new approach to art, which he published in his magazine that was tellingly named *Blast*.¹⁵ Famously, too, Ezra Pound's artistic imperative was "Make It New," emphasizing the value that he placed on novelty, and which has come to be considered the slogan of modernism.¹⁶ In addition to these artistic creeds, the modernists regarded the turn of the century as bearing out a temporal ideology of radical change. The first concept of a catastrophic break between 1890 and 1920 is scripted by Wilde's trials in 1895. After Wilde was sent to jail for committing acts of gross indecency, the critic W. E. Henley relished that the state had incarcerated "the High Priest of the Decadents."¹⁷ Virginia Woolf suggested another point of division when she asserted that there was a paradigmatic shift in human history when she made her famous statement that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed."¹⁸ Woolf's selection of 1910 is often associated with the first Post-Impressionist Exhibition that took place in London that year, signaling with its title that a previous artistic movement had come to an end. More definitive than Wilde's trials or Woolf's "1910" was the decisive break brought about by the eruption of the Great War in 1914.

¹⁵ Lewis "blasted" what he regarded as unsophisticated and outmoded forms of fictions, which he associated with what he termed the "Victorian vampire." "Manifesto," *Blast* (London: John Lane, 1914), 11.

¹⁶ While this phrase has long been regarded as the dictum of modernism, one must also remember that Pound did not pen these specific words until 1934, and that the imperative of "Newness" was already established. Jed Rasula notes that "the steady drumbeat of The New preceded Make It New by several decades—during which Pound himself contributed to the polyrhythm of its allure. With the migratory tenacity of a virus, this adjective fertilized the avant-garde wherever it landed." "Make It New," *Modernism/Modernity* 17, no. 4 (November 2010): 713-14.

¹⁷ [W. E. Henley], Editorial, *National Observer*, April 6, 1895, 547.

¹⁸ Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in *The Hogarth Essays* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 5.

When we look at the respective oeuvres of Malet, Syrett, and Richardson, however, we recognize that their fictions show little interest in such ruptures. Instead, their awareness of cultural and historical continuity, especially in relation to women, stays steadfast. This remains true even in relation to Richardson, who might appear to complicate this claim by virtue of her first novel's publication in 1915 during the war, as well as her remarkably innovative prose style, which led several of her contemporary critics to categorize her as a "post-war" writer. Richardson herself, however, was insistent that the label "post-war" was incorrect, in part because it ignored the actual chronology of *Pilgrimage*: "And the war finds one with the first chapter written of a long, long book, and the second begun, and the third in shape; one is therefore, when the time comes, incensed in being classified as a post-war writer altogether."¹⁹ This "post-war" label, moreover, emphasizes a separation from the very period that Richardson represents in such great detail by way of her experimental narration. *Pilgrimage*, which begins in 1893, thus supports my contention that it is not exclusively novelists such as Malet and Syrett, whose careers began in the nineteenth century and whose formal techniques have greater affinity with late-Victorian literary genres, for whom the fin-de-siècle marked a significant turning point in women's lives.

Malet, Syrett, and Richardson recognized that the 1890s constituted a period that not only brought about transformations in which women could realize certain professional and artistic goals; it was also a decade when the woman writer needed to reflect on specific legacies within the English novel itself. In practically every fiction I discuss, there are scenes in which the female protagonist reflects upon what she has learned from earlier examples of English fiction, in ways that reveal a heightened consciousness of literary history and the position that these characters occupy in relation to that history. In Malet's work, for example, we see explicit ties with George Eliot as well as earlier Gothic romanticism such as William Beckford's *Vathek*

¹⁹ Dorothy Richardson, "Beginnings," in *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, ed. Trudi Tate (London: Virago, 1989), 113. Originally published in *Ten Contemporaries: Notes towards Their Definitive Bibliography*, ed. J. Gawsworth, 2nd ed. (London: Joiner and Steele, 1933), 195-98.

(1786). In Syrett's fiction, we witness the significance of both Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). And in Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) is a prominent touchstone, as is *A Human Document*, a novel from 1892 by the once-popular W. H. Mallock. There is, I would contend, something of a pattern in the fictions that these novelists choose to engage with. One figure who attracts the attention of all three writers is Ouida (Marie Louise Ramé): an author who enjoyed overwhelming popularity during the 1860s and 1870s. By the late 1880s, when Malet was one of the first writers to pay tribute to this prodigious predecessor of extravagant romances, Ouida appeared to be something of a relic from a previous age. Malet, Syrett, and Richardson nonetheless make a point of preserving Ouida's legacy in relation to their writing.

Ouida had a decisive role to play in later developments in English aestheticism. Her luxurious descriptive prose and magnificently decadent characters provided a significant early example of the aesthetic romance: a type of fiction in which later writers such as Oscar Wilde and Max Beerbohm would exult. In *Moths* (1880), for example, we find a passage in which Ouida's narrator relishes comparing the *mondaine* Lady Dolly with art: "When [Lady Dolly] was seventeen, at the rectory, among the rosebuds on the lawn, she had been a rosebud herself; now she was a Dresden statuette; the statuette was the more finished and brilliant beauty of the two, and never seemed the worse for wear. This is the advantage of artificial over natural loveliness: the latter will alter with health or feeling, the former never."²⁰ Here, we can see clearly Ouida's aesthetic preference for artifice over nature, a predilection that constituted a defining characteristic of decadent aestheticism. In separate studies, Talia Schaffer and Joseph Bristow have demonstrated that the origins of the aesthetic novel are to be found in Ouida's romances. As Bristow emphasizes, it was Ouida's "brazen excessiveness that drew admiration from a generation of fin-de-siècle and early modernist male aesthetes."²¹ Ouida's significance had long

²⁰ Ouida, *Moths* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1880), 19.

been overlooked by scholars, in part due to her status as a popular author, rather than one associated with an elite readership. However, Wilde himself acknowledged the influential role of Ouida's ornate prose to the aesthetic tradition, and he styled her as "the high priestess of the impossible."²² Wilde was also indebted to Ouida's polished epigrams, which she fashioned for both her male and female dandies. For Malet, Syrett, and Richardson, Ouida's significance lies in her role as a literary predecessor who is at once a woman, a novelist, and an aesthete. Moreover, Ouida's appeal for all three writers is found not only in her vivid, sensual prose, but also in her transgressive women characters who boldly pursue their erotic desires. In Malet, we learn of Ouida's "refusal to circumscribe her art"²³ in order to conform to conventional moral standards; in Syrett, we hear of Ouida's "poisonous pages";²⁴ and in Richardson, Ouida's fictions are initially recalled by Miriam as "bad; evil books."²⁵ In many ways, Ouida's writings help us to focus on reasons why debates about art for art's sake are so important for the authors whose works follow in my chapters. Moreover, Ouida's legacy is necessarily entangled in discussions about decadence and the New Woman. In what follows, I want to make some general points about decadence, aestheticism, and the New Woman, so that we can see the backdrop against which Malet, Syrett, and Richardson are frequently defining their work.

Legacies of Aestheticism, Decadence, and the New Woman

In this section, I begin by outlining a standard history of aestheticism because it provides us with insights to several recurring points of reference in the works of the three writers I am

²¹ Joseph Bristow, "The Aesthetic Novel, from Ouida to Firbank," *A History of the Modernist Novel*, ed. Gregory Castle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38.

²² [Oscar Wilde], "Ouida's New Novel," *Pall Mall Gazette* 7539 (May 17, 1889): 3.

²³ Lucas Malet, "The Progress of Woman: In Literature," *Universal Review* 2, no. 7 (November 1888): 299.

²⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1915), 153-54. *The Victorians* was published as *Rose Cottingham* in the American edition brought out by G. P. Putnam. As I do not have access to the Unwin edition, my citations is to the American edition.

²⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:281.

discussing. Anyone who wants to explain the origins of this movement begins with the aesthetic theories of John Ruskin, with his emphasis on “the pursuit of beauty”²⁶ and the role of art in improving one’s moral nature. One must then acknowledge the first stage of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (formed by William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1849) that was responsive to Ruskin’s ideas. The Pre-Raphaelites fundamentally believed in representing the subjects of their art as they found them in nature, rather than conforming to the mannerism that had been introduced in the style of painters who came after Raphael. But it is in the Brotherhood’s second stage—which formed around Rossetti in 1857—that a shift took place toward valuing art for its own sake, rather than in service of any moral end. What went hand in hand with this new emphasis was the representation of bodies that did not conform to orthodox notions of beauty and well-being. For instance, Rossetti favored a style of femininity in which women’s bodies were released from Victorian methods of control, instead wearing medieval dresses, and with their massive tresses loose and flowing. Such images made several critics uncomfortable since the art elevated bodies that were thought to be “expressive of something unhealthy or unnatural.”²⁷ It is in this interest in extravagant and sumptuous bodies that we begin to see the roots of what was a crucial aspect of aestheticism’s appeal for Malet, Syrett, and Richardson: alternative styles of female corporeality.

In the realm of poetry, what was especially revolutionary in terms of representing women was the publication of Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* in 1866. Swinburne’s verses unleashed extraordinary forms of femininity that were by turns pagan, lesbian, sadomasochistic, and self-pleasuring. For example, in “Anactoria,” one of the volume’s best-known poems, the dramatic speaker desires to consume her woman lover: “That I could drink thy veins as wine,

²⁶ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters I*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1905), 3:624.

²⁷ J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 195.

and eat / Thy breasts like honey!”²⁸ A similar development was occurring simultaneously in prose. In 1867, Ouida published one of her most popular novels, *Under Two Flags*, in which we find a narrative featuring several forms of insubordinate womanhood, including a gamine woman named Cigarette who lives in the soldiers’ barracks, and whom the male protagonist thinks of as a “gallant boy.”²⁹ Cigarette exists in a world in which the social restrictions that organized women’s lives are completely removed, and she inhabits male spaces and male forms of speech.

As we move through the 1860s, there is a very important critical turn that takes place in relation to the work of Walter Pater. In this decade, Pater published three significant essays in the left-leaning *Westminster Review*: “Coleridge’s Writings” (1866), “Winckelmann” (1867), and “Poems by William Morris” (1868). In particular, it was in relation to the poetry of Morris that Pater started claiming that art was valuable for its own sake. In the essay on the eighteenth-century art historian Winckelmann, we begin to see Pater’s interest in a male homoerotic aesthetic. In 1869 he proceeded to publish “Notes on Leonardo da Vinci” in the *Fortnightly Review*. In this essay, we have an extraordinary account of the Mona Lisa. Pater explains that the Mona Lisa’s beauty is one “into which the soul with all its maladies has passed,” elaborating that “[a]ll the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form.”³⁰ This rather abstract way of talking about femininity in which the Mona Lisa is seen as a combination of different forms of femininity that are superimposed on one another; it is a complicated form of beauty with a complex cultural history.

²⁸ Algernon Charles Swinburne, “Anactoria,” in *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 96: lines 111-12.

²⁹ Ouida, *Under Two Flags* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867; London: Chatto and Windus, 1910), 117. Citations refer to the Chatto and Windus edition.

³⁰ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 98.

One further point that Pater made was in the Preface to his best-known work of art criticism, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). There, Pater emphasizes his interest in what the artwork means to the individual observer. He writes: “the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.”³¹ This emphasis on the subjective experience of art was antithetical to Matthew Arnold’s belief that the purpose of the viewer, and especially the critic, was to see the artwork as it really is, without one’s subjective impression. By contrast, Pater elevated the critic to practically the same level as the artwork. The fictions of Malet, Syrett, and Richardson all contain echoes of Pater’s wisdom. Some of the allusions are vague, while others are loud and clear. All three authors especially engage with the ideas found in Pater’s “Conclusion” to his 1873 study, in which he glorifies the sensuous aspect of aesthetic experience, such as in this well-known line: “To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.”³² At the time, Pater’s emphasis on sensate pleasures was condemned as hedonistic, causing such an outrage that he removed the “Conclusion” from the book’s second edition. Denis Donoghue explains that several reviews protested that the 1873 volume was “irreligious, blatantly hostile to Christianity, and designed to subvert the morals of impressionable young men.”³³ A notable condemnation came from a review published anonymously by Margaret Oliphant, in which she mocked the “Conclusion” for its “prettiness of phrase and graceful but far-fetched fancies.”³⁴ Not only did the Dean of Canterbury preach against it in 1873, but the Bishop of Oxford in 1875 also targeted the “Conclusion” when condemning a new school of thought at Oxford that was hostile to Christianity.³⁵ It is in the “Conclusion” that Pater fully

³¹ Pater, “Preface,” *The Renaissance*, xix.

³² Pater, “Conclusion,” *The Renaissance*, 189.

³³ Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 57.

³⁴ [Margaret Oliphant,] “Pater’s History of the Renaissance,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 114 (November 1873): 608.

³⁵ See Donoghue, *Lover of Strange Souls*, 58, 62.

emerged as the great English proponent of “art for art’s sake.”³⁶ It is in this area of Pater’s works that Malet, Syrett, and Richardson find resources for affirming the eroticism and pleasure-seeking of their women protagonists.

Oscar Wilde is the main legatee of Pater’s ideas, and in the early 1880s he began cultivating his own style of aesthetic dress and speech and spreading his own gospel of aestheticism. By 1880, the press was looking for a new figurehead of the aesthetic movement, since those men who had been most closely associated with art for art’s sake, such as Rossetti and Swinburne, were far less in the public eye. As Matthew Sturgis records: “The press needed a new face, a new personality—a living embodiment of Aestheticism.”³⁷ Wilde projected himself into that role, giving the public precisely what they wanted with his deliberate performance of excesses. Numerous images appeared in the press lampooning his love of ostentatious flowers, his long flowing tresses, his extravagant dandified tastes, and his over-bearing performative wit. All of these characteristics came to be linked over time with Wilde’s homoerotic preferences, and scholarly research has overwhelmingly focused on this aspect of Wilde’s developing career through the 1890s. At the same time, it is critical to bear in mind that Wilde also promoted women’s involvement in aestheticism, which is particularly evident in his editorship of the magazine the *Woman’s World* (1887-1889). Wilde made women the main writers for the journal, soliciting their thoughts on art, modern life, fashion, and fiction, as well as their literary contributions. Wilde featured articles from the likes of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the well-known campaigner for women’s suffrage, Jane Ellen Harrison, a classical scholar, and socialist fiction writers such as Edith Nesbit and Olive Schreiner. Sturgis records that “[p]erhaps [Wilde’s] greatest coup was to secure the support of the popular novelist Ouida.”³⁸ Moreover, as

³⁶ Pater, “Conclusion,” *The Renaissance*, 274. This is the original 1873 wording. In the 1893 edition, Pater changed this to “the love of art for its own sake,” 190.

³⁷ Matthew Sturgis, *Oscar: A Life* (London: Head of Zeus, 2018), 161.

³⁸ Sturgis, *Oscar: A Life*, 351.

Wilde's editorial assistant Arthur Fish remarked, Wilde wanted the main note of the periodical to be "the right of woman to equality of treatment with man."³⁹

As these examples demonstrate, femininity was always integral to the aesthetic movement, although in many ways the relationship between women and art for art's sake was often vexed. The beauty that aestheticism worships is pervasively represented through the bodies of women, often making them the objects of male aesthetic appreciation. There are many famous examples of this masculine obsession with the aestheticized female form, from the paintings of Rossetti that I have already discussed, to James Abbott McNeill Whistler's *Symphony in White No. 2* (1864), and from the poems of Swinburne to the verses of William Morris. These new forms of female embodiment, and the male dandyism that accompanied them, were repeatedly satirized, with illustrator and artist George Du Maurier regularly lampooning them in the satirical magazine *Punch*. As we can see from Figure 1, in the very middle of the illustration is Du Maurier's memorable character Mrs. Cimabue Brown—the female aesthete who inflates the significance of lovely objects and handsome faces—who is fashionably pallid and wilting, with masses of hair that recall Rossetti's favorite style of femininity. She is Du Maurier's female counterpart of his male figures Maudle, an artist-aesthete, and Postlethwaite, a languid poet. What we can see in Figure 1 is a typical satire on aesthetic pretentiousness. The illustration is titled "Nincompoopiana.—The Mutual Admiration Society" and features Mrs. Cimabue Brown waxing poetic about Postlethwaite's "grand head and poetic face, with those flowerlike eyes, and that exquisite sad smile!" and exclaiming about Maudle: "*Is not he divine?*" Du Maurier's caricatures had an enduring impact upon the ways in which popular culture would recall this particular movement. It is no accident that in not a few of his caricatures from this period, Postlethwaite begins to adopt the mannerisms and physical features of the young Wilde.

³⁹ Arthur Fish, "Oscar Wilde as Editor," *Harper's Weekly* 58 (1913): 18.



NINCOMPOPIANA.—THE MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY.

Our Gallant Colonel (who is not a Member thereof, to Mrs. Cimabue Brown, who is). "AND WHO'S THIS YOUNG HERO THEY'RE ALL SWARMING OVER NOW?"

Mrs. Cimabue Brown. "JELLABY POSTLETHWAITE, THE GREAT POET, YOU KNOW, WHO SAT FOR MAUDLE'S 'DEAD NARCISSUS'! HE HAS JUST DEDICATED HIS *LATTER-DAY SAPPHICS* TO ME. IS NOT HE BEAUTIFUL?"

Our Gallant Colonel. "WHY, WHAT'S THERE BEAUTIFUL ABOUT HIM?"

Mrs. Cimabue Brown. "OH, LOOK AT HIS GRAND HEAD AND POETIC FACE, WITH THOSE FLOWERLIKE EYES, AND THAT EXQUISITE SAD SMILE! LOOK AT HIS SLENDER WILLOWY FRAME, AS YIELDING AND FRAGILE AS A WOMAN'S! THAT'S YOUNG MAUDLE, STANDING JUST BEHIND HIM—THE GREAT PAINTER, YOU KNOW. HE HAS JUST PAINTED ME AS 'HÉLOÏSE,' AND MY HUSBAND AS 'ABÉLARD.' IS NOT HE DIVINE?"

N.B.—Postlethwaite and Maudle are quite unknown to fame.

[The Colonel hooks it.]

Figure 1. George Du Maurier, *Nincompoopiana.—The Mutual Admiration Society*, *Punch* (February 14, 1880): 66.

Both Christina Rossetti and Vernon Lee (the professional name of Violet Paget), among other women practitioners of art for art's sake, challenged the objectification of women that was often central to the art and fiction of leading male aesthetes. This point is significant to bear in mind for the purpose of understanding the work of Malet, Syrett, and Richardson, who follow this example of decoupling womanhood from male objectification in their feminist revisions. To give a well-known example of an early critique, in her sonnet "In an Artist's Studio" (composed 1856) Rossetti reveals that the male artist sees his sitter as if she were identical with the art that he creates: "Not as she is, but as she fills his dream."⁴⁰ By comparison, in *Miss Brown* (1885), a satirical novel about the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Lee launches a devastating attack on the kind of male aesthete whose obsession with artifice leads him to treat women as if they are only objects of art. It is in Italy that Walter Hamlin, the poet-artist at the center of Lee's narrative, discovers a highly attractive woman with a very plain name, Anne Brown, and takes it upon himself to give her an education, reflecting that she will be "a Galatea whose soul he had moulded even as Pygmalion had moulded the limbs of the image which he had made to live and to love."⁴¹ Hamlin thus imagines that he will treat her as if she were a piece of art, which Anne herself comes to realize, as we can see when the narrator comments: "Did he care for her only as a sort of live picture?"⁴² Anne, who is initially in love with Hamlin, gradually becomes disgusted with him as she grows aware of his narcissism. In the end, she realizes that in his eyes her purpose is nothing more than to reflect back to him his own self-absorbed image. Lee's novel makes a point that Hamlin is never able to recognize Anne for the intelligent, talented woman that she is in her own right.

⁴⁰ Christina Rossetti, "In an Artist's Studio," in *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*, ed. R. W. Crump (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 3:264.

⁴¹ Vernon Lee, *Miss Brown* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1884), 1:121-22.

⁴² Lee, *Miss Brown*, 1:305-9.

Our awareness of Rossetti's and Lee's respective criticisms owes much to the writing of scholars whose inquiries emerged in the late 1990s. There were two ground-breaking studies that were particularly influential in stimulating debates about gender and art for art's sake. First, Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer edited the remarkable essay collection *Women and British Aestheticism* (1999), in which they point out that "[m]ost of the scholarship on aestheticism has seen the movement as reflecting the masculine concerns of its male producers."⁴³ Their volume puts that male-centered perspective under critical scrutiny and aims instead to "demonstrate that women's participation in aestheticism was widespread, significant, and controversial and that recognizing this participation will reshape our views of both aestheticism and the history of women's writing."⁴⁴ The following year, Schaffer brought out her own full-length study, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, in which she draws attention to a substantial number of women who had a decisive role to play in aestheticism, focusing particularly on Ouida, the poet Alice Meynell, and Malet. Schaffer rightly contends that "female aestheticism" is "an integral part of both literary and feminist history."⁴⁵ These critical works have provided me with the scholarly platform on which I have built my own study.

Malet's, Syrett's, and Richardson's individual relations with decadence are arguably even more complicated than those with aestheticism. Studies such as Jackson's 1913 inquiry give the impression that decadence was embodied primarily by male practitioners. His seventeen-page chapter devoted to "The Decadence" does not once mention a single woman as having been associated with the movement. In many respects, the transformation of aestheticism into decadence is largely linked with Wilde: he was an aesthete in the 1880s, and by the time he was sent to jail for his sexual crimes he was, as we have seen, regarded as "the High Priest of the

⁴³ Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer, "Introduction" to *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 1.

⁴⁴ Psomiades and Schaffer, "Introduction," *Women and British Aestheticism*, 1.

⁴⁵ Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 33.

Decadents.” In the 1890s, the term decadent came to rapid prominence only to transmute into a pejorative. It is often associated with the artificial and the perverse. With the appearance of avant-garde periodicals such as the *Yellow Book* and the *Savoy* that featured provocative art and fiction, as well as the emergence of Aubrey Beardsley’s sensuous and grotesque black-and-white drawings, decadence became very visible in England. Arthur Symons, in his foundational 1893 essay on decadence, emphasized its “spiritual and moral perversity.”⁴⁶ Twenty years later, Jackson identified its four most characteristic elements as perversity, artificiality, egoism, and curiosity.⁴⁷ From these features, we can begin to recognize that what in aestheticism was an emphasis on art for its own sake to the exclusion of moral judgments became in decadence a delight in what is not simply beautiful but also perverse, decayed, and even ugly. Moreover, the dissident eroticism that we find within Swinburne’s aestheticism becomes the perverse sexuality of the decadence we connect with Beardsley’s artwork. It is with perverse sexuality in mind that Matthew Potolsky, in his influential study of decadence, adds a very important component to Jackson’s memorable list. Potolsky expands the characteristics of decadence to include “exoticism, morbidity, philosophical pessimism, and antifeminism, among other elements.”⁴⁸

Potolsky’s striking inclusion of “antifeminism” is crucial because it is a reminder of the pervasive way in which male decadence is obsessed with artifice, which frequently takes the form of exulting in women’s beautifully constructed surfaces while the actual bodies of women are considered repulsive. In the writing of the experimental French poet Charles Baudelaire—in whom we find the origin of decadence that strongly influenced British artists and writers—we discover the sentiment: “Woman is *natural*, that is to say abominable. Thus she is always vulgar.”⁴⁹ For Baudelaire, woman stands for the horror of nature against which artifice displays

⁴⁶ Arthur Symons, “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 87 (1893): 859. Symons rewrote and expanded this essay in 1900, renaming it *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*.

⁴⁷ Jackson, *The Eighteen-Nineties*, 76.

⁴⁸ Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 2.

its perfection. Not surprisingly, this dehumanizing attitude toward women is so pervasive in decadence that an overwhelming amount of scholarship takes for granted that decadence abhors femininity. For instance, Schaffer associates decadence with a masculinist sexualization of womanhood, and thus finds it difficult to see how this movement was of interest to female authors, since she claims that it was “constructed to exclude women writers.”⁵⁰ More recently, Kirsten Macleod has made a similar observation, stating that “women writers regarded [decadence] as a hyper-male artistic discourse that excluded women.”⁵¹ One has only to look at the majority of full-length studies about decadence—including Potolsky’s influential *Decadent Republic of Letters* (2013), Vincent Sherry’s *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2015), and Alex Murray’s *Landscapes of Decadence* (2016)—to gain the impression that the movement is one that is almost entirely dominated by men. These scholars are following a tradition that we see in studies by earlier critics such as Ellis Hanson in the 1990s.⁵² With the occasional exception of Vernon Lee, these scholarly works almost exclusively address male writers.⁵³

While scholars have more readily identified the influential role that women played in aestheticism, it has taken longer for critics to see that there were aspects of decadence that had great interest to feminist authors. The shift in criticism toward acknowledging women’s contributions to decadence has significant implications for understanding the works of Malet, Syrett, and Richardson. Linda K. Hughes, for example, has demonstrated that the pervasive

⁴⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (London: Black Spring Press, 1989), 25.

⁵⁰ Schaffer, *Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, 45.

⁵¹ Kirsten MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 84.

⁵² Ellis Hanson’s ground-breaking *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) looks at a familiar cast of male decadents, including Paul Verlaine, J.-K. Husymans, Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, the poet John Gray, and Baron Corvo (Frederick William Rothe).

⁵³ The major names that appear repeatedly are those of Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley, and Arthur Symons, as well as Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, and Huysmans.

notion of decadence “as a kind of exclusive male club”—one shaped, for example, by the works of Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley—is undermined by “[w]omen poets of the fin de siècle [who] thought otherwise.”⁵⁴ In addition, Bristow has argued that “several women writers were linked prominently with decadence,” and he has traced the way in which women authors who appeared in the *Yellow Book* were foundational to making the journal “look as if it were the quintessential organ of these ubiquitously decadent times.”⁵⁵ That scholarly attention is shifting toward women’s involvement in this movement is visible from a conference held at Oxford in July 2018 on “Women Writing Decadence—European Perspectives, 1880-1920,” which featured presentations on a host of female practitioners, including Michael Field (the professional name of the co-authors Katharine Bradley and her niece, Edith Cooper), Vernon Lee, Mabel Beardsley (an actress and the sister of Aubrey Beardsley), George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne),⁵⁶ Rachilde (Marguerite Vallette-Eymery), and Olive Custance. It must be emphasized that Malet, Syrett, and Richardson never engage with decadence uncritically, but instead they refashion its fixation with artifice, eroticism, and pleasure into forms that are enabling for their feminist narratives.

In addition to decadence and aestheticism, all three authors engage with a cultural development that has far more obvious ties with fin-de-siècle feminist literature: the New Woman. The formal naming of the New Woman came into its own in 1894 in a famous article by Sarah Grand (Frances Bellenden-Clarke McFall), the literary author and women’s rights campaigner, who advocated on behalf of women’s expansion into the public sphere. The figure was immediately plunged into a controversy over women’s roles that had been escalating long

⁵⁴ Linda K. Hughes, “Feminizing Decadence,” in *Women and British Aestheticism*, 119. Hughes’s chapter is about the fascinating poet Graham R. Tomson who later published as Rosamund Marriott Watson.

⁵⁵ Joseph Bristow, “Female Decadence,” in *The History of British Women’s Writing, 1880-1920*, ed. Holly A. Laird (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 85. Bristow’s discussion looks at George Egerton, Charlotte Mew, Méné Muriel Dowie, and Victoria Cross (Annie Sophie Cory).

⁵⁶ Born Mary, she instead liked to call herself Chav or Chavvy. While she was married to Egerton Tertius Clairmonte she was known as “Mrs Clairmonte,” until she divorced him in 1900. She then married Reginald Golding Bright the next year and took on his surname.

before this style of rebellious womanhood was given a name. Not only in public debate, but also in literature, engagements with the topic of women's liberation were numerous. One author who was closely associated with this figure, and who appears in Malet's, Syrett's, and Richardson's respective corpuses, is Henrik Ibsen. The Norwegian playwright in some ways provides a basis for understanding the New Woman, since his dramas depict female characters rebelling against traditional women's roles, in ways that generated disputes among English audiences in the late nineteenth century. The first unexpurgated performance of *A Doll's House* in London in 1889, for instance, outraged more conservative attendees, while at the same time, as Sally Ledger observes, it "struck a strong chord with the bohemian, intellectual audience" who attended the premiere.⁵⁷ The play's ending depicts the protagonist Nora Helmer leaving her husband and small children because she is no longer able to endure the stifling of her individuality. This bold conclusion resonated with those women who were on the side of abolishing marriage, which was a key issue in fin-de-siècle debates about women's evolving roles. For example, in her essay "Marriage" (1888) Mona Caird explored the history of women's sanctioned abuse within marriage. Caird's essay garnered such attention that it occasioned a heated debate in the *Daily Telegraph*, which posed the question: "Is Marriage a Failure?" Caird had argued that marriage should be conceptualized as a contract between equals that was freely entered into, and which could just as easily be dissolved. Caird's ideas, however, were not universally held by all those who were associated with the New Woman: this figure did not represent a singular political movement but was rather a figurehead for various forms of women's sexual insubordination during this period. For instance, some New Women advocated free union (sexual relationships between a man and woman who had made no contractual agreement to each other), while others promoted sexual purity and motherhood.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Sally Ledger, *Henrik Ibsen*, 2nd ed. (Plymouth: Northcote House, 2008), 6.

⁵⁸ In *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), Grand promoted motherhood and sexual purity. See Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 10-11.

In regard to literary engagements with these debates, Ann Heilmann has demonstrated that “New Woman fiction established a tradition of feminist political literature written for and consumed by a female mass market.”⁵⁹ Several of these novels feature transgressive women who become literary authors, including Ella Hepworth Dixon’s *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book* (1897), and George Paston’s *A Writer of Books* (1898). Unlike aestheticism and decadence that were often associated with a high-art elite, the New Woman was always part of popular culture, and the many books written about her were widely read. This literature was central to vehement debates about this figure that took place in the press. Repeatedly, critics voiced disapproval of not only the rebellious women characters, but also the polemical tone to be found in several of these works. For instance, in 1895 Hugh E. M. Stutfield complained that New Woman novels were “for the most part merely pamphlets, sermons, or treatises in disguise.”⁶⁰

One author who shared Stutfield’s disgust for the New Woman was Ouida. In response to Grand’s article in 1894, Ouida wrote an essay in which she voiced support for the men whose lives would be altered if women were to succeed in occupying traditionally male spaces, such as most of the professions.⁶¹ As I show in the chapters that follow, Ouida also decisively objected to Grand’s style of writing, admonishing that the New Woman needed to find “better models of literary composition.”⁶² Ouida’s riposte not only helped to fuel the controversy, but also served to bring her legacy back into the public eye. In her 1894 retort, Ouida’s views are especially striking, given the unorthodox forms of femininity that we find in her fiction. In reality, her

⁵⁹ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 2.

⁶⁰ Hugh E. M. Stutfield, “Tommyrotics,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 157 (1895): 837. Stutfield cites M^énie Muriel Dowie’s *Gallia* (1895) and George Egerton’s *Discords* (1894) as representative New Woman fictions; he also mentions Sarah Grand and Iota (Kathleen Caffyn) by name but does not reference any specific titles.

⁶¹ For an excellent discussion about these two essays, see Talia Schaffer, “‘Nothing but Foolscap and Ink’: Inventing the New Woman,” in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siecle Feminisms*, ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 39-52.

⁶² Ouida, “The New Woman,” *North American Review* 158 (1894): 610.

views in many ways were quite conservative. Her insistence on critiquing the style of New Woman writing also underlines her view of the New Woman as an un-aesthetic figure. The intense politics around the figure of the New Woman had the strongest lasting impact for the ways in which Malet, Syrett, and Richardson were thinking about femininity, especially in relation to women's professional aspirations. At the same time, the different literary genres through which these three authors engage with this figure address the New Woman reveals that each of them shares with Ouida a concern about the formal characteristics of New Woman fiction, and by extension, their own investment in promoting beauty and art as allies to the woman's cause, rather than endorsing polemics for their own sake.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation contains three substantial chapters that are devoted to Malet, Syrett, and Richardson in turn. My methodological approach embraces several representative examples of fiction from their respective corpuses. I am concentrating in large part on four novels by Malet, five by Syrett, and four by Richardson. Within the scope of the dissertation, these examples provide me with particular kinds of evidence about the ways in which these writers approached and revised the debates about aestheticism and decadence from the 1890s through the 1910s. My first chapter examines Malet's *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901), *The Far Horizon* (1906), *Adrian Savage* (1911), and *Deadham Hard* (1919). To date, scholars have generally associated Malet's interest in aestheticism with the eight novels that she wrote before 1902. By comparison, the works that she published in the early twentieth century have received minimal attention. This division of interest in Malet's career has much to do, I believe, with her conversion from the Anglican Church to Roman Catholicism following the success of the best-selling *Sir Richard Calmady*. In particular, her conversion has encouraged critics to judge her later novels as entrenched mainly in theology, and therefore as less transgressive in their sexual

politics. By contrast, I argue that in the four fictions I have selected, Malet engages in a careful reimagining of Catholic theology, and especially Marianism, for feminist purposes.

In relation to both *Sir Richard Calmady* and *Deadham Hard*, I explore Malet's interest in reimagining women's narratives that are set in the decades prior to the emergence of the New Woman. Although the 1850s through the 1870s marked the beginnings of reform for women in the areas of divorce, custody of infants, opening of women's colleges, and advances in property ownership, more private aspects of women's lives were less legible within public debate.⁶³ Malet's novels bring to light these more intimate areas of women's experience, particularly their sexual lives, relationships to their own bodies, private aspirations, and shifting perceptions of themselves as autonomous subjects, in ways that anticipate the emergence of the New Woman and the decadent. *The Far Horizon* and *Adrian Savage*, by contrast, take place during the fin de siècle and the early 1900s, respectively. In both novels, we discover women characters who represent a cosmopolitan feminism that is enabled through art. In *The Far Horizon*, the main woman character is an actress who experiences her highest fulfillment as an artist on the stage. Meanwhile, *Adrian Savage*, as we have seen, features Gabrielle St. Leger, a woman who is a model for male artists, but who seizes her agency and contests men's renderings of her by redefining her identity after her artist-husband dies.

My second chapter explores five distinguished novels that Syrett published between 1896 and 1916: *Nobody's Fault* (1896), *The Child of Promise* (1907), *Anne Page* (1908), *The*

⁶³ The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 abolished adultery as a criminal offence and treated as a contract rather than as a sacrament, allowing it to be regulated by common law courts rather than by the canon law of the Church of England. The act, however, still made it much more difficult for a wife to attain divorce, allowing a man to petition solely on the grounds that his wife had committed adultery, but a wife could only hope for divorce if adultery were combined with incest, cruelty, or bigamy. Progress was made in 1878, when it was granted that a woman could secure a separation from her husband on the grounds of cruelty alone. Before the Custody of Infants Act in 1873, mothers had not had legal rights to their children if they separated from their husbands, but the act allowed the court to give a mother access to her children under the age of sixteen if she was deemed the better caretaker. In the realm of women's higher education, Bedford Ladies College was founded in 1849, Girton College at Cambridge followed in 1869 (although it did not offer full degrees to women until 1947), and Somerville College at Oxford in 1879 (but women could not receive a degree until 1920). The first Married Women's Property Act in 1870 had allowed women to be the legal possessors of any money that they earned, and enabled them to inherit property. The second Married Women's Property Act in 1882 made further advances and abolished the doctrine of coverture, allowing a married woman to own, buy, and sell property, as well as restoring a woman's legal identity so that she was no longer subsumed under her husband.

Victorians: The Development of a Modern Woman (1915), and its sequel, *Rose Cottingham Married* (1916). I have chosen these works because they bring to light Syrett's remarkably diverse meditations on the ways in which a woman could make herself the subject, rather than the object, of art. In *Nobody's Fault*, Richard Wagner's music awakens the woman protagonist's erotic desires and inspires her to pursue her wish to be a published author. In *The Child of Promise*, the central character begins life in a communist colony, only to find she is naturally drawn to the decadent art of Beardsley and the sensual verses of Baudelaire. By comparison, *Anne Page* features a woman who has a transgressive affair with a French artist, which she compares to the cross-dressing romance of Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835): a novel whose sexual defiance was a source of inspiration for several English authors, including Swinburne. Meanwhile, *The Victorians* narrates the life of Rose Cottingham from childhood to early adulthood, and records the development of her consciousness, sexuality, and literary skill in relation to a string of encounters with forms of aesthetic culture. Finally, *Rose Cottingham Married* reveals that the protagonist finds in art for art's sake a satisfaction that she cannot achieve in her marriage or in her work on behalf of socialism. Together, these fictions attest to both Syrett's incisive critiques of the gender politics of aestheticism, and her powerful feminist refashioning of these cultural movements.

The third chapter pays close attention to Richardson's first four installments of *Pilgrimage: Pointed Roofs* (1915), *Backwater* (1916), *Honeycomb* (1917), and *The Tunnel* (1919), which together record Miriam's life in painstaking detail between 1893 and 1896. In the first volume, we see Miriam teaching at a girls' school in Germany and we recognize the significance of her education in London, which had included a thorough introduction to the aesthetic movement. In *Backwater*, Miriam returns to London and is employed at a girls' school where she offsets the monotony of her existence by indulging in several women's novels, the most significant of which are ones written by Ouida. By comparison, *Honeycomb* narrates her life as a live-in governess for a family, during which she begins to redefine herself as a New

Woman. In *The Tunnel*, her move to her own flat in London enables her to blossom fully as an aesthete who relishes art in everyday life.

As I have stated, Richardson's unprecedented narrative experimentation in many ways makes her a quintessential modernist. At the same time, she is an innovator whose remarkable achievements have yet to be fully acknowledged. The reasons for this neglect are numerous and diverse. They include the considerable demands placed on the reader by the length of *Pilgrimage*, an aspect of Richardson's form that, as Laurie Langbauer contends, is a key reason that the roman-fleuve stands on the border of modernism. Langbauer asserts that "Richardson achieves" the modernist effect of "blurring the boundaries between self and world," but she does so by "expanding the character to fill her multivolume, open form"—a form that was firmly associated with Victorian authors such as Anthony Trollope and Margaret Oliphant.⁶⁴ There is also the difficulty of acquiring volumes that remain in print, since other than a reissued edition of the first volume in 1989 (containing the first three installments of *Pilgrimage*), only two novels have been reissued since Virago's paperback edition ten years previously.⁶⁵ More to the point, there are the extraordinary challenges that we find in a narrative style that gives the reader access only to what is in Miriam's consciousness, without providing a clear context or explanation for the thoughts that pass through her mind. As several scholars such as Jean Radford and Kristin Bluemel have noted, *Pilgrimage's* location on the critical margins of modernism enables it to pose crucial questions about the terms upon which it has been excluded from the modernist canon.⁶⁶ My emphasis here on Richardson's ties with fin-de-siècle culture

⁶⁴ Laurie Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 40.

⁶⁵ Broadview brought out scholarly editions of *Pointed Roofs* and *The Tunnel* in 2014. Scott McCracken is currently preparing an edition of *Pilgrimage* for Oxford University Press, which should alleviate the difficulty of accessing Richardson's chapter-novels in the near future.

⁶⁶ Jean Radford, "Coming to Terms: Dorothy Richardson, Modernism, and Women," *News from Nowhere* 7 (1989): 35. Kristin Bluemel, *Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism: Dorothy Richardson's "Pilgrimage"* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 31.

aims to explore the critical challenges involved with a writer whose distinctly 1910s modernism focuses on the development of a young woman in an earlier period.

On the few occasions when scholars have considered the role of the 1890s in *Pilgrimage*, they have generally assumed that it relates directly to Richardson's biography. There is some truth in this, since the events in Miriam's life align in many ways with those that feature in Richardson's own career. Early scholarship on *Pilgrimage* in particular tended to examine Richardson's roman-fleuve from the perspective of her own life. Notable examples include full-length studies by Gloria Fromm (1977), Gillian E. Hanscombe (1982), and Jean Radford (1991). Fromm, for instance, asserts that since *Pilgrimage* is "a more consciously drawn self-portrait than is commonly to be found" in fiction, we need to understand that "in Dorothy Richardson's case at least, the critic and the biographer must truly join forces."⁶⁷ A biographical explanation of the setting of *Pilgrimage* on its own, however, does not serve our understanding of these novels particularly well. Within the last twenty years, scholars have, to be sure, thought a little more carefully about Miriam's relationship with certain historical contexts. For example, Deborah Parsons emphasizes the crucial role of Miriam's migration through the city as one that belongs specifically to the 1890s, asserting that *Pilgrimage* takes the form of a "turn-of-the-century female *Bildungsroman* [that] investigated the possibilities of women's identification with urban figures who seemed to accord with their own experience of alienation yet were not limited by class or gender in their exploration of city space."⁶⁸ In a similar way, Scott McCracken has rightly noted that Miriam's role in the volumes of *Pilgrimage* set in the 1890s "read like a deliberate performance of the public image of the New Woman."⁶⁹ As these observations indicate, the fin-de-siècle setting of *Pilgrimage* has far greater significance to the narrative than

⁶⁷ Gloria G. Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), xiii.

⁶⁸ Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 125.

⁶⁹ Scott McCracken, *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction, and the Urban Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 25.

a matter of biographical coincidence. My chapter illuminates the ways in which Miriam's distinctly female consciousness is formed through her encounters with the concluding decade of the nineteenth century.

Although I have chosen to explore these three women writers in great depth, they are far from the only authors at the turn of the century who drew on the resources of aestheticism in order to reimagine women's plots. Among other writers who have similar preoccupations during this period is Ada Leveson, who between 1907 and 1916 wrote six witty novels, in which she parodies male dandies and fashions clever women characters who reject the traditional dictates of heterosexual romance. By comparison, Victoria Cross (Annie Sophie Cory) wrote for the *Yellow Book* and published several sexually insubordinate novels at the fin de siècle. In addition, John Oliver Hobbes (Pearl Craigie) wrote full-length fictions that explore the lives of women saints and women artists, and she, like Malet, chose to convert from the Anglican to the Roman Church. There is also the prodigious May Sinclair, whose novels range from Victorian realism to experimental modernism, and who, like Syrett and Richardson, was deeply interested in the legacy of the Brontë sisters.

At the same time, of this larger group of authors, Malet, Syrett, and Richardson stand out as possessing the closest affinities in terms of their relentless investment in aestheticism and decadence, the substantial size of each of their oeuvres, their reliance on literary endeavors as a primary source of income for a significant period of their lives, and the continuation of their careers after the Great War. Moreover, it is worth remarking that all three women chose to be single for long stretches of their lives. Malet separated from her husband after fifteen unhappy years of marriage and never had a male partner again. Syrett remained single her whole life. And Richardson did not marry until the age of forty-four, after having twice refused the much younger Alan Odle (he was only twenty-nine), whom she eventually agreed to wed because it was thought that he did not have long to live, and she wished, as Odle's biographer records, to

“make his last months as comfortable as possible.”⁷⁰ A further similarity that unites these writers is that none of them had children.⁷¹ We do not know every precise reason in each woman’s case, but not having offspring no doubt facilitated each author’s prolific literary output, as well as constituting one form of the resistance to traditional women’s roles that we find in their respective literary projects.

Although I focus minimal attention on each author’s personal life, I find it significant that although Malet, Syrett, and Richardson belonged to different literary circles, in many ways their circumstances and private values unite them: writing was their passion as well as their profession, and more than this, the aspirations of female autonomy that are so richly embodied in their women protagonists are also evident in their own lives. In reinvigorating their individual corpuses, I am not merely completing a scholarly task. On the contrary, I am also indicating that I believe, as they did, that encounters with forms of aesthetic and decadent culture—and especially with women’s interventions into these forms—has something both instructive and pleasurable to transmit to the reader who is willing to critique the ideas and artistic creations of art for art’s sake, while also being open to experiencing delight.

⁷⁰ Martin Steenson, *The Life and Work of Alan Odle* (Stroud: Books and Things, 2012), 16.

⁷¹ Malet was to eventually informally adopt her second cousin, Gabrielle Vallings, but not until Gabrielle was already almost twenty years old. She came to live with Malet as a friend and companion.

Chapter One

Lucas Malet's Later Aesthetic Novels, 1901-1919:

Looking Back on the Woman's Plot in English Fiction

In 1901, when Lucas Malet (the professional name of Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison) published *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, there was a clamor from reviewers. The influential critic Stephen Gwynn called it “the best novel since *Middlemarch* written by a woman.”¹ W. L. Courtney also put Malet’s novel in the same company: “we have to go back a good many years, back to the best work of George Eliot, or even of Thackeray, to find its equal.”² William L. Alden, too, in the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books* praised it highly: “I do not know of any English novel of the last twelve months which so thoroughly deserves respectful treatment”; he continued: “[it] will place the author very high up on the role of living English novelists.”³ Similarly, *Literature* ran a review claiming Malet’s superiority over her contemporaries: “Like the great dramatists she aims only at the essential truth of character and emotion. We do not think any living writer could succeed in so profound and vivid a realization of mental history as she has done.”⁴ For these critics who lauded Malet’s achievement, her identity as a woman (which reviewers had become aware of within the few years following the publication of her first novel in 1882⁵) was either negligible, or, as in the case of Gwynn,

¹ Stephen Gwynn, review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, *New Liberal Review* 2, no. 10 (November 1901): 480.

² W. L. Courtney, *The Feminine Note in Fiction* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1904), 111.

³ William L. Alden, review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet, *New York Times Saturday Review of Books*, October 5, 1901, 722.

⁴ Unsigned review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet, *Literature* 9 (September 14, 1901): 260-61, quoted in Patricia Lorimer Lundberg, *An Inward Necessity: The Writer's Life of Lucas Malet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 239.

⁵ Talia Schaffer notes that Malet’s pseudonym “was swiftly uncovered; by 1885, reviewers were confidently assuming readers were aware of her real identity and gender, although there were still pockets of ignorance as late as 1896, when a reviewer for the *New York Times* called her ‘Mr. Malet.’” “A Novelist of Character: Becoming Lucas Malet,” *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930*, ed. Marysa Demoor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 84.

occasioned comparison with George Eliot: another formidable woman novelist who wrote with a male pen name.

Equally passionate, however, was the condemnation of those critics who were outraged that anyone, but especially a woman, would dare to address in such a frank manner such topics as male disability, incestuous passion, potent female sexuality, and indulgence in vice. Another writer for the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books* described *Calmady* as “coarse, impure, and degrading” and called it “a sad instance of modern degeneracy.”⁶ In *Harper’s Weekly*, James MacArthur printed an anonymous review, saying that *Calmady* “is disgusting in its superficial disclosure of the forbidden” and “[t]he author[’s] power of vividness in description . . . is put to ignoble use . . . page after page produces a shuddering horror.”⁷ By comparison, the writer for the *Saturday Review* concurred that Malet had misused her talent: “it seems regrettable that [Malet] should abuse her gift in deference to modern cravings for sensation.”⁸ In spite of, and likely even fueled by, these negative responses, *Calmady* was nonetheless an immediate bestseller. The controversy it aroused also led to an interest in the life of its author. William Wallace Whitelock interviewed Malet in 1901 at her London home for the *New York Times*. She was still attracting interest two years later when the writer and theatre critic William Archer visited her residence South Kensington and subsequently published an eight-page “conversation” in the *Pall Mall Magazine*.

The furor caused by *Calmady*’s publication makes it easy to understand why scholars who have contributed to the recovery of Malet’s oeuvre since the 1990s have been especially drawn to this controversial novel, one that quickly allows us to grasp the magnitude of Malet’s impact on literature in England and the United States at the turn of the century. For the most

⁶ J. M. C., review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet, *New York Times Saturday Review of Books*, June 21, 1902, 422.

⁷ James Macarthur, review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet, *Harper’s Weekly* 46 (April 12, 1902): 474.

⁸ Unsigned review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 92, no. 2399 (October 19, 1901): 501.

part, assessments of Malet's oeuvre since her death in 1931 have regarded *Calmady* as the pinnacle of Malet's professional life (which began in 1881) and have characterized Malet as an author who epitomizes the late-Victorian period, in spite of the fact that she published her final novel in 1924. Moreover, Malet's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1902 has been regarded as marking a turning point in her later fiction toward greater conservatism. In what follows, I challenge this evaluation of Malet's oeuvre, arguing for a reassessment of the fiction she published between 1901 and 1919. I demonstrate that Malet's religious conversion, far from subduing her narratives, inaugurated her development of a subversive Catholic iconography in her fictions, which was already recognizable in *Calmady*. Moreover, I consider her 1901 novel as marking the beginning of an exciting phase in her oeuvre in which she extends her revision of Victorian women's narratives, and in which she makes clear that aestheticism and decadence are foundational to the shaping of a modern female subjectivity.

In this chapter, I will discuss four of Malet's novels: *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, *The Far Horizon* (1906), *Adrian Savage* (1911), and *Deadham Hard* (1919). In this introduction, I lay the foundation for the most crucial debates about female sexuality, Roman Catholicism, and women's authorship that form the most significant contexts for the novels that Malet published between 1901 and 1919. In addition, I provide an overview of the traditional ways in which Malet's oeuvre has been read, and into which I am making an intervention by arguing that the traditional paradigms have kept scholars from fully recognizing the feminist and sexually transgressive energies of the novels Malet wrote in the first decades of the twentieth century. Once I have laid out the stakes of my argument in terms of gender, literary form, and scholarly intervention, I will then proceed to an in-depth analysis of each of the four novels that I have chosen to investigate in great detail.

The Shock of Malet's Aestheticism and Female Eroticism

The History of Sir Richard Calmady enables us to begin to understand the blending of form and content that underpins the power of Malet's early twentieth-century narratives. Malet's 1901 novel is a substantial volume of more than six hundred pages, and tells the unusual story of Richard Calmady, who is born in the 1840s with legs that terminate into feet where his knees should be (what the doctor calls "spontaneous amputation"⁹). Richard experiences alienation from society because of his deformity, and as an adult, he seeks solace in a series of increasingly depraved indulgences. There are three women characters who are equally important to the narrative: Richard's mother Katherine who cares for him with an uncompromising love; his seductive married cousin Helen de Vallorbes who is perversely obsessed with his abnormal body; and his other cousin Honoria St. Quentin, who is an androgynous suffrage activist and socialist who is predominantly attracted to women. In order to narrate this bold psychological study of a man beset with unusual mental challenges due to his unprecedented physical form, Malet draws on several different literary genres to create a masterpiece of formal hybridity. Talia Schaffer summarizes Malet's immense achievement when she explains: "One of the important innovations of *Calmady* is that it shows how the period's dominant movements could be combined. It is a Jamesian psychological study, an aesthetic tale, a New Woman narrative, a naturalist document, and yet it also patterns itself on the founding mythic, religious, and literary texts of Western culture."¹⁰ To this already remarkable list, Catherine Delyfer emphasizes two other genres that will be influential to my analysis: "a Gothic tale," and a "rearticulation of Decadence."¹¹

⁹ Lucas Malet, *The History of Sir Richard Calmady: A Romance* (London: Methuen, 1901), 64. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss in detail the explanation given in the narrative for Richard's deformity. Talia Schaffer has identified a possible precursor for Richard: Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh (1831-1889), who was born without hands or feet. Schaffer also notes the following details about Kavanagh that are also true of Richard: he "travelled extensively, married his cousin, and became a Member of Parliament." "Introduction," *The History of Sir Richard Calmady* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), xviii.

¹⁰ Schaffer, "Introduction," *Sir Richard Calmady*, xiv.

Malet's use of beautiful aesthetic prose in *Calmady* enabled her to write about several topics that were considered unfit for literary representation. While many reviewers objected to a section of the novel in which Richard goes on his "Rake's Progress," Malet's depiction of female sexuality was considered even more disturbing. There is one scene that publishers found so shocking that by the third British edition, and in the first American one, the episode's culminating paragraph had been removed. In this scene, the beautiful and seductive Helen, who is obsessed with Richard, is determined to bring her passion to consummation. In the following lines, she is described as if she were an animal, and Richard as her prey: "Helen set down her lamp, let drop her slippers upon the floor, sprang across the intervening space, fierce, yet graceful, as some lithe and amorous beast, flung herself down beside Richard Calmady upon the couch, and caressed him with quick, lascivious fingers, while her lips fastened on his lips."¹² Here we see the power of Malet's rich language and her bold depiction of female eroticism, which she explored repeatedly in her novels, and which will be a central focus of this chapter. I want to point out that in the longer span of her fiction, this episode is extremely important to consider, not because it offended people, but because it is one of the several unprecedented ways in which Malet represented women's sexuality in overt as well as subtle and suggestive ways. As I will show, it appears to be the case for *Calmady* that reviewers were distracted by the blatant descriptions of Helen's ravenous lust, and therefore overlooked the narrative's depiction of other less dramatic forms of transgressive female sexuality (including passionate celibacy, incestuous eroticism, and same-sex desire). In the novels that she wrote after *Calmady*, Malet continued to explore the many dimensions of women's sexuality, revealing the existence of a multifaceted female eroticism existing within the nineteenth century that, for the most part, had only been hinted at in Victorian novels.

¹¹ Catherine Delyfer, *Art and Womanhood in Fin-de-Siècle Writing: The Fiction of Lucas Malet, 1880-1931* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), 84.

¹² Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 459-60.

Malet's Oeuvre and the Preoccupation with *Sir Richard Calmady*

Malet wrote *Calmady* at the mid-point of her career, but although half her professional life was still before her, she would never again receive the kind of attention that *Calmady* garnered. Malet had already written seven novels before *Calmady*, and went on to complete eight more full-length fictions, with her final completed novel published in 1924. It is fair to say that in the recovery of Malet's fictional corpus, *Calmady* has been regarded as her most important work. For example, Schaffer has stated that in *Calmady*, Malet "wrote too well about subjects that were too controversial. In that sense, although it was the book of 1901, it was far ahead of its time."¹³ Elsewhere, Schaffer asserts that it is "possible to read [*Calmady*] as the epitome of a female corpus of aesthetic thought."¹⁴ In a similar vein, Patricia Lorimer Lundberg devotes an entire chapter to *Calmady* titled "Birthing a Masterpiece," in which she states: "Malet ended 1901 at the pinnacle of her career."¹⁵ Catherine Delyfer, too, emphasizes that *Calmady* "presents us with a rare occurrence—an enabling literary rearticulation of Decadence by a feminist woman novelist."¹⁶ All of these assessments point to the enormous achievement of *Calmady* and stress that Malet's 1901 novel was groundbreaking on multiple levels. Moreover, it is certainly the case that these and other recent critics have mostly concentrated their attention on the fictions Malet produced in the 1880s and 1890s, with *Calmady* discussed as the culmination of this ground-breaking early phase. Without denying the significance of *Calmady*, I want to suggest that while in many ways it marks the culmination of Malet's literary production in the 1880s and 1890s, it also marks a breaking away from her earlier work and

¹³ Schaffer, "Introduction," *Sir Richard Calmady*, xxviii.

¹⁴ Talia Schaffer, "Connoisseurship and Concealment in *Sir Richard Calmady*," in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 44.

¹⁵ Patricia Lorimer Lundberg, *An Inward Necessity: The Writer's Life of Lucas Malet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 251.

¹⁶ Delyfer, *Art and Womanhood*, 84.

inaugurates her later novels, a period of her corpus the significance of which has not been fully recognized. In these later fictions something becomes very apparent that was already evident in the critical essays that she had published at the fin de siècle in prominent periodicals: her consciousness of what it means to operate in an explicitly female tradition of women's writing is manifested in various forms of engagement with the tradition of English fiction. Malet reimagines what kinds of plots could be possible for women in these phases of the recent past. Her later fiction rewrites narratives of female desire and of women's professional and political ambitions, in ways that were seldom possible in women's fictions published during the fin de siècle and early Edwardian period.

There are several factors that contributed to the decline in attention given to Malet's novels after *Calmady*, but one of the primary reasons, as I have briefly stated already, was the belief that Malet's greatest literary achievements were restricted to developments that took place at the fin de siècle. In 1932, one year after Malet's death, the influential critic and writer Janet Courtney published a retrospective on Malet's career: "A Novelist of the Nineties." This title indicates how Malet's oeuvre was perceived, despite the fact that she continued to publish for another two and a half decades. Courtney calls the nineties Malet's "zenith,"¹⁷ and explains that it was with *The Wages of Sin* (1891) and *Sir Richard Calmady* that Malet "first startled attention, and those two novels were a portent of the 'nineties."¹⁸ Courtney emphasizes that Malet's contributions to the fin de siècle were especially significant because of her gender. She states that as readers of the time were well aware, Thomas Hardy's novels *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895) were "both also portents of the 'nineties."¹⁹ These final novels of Hardy were controversial because of how they challenged Victorian notions of sexual morality, skewering the sexual double standard, and frankly depicting female erotic

¹⁷ Janet Courtney, "A Novelist of the Nineties," *Fortnightly Review* 131 (February 1932): 230.

¹⁸ Courtney, "Novelist of the Nineties," 230.

¹⁹ Courtney, "Novelist of the Nineties," 230.

desire. Courtney points out just how unusual it was for a woman to write in the same vein when she queries: “what were we coming to when such a novel could be written by a woman[?]”²⁰ In this statement, Courtney specifically refers to the way in which *The Wages of Sin* and *Calmady* broke new ground in what it was possible for a woman writer to achieve.

Malet’s devotion to the cause of the woman writer specifically, and to risk-taking fiction in general, is evident in her essays, letters, and reviews. Malet was involved in contesting the censorship of fiction, including the unauthorized removal of passages of her own writing. She also joined in an organized protest in 1902 against the censorship of Maurice Maeterlinck’s play *Monna Vanna*. In addition, she challenged what was considered appropriate subject matter for women authors. In the same year that *Calmady* was published, Malet was the keynote speaker for the annual “Ladies Night” of an otherwise exclusively male literary association, the New Vagabond Club. Malet’s topic was the “difficulties which beset the path of the woman of letters.”²¹ Malet used this opportunity to denounce the ongoing practice that she found pervasive in men’s criticism of female writers: that they evaluated women’s fiction as if it were autobiography, and always kept the woman’s gender in view, urging her audience for “impartial and impersonal criticism of our literary work.”²² Moreover, Malet returned to this theme a few years later when she reviewed a book by Janet Courtney’s husband, the English author William Leonard Courtney. In 1904 Courtney published a study of eight women novelists titled *The Feminine Note in Fiction*. Malet was among the writers whom he discussed. She reviewed the work for the *Bookman*, emphasizing that Courtney’s attempt to define what makes a work of fiction “feminine” only succeeded in replicating the “fallacy” that the “feminine angle” is the

²⁰ Courtney, “Novelist of the Nineties,” 230.

²¹ Typescript of speech by MSLH/“Lucas Malet” to the New Vagabond Club, December 23, 1901, London, Richmond Library, Sladen Collection, Misc. Letters 25. I. f105-07, quoted in Lundberg, *Inward Necessity*, 250.

²² Typescript of speech by MSLH/“Lucas Malet” to the New Vagabond Club, quoted in Lundberg, *Inward Necessity*, 250.

“neurotic and hysteric note.”²³ We discover in these writings, then, Malet’s commitment not only to thinking carefully about women’s contributions to English fiction, but also to actively promoting the continued expansion of women into the ranks of those bold authors whose works addressed controversial subjects, and advocated on behalf of new critical approaches to women’s writing.

The Shadow of Roman Catholic Conversion

These examples of the topics Malet passionately wrote about in her non-fiction make it clear that she was very attuned to the position of the woman author in the early twentieth century. Yet it is in these same years that Janet Courtney points to a change not only in Malet herself, but also in the caliber of Malet’s fiction. Courtney identifies Malet’s conversion from the Church of England to Roman Catholicism in 1902 as a turning point in the author’s spiritual life as well as in the quality of her writing. Courtney declares that “[c]onversion may have brought peace to [Malet’s] soul; it was her ruin as an artist.”²⁴ She elaborates that Malet’s commitment to the Church became primary, and Courtney believes that her religious fervor compromised Malet’s artistic power: “critics of discernment could not but see that she wrote in fetters.”²⁵ Significantly, in one of the early recoveries of Malet’s work in 1994, Patricia Srebrnik replicates Janet Courtney’s judgment, asserting that although in converting to Roman Catholicism Malet had “indicated her determination to write as candidly and as openly as a (French) man of letters,” it remained the case that “[u]nfortunately for Malet’s career as an author, the conversion did not have the desired effect.”²⁶

²³ Lucas Malet, review of *The Feminine Note in Fiction*, by W. L. Courtney, *Bookman* 27, no. 159 (December 1904): 116.

²⁴ Courtney, “Novelist of the Nineties,” 240.

²⁵ Courtney, “Novelist of the Nineties,” 240.

²⁶ Patricia Srebrnik, “The Re-Subjection of ‘Lucas Malet’: Charles Kingsley’s Daughter and the Response to Muscular Christianity,” in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 208.

Srebrnik is addressing here the fact that Malet's conversion was especially daring because it was in opposition to the upbringing the author had received from her father Charles Kingsley, a celebrated novelist and clergyman in the Church of England who was fiercely anti-Catholic. The mid-nineteenth century Oxford Movement (also called Tractarianism) led by John Henry Newman that sought to return the Anglican Church to many of its traditional Roman Catholic roots was the special object of Kingsley's vituperation. Newman's much-celebrated *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864) was written in direct response to Kingsley's attacks on Newman that were published in the press. In the *Apologia*, he chooses to address Kingsley's question: "What does Dr. Newman mean?", and writes: "he shall be answered;—not for his own sake, but for mine," and further states that he must "give the true key to my whole life" by drawing out "the history of my mind."²⁷ Kingsley's attacks originated in his opposition to what he regarded as a feminization of the church, which also bore with it the feared specter of male homoeroticism. Kingsley's statements in a letter are revealing: "In [Newman] and all that school, there is an element of foppery—even in dress and manner; a fastidious, maundering die-away effeminacy, which is mistaken for purity and refinement; and I confess myself unable to cope with it."²⁸ This letter reveals quite clearly how uncomfortable Kingsley felt around men who did not conform to the athletic masculinity that he prized. Kingsley supported a gospel of muscular Christianity in which he applauded masculinity and male physical strength as associated with spiritual robustness. It was precisely this environment of overbearing manliness that Malet found oppressive, and which her fiction both implicitly or explicitly would challenge and condemn. In Srebrnik's formulation, however, Malet's dedication to the Roman Church casts a conservative coloring over the fiction she wrote after *Calvary*. The persistence of this view is evidenced in a recent assessment in which Alani Hicks-Bartlett's asserts that Malet's "[religious] reorientation

²⁷ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: The Two Versions of 1864 and 1865*. Edited by Wilfrid Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 99. These quotations remained consistent from the 1864 to the 1865 edition.

²⁸ Quoted in Susan Chitty, *The Beast and the Monk: A Life of Charles Kingsley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), 236.

led her, at least superficially, to choose less disarming subject matters since she wanted to be in greater alignment with the dogmata of the Catholic Church.”²⁹

Although the fictions that Malet wrote between 1902 and 1919 have sustained the accusation of greater conservatism, the novels that she wrote after the Great War have, on the contrary, been seen as formally progressive: marking a shift towards a style that has affinities with the greater fragmentation, subjective narration, and skepticism of modernism. Thus, the time between Malet’s religious conversion and her publication of ostensibly more experimental narratives after 1919, remains one of critical neglect. In what follows, I argue that far from curbing Malet’s subversive literary output, the material she composed following her conversion to Rome carries on her penchant for exploring forbidden subjects, and for her innovative use of form. In particular, Malet found in the worship of the Virgin Mary a powerful resource for elevating womanhood. While Malet’s entire oeuvre displays her interest in the figure of the Madonna, Malet’s Marian figures in her later period embody the female divinity in striking new ways. Instead of seeing *Calmady* as the culmination of Malet’s greatness, then, I take it as the springboard for three later novels: *The Far Horizon* (1906), *Adrian Savage* (1911), and *Deadham Hard* (1919).

Malet’s Literary Career, 1901-1919

Malet’s mid-career fiction demands attention not only because it has received comparatively less investigation, but also because it shows Malet reimagining narrative possibilities for her women characters. In particular, she explores the way in which female sexual desire and professional ambition disrupt the teleology of the marriage plot. *Calmady*, as we have seen, not only explores the unusual topic of male physical disability, but also examines three powerful women characters’ alternative priorities to romance and marriage. *The Far*

²⁹ Alani Hicks-Bartlett, “Vanity of Vanities’: The *Bildungsroman*, Corporeal Fragility, and the Aesthetic Ideal in *The Far Horizon*,” in *Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays*, ed. Jane Ford and Alexandra Gray (New York: Routledge, 2019), 70.

Horizon, Malet's first novel following her conversion, features a bank clerk who finds restoration in the Roman Catholic faith of his parents, but whose conversion is inspired largely from an unexpected direction: his relationship with a self-possessed stage actress named Poppy. Set at the time of the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the narrative engages with questions about changing notions of womanhood at the turn of the century. In this novel, Malet combines her psychological realism with an unusual meditation on Decadent femininity.

In *Adrian Savage*, another novel following her conversion, we find parallel tales of women's lives in the early 1900s. The narrative features a woman living in Paris who has found liberation in feminism, and another woman living in a country town in England, whose suppression of all personal desires until her father's death leads to a tragic romantic attachment in which she continues to believe herself inferior to her chosen male object. These contrasting lives not only draw into focus the need for greater reform for women in England, but the narrative also emphasizes that in spite of their extreme differences, these women are united by their shared experiences as women. *Adrian Savage* exhibits a more spare prose style, and juxtaposes Malet's usual omniscient narrator with a first-person speaker. *Deadham Hard* (1919) explores the limitations for a young woman who desires to be a professional author in the 1870s, and discovers that she must embrace her sexual desires in order to succeed. In this 1919 novel, Malet chronicles an unusual family history and draws on the resources of the aesthetic romance to narrate a plot of female sexual awakening. Malet's feminist Marianism that is powerfully represented in *Calmady* becomes even more tied up in her feminist politics in *The Far Horizon* and *Adrian Savage*. Although her Mariology is less explicit in *Deadham Hard*, the ways in which Malet reimagined femininity through her assertive and erotic Madonnas crucially underpins her revisionary representation of womanhood in this 1919 novel. In all of these novels, Malet offers incisive political critique, but rather than being overtly polemical, her fiction achieves its commentary through her innovative mixing of forms.

The Women's Movement and the Woman Novelist

Malet was herself a highly politicized figure. As we have already witnessed, *Calmady* caused a critical storm that led to Malet's greater visibility in the press, but she also engaged in a more public debate that was independent from questions of fiction when she published an essay for the *Fortnightly Review* entitled "The Threatened Re-Subjection of Woman" (1905). In this essay, she addresses President Theodore Roosevelt's eugenically inflected ideas about marriage and childbearing. Malet emphasizes that Roosevelt wanted women to behave as if there had not been a woman's movement; she states that his desire to legislate women's lives "would constitute an unpardonable encroachment on personal liberty."³⁰ She insists that even if the current tide is turning away from the women's movement, "the solid advantages will remain both to individuals and to the mass."³¹ Malet's essay prompted two responses that also appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, one from Mona Caird, and the other from Lady Agnes Grove. Both Caird and Grove read Malet's essay as placing too much emphasis on the value of motherhood, and accuse her of being too tame. Caird and Grove in their respective responses used Malet's essay as the occasion for voicing their own positions, and in the process misrepresented Malet's argument. Lorimer Lundberg stresses that when Malet was cast in this more conservative light, it may have seemed to be verification to some people that her conversion had quenched the fires that had fueled *Calmady*.³²

The politics of Malet's essay, however, were actually continuous with a piece she had written in 1888 titled "The Progress of Woman in Literature." This essay had appeared in the *Universal Review* in a form right next to Millicent Fawcett, the great suffragist leader, whose essay on "The Progress of Woman in Political Education" had preceded Malet's contribution. "Progress" is worth spending some time considering because it establishes two important

³⁰ Lucas Malet, "The Threatened Re-subjection of Woman," *Fortnightly Review* 77, no. 461 (May 1905): 815.

³¹ Malet, "Threatened Re-subjection," 819.

³² See Lundberg, *An Inward Necessity*, 286-88.

aspects of Malet's thoughtful engagement with gender and fiction that I will examine in turn. First, Malet had a detailed knowledge of literature written in the nineteenth century, and she was especially interested in the history of English women's writing. Secondly, in Malet's discussion of the kind of novelist who is needed to move English fiction forward at the turn of the century we find a key to the goals of her own fictional project. To begin with, Malet's handling of the topic: how women have advanced fiction in the "last thirty to forty years," reveals her investment in the advancement of women's fiction.³³ She claims that women authors have "put away childish things" and have instead emerged with a "high and daring temper."³⁴ After rhetorically asking: "what on earth we [women authors] have become?", she gives the answer: "Amazons, perhaps, it is best to call us again."³⁵ This bold statement reveals Malet's perception of her fellow women authors as powerful warriors who have emerged as a formidable force to be reckoned with.

Malet then begins to address specific women authors and their achievements. She claims that George Eliot's novels marked a "watershed" moment in women's literature: "[t]hese are the strongest, weightiest utterances we have got, or are likely to get, from any woman."³⁶ Malet identifies the source of Eliot's strength as her commitment to realism. Malet asserts that Eliot's novels "rise supreme," although she offers the caveat that they are "not the most beautiful" writing from a woman.³⁷ The writer who exemplifies the lush style that Malet cherishes is discovered when, in the same essay, she praises the formidable author of aesthetic romances: Ouida, the professional name of Marie Louise Ramé (1839-1908). Malet calls Ouida a "genius" who is "endowed with splendid gifts."³⁸ Ranked among her greatest virtues are her

³³ Lucas Malet, "The Progress of Woman: In Literature," *Universal Review* 2, no. 7 (November 1888): 295.

³⁴ Malet, "Progress of Woman," 296, 297.

³⁵ Malet, "Progress of Woman," 297.

³⁶ Malet, "Progress of Woman," 297.

³⁷ Malet, "Progress of Woman," 298, 297.

“descriptive passages,” which Malet compares to those of “Mr. Ruskin.”³⁹ Moreover, Malet lauds Ouida for rejecting the pressure to perpetuate the ideal of domestic womanhood: “Ouida, by her refusal to circumscribe her art by ‘[what was thought] desirable’ for artificially-innocent and modest young ladies from eighteen to eight-and-forty, has unquestionably helped to give [the works of modern English artists] a shove down towards the horizon.”⁴⁰ In other words, Ouida unflinchingly represented the realities of life that were considered unfit for women readers, which, as we can deduce from the emphasis on “modesty” and “innocence,” includes sexuality.

In her conclusion to “Progress,” Malet imagines the literary skills an author must possess in order to move the English novel into its next phase: “I dream of the coming of some new great writer among us” who will “carry [the English novel] upward, clear in form, well-balanced, graced with the maturity of conception and directness of presentment which gives French art its distinction and intellectual charm.”⁴¹ Clarity, balance, and directness are akin to the realism that Malet praised in Eliot’s writing. Here, I want to suggest that this description also applies to Malet’s own fiction. Known for her unflinching depiction of grotesque and taboo subjects, she was at times associated with French naturalism, as one reviewer stated: “[her] relentless realism [is] characteristic of modern French fiction.”⁴² To these French qualities, that Malet adds literary elements which had become central to the English novel tradition: “the play of fancy, the richness of detail, the wonder and the mystery that belong to English romance—the romance of Shakespeare, of the great ballads, of the ‘Morte d’Arthur.’”⁴³ Fancy, richness, and mystery bring to mind Ouida’s aesthetic romances as well as Malet’s own novels. Malet thus strives to embody

³⁸ Malet, “Progress of Woman,” 299.

³⁹ Malet, “Progress of Woman,” 299.

⁴⁰ Malet, “Progress of Woman,” 299.

⁴¹ Malet, “Progress of Woman,” 301.

⁴² “Lucas Malet and Her Work,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1901, BR8.

⁴³ Malet, “Progress of Woman,” 301.

the formula that she prescribes. As we have observed with *Calmady*, Malet blends realist directness with romantic aestheticism, and I will argue that her later novels are characterized by her experimentation with various strategies for combining these French and English traditions.

In this chapter, then, I assert that in Malet's novels from the 1900s and 1910s we discover the way in which Malet continued to find aestheticism and realism useful for pushing the boundaries of what was considered acceptable subject matter for a woman novelist. What is more, we find the fruit of what may have been her ultimate act of rebellion: converting to Catholicism in the face of an increasingly secular and materialistic age; and moreover, in opposition to the beliefs of her own father who was the most outspoken opponent of Catholicism in the nineteenth century. I argue that Malet did not write in fetters, but rather her feminist Marianism that is powerfully represented in *Calmady* becomes even more tied up in her feminist politics in *The Far Horizon* and *Adrian Savage*. Although her Mariology is less explicit in *Deadham Hard*, the ways in which Malet reimagined femininity through her assertive and erotic Madonnas crucially underpins her revisionary representation of womanhood in this 1919 novel. In the remainder of this chapter I will offer in-depth readings of each of these four novels.

The History of Sir Richard Calmady: Transgressive Bodies, Femininity, and Perverse Sexual Desire

When reviewers assessed *Sir Richard Calmady*, there was a strong emphasis in their comments on the novel's psychological power. In particular, Malet's representation of a disabled man who is not a monster, but rather is sympathetically rendered as a full human being through the reader's access to his mental workings, is remarkable. Yet, what is also very noticeable about Malet's 1901 fiction is that, in bringing together elements of the aesthetic romance and French naturalism, the narrative places considerable stress on physicality. Both of these genres draw attention to different aspects of embodiment. Where aestheticism is concerned with beauty and excess, naturalism tends to concentrate on the grotesque. *Calmady* combines these modes in

order to explore unusual kinds of corporeality, and, by extension, the forms of desire that either emanate from these bodies or which turn these bodies into objects of desire. *Calmary*, then, in addition to representing intricate psychologies is also a novel that engages deeply with the characters' physical and sexual histories.

Calmary, moreover, is a novel that addresses bodies that Victorian culture typically deemed unrepresentable. To be sure, there is of course a carefully portrayed disabled male body at the center of the story. But Malet surrounds Sir Richard Calmary's corporeality with female forms that are described performing unsanctioned acts, including a mother insatiably caressing her baby son, a socialist activist expressing lesbian desire, and an adulteress experiencing autoerotic bliss. In regard to the latter, these are the startling bodies of Katherine, Honoria, and Helen, respectively. Even though these three characters possess distinct kinds of femininity, they are united by the fact that, in their own unique ways, they diverge from traditional expectations of Victorian womanhood. In the following analysis, I focus not only on the manner in which Malet presents a disabled male protagonist, I also examine how Malet reconceives different types of Victorian femininity, especially with regard to dissident forms of sexual desire. At the fin de siècle, deviations from orthodoxy in behavior, physicality, and art were often considered manifestations of degeneracy. *Calmary*, I argue, challenges the notion that what is unconventional is morally reprehensible, in terms of what was fit or permissible in fiction, and also in the realm of how to respond to corporeal transgressions.

Katherine's body establishes a female corporeality that is an amalgamation of the spiritual and the sensual. Many of the earliest sections of *Calmary* pay very close attention to Katherine's physicality, especially in relation to her marriage and her subsequent pregnancy. One of the most noticeable aspects of Katherine's embodiment is that the narrative associates her with the Virgin Mary. When she becomes a mother, this connection is further strengthened. At the same time, the novel insists that Katherine possesses a highly sensual and erotic body. Moreover, she is not only her husband's object of desire, she is also a figure who attracts the

attentions of both a celibate priest and a younger woman. Here I demonstrate the complex ways that Katherine's femininity coincides with and deviates from prescriptive notions of Victorian womanhood. I begin by investigating how and why Marian symbolism plays such a prominent role in characterizing Katherine's physicality. Such symbolism, I contend, provides a framework for fully understanding the different types of femininity that Honoria and Helen embody.

The alignment of Katherine with the Holy Mother relates to the larger theological debates that preoccupy *Calmady*. In the opening chapters, Catholic imagery emerges when the narrator explores the tensions between two competing forms of Christian faith: Puritanism and Tractarianism. In order to make this point, the narrator provides a long historical view of developments within Christianity in England. The first sentence of the novel introduces Puritanism, condemning it in no uncertain terms, for we are told that the narrative opens “[i]n that fortunate hour of English history, when the cruel sights and haunting insecurities of the Middle Ages had passed away, and while, as yet, the fanatic zeal of Puritanism had not cast its blighting shadow over all merry and pleasant things.”⁴⁴ The family's genealogy is embedded in this religious past, for it is during this “fortunate hour” that Sir Denzil Calmady builds his ancestral home, Brockhurst. We also discover that a curse came upon the Calmady family during Sir Denzil's lifetime. Sir Denzil impregnated his servant and promised to marry her, but then threw her over for a woman of wealth. When he and his bride were riding to Brockhurst in a carriage, the servant's child was crushed beneath its wheels. The enraged mother cast a curse that “Sir Denzil's male descendants, one and all”⁴⁵ will die young, and die in unusual fashions, until there comes a fatherless and crippled “half angel, half monster”⁴⁶ who will lift the curse. When Richard Calmady is born, the family's curate, who has discovered the record of the family's history in their library, speculates that Richard may be the savior. Richard is born in

⁴⁴ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 1.

⁴⁵ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 5.

⁴⁶ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 61.

1843, a time that the narrative closely associates with the challenge to Puritanism that came through Tractarianism: the movement started at Oxford, as we have seen, that sought to return the Anglican Church to more Roman Catholic forms of worship.⁴⁷

Once the novel has moved forward to the mid-nineteenth century—the time of the main action—we briefly learn about the courtship and marriage of Richard Calmady senior to Katherine Ormiston, which results in the birth of their disabled son. Their marriage plot is then suspended for several chapters in order to establish the biography of their Tractarian curate, Julius March, whom Richard knew at Oxford. We learn that Julius took his degree at Oxford in the early 1830s and was devoted to the Tractarian movement from its earliest inception. Julius is drawn to the ways in which Tractarian forms of spirituality focus on beauty, mysticism, and ritualism: the use of vestments, candles, and especially the ceremonies surrounding the Eucharist. Julius’s attraction to the Oxford Movement is not surprising when we learn that he had been “very insufficiently satisfied by the lean spiritual meats offered [him] during an Evangelical childhood and youth.”⁴⁸ Julius’s disregard for his chronic ill health in the dampness of Oxford emphasizes the intensity of his spiritual devotion. The narrator records that Julius suffered from colds, coughs, and asthma but “[he] did not greatly care.”⁴⁹ We learn that he is “in that exalted frame of mind in which martyrdom, even by phthisis or bronchial affections, is immeasurably preferable to no martyrdom at all.”⁵⁰ Here it is important to note the satirical tone toward Julius: he is a man who has not yet faced any true challenges of the flesh. He does, however, experience a spiritual challenge, for he is tempted to turn fully to Rome. In this regard, Julius is a figure who is reminiscent of John Henry Newman: a fellow at Oriel College, and one

⁴⁷ While Malet’s focus on Tractarianism has not gone unnoticed by recent critics, it has not been the focal point of any sustained discussion. Delyfer, for example, notes that “Catholicism (the crisis of the Oxford Movement) provide[s] the mystic backdrop of the novel.” *Art and Womanhood*, 100. Delyfer’s focus on the function of art in Malet’s fiction means that this remains an informative observation, but one which is not expanded upon.

⁴⁸ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 18.

⁴⁹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 19.

⁵⁰ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 19.

of the Oxford Movement's main reformers. Newman eventually converted to Rome in 1845, confirming the fears of his detractors at the University, and also resulting in his expulsion from Oxford. Unlike Newman, Julius stubbornly persists in his dedication to the Anglican Church, to which he owes so much: "Through her ministry he had received illumination. To the work of her awakening he had given all his young enthusiasm. How then could he desert her?"⁵¹ Although Julius remains in the Church of England, his Tractarian beliefs are so notorious that a local Anglican priest has an "instinctive terror of Mr. March's 'well-known Romanising tendencies.'"⁵²

The sustained note of Julius's plot throughout the novel is the nature of his relationship to Katherine. Julius, in his religious ardor at Oxford, had taken a secret vow of celibacy (a very Catholic impulse indeed). Now in close proximity with the beautiful Katherine, he finds himself experiencing entirely new sensations. He passionately idolizes her but his celibacy means that he directs his feelings into worshipping her as he would an inaccessible deity. When we first see Julius in his private room at Brockhurst, the reader's attention is directed to a statue: "two candles burned on either side of a bronze *pietà*, which Julius had brought back with him from Rome,"⁵³ where he had been staying to recover from his ill health. This bronze figure, described as an "age-old witness to the sanctity of motherhood and of suffering alike," appears three more times in the next few pages.⁵⁴ When Julius, watching Katherine kiss her husband in the dusk, discovers that he desires her, the narrator explains that he "turned and fled down the passage and back into the chill study, where the candles burned on either side the image of the Virgin Mother cradling the dead Christ upon her knee."⁵⁵ The narrative makes it clear that Julius is metaphorically grafting Katherine onto the Virgin Mary: imagery that is sustained throughout

⁵¹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 20.

⁵² Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 21.

⁵³ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 37.

⁵⁴ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 38.

⁵⁵ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 38.

the rest of the novel. Julius remains celibately devoted to Katherine even after her husband's death, gaining for himself the name "Julius the faithful."⁵⁶ Through Julius, then, we see Katherine as a Madonna, but Julius is clearly subverting the sanctity of the Virgin Mary by eroticizing the object of his adoration.

The first description in the narrative of Katherine Calmady's physical presence is brief, but suggestive of a woman with rich dimensions. We are told that she has gained the admiration of a guest at Brockhurst because of her "radiant youth, her courtesy, her undeniable air of distinction, and a certain gracious gaiety which belonged to her."⁵⁷ When her new husband compliments her excellence in hosting their guests, he provides an apt term for the manner she possesses in all her interactions: "you entertained them . . . like a queen."⁵⁸ Katherine's stateliness and magnanimity, combined with her dignified demeanor, associate her not only with an earthly monarch but also, as we discover, with Mary as the Queen of Heaven. As we can begin to grasp, Katherine's relationship with her husband is ideal. The narrator observes that the couple appear "as two heroic figures—immortal, fairy lovers."⁵⁹ A description of their affectionate embrace makes evident the passionate nature of their romance: "Katherine stopped, leant—with a superb abandon—back against her husband, resting her hand on his shoulder, drew his arm around her waist for support, drew his face down to her upturned face until their lips met."⁶⁰ This passage is especially remarkable for the way in which Katherine performs all of the action, including arranging her husband's body, thus demonstrating agency in her marriage through expressing her physical desire. Her intimate action also reveals the perfect security that she enjoys. This married bliss, however, does not last for long. While Katherine is well advanced

⁵⁶ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 417.

⁵⁷ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 8.

⁵⁸ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 16.

⁵⁹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 38.

⁶⁰ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 38.

in her pregnancy, Richard has a riding accident in which his horse tramples him. Although the surgeon, Dr. Knott, tries to save his life by amputating his leg, he soon dies. While he is struggling toward the end, Katherine says she wishes she could go with him into death. She declares: “Let us go together, take me . . . I love you, I will not be left.”⁶¹

This passionate love for her husband that leads to her temporary disregard for her pregnancy comes back to haunt Katherine when her child is born. Baby Richard’s shortened legs are such a striking reminder of his father’s accident that the doctor and Katherine’s brother Roger cannot help but connect his deformity with the trauma Katherine experienced from her husband’s trampling and death. Dr. Knott, Roger, Julius, and eventually Katherine herself, all associate the “spontaneous amputation” of the baby’s legs with the tragic demise of her spouse.⁶² Dr. Knott declares that he is “old fashioned enough, perhaps scientific enough” to believe the notion that “the passion of true lovers” creates a beautiful child, for Richard is perfect in every way except his legs. Dr. Knott elaborates that “love is an incalculably great, natural force,” and he therefore reasons that “[i]n this case [love] has worked strangely against itself—at once for irreparable injury and for perfection.”⁶³ Dr. Knott’s statement is clearly indebted to a notion that was well established in the eighteenth century, which, as Dennis Todd explains, was “the doctrine that the mother’s imagination had the power to mark or even shape her fetus.”⁶⁴ In particular, the mother’s imagination “overshadowed all other explanations of the causes of monstrous birth.”⁶⁵ Dr. Knott reframes this idea in terms of the power of love, and, as I will show below, the concept is even further modified in order to positively attribute agency to Katherine.

⁶¹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 48.

⁶² Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 64.

⁶³ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 65.

⁶⁴ Dennis Todd, *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 45.

⁶⁵ Todd, *Imagining Monsters*, 47.

Katherine's eventual witnessing of her son's form amplifies her eroticism. Fearing the distress it will cause her, Katherine is initially kept ignorant of baby Richard's disability. Once she asks to see him, however, Roger informs her of the infant's crippled condition, and she then prepares to look upon the uncovered body of her son for the first time. What follows is a remarkable scene in which we have the first glimpse of the strikingly sensual nature of Katherine's motherhood. Having "unwrapped the shawls" that protect him, and taken "off one small garment after another," she places the baby "lying stark naked on her lap" and studies him.⁶⁶ Then follows an arresting passage worth quoting at length:

She bent down and solemnly kissed the unlovely, shortened limbs, not once or twice but many times, yielding herself up with an almost voluptuous intensity to her own emotion. She clasped her hands about her knees, so that the child might be enclosed, overshadowed, embraced on all sides, by the living defences of its mother's love. Alone there, with no witnesses, she brooded over it, crooned to it, caressed it with an insatiable hunger of tenderness.⁶⁷

Here we have a mother who is described with the curious words "voluptuous" and "insatiable"—two adjectives that we do not typically associate with a feeling of a mother toward her child, but which instead provoke thoughts of sensuality, appetite, and desire. These associations signal that Katherine's body is still erotic—her motherhood has not neutralized her sexuality. Moreover, this is not the sweet and sanitized depiction of Victorian motherhood that would have been familiar to Malet's readers.⁶⁸ Becoming a mother more strongly solidifies Katherine's association with the Virgin Mary, but unlike the purity that was so often prized in Mary because she was not spoiled by the taint of sexuality, Malet's Madonna possesses an erotic maternal body

⁶⁶ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 74.

⁶⁷ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 75.

⁶⁸ My efforts to discover whether there was a discourse about child disability in the late nineteenth century have yielded very little results. The only representations of child deformity or disability that I can discover are in the form of fiction. Here, we find compassionate mothers, but not erotic mothers.

that is magnified rather than elided. We are therefore presented with a powerful mother figure, but whose body remains transgressively sexual.

Here we see one of the distinct ways in which Malet is constructing a feminist Marianism that has ties to, but which goes beyond, the Oxford Movement's increased emphasis on the Virgin Mary that made her more central to salvation than was typical of Protestant doctrine. In particular, the Mariology of John Henry Newman hovers in the background of this novel by way of Julius. Mr. March has such difficulty with all of the physicality and sensuality that he witnesses at Brockhurst because he has been trained to think about the body in the manner of Newman, for whom the flesh had to be wholly spiritualized. Newman's ideology of the body had direct implications for his Mariology; he is most concerned with Mary's purity: she is "the only spotless child of Adam's seed."⁶⁹ Significantly, he makes Mary an active agent in the Incarnation, but at the same time he emphasizes her obedience over her divine motherhood, thus minimizing her explicitly female contribution to salvation. In "Our Lady in the Gospel," for instance, he states that Mary was "blessed in two ways," explaining: "She was blessed in being [Jesus's] Mother; she was blessed in being filled with the spirit of faith and obedience. And the latter blessedness was the greater."⁷⁰ In contrast, we find in Malet's Madonna a form of embodiment that, as we saw when she holds Richard on her knees, saturates her environment and keeps in sight her sexuality as crucial to her protective motherhood: Richard's survival will be dependent on the "*living* defences of his mother's love."⁷¹ In this way, Malet's Marianism returns the distinctly female body to the theology of salvation, for Richard will ultimately be a Christ figure. What is more, because of the power attributed to Katherine's passion for her husband resulting in the resemblance of her son's body to her husband's trampled form, Katherine is in fact given

⁶⁹ John Henry Newman, "The Glories of Mary for the Sake of Her Son," *Newman Reader* (National Institute for Newman Studies, 2007), 355. Newmanreader.org.

⁷⁰ John Henry Newman, "Our Lady in the Gospel," in *Catholic Sermons of Cardinal Newman* (London: Burns and Oates, 1957), 93.

⁷¹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 75 (emphasis mine).

responsibility in creating the aspect of Richard's physicality that determines that he will be a savior, for it is this disability that makes him the "half angel, half monster"⁷² that was foretold. In this way, Malet makes her Madonna's physical passion, rather than her purity, the lynchpin of her active agency in bringing forth a savior.

We can recognize in this refashioning of the Madonna that Malet was adopting and extending the feminist discourse that had been constructed around the figure of the Virgin Mary in the Victorian period. For certain women writers and reformers throughout the nineteenth century, the Holy Mother had functioned as an important point of reference when advocating women's rights. Kimberly VanEsveld Adams's study, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism* (2001), illuminates the significance of the Madonna in the work of a few key Victorian women, including George Eliot. In the Virgin Mary, these women found an exemplar who stood for spiritual equality with men, from which they could argue that they should also be equals politically and socially. These women placed a much greater significance on the Virgin Mary than was typical in the Protestant Church, and in this way, although none of them were Anglo-Catholic, their sympathies coincided with aspects of the Oxford Movement. The Tractarian promotion of Mary, however, was the cause of a more sanitized version of the Holy Mother, for, as we saw with Newman, her virginity was idealized, and this characteristic was enshrined in the figure of the Angel in the House. This icon was popularly celebrated in Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name, first published in 1854, praises feminine purity, domesticity, and motherhood. It is easy to recognize why reviewers identified these traits in Katherine and thus lauded her as an ideal mother. As we have seen, though, her subversive sensuality makes a significant departure from this ideal.

One of the questions that the narrative poses to the reader concentrates on the relationship between Katherine's Marianism and her son's disabled corporeality. This inquiry is

⁷² Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 61.

highly significant because the narrative proceeds to look at the way in which this unusual male form calls forth distinct responses from each of the three central women characters. What I want to discuss is why these women have a very special relationship to Richard's body that contrasts with the responses of several reviewers who recoiled from the narrative's frank treatment of male disability: "The deformity of Richard," said the *New York Times*, "is monstrous—nothing but the most diseased and morbid imagination could conceive and develop such a plot."⁷³ Part of the reason for the repudiation of Malet's art is that these critics conceive of Richard's body in relation to fin-de-siècle understandings of degeneracy. Malet's novel, I contend, was confuting Victorian understandings of the post-Darwinian myth of degeneracy. Developments in biological, medical, and psychiatric sciences claimed that essentially any physical or social deviation from what was deemed normal—such as insanity, criminality, or even homosexuality—were symptoms of degeneracy that had been determined through heredity. In this regard, the reviewer's choice of the word "morbid" is especially telling. John Stokes has argued that in the 1890s "the single word 'morbid' . . . carried a burden of meaning greater than any other derogatory adjective."⁷⁴ Stokes further explains that this word "linked the artistic minority" with "lunatics, criminals and sexual deviants."⁷⁵ Stokes is referring to those artists who dared to explore aberration, perversity, and the grotesque: in other words, decadents and naturalists. The reviewer, then, is squarely assigning Malet and her literary offspring to this category.

Calmady, however, posits a different theory about deformity and heredity. We have already seen that in accounting for Richard's disability those characters who are intimately acquainted with all of the circumstances attribute it to Katherine's intense response to her husband's disfigurement. This might initially seem in alignment with the discourse of eugenics,

⁷³ J. M. C., review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet, *New York Times Saturday Review of Books*, June 21, 1902, 422.

⁷⁴ John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 26.

⁷⁵ Stokes, *In the Nineties*, 26-27.

which claimed that biological deformity signified moral degeneracy, and would thus be an indictment of Katherine's love as misplaced when prioritizing husband over unborn son. *Calmady*, however, definitively rejects the notion that a body's imperfections are caused by a lack of morality. The novel figures this discussion in terms of the relationship between body and soul. There is a telling scene where Richard, as a young man, is reading Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which was first published in 1621 and remained popular through the nineteenth century. Richard quotes Burton to his mother: "bodily imperfections do not a whit blemish the soul or hinder the operations of it, but rather help and much increase it."⁷⁶ In this statement, we see a formulation about bodily deformity that is the opposite of degeneration: it is not a sign of depravity but rather a stimulus to moral perfection. Richard thinks this idea is a "nice, neat, little arrangement" but he is unable to take comfort from such a notion: "it's beastly difficult to care a hang about your soul, one way or another, when you clearly perceive your body's making you the laughing-stock of half the people."⁷⁷ After Richard has suffered ridicule, dehumanization, and rejection, however, he finds that it is indeed his physical imperfections that have "emancipated [him] from the delusions of his class" and enable him to recognize his brotherhood with the "suffering and humiliation" of the multitudes.⁷⁸ Richard, in other words, becomes morally dignified because of his distinctive form of embodiment, and this puts an end to the Calmady curse, thus turning Richard into a Christ-like savior.

The narrative's refutation of eugenic thinking and notions of degeneracy has further implications for the ways in which *Calmady* represents deformity. In light of the rapid growth of disability studies within the literary field, *Calmady* has been the focus of several scholarly interventions. Delyfer, in her astute analysis, points out that in early parts of the narrative Richard's body is represented using the "rhetoric of the exotic." In Rosemarie Garland-

⁷⁶ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 186.

⁷⁷ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 187.

⁷⁸ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 546.

Thomson's taxonomy of modes of looking, she explains that the exotic "presents disabled figures" as "sensationalized [and] eroticized"; this a model of viewing that is marked by "uninvolved objectification."⁷⁹ As Delyfer reminds us, this phase of the narrative reflects typical Victorian treatments of the extraordinary body as an exotic spectacle, and my discussion of Helen will illustrate one of the ways in which Richard's body is spectacularized. In contrast with Helen's viewpoint, however, the reader is positioned to identify increasingly with Richard and feel empathy for him, and in the later parts of the narrative Richard's struggles are explicitly associated with the suffering of Christ, thus turning Richard, at least metaphorically, into a Christian savior. Moreover, through his hardship Richard is able to recognize that "of necessity, only the Man of Sorrows can truly be the Son of God."⁸⁰ Malet therefore untethers Richard from the exotic and elevates him through his identification with Christ. Such identification has already been heralded early on in Julius's statue, in which Christ is lying in his mother's lap. It recurs when this same arrangement was replicated when Katherine put her baby son on her knees and looked upon his deformity.

The bodies of mother and son are both central to another figure: Honoria St. Quentin, who also bears an unusual form of embodiment and the unsanctioned desires that emanate from that body. Honoria is an androgynous woman whose lesbian desire is fully awakened by Katherine, yet who will ultimately position herself with manly authority as suitor to a feminized Richard. Honoria's femininity stands in stark contrast with the womanly mother. Her independence, activism, and advocacy on behalf of other women is the basis for both Schaffer's and Delyfer's respective assessments that Honoria is an early New Woman. Where Katherine can be seen as a subversive Angel in the House, Honoria possesses the name of this figure as she appears in Coventry Patmore's poem, in which the speaker meets a woman named Honoria,

⁷⁹ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography," in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, ed. Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: MLA, 2002), 65.

⁸⁰ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 545.

whom he considers perfect in feminine virtue and beauty. In *Calmady*, by contrast, this name is deployed in order to construct an utterly different kind of female figure, and when we assess Honoria St. Quentin's full name we detect additional allusions to figures dating from several centuries before Patmore's appropriation. Both the forename and family name of Malet's character are found in Roman antiquity. Honoria was the Roman Emperor Valentinian III's older sister, and is best known for her plea of love to her family's enemy Attila the Hun. Just five years before Malet published *Calmady*, Michael Field (the professional name of the co-authors Katharine Bradley and her niece, Edith Cooper) dramatized Honoria's romantic passion for Attila in their verse-drama, *Attila, My Attila!* (1896). In Michael Field's version, Honoria is going to be made Augusta, which would prevent her from marrying. In defiance, Honoria finds transgressive ways to express her sexuality, including her wish to be carried off by Attila. In connection with the Roman Honoria, then, we have a powerful woman who expresses her unsanctioned sexual desire.

As to Honoria's family name, Saint Quentin was an early Christian saint that legend records was a Roman citizen martyred in Gaul. There was a cult in his honor during the Middle Ages. With these two names Malet therefore links the assertive sexuality of the pagan Roman Honoria with the religious zeal of the Christian Roman Saint Quentin. As we will see, in Honoria's lesbian worship of Katherine as Madonna she will replicate this joining of eroticism and religion. In addition, Malet is linking a woman's name with a man's name, signaling Honoria's androgyny. Honoria, the defender of women's rights and the lover and worshipper of Lady Katherine, is Malet's fascinating nineteenth-century embodiment of these Roman-era symbols of the sensual and the saintly.

When Honoria first appears in the narrative, we are presented with a striking description: "She was unusually tall, and there was a lazy, almost boyish indifference and grace

in the pose of her supple figure and the gallant carriage of her small head.”⁸¹ This confident boyishness is one of the defining features of Honoria, who is described by her friend (and erstwhile object of desire) Helen as a “woman’s woman,” one who does not care about men.⁸² Moreover, Honoria is committed to celibacy, as Helen explains to Richard: “I really believe when poor, dreadful, old Lady Tobermory left her all that money Honoria’s first thought was that now she might embrace celibacy with a good conscience.”⁸³ Honoria thus joins the ranks of Julius March as eschewing sexual intimacy, although Honoria’s motives do not spring from religious fervor, but rather indifference to the wants and needs of men. Honoria, we discover, is also ranged with Julius because she is a worshipper of Lady Calmady. When Richard embarks on his “Rake’s Progress” (in reference, of course, to William Hogarth’s series of paintings) Katherine is devastated and remains aloof and inaccessible to her friends. Honoria, nonetheless, stays on at Brockhurst, hoping to provide comfort and consolation. It is at this point that the reader encounters a striking scene of female homoeroticism that also draws on religious imagery in a powerful assertion of woman as a figure both sexual and sacred. Honoria tells Katherine that she has been the cause of a new phase in Honoria’s life: “I never cared for anyone—really to care, I mean—till I cared for you.”⁸⁴ She then elaborates: “[you] opened a door” and “let in such a lot of light!” and continues: “when you had let in the light, Cousin Katherine, good heavens, how thankful I was I had never married. Picture finding out all that after one had bound oneself, after one had given oneself! What an awful prostitution.”⁸⁵ Honoria’s utterance is remarkable in its frank revelation that Katherine has called forth feelings in Honoria that are those of romance

⁸¹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 177.

⁸² Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 247.

⁸³ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 247.

⁸⁴ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 415.

⁸⁵ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 416.

and sexual attraction. Moreover, her language combines the more overt sexual reference to “prostitution” with the religious language of finding the light.

The episode then unfolds into actions that extend the entwined symbolism of eroticism and spirituality: “[Honorina] knelt down—her tall, slender figure, angular, more like that of a youth than like that of a maid, in her spare, mud-stained habit and coat. Impulsively she put her hands on Lady Calmady’s hips, laid her head in her lap.”⁸⁶ Honorina’s first action—her kneeling—of course is the traditional position one assumes when addressing a deity. Her next move, however, so physically intimate, unmistakably echoes an earlier scene of sexual transgression between Helen and Richard, when the narrator records that Helen “knelt upon the tiger-skin before the dancing fire. Her hands grasped the two arms of Richard’s chair. She leaned down right across it, the lines and curves of her beautiful body discernible under her delicate draperies.”⁸⁷ Where Helen knelt over Richard’s lap, with her womanly form in feminine finery, Honorina kneels over Katherine’s—Honorina’s boyish figure emphasized through clothing that outdoor sport had dirtied. Helen’s kneeling position unmistakably suggests she is performing oral sex, and through this carefully orchestrated repetition of the earlier scene, Honorina’s action contains this sexual charge as well.

Following this intimate gesture, Honorina speaks, thus elaborating the spiritual imagery: “Have you but one blessing, oh! my more than mother?”⁸⁸ That Honorina asks for a blessing from her “more than mother” solidifies the image of a penitent importuning the Holy Mother. It also, however, once again emphasizes that there is more than a familial tie between these two women: “mother” cannot contain the multiple facets of Honorina’s feelings toward her cousin Katherine. Katherine’s response indicates that the implications of Honorina’s words and actions have not

⁸⁶ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 417.

⁸⁷ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 269.

⁸⁸ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 417.

gone unnoticed; the narrator records that she is “at once touched and almost repulsed.”⁸⁹

Katherine kindly counsels Honoria that the proper object of such feelings is a man, and cautions that “only half the lesson” of truly caring for someone has been taught to Honoria: “The other half . . . neither I, nor any other woman, can teach you.”⁹⁰ Katherine, then, gently deflects Honoria’s sexual overture, and Honoria channels her desire into devotional fervor. That critics did not particularly remark upon this scene is due, I contend, to how successfully the narrative had already coded Katherine as a Marian figure, as well as the continued use of religious imagery in these passages. Honoria can be a manly woman with forbidden desires like her pagan namesake because of Katherine’s role as Madonna.

Moreover, Honoria’s unsanctioned lesbian desires are ultimately replaced with what is, ostensibly, an acceptable feeling of passion when the narrative provides her with a man to teach her the “other half” of the lesson. This occurs when Richard returns to Brockhurst after he has extensively traveled, seeking all forms of entertainment and paying women for pleasure, and having sunk to his lowest point when, against his resolve, he has sex with the married Helen. Honoria finds herself drawn to the reformed Richard and his new devotion to hard work and desire to improve the lives of the less fortunate. Although the novel culminates in their heterosexual union, it is important to note that neither Richard nor Honoria conform to traditional gender roles. Clearly Richard is biologically a man, but in many ways he deviates from Victorian ideals of manliness. Richard’s disability feminizes him because he is dependent on other people for his basic functioning, just as women were treated as dependents of men. In addition, Richard’s shorter body is the cause of the obstacles he must overcome in order to take his position as a gentleman in Victorian society: a culture that deems his body inferior just as it does the bodies of women. When Richard is a young man the narrator notes that his “temperament,” which is shaped by his disability, causes him to perceive events both “as a

⁸⁹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 416.

⁹⁰ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 417.

woman” and “as a man.”⁹¹ Richard is further positioned as a woman when Honoria proposes marriage and refers to herself as a man when she does so.⁹² In the same scene, Honoria tells Richard: “your crippling has come to be dearer than any other man’s wholeness.”⁹³ That he is not a “whole” man marks him out as a deviant from traditional masculinity, and I contend that it is precisely Richard’s feminization that makes him more appealing to a woman who has not previously been attracted to men. Moreover, the fact that Honoria does not need Richard to fill a traditional manly role because of her own participation in masculinity makes her a suitable partner for Richard. While the novel ends in marriage, then, both figures incorporate aspects of masculinity and femininity, suggesting an endless play of gender pairings between them.

In stark contrast with Honoria’s androgyny and dedication to helping the disadvantaged is Helen, who is pristinely beautiful, self-absorbed, and gorgeously attired. Helen is an aesthete in the vein of Ouida’s *mondaines*: women who are powerful, wealthy, and only interested in others as the means to their own pleasure. Helen lives life as a performance, and the narrator calls her an “artist” because of her constant awareness of her self-presentation and the impressions she creates. Helen and Richard, who are cousins, make one another’s acquaintance when they are children. Richard is hopelessly smitten with Helen, who even then is described as “seductive,” and the narrator remarks that “[t]he exquisite refinement of the girl’s whole person delighted him.”⁹⁴ She is a heartless child, which we discover when the gallant Richard shuffles nervously around in an attempt to show her the glories of Brockhurst, and upon seeing his awkward movements Helen is seized with “a fit of uncontrollable laughter,” and she dances around jeering at him in French.⁹⁵ Katherine witnesses this scene, and she flings aside the

⁹¹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 169.

⁹² Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 610.

⁹³ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 610.

⁹⁴ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 131.

⁹⁵ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 134.

dancing Helen, causing the little girl to hit a table that leaves a scar on her forehead: the only physical blemish that Helen ever suffers. When first described as an adult, we discover that Helen's appearance "spoke the last word of contemporary fashion in its most refined application. She was a great lady, who knew the world and the worth of it. And she was absolute mistress both of that knowledge, and of herself."⁹⁶ Like her Trojan predecessor, Helen has great beauty, but which leads to great destruction. Now a married woman, Helen encounters Richard when she and Honoria pay an unsolicited visit to the Brockhurst estate. Richard's old attraction to Helen is reawakened, and Helen becomes fascinated with this man who is utterly unlike any other that she has seduced. The narrator informs us that what is "grotesque" in Richard "supplied [for Helen] the last word of sensuous and dramatic attraction."⁹⁷

Helen succeeds in a partial seduction of Richard while at Brockhurst: the scene where Helen kneels in Richard's lap, and which I contrasted with that between Honoria and Katherine, occurs in this part of the narrative. Helen leaves Brockhurst, however, before attaining her full conquest, going to Paris where she finds herself suddenly in the midst of the Franco-Prussian War (July 1870 – May 1871). Witnessing the turmoil firsthand, Helen becomes fearful and superstitious, experiencing a temporary revival of religious feeling from her school days in France where she was taught by nuns. In her terror lest the "Four Last Things—death and judgment, heaven and hell" are real, she returns to the Holy Church in order to be "on the safe side."⁹⁸ She harbors reservations about Christian belief, but chooses to conceal them from the priest, reasoning that he is "but human. It is only charitable to be considerate of his feelings . . . and avoid burdening his conscience."⁹⁹ Her newfound piety leads her to choose Mary Magdalene

⁹⁶ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 179.

⁹⁷ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 238.

⁹⁸ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 378.

⁹⁹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 378.

as her “special intercessor,” and she is inspired to write a one-act drama about the saint’s life after her conversion.¹⁰⁰

Helen’s alignment with Mary Magdalene, however, paves the way for a spiritual sensuality that is not simply erotic, as in Katherine’s case, but perverse. Fleeing the effects of the war, Helen goes to Italy, and once there she begins to be restored to her usual self-confidence. Regarding her superstitious return to the Church as embarrassing, she puts her study of Mary Magdalene to a different purpose and imagines a “second, a companion, one-act drama founded upon the life of the Magdalene, but, this time, before the saint’s conversion, at an altogether earlier stage of her very instructive history.”¹⁰¹ Here we see that Helen’s self-identification with the Magdalene proves more poignant in regard to the saint’s life when she was an adulteress. Helen, we discover, is the unredeemed Magdalene to Katherine’s erotic Madonna. Shortly after this association has been firmly established, Helen is viewed in a startlingly erotic scene. While musing upon her desire to reaffirm her seductive power, Helen realizes that she might still have a chance to ensnare Richard. With this recognition comes a reawakened awareness of her own beauty, and she stands “before a tall glass” to contemplate her reflection.¹⁰² Helen removes her bodice and admires her neck, arms, and skin. She then looks “intently into her own eyes— meeting in them, as Narcissus in the surface of the fatal pool, the radiant image of herself. And this filled her with a certain intoxication, a voluptuous self-love, a profound persuasion of the power and completeness of her own beauty.”¹⁰³ Then Helen turns this self-love into touch: “She caressed her own neck, her own lips, with lingering finger-tips. She bent her bright head and kissed the swell of her cuplike breasts.”¹⁰⁴ This autoerotic scene begins by identifying the neck

¹⁰⁰ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 379.

¹⁰¹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 379.

¹⁰² Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 384.

¹⁰³ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 384.

¹⁰⁴ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 384.

and lips: parts of the female body that often function in literature as a displacement for a woman's covered regions. The explicit descriptiveness of Helen's breasts as objects of self-desire, however, is striking.

There is a long history in visual art that makes representing the breast permissible when it is linked with motherhood. In particular, the nursing Madonna, or *Maria lactans*, was an extremely popular image in religious art beginning in the Middle Ages. The milk of the Madonna was seen as a parallel to Christ's blood: a sacrifice that nourishes others. The association between the nursing Mary and Helen emerges through the description of Helen's breasts as "cuplike," for the adjective evokes an image of the breast as providing a liquid to be consumed, and even resonates with the cup or chalice that is used in the celebration of the Eucharist. The nourishing breast, however, is pointedly dissociated from motherhood, only appearing in the narrative in this erotic manner, but never in relation to Katherine's mothering body. "Cuplike" of course, also has to do with the shape and beauty of Helen's breast, and signifies that she is fetishizing her body. This separation of the breast from nursing and its investment instead as an erotic object pointedly severs its symbolic tie to motherhood, continuing the narrative's representation of the female body as sexual regardless of whether that body is also pregnant, mothering, or participating in religious iconography.

Just as Helen's breast is a religious symbol with no corresponding spiritual reality, so the forms of the religious practice she retains even after she leaves France, further bear out that her physicality lacks a corresponding spiritual or moral dimension. Although she returns to having greater interest in sinners than in saints, Helen persists in certain Romanist practices such as confession. When she and Richard meet in Naples at her villa, she explains to him that her religion is a "luxury of moral purification," and she tells him why she goes to confession: "Just as one takes one's bath twice daily, not that it is necessary but that it is a luxury of physical purity

and self-respect, so one comes to go to confession.”¹⁰⁵ Here we see that Helen considers her religious practice to be a luxury—it is just one of several ways that she indulges in things that are not “necessary,” but which reinforce her desire for excess. Even more important is Helen’s claim that she is a “sacramentalist.” Helen tells Richard: “I can only reach high-thinking through acts which are external and concrete. In short, I am a born sacramentalist.”¹⁰⁶ Helen is referring to the Church’s use of outward signs to represent inward realities. The Eucharist—bread and wine blessed in order to be transformed into Christ’s body and blood—is a sacrament at the center of every Roman Catholic service. One of the major goals of the Oxford Movement was to return the sacraments to the English Church service. For Helen, however, sacramentalism has little to do with *spiritual* realities and has everything to do with that which is “external and concrete.” She is adopting a religious concept in order to suit her obsessive focus on her body, and she uses sacramentalism as permission to perform actions that would otherwise be regarded as taboo.

The most significant of Helen’s sacramental transgressions is her fetishization of Richard’s body and her manipulation of this religious concept in the service of her sexual desires. Helen is fascinated with Richard’s disability. She tells him: “You stimulate, you arrest, you satisfy one’s imagination, as does the spectacle of some great drama.”¹⁰⁷ And she further poses an intriguing question: “Will you never comprehend, Dickie, that what is hateful in yourself, may to someone else be the last word of attraction, of seduction, even?”¹⁰⁸ It is in this scene that the narrator takes Helen’s association with the unredeemed Magdalene and pushes it further by explicitly calling Helen a prostitute: “whatever her sins and lapses, Helen de Vallorbes had the fine aesthetic appreciations, as well as the inevitable animality, of the great courtesan. The artist was at least as present in her as the whore.”¹⁰⁹ Having reminded us in stark terms that

¹⁰⁵ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 436.

¹⁰⁶ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 436.

¹⁰⁷ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 453.

¹⁰⁸ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 452.

Helen is an artist of sexuality, the scene progresses to Helen's transformation of sacramentalism into an argument to Richard that they should consummate their desires. She claims that the "idea" of their mutual lust compels that they put it into "action": "Better, far better, be a sacramentalist like me and embrace the idea through the act, than refuse the act in dread of imperiling the dominion of the idea."¹¹⁰ Helen's application of this religious concept to the act of having unwedded adulterous sex is a bold appropriation, and Richard, at least temporarily, becomes a sacramentalist of Helen's variety. He surrenders his resolve not to violate his idea of feminine perfection by sleeping with Helen. The next morning, however, he deeply regrets the lapse of his resolution, feeling that the act has most definitely imperiled and even violated his ideal. Richard's ideal, though, was false all along. For the novel makes it clear that she who possesses the greatest physical perfection is the most morally depraved, once again renouncing the claims of degeneracy and eugenic thinking.

It is not ultimately Helen's beauty, however, that is condemned, but her narcissism. When Richard next sees Helen after their night of passion, there is an unusual moment when he observes her as if they exist in a spiritual realm: "Her soul kneeled on her lap, its delicate arms were clasped about her neck—black against the lustrous white of her skin and all those twisted ropes of seed pearls. It pressed its breasts against hers, amorously."¹¹¹ This image that gives flesh to Helen's soul makes it abundantly clear that what is irredeemable about Helen's sexuality is that it is directed only toward herself. In this regard, her passions remain distinct from those of the other two central woman characters. Katherine and Honoria, as we have seen, also express their dissident eroticism, but their respective sexualities are aligned with their wider concerns for the well-being of others. In the case of Katherine, her sympathies involve those most immediate to her, including her son and her curate. By comparison, with respect to Honoria, her

¹⁰⁹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 452.

¹¹⁰ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 454.

¹¹¹ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 483-84.

outgoing desires relate to her dedication to the far-reaching improvement of the lives of individuals whom she has not even met.

Calmady's remarkable rewriting of the disabled male body and the sexually transgressive female body can be most fully understood when we consider that the its frank depictions of perversity and unsanctioned eroticism are enabled by the decadent mode, but that the novel resists the kinds of endings that we typically find in such novels. Delyfer has pointed out that *Calmady's* decadence "is held in check by the constraints of the romance mode" because ultimately Richard marries.¹¹² I would like to argue that the suspension of decadence in the end is significant in terms of the ramifications for Malet's rewriting of corporeal difference, since it is the case that the perverse male body in decadent fictions generally sickens or dies. Two examples immediately come to mind. For instance, in Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A Rebours* (1884) the protagonist, isolated in his museum-like home, has a body that becomes unable to perform basic digestive functions. In *Dorian Gray*, Dorian's perfect façade disappears when he stabs his hideous portrait, bringing on his death. In *Calmady*, by contrast, Richard returns to community, where he finds healing and restoration for his soul, which enables him to accept his body. This is also true for the women's bodies. Helen's form, with its single scar, will stay otherwise perfect. Honoria's boyish elegance persists, and although in the final chapter she is depicted as wearing a long white dress that feminizes her more than in earlier scenes, we are told that "as of old, a triumph of high purity, of freedom of soul" remains in her aspect.¹¹³ Katherine's beautiful maternal body is the most conspicuous physical presence in the final chapter. Richard sums up how she appears when she walks: "that stately fashion, the whole of you—body, mind, and spirit, somehow evident—gathered up within the delicious compass of yourself!"¹¹⁴

¹¹² Delyfer, *Art and Womanhood*, 83.

¹¹³ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 614.

¹¹⁴ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 617.

Calmady ends at Brockhurst by positioning Katherine in relation to three other characters: Honoria, Julius, and Richard. In the first instance we are reminded of Honoria's unsanctioned attraction to Katherine. In the second, we recall Julius's erotic worship of Katherine as a Madonna. In the third, we observe Katherine's role as faithful mother to a disabled son. In sum, the erotic, womanly, maternal body has been the object of worship and sustenance to these three figures. In the closing scene, Richard, the Christ-figure, tells Katherine: "I am very grateful to you for having brought me into the world."¹¹⁵ These words solidify the powerful idea that Malet's Marianism has made the Madonna's femininity her most essential trait in distinct contrast with the Puritan and even Newmanite traditions that elided the Virgin Mary's gender, and thus the centrality of woman to salvation. Rather than focus attention on the successful romantic couple in the end, the final chapter rather pointedly does not even depict Honoria and Richard together. The marriage plot, brought about only in the previous chapter, does not therefore usurp those unorthodox relationships that have been central to the rest of the narrative: erotic female friendship, celibate heterosexual passion, and the dynamic between mother and son in which the sexual female body remains prominent. Ultimately, Malet's conspicuously unwed, independent, and sexual Madonna remains the novel's culminating figure.

The Far Horizon: Passionate Celibacy and the Decadent Madonna

In no way did Malet try to conceal her conversion to the Roman Church when she wrote *The Far Horizon*, which is to be sure her most explicitly Catholic novel. Moreover, Malet made no attempts at obscuring her identity with this novel, for the first time publishing on the title page as "Lucas Malet (Mrs. Mary St. Leger Harrison)."¹¹⁶ The novel, therefore, performs a disclosure

¹¹⁵ Malet, *Sir Richard Calmady*, 617.

¹¹⁶ By printing these two names together, Malet unites her professional and private identities. Although British reviewers (and many American ones) and much of Malet's reading public would have already been aware that she was

of Malet's religious thought as well as her gender identity: revelations that may indicate the level of Malet's self-confidence and courage to defy both religious and sexual prejudice following her triumph with *Calmady*. *The Far Horizon* opens in the final years of the nineteenth century and initially focuses on Dominic Iglesias, the head clerk at a prestigious London bank who has become disillusioned with the monotony of his professional life. When he retires, he meets a former actress and they begin an unlikely friendship. Nourished by the affirming intimacy they develop, the actress eventually returns to the stage, and Dominic's quest to give meaning to his existence leads him back to the Catholic faith of his Irish mother and Spanish father.

At the time of its publication, *The Far Horizon* received generally favorable reviews, in spite of having a plot that promotes a form of religion that remained subject to widespread criticism in Protestant England. We find such hostility in *The Far Horizon* through Dominic's Anglican friend George Lovegrove, who associates Romanism with "lurid legends" of Mary Tudor and "inquisitorial tortures,"¹¹⁷ and further claims that it is a "dreadful dotting apostasy."¹¹⁸ Based on this conception of the Roman Church, Lovegrove tells Dominic he cannot grasp that someone "so mentally superior, so independent in your thought, should have become a Romanist."¹¹⁹ Anti-Catholic sentiment is also easily found in British periodicals at the turn of the century. In 1901, the *National Review* ran an article entitled "Roman Catholic Encroachments," in which the author expresses great antipathy to the Roman Church, writing that the "real unpopularity of Romanism in England arises less from its doctrines than from the fact that it is a political and anti-national organization."¹²⁰ The writer is especially angered because the Roman Church refused to hold a funeral service for Queen Victoria, who died that year, and the author

a woman, Malet is also uniting her literary identity, which most early reviewers identifies as a masculine name, with her identity as a woman.

¹¹⁷ Lucas Malet, *The Far Horizon* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1907), 243.

¹¹⁸ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 244.

¹¹⁹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 241.

¹²⁰ "Roman Catholic Encroachments," *National Review* 37, no. 217 (March 1901): 9.

claims this is “a painful illustration of the [Church’s] intolerance,” as well as its “lack of goodwill.”¹²¹

In spite of the pervasiveness of anti-Romanist feeling, reviewers tended to smooth over Dominic’s conversion and focused instead on the novel’s “deep human interest,”¹²² and how the “the essential hue and physical atmosphere of London are made palpable.”¹²³ By contrast, for the Catholic priest and literary critic William Barry the novel’s religious message was a distinct aspect of its achievement. In a letter to Malet, he told her: “Your apology of the Catholic Church is magnificent.”¹²⁴ In his laudatory notice in the *Bookman*, however, Barry skirted Catholicism and focused instead on the novel’s artistic achievement, emphasizing that *The Far Horizon* had accomplished what Malet herself had said art should achieve: “things of beauty and moment holding in them the promise of enduring result.”¹²⁵ Later assessments of Malet’s “Catholic novel,” however, disagreed with Barry’s calculation of its artistic achievement, such as Janet Courtney’s dismissal that I examined in the introduction to this chapter, in which she pinpoints *The Far Horizon* as a sign that Malet had compromised her powerful artistry in service to her religious zeal. This is exactly the position that Patricia Srebrnik takes in her 1994 assessment of Malet’s works. For both of these authors, Malet’s 1906 novel is little more than a religious tract clothed in fictional form.

What I contend in this chapter, however, is that *The Far Horizon* is far more closely aligned with *Calmady* than these evaluations would suggest. Perhaps most obvious is the use of religious symbolism—especially Marianism—in furthering Malet’s project of rewriting Victorian

¹²¹ “Roman Catholic Encroachments,” *National Review*, 9.

¹²² E. John Solano, “An Appreciation of *The Far Horizon*,” *Monthly Review* 26, no. 77 (February 1907): 143.

¹²³ Unsigned review of *The Far Horizon*, by Lucas Malet, *Athenæum* 4128 (December 8, 1906): 729.

¹²⁴ William Barry in a letter written on November 20, 1906, held in the Kingsley Family Archives, quoted in Lundberg, *An Inward Necessity*, 305.

¹²⁵ William Barry, “Lucas Malet’s Saint and Sinner,” *Bookman* 31, no. 183 (December 1906): 144 (this quotation is interpolated).

femininity. Moreover, *The Far Horizon*, like *Calmady*, is an exploration of the psychologies of figures that it was not common to encounter in fiction. Here, we have a celibate middle-class bank clerk who becomes a Roman Catholic, and a daring actress who defies stereotyped notions of both women stage performers and female sexuality. The latter is Poppy St. John, and through her unlikely friendship with Dominic, the narrative explores an intersection between the male Catholic convert and the decadent bohemian woman. The novel makes it clear through these distinct figures that in order for human existence to be meaningful, there must not only be beautiful surfaces but also beautiful substances. Dominic finds the unity of substance and surface in the rituals and mystery of Roman Catholic practice, and Poppy embodies these unities as a woman whose artifice is the outward form of her identity as a true artist. More important for my argument, moreover, is the fact that through Poppy the narrative recuperates the occasionally questionable figure of the actress as an earthly queen, elevating performative, corporeal, erotic womanhood. In its representation of Poppy, *The Far Horizon* goes against the grain of many nineteenth-century representations of actresses as morally questionable because they put their bodies on display in exchange for money.

Like *Calmady*, *The Far Horizon* participates in what Malet called the “wonder and the mystery that belong to English romance.”¹²⁶ In Malet’s 1906 novel, wonder and mystery are largely tied to the mysticism of Roman Catholicism. The narrative itself, however, is in a predominantly realist mode. Moreover, a fixation with beauty and surfaces persists in *The Far Horizon*, but it is less present in the narrator’s style than in the characterization of Poppy whom, as I will show, embodies Malet’s engagement with decadent femininity. These plotlines of Roman Catholic conversion and female decadence, moreover, unsettle the expectation that the central plot about a friendship between a man and a woman will ultimately hurtle toward the teleology of romance and marriage. Instead, their friendship helps us to see the two parallel

¹²⁶ Malet, “Progress of Woman,” 301.

movements that occur when the man's ultimate purpose is to find spiritual fulfillment, and the woman's fulfillment is not only the artistic perfection associated with decadent womanhood, but also her professional success that will render the financial stability of marriage superfluous. This is certainly not the fragmented, non-progressive style of certain kinds of modernist writing that was developing at this point, but it decidedly shatters the imperative of heterosexual attraction that permits female sexuality only if it is directly associated with the function of procreation occurring in wedded union. Malet's realism, in other words, turns out to be rather disruptive because the replacement of the marriage plot with a heterosocial friendship shapes the novel's form.

The action in *The Far Horizon* occurs against the backdrop of the Second Anglo-Boer War, which took place from 1899 to 1902. Not only is the war significant as an indicator of England's threatened empire, but its dates are also critical because they mark the transition from the Victorian period into the early twentieth century. It is often pointed out that by 1906 it was already clear that Britain would lose control over South Africa, and there is a sense that the war was a harbinger of decolonization. At this pivotal political moment, Malet focuses attention on England's economic situation through Dominic, who becomes essential to the functioning of the "banking house of Messrs. Barking Brothers & Barking."¹²⁷ The novel's emphasis on the materiality of this turn-of-the-century culture is articulated through a character who complains that money is the "chosen ruler of this contemptible *fin de siècle*, and [it is] safe to be even more tyrannously the ruler of the coming century."¹²⁸ This statement is essentially one about modernity as associated with an increasingly consumer-obsessed culture. At the same time, there is a strong sense that the position of women is intimately tied up with this transitional period, and specifically with the economy as it relates to women's independence and choice of professional work instead of marriage. Moreover, the figures of the actress and the prostitute

¹²⁷ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 14.

¹²⁸ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 86.

were often made to bear the symbolic burden of this obsession with surface and artifice as we find in many fictions of the period.¹²⁹ Rita Felski explains that this was “a culture increasingly structured around the erotics and aesthetics of the commodity.”¹³⁰ That *The Far Horizon* features an actress, then, is not especially surprising, but Malet resists the coopting of this figure as commodity object, instead refashioning her as an example of women’s autonomy, artistry, and self-construction.

Before turning to the actress, it is necessary to begin by understanding the novel’s ostensible protagonist, Dominic Iglesias, who has a central role to play in the ways in which *The Far Horizon* offers an unexpected rewriting of the relationship between gender, spirituality, and the body. Dominic is a character who, despite almost single-handedly saving the English banking house at which he works from utter collapse during the war, feels like an outsider to English society. Dominic’s family name, Iglesias, is of course unmistakably Spanish, and we learn that Dominic was born in Spain to a father who was involved in revolutionary intrigue. But even though he has lived in London since he came there with his mother as a very small child, Dominic feels that he does not belong. Dominic’s first name, moreover, reinforces his association with Roman Catholicism through the way that it brings to mind the Dominicans: a Catholic order founded in Spain and approved by the Pope in the thirteenth century, known for their preaching and their intellectual tradition. Moreover, Dominic’s eventual conversion to the Roman Church further marks him as an outsider, which we discover when Lovegrove, as we have seen, declares that Roman Catholicism is the “enemy . . . of patriotism.”¹³¹ When the novel opens, we learn that Dominic is a character in his early fifties who is in a place of “middle class suburban security.”¹³² Reflecting on his life, he notes: “I have lost my pliability, lost my

¹²⁹ See, for example, Zola’s *Nana* (1880), George Gissing’s *The Unclassed* (1899), W. Somerset Maugham’s *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), and Annie Edwards, *The Morals of Mayfair* (1858).

¹³⁰ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 4.

¹³¹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 337.

¹³² Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 1.

humanity. I am a machine now, not a man.”¹³³ This statement obviously points to the way in which Dominic’s existence has been dominated by tedious monotony to the detriment of satisfying his need for variety, beauty, and amusement. Sitting on the top of an omnibus shortly after retiring from the bank, Dominic observes a side of London life he had never noticed before, and which strikes him as contrasting sharply with his own existence: it is a “gayer, fiercer, simpler life, quick with violences of vivacious sound and vivid colour.”¹³⁴

The figure who embodies this vibrant London life, and who introduces decadence into the narrative, is the actress Poppy, whom Dominic meets when he is sitting on a bench in a London park. Her entrance is preceded by that of a dog—a toy spaniel—who comes and sits beside Dominic. This is the setting for Poppy’s introduction. The sound of her voice is the first thing that signals her presence, for she is heard calling out for her pet in a voice “imperative in tone, yet perceptibly shaken by laughter.”¹³⁵ Poppy then enters the scene and the narrator supplies a very detailed description of her physical appearance:

[Her face] was small, the features insignificant, the skin smooth and fine in texture, but sallow. Her hair, black and very massive, was puffed out and dressed low, hiding her ears. Her lips were rather positively red, and the tinge of colour on either cheek, though slight, was not wholly convincing in tone. Even to a person of Mr. Iglesias’ praiseworthy limitation of experience in such matters, her face was vaguely suggestive of the footlights—would have been distinctly so but for her eyes. These were curiously at variance with the rest of her appearance. They belonged to a quite other order of woman, so to speak—a woman of fine physique, of higher intelligence, possibly of nobler purposes.¹³⁶

¹³³ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 28-29.

¹³⁴ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 22.

¹³⁵ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 41.

¹³⁶ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 43.

In this passage, we encounter an unusual kind of femininity. Poppy's face points to a cosmetic type of womanhood, since the artificial redness of her lips is emphasized through qualifying adverbs that draw attention to their striking color. Moreover, the rouge on her cheeks is called "not wholly convincing"—the falsity of color belied by its improbability. The narrator next draws attention to the way in which her painted face, even to a man with little experience of London entertainment, makes her look as if she were on the stage, underlining a strong association between cosmetics and theatrical performance. Dominic's suspicion, as we know, is well founded, for even though at this point in the narrative Poppy has retired from acting, her theatrical identity is so ingrained that it has left indelible marks upon her.

That Poppy is thoroughly English, in contrast with Dominic, underpins her equation with London, while at the same time her self-construction points to her autonomy. Poppy is twenty-nine years old when this scene occurs, and her Englishness is initially emphasized through her speech, for we are told that in spite of her control over her voice, there is yet a betrayal of her origins, for her vowel sounds have "the tang in them common to the speech of the cockney bred, the aspirates happily remained inviolate."¹³⁷ In a later description, we discover that "[h]er make altogether was that not uncommon to London girls of the lower middle-class: small-boned and possibly anaemic, but prettily moulded, and with an attraction of over-civilisation as of hot-house-grown plants."¹³⁸ That Poppy has obscured these origins, however, is emphasized by her self-construction in the way she clothes herself—the narrative spends considerable time describing the details of her beautiful garments—as well as in the way she wears cosmetics.

Poppy's makeup introduces the novel's engagement with decadence: a movement closely associated with the worship of artifice frequently represented by a fixation with women who enjoyed cosmetics and, by extension, represented the triumph of art over nature. Charles

¹³⁷ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 45.

¹³⁸ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 105.

Baudelaire established this preoccupation in his 1863 essay, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in which he writes that woman “has to lay all the arts under contribution for the means of lifting herself above Nature.”¹³⁹ When detailing how various kinds of paint are employed to achieve different effects, Baudelaire notes that “the rouge which sets fire to the cheek-bone only goes to increase the brightness of the pupil and adds to the face of a beautiful woman the mysterious passion of the priestess.”¹⁴⁰ For Baudelaire, woman’s makeup elevates her to something “superior and divine,”¹⁴¹ an idea that the narrative will also bear out in further characterizations of Poppy. Baudelaire’s fascination with women’s makeup can be traced to British writers such as Arthur Symonds, who almost obsessively uses the words “rouge” and “paint” in his poems collected in *London Nights* (1895). For the decadent, the artificial is infinitely to be praised over the natural, and Max Beerbohm makes this clear in his amusing essay from 1894, “A Defence of Cosmetics,” in which he praises makeup in a deliberately excessive style. Beerbohm explains that to be “independent of Nature” is what makes artifice “the strength of the world,” and on this basis he makes the following statement about women: “in that . . . mask of paint and powder, shadowed with vermeil tinct and most trimly penciled, is woman’s strength.”¹⁴²

Although these descriptions of women who use makeup appear laudatory, in reality these male authors did not necessarily create empowering female figures. In Baudelaire’s work, especially, we find troubling representations of women as dehumanized objects. For decadent writers more generally, cosmetic femininity is usually embodied in a femme fatale who projects and wields her feminine power through a manipulative eroticism. We find such an example in Oscar Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband* (first performed 1895), which features Mrs. Cheveley, an adventuress who seduces men and threatens blackmail when she does not readily attain what

¹³⁹ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964), 33.

¹⁴⁰ Baudelaire, “Painter of Modern Life,” *Painter of Modern Life*, 34.

¹⁴¹ Baudelaire, “Painter of Modern Life,” *Painter of Modern Life*, 33.

¹⁴² Max Beerbohm, “A Defence of Cosmetics,” *Yellow Book* 1 (April 1894): 68.

she desires. She is strongly associated with her rouge, about which the character Lord Goring remarks: “she wore far too much rouge last night, and not quite enough clothes.”¹⁴³ We also find in the 1899 edition of Wilde’s play the following description of her appearance: “Rouge accentuates the natural paleness of her complexion.”¹⁴⁴ Malet’s narrative challenges this association between makeup and selfish manipulation, forging instead a connection between Poppy’s use of cosmetics and her ability to construct her identity as an assertive woman, one who is at the same time warm-hearted and gentle. As the narrative further shows, Poppy cannot be classed with the femme fatale because the narrator is careful to note that her eyes—the one part of her visage untouched by paint—create a contrast with the rest of her face that is so striking that they belong to a different “order” of woman than the rest of her face suggests. This “order” is defined as a class of women who have “higher intelligence” and “nobler purposes.” The narrative resists, therefore, the typical reduction of the artificially made-up woman to her body and sexuality, and instead insists that Poppy possesses intelligence and nobility, a combination in which we discover the novel’s unprecedented rewriting of decadent femininity.

The connection Baudelaire articulates between cosmetics and divinity is also found in Malet’s formulation of her painted lady. The divinity enters the picture when the narrative forges a connection between Poppy and the Madonna. We find the beginnings of this association in the following passage:

She advanced slowly, her trailing string-coloured lace skirts gathered up lazily in one hand. About her shoulders she wore a long blue-purple silk scarf, embroidered with dragons of peacock, and scarlet, and gold. . . . Her face was in shadow owing to the breadth of the brim of her hat. Otherwise the sunshine embraced her whole figure,

¹⁴³ Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband* (London: L. Smithers, 1899), 80.

¹⁴⁴ Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*, 6.

conferring on it a glittering yet singularly unsubstantial effect, as though a column of pale windswept dust were overlaid, here and there, with splendor of rich enamel.¹⁴⁵

This final description is particularly striking, since it takes something as wholly unremarkable as dust and turns it into something beautiful (a formula that replicates the relationship between nature and cosmetics). It is from this description that the narrator confers upon Poppy her title: “the Lady of the Windswept Dust.” This elaborate label is highly significant, since readers see it even before learning Poppy’s name. The narrator deploys this title as if it were an official designation, carrying with it an echo of a different kind of Lady: the Virgin Mary, who in Roman Catholicism is called by a number of names, including among others: Our Lady of Peace, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and Our Lady of Seven Sorrows. These titles emphasize Mary’s divinity as well as her humanity—and thus her ability to understand human supplicants. Similarly, the “Lady of the Windswept Dust” encapsulates Poppy’s possession of an ethereal quality that is, however, profoundly human. In the Hebrew Scriptures, mortality is both literally and metonymically referred to as dust, as in Genesis 3:19: “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Poppy’s title, then, is the narrative’s first indication that she is associated with Catholic Marianism. This use of Romanist symbolism naturally raises a pressing question. Why is Malet constructing a femininity that links decadent womanhood with the Madonna?

Here, a statement from Malet’s novel *Adrian Savage* (1911) helps bring into focus why Poppy St. John is associated with the Virgin Mary. In this later novel, the titular protagonist remarks that “when [the Protestants] conspired to depose Our Blessed Lady from her rightful throne in heaven, they, incidentally, went far to depose woman from her rightful throne here upon earth.”¹⁴⁶ Here, we discover a fully articulated feminist Marianism, and we can see that it is explicitly Catholic, furthering the critique of Puritanism that we witnessed in *Calmady*. In *The Far Horizon*, Poppy represents the return of woman to her earthly throne, and her humanity is

¹⁴⁵ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 41-42.

¹⁴⁶ Lucas Malet, *Adrian Savage* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911), 157.

forcefully represented through minute attention to her corporeality. This is of course manifested through Poppy's professional work as an actress: a woman who puts her body on display and further draws attention to it through her use of cosmetics. Poppy is a woman without religious practice except for the temple of the theatre, so it seems fitting that the reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* wrote that Poppy has a "frank paganism."¹⁴⁷ This comment appears paradoxical, however, if she is also a Madonna figure. It is nevertheless in this ostensible contradiction that we find the affinity of Malet's narrative with decadent constructions of Roman Catholicism. As Ellis Hanson has pointed out, decadents were obsessed with an aesthetic of paradox, which they also found in Romanism: "The Church is at once modern and yet medieval, ascetic and yet sumptuous, spiritual and yet sensual, chaste and yet erotic, homophobic and yet homoerotic, suspicious of aestheticism and yet an elaborate work of art."¹⁴⁸ Malet's decadent Marianism makes Poppy into such a figure: pagan and yet divine, surface and yet substance, painted and yet noble, sexual and yet (in relation to Dominic) celibate.

This final paradox is one that enjoys special prominence in the narrative. Poppy has been described in terms that make her erotic attraction clear, but a defining feature of her connection with Dominic is that it is a celibate friendship. Given their lively first encounter and a chapter that opens with the two of them seated beside each other on a bench, it would seem that such an auspicious beginning between two attractive single people would herald a romance. Moreover, their first long conversation in the park leads to Dominic visiting Poppy at her London flat on occasional intervals that eventually become weekly occurrences. Malet's narrative is quite remarkable, then, for resisting the expectation of romance and elevating a type of friendship that we might call, using Wilde's delightful phrase, a "passionate celibacy."¹⁴⁹ Both parties cherish

¹⁴⁷ Unsigned review of *The Far Horizon*, by Lucas Malet, *Publishers Weekly* 70 (December 22, 1906): 1827.

¹⁴⁸ Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 7.

¹⁴⁹ In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the central romantic couples find themselves unable to be wed when Lady Bracknell will not give her consent for her daughter Gwendolen to marry Jack (who was actually christened Ernest), and so he will not give his consent for his ward Cecily to marry Lady Bracknell's nephew Algernon. When Lady

the friendship and eventually reach a place where they only make important life decisions after consulting each other. Poppy tells Dominic: “Your friendship’s the loveliest thing I’ve ever had,”¹⁵⁰ and later Dominic says to Poppy: “you are to me, dear friend, what no other human being has ever yet been,” and continues: “I only pray God, if it is not self-seeking, that you may continue to want me as long as I live.”¹⁵¹ From such declarations we can detect the passion that makes Wilde’s phrase so apt. Moreover, it is certainly the case that Dominic and Poppy experience feelings of attraction, but they actively choose to resist the temptation to act on their sexual longings. In one scene, for example, when Dominic kisses Poppy’s face, hair, lips, and eyes, the narrator declares that he “kissed them reverently, gravely, proudly, with the chastity and chivalry of perfect friendship.”¹⁵² Dominic provides an eloquent definition of friendship, saying that it “has no need of explanations” and “accepts what is given without question.”¹⁵³ He further states that it “must be rooted in reverence for the individuality of the person dear to it.”¹⁵⁴ As Dominic’s words point out, unlike the demands of romance in which the individuals become focused on their identity as a couple, friendship allows for the flourishing of individuality, and this is especially important when it comes to Poppy’s growing independence and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, this ostensibly chaste friendship provides to both parties the inspiration and confidence they need to pursue two respective forms of personal development. On the one hand, Dominic finds spiritual clarity and fulfillment by returning to the Catholic faith of his parents, and his life is ultimately one of spiritual exultation. On the other hand,

Bracknell insists she will not change her mind, Jack declares: “Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.” Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (London: L. Smithers, 1899), 139.

¹⁵⁰ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 165.

¹⁵¹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 319.

¹⁵² Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 324.

¹⁵³ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 252.

¹⁵⁴ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 252.

Poppy has a triumphant return to the stage: her earthly, performative, and artificial side elevated to an earthly throne.¹⁵⁵

At the same time, the narrative does not shy away from making plain Poppy's sexual nature alongside her choice to pursue friendship with Dominic. We discover that Poppy is married but separated from her husband, de Courcy Smyth: a sniveling, self-righteous playwright who lacks talent but who insisted that Poppy perform in his disappointing productions, which she remembers as "those rotten plays of his, inflated impossible stuff."¹⁵⁶ When she left de Courcy Smyth, she also left the theatre. We learn that since then, Poppy has supplemented the money she had saved from acting with betting on horse races and playing at cards. As her friendship with Dominic develops, however, Poppy desires to no longer rely on an income that is dependent on other people's loss of money. Instead, she aspires to be independent and make her living with a profession. Her heart, it is clear, is still in the theatre, and she therefore seeks out those who can help her return to the stage. In addition to learning of Poppy's marriage, we are also made aware that she has a lover, Alaric Barking,¹⁵⁷ and that before him she has had a stream of male lovers, which the narrative represents as a matter of course. Poppy herself declares that she has enjoyed playing "pitch and toss" with men's hearts.¹⁵⁸ Her sexuality is clearly promiscuous and it threatens stable relationships: "fires of the sort lighted by Poppy are not precisely such as contribute to the peace and security of the domestic hearth."¹⁵⁹ With these words, the narrator is clearly indicating that Poppy has no ties to the hearth-tending

¹⁵⁵ A novel published by May Sinclair in 1904, *The Divine Fire*, has some startling similarities to Malet's novel, turning on a central issue of art and a materialistic culture, and the way in which women's bodies and their affections circulate as commodities. We also find characters that have an almost eerie familiarity, including a music hall actress named Poppy, who becomes sexually involved with a financial agent. Emphatically unlike Sinclair's novel, however, is that *The Far Horizon* offers hope and redemption by way of religion and art, whereas *The Divine Fire* can produce but little consolation for the despair brought on by an entirely materialistic life.

¹⁵⁶ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 193.

¹⁵⁷ Alaric, as it happens, is the youngest son of Sir Abel Barking of Barking Brothers & Barking who own the bank at which Dominic worked (and returns to work at during the war).

¹⁵⁸ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 165.

¹⁵⁹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 192.

Angel in the House. And yet, Poppy is also a secular Madonna: a refashioned earthly queen whose most human and corporeal qualities are venerated because they are dust.

Along with returning to her profession, Poppy chooses to end her erotic relationship with Alaric, not because she determines that there is anything wrong with unwedded sex, but because she wants to be her own mistress rather than a man's object: "For upon what, as she asked herself bitterly, when all is said and done, do these male human locusts pasture, save on the souls and bodies of women, finding a garden before them, and, too often, leaving but a desert behind?"¹⁶⁰ Poppy resolves that she will set aside a sexual partner for the superiority of a friend, for she reflects that she is "standing at the parting of the ways, between the dear old devil of love and the deep sea of friendship."¹⁶¹

Poppy's disillusionment with her card games and male admirers leads her to instead reassert her identity as an artist of the stage. Visiting a theatre to see a friend perform in a new play, we witness Poppy in a theatre for the first time, and the narrator remarks: "the artist in Poppy dominated all else, vibrant and alert."¹⁶² The fact that Poppy is her most complete, individual self in this space is brought into even more explicit focus when Dominic, who happens also to be in attendance at the play, catches sight of Poppy and notes that she looked "preeminently at home. . . . [h]ere, amid highly artificial and conventional surroundings, she seemed to him the most natural and vital being present, retaining the completeness of her individuality, the energy and mystery of it alike."¹⁶³ The wording here is striking, as it is in this "highly artificial" setting that Poppy is said to be "most natural": artifice is the proper setting for one whose artistic medium is self. We are thereby brought back to the decadence of Poppy's femininity, which emphasizes that artifice is power, and in Malet's formulation that power

¹⁶⁰ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 205.

¹⁶¹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 201-2.

¹⁶² Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 196-97.

¹⁶³ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 206.

means individuality, single-mindedness, and self-expression, *not* the reductive formulation of the woman as erotically manipulative. This representation of Poppy as individual and artist brings to mind the way in which certain Victorian feminists depicted the Madonna as an artist who had no need of men, such as art historian Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), who, as VanEsveld Adams summarizes, “considered [the Madonna] a powerful symbol of the female artist, miraculously producing books, or ‘virgin births,’ with no man’s aid.”¹⁶⁴

To make a comparison between the woman writer and the Holy Mother is certainly bold, but Malet takes this Marian creativity a step further by suggesting that Poppy, like the Queen of Heaven, should be venerated because of her excellence as an actress. The actress was a notoriously controversial figure from the Restoration through the nineteenth-century period because she transgressed the traditional restriction of women to the private domestic realm. The actress was also considered dangerous because, like a prostitute, she put her painted body on display in exchange for money. As Tracy Davis records: “the actress and the prostitute were both objects of desire whose company was purchased through commercial exchange.”¹⁶⁵ Malet does not attempt to distance Poppy from the association of actresses with prostitution, but rather deliberately suggests the connection. When Poppy visits the theatre and Dominic thinks she looks so natural, she is described in a manner that casts her in the role of Mary Magdalene: standing up to applaud, she removes her black coat, revealing “a startling costume.”¹⁶⁶ The narrator explains: “she was clothed in rose-scarlet from shoulder to foot; and that without ornament of any description to break up the daring uniformity of colour.”¹⁶⁷ The use of the word “scarlet” here, rather than simply red, is especially evocative in bringing to mind the color of sin,

¹⁶⁴ Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001), 1.

¹⁶⁵ Tracy Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 100.

¹⁶⁶ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 196.

¹⁶⁷ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 196.

which is a color often used for depictions of prostitutes and especially of Mary Magdalene. The association between the actress and the prostitute is again invoked when the narrator records Dominic's impression of Poppy when she emerges from the theatre after her successful first night: "she did not look out of place in this somewhat cut-throat alley, with the questionable sights and sounds of midnight London all about her; but vivid, exultant, true daughter of great cities."¹⁶⁸ Poppy is unapologetically connected with night-time London alleyways, which brings to mind women of the night. While these associations emphasize Poppy's sexual nature, she does not take money from her lovers, a distinction which ensures that her erotic expression is regarded as purely for her own pleasure, rather than returning her to the category of women whose sexuality turns them into commodities. In this episode of the narrative, Poppy is associated with the Magdalene, but her identity as a bold, sexual woman exists simultaneously with the role she plays as a saint, for she is instrumental in assisting Dominic's reconciliation with the Holy Catholic Church. It is because of the narrative's elevation of Poppy to the status of secular saint, as I will show, that I disagree with Holly A. Laird's recent assertion that Malet's characterization of Poppy does "little to diminish her reaffirmation of the stereotype of the actress-mistress."¹⁶⁹

The Far Horizon confers sainthood upon Poppy through her friendship with Dominic. A key element of Dominic's attraction to the Church of Rome is its saints, and the narrator explains that "[Protestantism] might tend to the making of respectable municipal councilors; but, in [Dominic's] opinion, it was idle to pretend that it tended to the making of saints—and for the saints, those experts in the divine science, Iglesias confessed a weakness."¹⁷⁰ The saints are intermediaries between humans and God, facilitating the human journey to the Divine. This is

¹⁶⁸ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 352-53.

¹⁶⁹ Holly A. Laird, "Against the English Nation: The Ideological Proto-Modernism of *The Far Horizon*," *Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays*, ed. Jane Ford and Alexandra Gray (New York: Routledge, 2019), 198.

¹⁷⁰ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 225.

precisely the role Poppy occupies for Dominic. In addition to the narrator calling Dominic's visits a "weekly pilgrimage,"¹⁷¹ Dominic tells Poppy that it is in large part thanks to her that he returned to the Church, explaining that "recently—since I have known you in short, it has pleased Almighty God by degrees to restore my sight."¹⁷² Poppy is doubtful about this statement and asks: "do you seriously mean to tell me that I—I—have had anything to do with that?"¹⁷³ Dominic responds: "You have had much to do with it . . . for your friendship woke up my heart."¹⁷⁴ We can clearly see, therefore, that Poppy has been the accessible human (conduit) that has facilitated Dominic's spiritual reawakening. This role as spiritual anchor may seem to place Poppy in the role of the Angel in the House, who was considered the moral and religious center of the home. The narrative rewrites this figure, however, for Poppy's guidance is through no intent of her own. That she is nonetheless the catalyst for Dominic's return to the Church further shows that a "pagan," painted, sexual woman is not the antipathy of Christianity, but can in fact have a critical role to play in a person's spiritual journey, returning us again to how the novel portrays Poppy as paradox. Moreover, we learn that Poppy has ascended to the most important place in Dominic's heart when she expresses a curiosity about whether other women have ever meant as much to him. His somewhat evasive response prompts her to ask: "So—so it comes to this—I reign all alone?"¹⁷⁵ To this audacious question, Dominic provides a direct answer: "Yes, dear friend, save for my love for my mother—such as the throne is or ever has been—you reign alone."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 154.

¹⁷² Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 283.

¹⁷³ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 283.

¹⁷⁴ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 283.

¹⁷⁵ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 321.

¹⁷⁶ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 321.

Poppy's enthronement in Dominic's heart occurs as she is also advancing closer to her enthronement on the stage. Contrasted with her growing power in the theatre, however, is Dominic's waning health due to his return to the bank. After Dominic has only been retired for nine months, the banking-house is faced with possible ruin due to the effects of the war on the establishment's "extensive connection with land and mining in South Africa."¹⁷⁷ The bank approaches Dominic to rehire him in order to assist them in recovering from the debacle, and following careful deliberation he is convinced that to withhold his support would be to deny his nobler nature: "so it occurred to him, not merely as conceivable but as incontestable, that the road to the far horizon, instead of leading in the opposite direction to the city banking-house, for him, at this particular juncture, led directly into and through it."¹⁷⁸ The "far horizon," therefore, symbolizes a greater purpose or reality that exists beyond the plane of material human existence. It is an explicitly religious concept: the far horizon is "touched by the glory of the Uncreated Light."¹⁷⁹ Initially, Dominic's disillusionment with his mundane life at the bank caused him to lose focus on this horizon until, with Poppy's inspiration, he returned to the Roman Church. Now, Dominic is following the light by returning to the bank. After only a short time, however, we learn that his "close application to business was beginning to tell injuriously on his health."¹⁸⁰ In the same scene where this information is disclosed, Dominic's vision goes "suddenly black" and he falls.¹⁸¹ This is the beginning of his physical decline, and it is, to use the narrator's term, his "cardiac affection" that will claim his life at the end of the novel.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 271.

¹⁷⁸ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 275.

¹⁷⁹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 183.

¹⁸⁰ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 309.

¹⁸¹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 311.

¹⁸² Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 378. This unusual way of referring to illness as "affection" is something we see repeatedly in Malet's fiction. It shows that she is thinking about sickness as something that affects the body.

Dominic's conception of death in terms of artistry sets up the novel's alignment of the friend's simultaneous artistic achievements. Dominic, contemplating his own death, thinks that dying has an artistic element: "[t]o meet death with a gracious stoicism, well-dressed and standing upright, is, rightly considered, a very fine art."¹⁸³ He will succeed in this artistry on the same night that Poppy realizes the full potential of her talent as an artist on the stage. We learn that Poppy "played as she had never played before," and we are told of her "astonishing manifestation of talent."¹⁸⁴ The audience is dazzled, and the narrator records: "Twice the curtain was raised at the end of the performance, and the Lady of the Windswept Dust made her bow with the rest of the company."¹⁸⁵ The deployment of Poppy's title here, rather than her name, emphasizes the connection between her theatrical, cosmetic femininity and her enthronement as an earthly Madonna. At the same time as Poppy is receiving the praise of her audience, Dominic's life is ebbing away. Following her curtain calls, Poppy rushes to his bedside, but to her great distress he has died in her absence. Dominic, however, has also had his triumph, for not only does he succeed in dying gracefully—he was "[b]eautiful in death as in life"—he has also "reached the Land of the Far Horizon":¹⁸⁶ he has attained the ultimate spiritual exultation.

When Poppy arrives at the house, she is described in a manner that is especially vivid in uniting her cosmetic femininity with her secular sainthood: "She had not stayed even to clean the grease-paint off her face. Just as she was, the stamp of her calling upon her, eager, fictitious, courageous, triumphant, . . . she came."¹⁸⁷ The outward symbol of Poppy's inward artistry—the actor's grease paint—calls to mind the way in which saints are often marked by some sort of stamp (most commonly, the stigmata) that is a sign verifying their holy status. The novel's final

¹⁸³ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 379.

¹⁸⁴ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 384.

¹⁸⁵ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 385.

¹⁸⁶ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 387.

¹⁸⁷ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 387.

paragraph presents a tableau, in which Poppy's acting and her sainthood are again merged. Lovegrove has been staying beside Dominic's body and is worn out with weeping, and Poppy urges him to go home: "I promised Dominic I would watch with him till the dawn. I keep my promise."¹⁸⁸ These words recall how Christ asked the apostles to watch with him on the night he was betrayed. Here, Poppy's last name, St. John, finds an echo in the apostle whom Christ loved. Then the narrator describes the tableau: "the Lady of the Windswept Dust laid her extravagant bouquet with its yellow streamers, on the floor, at the foot of the bier; and kneeling upon the vacant *prie-dieu*, beside the little nun, buried her painted face in her hands and wept."¹⁸⁹ The final description of Poppy, as a woman with a "painted face," reminds us once again that she is "the Lady"—an earthly Madonna—and also that a distinct aspect of that identity is as a Magdalene associated with prostitution. Beside the nun, and bowed on the kneeling bench, she should be out of place, and yet this scene is exactly what the narrative has been preparing us for. The unorthodox Madonna: disrupting conventional notions of good and evil, sanctity and sin; a Madonna erotic and performative, and yet her sexuality denied in favor of celibate friendship, and this friendship undermining traditional notions of manhood and womanhood. The ending, therefore, is in no respect a sign of religious conservatism. What we see in *The Far Horizon* and Malet's other Catholic fictions is that they are, when considered in light of the teaching of the Church, highly disruptive, offering a very liberal reconstruction of religious orthodoxy. In the end, Malet's "Catholic novel" has exulted in the glories of a decadent Madonna.

Adrian Savage: The Widow, the Spinster, and Feminist Modernity

In *Adrian Savage*, Malet puts under scrutiny the relationship between femininity and the changing social landscape of the first decade of the twentieth century, continuing to reflect on her contemporary moment as she had in *The Far Horizon*. Malet's 1911 novel examines the ways

¹⁸⁸ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 388.

¹⁸⁹ Malet, *The Far Horizon*, 388.

in which womanhood could be reimagined in this new era, while also exploring the consequence for women whose lives were still controlled by restrictive notions of femininity. *Adrian Savage* was well reviewed, and critics recognized that it was a novel very much of its moment, both in terms of its narrative style, and its subject matter. In an insightful review in the *Bookman*, M. P. Willcocks, a literary critic and novelist, wrote in praise of *Adrian Savage*, stating that the novel “must take its stand by the side of the masterly pictures of our time, for it is a work of art.”¹⁹⁰ Willcocks is specifically thinking of “our time” as modernity, for she declares that Malet’s novel suits the new century because “it is the wind of modernity that ‘Adrian Savage’ paints, the wind of that spirit of the age, whose most striking aspect is Feminism.”¹⁹¹ Here, Willcocks is drawing attention to the manner in which *Adrian Savage* stresses that modernity’s most important characteristic is the women’s movement. A relatively new term, “Feminism” was associated with the assertion of women’s rights and especially women’s suffrage, a word which was first used in England in the 1890s, but came from the French term *feminisme*, coined by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier in 1837. Malet explores Feminist Modernity through the figure of Gabrielle St. Leger, a French woman who also represents a new kind of Madonna in Malet’s oeuvre: Catholic, modern, widow, mother, and activist for women’s rights. Malet takes the exploration of this freshly imagined Madonna in innovative directions, in part by contrasting Gabrielle with Joanna Smyrthwaite who, as a sexually repressed spinster, has not enjoyed the erotic success with men that Gabrielle represents. Moreover, residing in Protestant England, Joanna has not had the benefit of the affirmation of womanhood found in Catholic Marianism, and neither has she been acquainted with the praise of female autonomy preached by Feminism. In the following

¹⁹⁰ M. P. Willcocks, “A New Tale of Two Cities,” review of *Adrian Savage*, by Lucas Malet, *Bookman* 41, no. 242 (November 1911): 107.

¹⁹¹ Willcocks, “A New Tale,” 107. The phrase “spirit of the age” has the ring to it of John Stuart Mill’s series of essays written in 1831 under this title, discussing an intellectual and moral shift occurring in this period, which he noted was a period of self-conscious change. It would seem that Willcocks is using it to suggest that the early twentieth century marks a new period of change.

discussion, I argue that Malet fixates on these two forms of unmarried womanhood and thereby draws attention to the centrality of the single woman in the modern era.

These two figures, the widow and the spinster, were objects of social concern in the early twentieth century, just as they were in the Victorian period. Spinsters were seen as a problem because, as Alison Oram observes, they “lacked an outlet for their sexual and parental instincts.”¹⁹² Moreover, as Laura Doan puts it: “Within the symbolic order, the spinster is defined by absence; she lacks a primary relationship with a man to fulfill her role as wife and mother.”¹⁹³ At the same time, the spinster was an important figure for the women’s movement: the reality that women outnumbered men meant that marriage could no longer be the expected destiny of every woman, and therefore they required access to greater educational and professional opportunities. Ella Hepworth Dixon, as Emma Liggins points out, advocated on behalf of the spinster, asserting that this form of single womanhood was not unsexed: she simply had resolved not to enter into a contract that would make her a man’s property.¹⁹⁴ Joanna, as we shall see, is not familiar with such progressive ideas about the independent single woman, and is therefore unable to be empowered in opposition to the conventions about marriage and female identity that surround her. Joanna, therefore, remains under the delusion that marriage is the only destiny that would offer her a satisfying personal life.

Although also a single woman, the widow presented a different kind of social concern in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The research of the women’s rights campaigner Frances Power Cobbe indicated that, as Liggins summarizes, “the status of widows was generally ignored in Victorian society, despite their large numbers.”¹⁹⁵ As Liggins also observes, widows

¹⁹² Alison Oram, “Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Interwar Discourses,” *Women’s History Review* 1, no. 3 (1992): 415.

¹⁹³ Laura Doan, Introduction to *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel*, ed. Laura Doan (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 5.

¹⁹⁴ Emma Liggins, *Odd Women? Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women’s Fiction, 1850s-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 83.

¹⁹⁵ Liggins, *Odd Women?*, 35.

were “often bracketed with spinsters as requiring social support, or at least financial help from men.”¹⁹⁶ The widow’s identity and status, like the spinster, were defined by her relation to men. At the same time, however, the widow had the advantage of being considered more womanly than the spinster, for the widow had at one point fulfilled her sexual and possibly maternal role, and thus those aspects of her identity were not in question. The widow, therefore, also potentially had “more freedom in her private life.”¹⁹⁷ We see in Malet’s depiction of Gabrielle that being a widow does, indeed, guarantee her greater security: she can forge a new independent identity and participate in the women’s movement. If Joanna and Gabrielle are the twin figures of Malet’s female modernity, then it is a modernity that is concerned with the meaning of woman apart from her relationship to man: modern womanhood, in these two instances, signifies female independence. The research of Sheila Jeffreys suggests that 1911, the year in which *Adrian Savage* was published, “represented the time at which marriage was least popular between 1801 and 1931.”¹⁹⁸ This was the high point, in other words, of women choosing not to marry before the First World War would have dramatic implications for the women’s movement. What I want to argue is that as *Adrian Savage* unfolds, even though it is ostensibly focusing on the titular protagonist, it is largely taken up with the subject of single women. I will therefore look at the emancipated widow first, and then explore the narrative of the repressed spinster.

Adrian functions in the narrative as a figure whose trips between France and England facilitate the juxtaposition of French feminism with English femininity. The narrative opens in the lively cultural center of Paris, which is also the home of an active feminist movement. Adrian, whose father was English and mother was French, dwells in Paris as an assistant editor where he also runs a literary review. He is in love with the recently widowed Gabrielle St. Leger,

¹⁹⁶ Liggins, *Odd Women?*, 36.

¹⁹⁷ Liggins, *Odd Women?*, 35.

¹⁹⁸ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1985), 89.

whose artist husband belonged to the same artistic circle as Adrian. The narrative shifts between the bustle of Paris and a small English town in Kent that is virtually untouched by modernity: Stourmouth. This antiquated place enters the narrative when Adrian learns of his cousin's death, and that he is the co-executor of his cousin's estate in the south of England. He must, therefore, travel across the Channel to assume his legal responsibilities. Here, Joanna, the daughter of the deceased (with whom Adrian shares executor duties), comes into focus, presenting a form of shackled womanhood that is in stark contrast with Gabrielle and the kinds of women with whom Adrian has been acquainted in France.

Joanna is a woman whose entire existence was shaped by her father's stifling of her individuality. A family friend, who has known Joanna since her childhood, tells Adrian that as a little girl she had "made herself useful as [her father's] amanuensis and reader and so on. He looked upon her as his private property."¹⁹⁹ Joanna becomes infatuated with Adrian, the first man to treat her with kindness and deference, but for much of the narrative he remains tragically oblivious to the feelings he evokes, constantly contrasting the plain Joanna with the beautiful Gabrielle. The narrative thus explores woman as both object and subject of desire: while the reader is thoroughly acquainted with Gabrielle's treatment as an object of desire from two male perspectives, we are also given an intimate look at woman as desiring subject through the revelations found in Joanna's journal entries, which are included within the narrative. This is the only example in Malet's oeuvre where she uses the unusual narrative structure of interleaving a first-person speaker with a third-person narrator. It may also be the only time in her fiction where she employed any kind of first-person narration. I contend that Malet gives us this direct access to a woman's consciousness in *Adrian Savage* in order to emphasize the gendered stakes of narration, and draw attention to different forms of narrative authority. We

¹⁹⁹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 88-89.

will see that although Joanna is not an object of interest to any man, she is an object of interest to the reader because we have access to her interiority.

But before we become acquainted with Joanna's journal entries, the narrative spends considerable time focusing on Gabrielle and her new form of Marianism. Unlike the pagan Poppy, Gabrielle is a Roman Catholic, but she shares with Poppy a passion for female independence. We discover that Gabrielle has not yet reconciled her Catholic faith and her attraction to "emancipated and self-sustained womanhood."²⁰⁰ She is struck by realizing that most of the people whom she knows from her husband's artistic set, as well as the feminists with whom she is familiar, have abandoned religious belief, and so she wonders: "Was there no middle way? Was no marriage between the old Faith and the new science, the new democracy, possible? If you accepted the latter, did negations and denials logically follow, compelling you to the former go?"²⁰¹ Gabrielle, derived from Gabriel, means "God is my strength," which is perhaps something more of a promise than a present reality at this point in Gabrielle's life. Gabrielle's full name is unusual within Malet's oeuvre because it possesses associations of personal significance to the author. St. Leger, of course, is Malet's middle name. Moreover, the novel is dedicated to her second cousin, Lilian Mary Gabrielle Francesca Vallings, whom Malet, within a few years of her husband William Harrison's death in 1897, had adopted as her lifelong companion. At the time, Lilian was a teenager. The novel thus overtly connects this Madonna figure with Malet and her "cousin-daughter."²⁰² It is easy to see the association between the Catholic Malet and Gabrielle St. Leger, who has recently been freed from an unhappy marriage to an older husband. Gabrielle has a little daughter whom she adores named Bette. Although only twenty-seven, Gabrielle has experienced much of life: "[d]aughter, wife, mother, widow—

²⁰⁰ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 38.

²⁰¹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 38.

²⁰² Lundberg, *An Inward Necessity*, 338.

young though she still was, she had sounded the gamut of woman's most vital experiences."²⁰³ Gabrielle's husband, we discover, stunted her personal growth once they were married, and now that she is alone, she wants to develop her autonomy: "she could not consent to part with her freedom, with the repose of mind and the large liberty of thought and action her freedom permitted her. Her body was her own. Her soul, her emotions were her own."²⁰⁴ This self-possession, however, is threatened constantly, for the exceptionally beautiful Gabrielle—with the "strange recondite quality of her beauty, and the challenge it offered"²⁰⁵—has many admirers, among them Adrian, as we know, and the eccentric artist René Dax, whom Gabrielle calls a "genius."²⁰⁶

It is by way of Dax, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, that the novel most explicitly connects Gabrielle with the Virgin Mary. When we first hear of Dax, Adrian says: "there could be no doubt about his value from the first. He is extraordinary."²⁰⁷ Anastasia Beauchamp, an unmarried woman of the older generation who nonetheless "preache[s] matrimony" and is "anti-feministe, distrustful of modern tendencies,"²⁰⁸ retorts: "He is extraordinarily perverted."²⁰⁹ This one word, "perverted," signals to the reader what will be made clear about Dax: he is a decadent artist, a caricaturist and minor poet, whose work is shocking and pornographic. At one point, he calls his drawings "obscenities."²¹⁰ Dax's nickname is "the tadpole," which the narrator explains he acquired in school due to his "immense domed head

²⁰³ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 9.

²⁰⁴ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 31.

²⁰⁵ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 11.

²⁰⁶ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 13.

²⁰⁷ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 13.

²⁰⁸ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 25.

²⁰⁹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 13.

²¹⁰ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 306.

and neat little toy of a body.”²¹¹ This appellation has something of the degenerate about it, recalling the stages of evolution, and possibly the idea that Dax has not evolved forward but rather backward, in keeping with the tie between decadence and degeneration. Although his first name, René, meaning to be reborn, aspires toward greater heights, his family name reinforces the oddity of his body, since Dax means someone who possesses a duck-like gait. As a man who has a pet ferret, the narrative is strongly suggesting an association between this genius artist and animalism or primitiveness, an association that we will also discover in Adrian’s form of masculinity.

For Dax, Gabrielle is the realization of his ideal: the perfect woman, whom he names “The Madonna of the Future.” Dax draws Gabrielle in a brilliant portrait that depicts her as “the embodiment and exponent of some compelling idea, the leader of some momentous movement, the elect spokeswoman of a new and tremendous age.”²¹² The idea that Gabrielle embodies is “Modernity.”²¹³ The narrative reinforces that this is not simply Dax’s perspective on her, for both Adrian and Anastasia identify her with Modernity: Anastasia declares that “the wind of Modernity, which blows from out the future, is upon her face.”²¹⁴ Adrian and Anastasia regard Gabrielle’s modernism as unfortunate, since one of its manifestations is a rejection of romance. The narrative, however, also offers the connection in a positive light: “the twentieth century and its awakening militant feminism found expression in [Gabrielle’s] firm hands and their promise of fearless and ready strength.”²¹⁵ The link here between Modernity, Feminism, and Gabrielle also draws into focus the way in which the narrative represents Modernity, chiefly, as having to do with the emancipation of women. Malet, then, constructs a very different version of

²¹¹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 21.

²¹² Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 171.

²¹³ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 171.

²¹⁴ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 154.

²¹⁵ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 18.

Modernity than what we usually encounter in the canonical texts of Modernism, in which it is gendered male. Rita Felski has pointed out that Modernism's association with maleness is reinforced when we only look to those male-authored fictions that have made claims on their own definitive status. Felski asks: "How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women?"²¹⁶ Here, *Adrian Savage* represents a powerful answer to this question: Modernity is female, and its keynote is Feminism.

Gabrielle, then, is Malet's modern Madonna. Dax's obsession with her as this figure, however, is problematic. We learn that Dax has no religious belief, and therefore unlike Poppy, whose enthronement for Dominic was the earthly counterpart to the Virgin Mary in heaven, Dax has no divine woman to worship. He thus requires that Gabrielle be a woman who surpasses human limitations: although he elevates her, in the process he dehumanizes her. He sees Gabrielle as his secular salvation, telling her: "[you are] an object of faith, an object of worship."²¹⁷ Dax takes his mania to extreme ends, wanting his artist's studio to be a temple for Gabrielle, and declaring that she can save him "by coming here to remain permanently."²¹⁸ When she seems put off by this suggestion, Dax claims that he does not want her for sensual gratification: "Mistress—wife—pah!—Madame, my art has been all that to me, and more than that . . . But my art has never been to me that thing so far more sacred, more human—a mother."²¹⁹ Here, we see that Gabrielle's motherhood is central to Dax's reason for associating her with the Virgin Mary. As a widow, moreover, she can more easily be constructed as a chaste woman: like Mary a mother and yet one who has been distanced from her sexuality. Dax has already turned Gabrielle into art through an image so realistic that Adrian thinks: "it was *la belle*

²¹⁶ Felski, *Gender of Modernity*, 10.

²¹⁷ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 306.

²¹⁸ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 305.

²¹⁹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 306.

Gabrielle to the life; and alive—how wonderfully alive!”²²⁰ Dax has thus fixed her on his canvas, but he is unsatisfied: he wants to go even further and turn her body into art through enacting a ritual in which both of them will drain their blood into a basin. Dax believes he would thus preserve Gabrielle’s perfection forever, as he urges when he attempts to convince her to submit to his plan: “Consider only that from which I save you. The degradation of marriage, of the embraces of a lover . . . From the shame of old age.”²²¹ We see here that it is from a fear that Gabrielle will be defiled by sexuality, as well as a terror that her beauty will decrease over time, that Dax wants to preserve her forever in the roles of widow and of mother. Dax’s fixation with turning Gabrielle into his ideal thus demonstrates that it is not enough to return woman to her earthly throne: the Madonna must still be on her heavenly one.

Adrian, in contrast with Dax, venerates the Blessed Mother. Moreover, he regards himself as enlightened about women’s equality, in part because of his regard for the Virgin Mary. He makes a point, after visiting England, of telling Gabrielle that the Protestant disregard of the Holy Mother has done harm to women because it has lowered the value placed upon them. At the same time, he retains very traditional views about women, such as that “[t]he very reason and purpose of woman’s existence [is] charm and beauty.”²²² Furthermore, he maintains a very self-important attitude toward Gabrielle, blindly believing that her heart and her sexual desire are dormant in spite of her fruitful marriage, and “[he] further believe[s] himself, thanks to the workings of constitutional masculine vanity, to be the princely adventurer designed by providence for the far from disagreeable duty of waking her up.”²²³ Although Adrian does not want to go to the lengths that Dax planned in order to preserve Gabrielle in her perfection, he constantly fantasizes about making Gabrielle his own. Here, Adrian’s characterization of

²²⁰ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 170.

²²¹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 312.

²²² Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 85.

²²³ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 9.

marriage as only desirable if it is “marriage by capture” provides some insight into his character, for when he thinks of marriage it is as “this apparently most primitive, even savage, of human relations.”²²⁴ Adrian has in mind the concept of capture marriages that emerged in the mid nineteenth century in the work of Swiss anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen who theorized that in primitive civilizations marriages were conducted by the groom fighting for, seizing, and carrying off the woman he desired to be his wife. That Adrian possesses the family name “Savage,” then, further reinforces that his masculinity is of this primitive kind that venerates conquering women, in spite of his apparent enlightenment.²²⁵ Although Adrian desires to “capture” Gabrielle, he also masquerades as a sort of protector against men with vile intentions. This is chiefly seen when Adrian is the one to arrive at the studio when Dax is relaying to Gabrielle the details of the ritual death he wants them to enact behind a “red screen.”²²⁶ Saving her from this more obvious tyranny, Adrian establishes himself in her mind as someone who represents “safety and restoration.”²²⁷

Gabrielle, subjected to idealization, and so strong, beautiful, and assertive, stands in stark contrast with the repressed, unattractive, self-effacing Joanna, who is far from being idealized by any man, but who idealizes Adrian. The narrator’s first description of Joanna makes no attempt at softening her lack of physical attractiveness, noting that she has “a face making but small claim to beauty.”²²⁸ It is a visage “almost painful in its effect of studied self-repression, patient as it was unsatisfied, an arrested, consciously resisted violence of feeling perceptible in every line of it.”²²⁹ Joanna is only twenty-nine, but as this description makes clear, her self-

²²⁴ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 8.

²²⁵ Adrian, a form of the Latin given name Adrianus or Hadrianus, means sea or water, and most certainly references his travels back and forth across the Channel between Paris and Stourmouth, which stand for Catholic/ Protestant; feminist/ patriarchal; Gabrielle/ Joanna.

²²⁶ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 312.

²²⁷ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 460.

²²⁸ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 62.

repression has worked so unforgivingly that she is almost painful to look at. Moreover, she seems advanced for her years, as a family friend remarks: “she has aged lately.”²³⁰

Joanna is the figure in whom the detriment of repressive femininity is concentrated.²³¹ Prior to her father’s death, Joanna worked as his secretary, being treated as his property, as noted earlier, rather than a full human being. Joanna records in her journal that when her father died she recognized she “should never be afraid of him any more,”²³² and again emphasizes that it is “extraordinary” to feel that she has “ceased . . . to be afraid.”²³³ Given that freedom from fear is Joanna’s overwhelming impression at her father’s death, we can easily understand the severity of the male tyranny under which she has suffered her whole life. Adrian, who is astonished to find that Feminism has not emancipated women in England, recognizes in Joanna a type of femininity that he had previously only observed on the stage: “For, now that he came to think of it, might not Joanna, . . . in all her feminine leanness and overstrained mentality, have stepped straight out of one of those plays of Ibsen’s[?]”²³⁴ Ibsen’s women, trapped within a system that stifles them and fighting to forge their own paths, resonated with the English New Woman. Ibsen’s *Doll’s House* had, of course, caused a sensation when it was first performed in London in 1889.²³⁵ As Sally Ledger records, Ibsen’s attack on narrow-mindedness and blind following of authority “struck a strong chord with the bohemian, intellectual audience” who

²²⁹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 62.

²³⁰ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 89.

²³¹ In this regard, it is notable that Malet’s fiction approaches Victorian womanhood in contrasting ways. In several of the novels that Malet set in the Victorian past (such as we saw with *Calmady* and as we will see with *Deadham Hard*), she is interested in exploring women characters who resist and overcome restrictive expectations for female behavior. But in *Adrian Savage*, which is so explicitly concerned with Modernity and the liberating possibilities that it offers to women, she focuses on the consequences for those communities that are untouched by feminism.

²³² Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 66.

²³³ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 67.

²³⁴ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 91.

²³⁵ In 1890, the first English edition of Ibsen’s collected plays came out under the editorship of William Archer.

attended the London premiere.²³⁶ It is clear, then, that whereas Gabrielle is a modern woman, Joanna still faces the kinds of fin-de-siècle challenges against which the New Woman rebelled, but Joanna has not yet found a way to fight back. In Joanna, we see a woman in need of emancipation, one whose sisters have peopled the stage, but who remains unaware of their sorority.

The theme of the closeness between women is one that the narrative emphasizes on an even larger scale than Joanna's similarity to Ibsen's fictional women. The narrative structure reinforces how closely women are aligned with each other merely by the fact of their gender. Adrian bitterly resents that he stands outside this communion, for it makes him acknowledge his distance from Gabrielle, and he reluctantly recognizes: "Joanna Smyrthwaite and Gabrielle St. Leger—their radical differences of circumstance, endowment, and experience notwithstanding—were still essentially nearer to each other, more capable of mutual sympathy and understanding in the deep places of their nature, than he, with all his acute sensibility and dramatic insight, could ever be to either of them!"²³⁷ Here we see that there is something about femininity that Adrian feels alienated from. As readers, we are very aware of the way in which Gabrielle and Joanna, though outwardly very different, have suffered under the controlling hands of men. The narrative has also already suggested their sorority two chapters prior to Adrian's reflections. In the chapter that introduces Joanna and her journal entries, the opening and conclusion of the episode draw a connection between the two women. First, we learn there is a "northeasterly wind" outside Joanna's house that "at this same hour, cried homeless . . . to the disturbance of Gabrielle St. Leger's meditations upon the deceptions of modern marriage."²³⁸ And again at the end of the chapter, following Joanna's first journal entry, the narrator remarks: "Two o'clock had struck before Joanna Smyrthwaite closed and locked her

²³⁶ Sally Ledger, *Henrik Ibsen*, 2nd ed. (Plymouth: Northcote House, 2008), 6.

²³⁷ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 92.

²³⁸ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 61.

diary and replaced it in the pigeon-hole of the satinwood bureau. At the same hour, away in Paris, Gabrielle St. Leger, answering little Bette's cry, gathered the child's soft, warm body in her arms."²³⁹ Although the actions of these two women in the early morning are very different, the narrator finds it sufficient that they are both awake in order to transition from one to the other. Here, we discover the idea that there is a kind of closeness between women that transcends geography: their ostensible differences are overcome simply because they are women. Several times throughout the narrative, circumstantial details, or Adrian's thoughts, connect Joanna and Gabrielle. As readers, then, we are repeatedly encouraged to think of the widow and the spinster in relation to each other. One of the tragedies of the novel is that the women themselves do not recognize this sisterhood. Gabrielle has her feminist compatriots, but Joanna is utterly unaware that she is connected to other women who would sympathize with her experience of oppression at the hands of men.²⁴⁰ Instead, it is a man who condescends to her—Adrian—who remains the dominant concern in her life. As Joanna writes in her journal: "I am resolved to exterminate my pride and submit to be nothing, so that [Adrian] may give everything."²⁴¹ Joanna has so thoroughly absorbed the necessity for submission when relating to men that she cannot imagine another paradigm for a male-female relationship.

In Joanna's first diary entries we see how her perception of men as providing meaning to women's lives quickly manifests in her interactions with Adrian. Given significant responsibilities in the wake of her father's death, Joanna demonstrates that she is levelheaded and very capable of managing finances and the care of property. We learn that Adrian has complimented her on her skill, which she has recorded in her diary: "He said he admired my

²³⁹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 74.

²⁴⁰ Adrian has already noted earlier in the novel that Englishwomen, without "Our Blessed Lady," have "no eternal, universal Mother, whose aid and patronage she can invoke in hours of perplexity and distress," (157) and must therefore seek help wherever she can. Now, he repeats this notion when he says that Joanna did not have hope because she "had no religion, no faith in Almighty God" (465). Although Adrian does not draw explicit attention to the Madonna in this passage, it is a reminder that the novel advances the view that this absence of a divine female figure marks the shortcomings of Protestantism and how it fails to supply the needs of womankind.

²⁴¹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 220.

business capacity and my high sense of duty.”²⁴² Joanna’s journaling, we discover, has played an important role in her life since she was a girl, for it has been the only outlet for her feelings. Moreover, she cherishes her journals because they are her only possession “exclusively, inviolably her own.”²⁴³ Joanna’s autobiographical voice rendered through these sacred diaries has not always been appreciated by other critics. To be sure, Joanna is not a traditionally appealing character, yet Lundberg goes so far as to define Joanna as “repellent.”²⁴⁴ The reader’s access to this character’s thoughts and emotions through her journal, however, create a picture that is counter to the more critical impression we often receive from the third-person voice. Malet had an enduring interest in the figure of the self-repressed spinster, depicting her at times as a source of amusement, such as the self-deluded Serena who is infatuated with Dominic in *The Far Horizon*, and later in the figure of the self-important governess Theresa Bilson in *Deadham Hard* (1919). Joanna, although never a source of comedy, like these figures is at times the object of contempt. For example, we see the basis for Lorimer Lundberg’s adjective when, during a conversation with Adrian in which Joanna feels reassured of his good opinion, her “ecstatic expression” is described as “nearly touching upon idiocy.”²⁴⁵ This characterization is certainly unflattering and could surely cause a reader to feel repelled, but this representation of Joanna is complicated by the reader’s access to her journal, which through its revelation of her pain and self-doubt, loneliness and desire, calls forth the reader’s sympathy. For example, we discover a passage that counters the harsh judgment of her expression: “I cannot help feeling that I may have been rendered unnecessarily stupid and diffident through subjection to [papa].”²⁴⁶ From such a passage the reader understands early on that Joanna’s deficiencies are

²⁴² Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 81.

²⁴³ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 64.

²⁴⁴ Lundberg, *An Inward Necessity*, 333.

²⁴⁵ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 271.

²⁴⁶ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 77.

not her fault, and that she more than recognizes, and regrets, her limitations. It is also, moreover, crucial to note that this moment of unforgiving criticism occurs when the narrator is focalizing through Adrian's perspective.

This structure of alternating between omniscience and first-person narration reveals strikingly different understandings of the interactions that occur between Joanna and Adrian, drawing attention to the subjective nature of, not only Joanna's record, but also of Adrian's perspective.²⁴⁷ For example, we learn of Joanna's first interaction with Adrian from her diary, in which she records the details of his kindness. In the following passage, we witness the way in which Joanna's body becomes sacred to her because she has received from Adrian what she perceives as physical affection:

[Adrian] kissed my right hand. This surprised and affected me. No one ever kissed my hand before. . . . When I came up-stairs I locked the door of my room, and walked up and down in the firelight, looking at my hand, for a long while before I recovered sufficient self-control to light the candles and sit down and write. I have a strange feeling toward my own hand. It seems to have gained an intrinsic beauty and value, as of something quite apart from myself. I look at it with a sense of admiration. I enjoy touching it with my other hand.²⁴⁸

Joanna's account draws attention to her intense reaction to feeling that her body has value. We can see that positive physical sensations are very unfamiliar to her since this simple kiss on her hand makes such an impression. That she fixates on the sensation of her hand rather than

²⁴⁷ The interspersed of Joanna's first-person narration with an omniscient narrator recalls the structure of Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), which features Esther Summerson's journal interleaved with Dickens's third-person narrator. Esther is a loving, self-sacrificing orphan who is rewarded for her virtue with marriage to her sweetheart. Her journal reveals how Esther becomes stronger when she recognizes how she is connected to others by love, and her goodness is a reminder of the kindness that exists in the world, which is often in short supply in the novel's other plots. Joanna, by contrast, was a dutiful daughter until her father's death released her from years of self-effacement, but her obedience receives no reward. In the privacy of her diary, Joanna finally discovers that she possesses a voice and desires that are distinctly her own: it is a place of individuation, but also of revealing feelings of connection to another, but which will prove to be unfounded. For Joanna, self-sacrifice and obedience result in her destruction.

²⁴⁸ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 82-83.

explicitly recording her desire for Adrian also indicates that erotic longing is unfamiliar to her, and most certainly was previously impermissible.

Joanna's feeling that her hand is sacred is juxtaposed just two chapters later with Adrian's far less flattering assessment of her body. As he observes Joanna walking toward him down a "broad staircase," the narrator records his opinion of her appendages: "both her feet and hands, though comparatively small, were lacking in individuality and in that sharpness of outline which is the mark of fineness of breeding. They might have been just anybody's hands and feet; and so—he felt amusedly ashamed of himself for admitting it—they were exactly the hands and feet one would expect Joanna Smyrthwaite to possess."²⁴⁹ Adrian's perspective here is completely at odds with the value that she had attributed to her body in her journal because his assessment is exactly the opposite: her hand is not special because it possesses no marking to make it distinct and individual. Adrian and his "amused shame" perpetuate a male kind of viewing that diminishes the female object that it observes, taking for granted its own superiority of judgment. In such narrative instances, it becomes clear that although Adrian is "the hero of this book"—as the title of the first chapter satirically declares him to be—Malet's novel is inviting the reader to question what it means to occupy this traditional role, and certainly whether this confident, attractive, intelligent protagonist is to be taken on good faith. More to the point, the novel raises the question of whether such a male protagonist has a place in modernity.

That Adrian plays no role in attempting to liberate Joanna from a despairing spinsterhood, although he has claimed to feel sorry for her and decries the treatment of women in England, establishes that he is outside feminist modernity. Once Joanna realizes that Adrian will never reciprocate her longings, she completely despairs. Apart from Adrian, she feels as if her life has no meaning, for she has no profession or prospects for self-fulfillment, especially isolated as she is in Stourmouth. After her father's death, she had recorded in her journal: "I feel

²⁴⁹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 94.

alarm in thinking of the future. . . . Will it be cruel and purposeless, too?”²⁵⁰ Since then, the only meaning she had found was in wishing to be worthy of Adrian, and now that this aspiration has failed, her reality is most certainly cruel and purposeless. Joanna experiences her unrequited desire as an illness. When she learns that she has entirely misinterpreted Adrian’s kindness toward her, she works herself up into a physical sickness, and the narrator explains she had “an ache through mind and body of blank misery, at once incomprehensible and deadening from its very completeness.”²⁵¹

Following Adrian’s rejection, Joanna writes in her journal with a sense of self-knowledge and self-confidence that is striking for a woman whose previous entries had often been tentative and self-doubting. Joanna writes: “I felt my nature and intelligence had never found their full expression, that the strength of my character had never fully disclosed itself . . . I came to the conclusion this desire for entire and arresting self-expression is not actually new in me. I saw that I have always, implicitly though silently, entertained a conviction that the opportunity for self-expression would eventually present itself.”²⁵² Here, we see that the journal allows the reader to have access to this profound moment when Joanna records her self-revelation, and crucially, this a realization that her deepest desire has distinctly to do with herself and her singular identity, rather than desiring an object outside herself. She records that she had imagined she would achieve self-expression through marriage to Adrian and the new identity he would give her, but now she devises a different plan, and she writes that it will come about because she “definitely and irrevocably willed it.”²⁵³ What she has decided upon is drastic: she resolves to immolate herself. She believes that through this act of self-destruction she will finally express her singular desires and her independent agency.

²⁵⁰ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 74.

²⁵¹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 374.

²⁵² Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 415-16.

²⁵³ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 417.

Joanna's final presence in the narrative is in the form of her words authorizing her self-murder: "Life is already over. I am already dead."²⁵⁴ She leaves her journal to Adrian, desiring that her true self will at last be known: "At least read it—I am no longer ashamed. I want you to know me as I really am."²⁵⁵ Adrian, who reads the journal, does indeed gain knowledge of Joanna that he did not possess without this record of her consciousness, and he describes it as "the most poignant, the most convincing human document I have ever read," and explains that Joanna wrote with "uncompromising truthfulness, with appalling self-scrutiny, self-revelation and unflinching courage."²⁵⁶ Joanna's self-expression, then, has in fact been twofold: her self-immolation, but also her self-revelation in her diary. Adrian is impressed by Joanna's autobiography, while remaining aware that to take one's own life, according to the Church, was a cardinal sin. Adrian emphasizes that the Church's disapproval was not a deterrent to Joanna, however, for he knows that she "had no religion, no faith in Almighty God."²⁵⁷ Yet, for Joanna's Protestant relatives, the evidence that her death was self-destruction must be denied and hidden so as not to bring judgment and scandal on the house. The mechanism of Joanna's immolation is left unspecified in her journal. As readers we are only told that she was discovered lifeless in her bed. That Joanna's death is represented by her family as one in which she is a victim, rather than the agent, divests her of her decisive act of self-will. Thanks to her journal, though, the reader possesses this knowledge, once again driving home the significance of having access to a character's consciousness.

The tension between desire for a man, and desire to embody one's potential for individuality is also borne out in Gabrielle, although in a very different form. For Gabrielle, acting on her sexual desire means compromising her resolve to "belong wholly and exclusively

²⁵⁴ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 424.

²⁵⁵ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 424.

²⁵⁶ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 464.

²⁵⁷ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 465.

to herself, not to be the property of any man, however devoted, talented, charming.”²⁵⁸ This resolve begins to crumble, however, upon Adrian’s return from Joanna’s funeral, when he is visibly shaken, calling forth her sympathy, and determined to attain the answer he desires from her. Before he begins relaying the story of Joanna’s death, the narrator notes that Gabrielle experiences feelings of attraction for her devotee that she nonetheless hesitates to embrace. Twice, we are told of the turmoil she is experiencing. First, the narrator remarks that “[t]he young man’s genuine and undisguised trouble combined with his actual physical nearness to threaten her emotional equilibrium.”²⁵⁹ Second, we learn that Adrian’s attractive qualities, including notably his “virility,” have “stirred and agitated her, proving dangerous alike to her senses and her heart.”²⁶⁰ The language of threat and danger here signifies that to indulge in erotic longing is equally to surrender some measure of self-possession.

Adrian’s romantic appeal to Gabrielle begins in the form of relaying Joanna’s tragic story, but he at first leaves his own identity in the affair anonymous. Gabrielle, when hearing that Joanna took her life because the man she loved did not return her feeling, thinks it is “so great a waste” and wonders “[h]ow could such devotion fail to attract, fail to create a response?”²⁶¹ Adrian answers, explaining that the man tried to sacrifice himself for the woman’s sake, but he could not: “Because, Madame, because the man already loved you.”²⁶² In this way, Adrian makes his plea of love to Gabrielle, transferring to her, however indirectly, the burden of Joanna’s death. No sooner has he recounted Joanna’s story than he asks Gabrielle to marry him, clearly seeking vindication of his decision to reject Joanna in favor of Gabrielle, for he tells her:

²⁵⁸ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 27.

²⁵⁹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 459.

²⁶⁰ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 460.

²⁶¹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 466.

²⁶² Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 466.

“It is for you to condemn or to acquit me.”²⁶³ Thus assailed, Gabrielle responds: “I surrender.”²⁶⁴ In order for the reader to understand this conclusion as a regretful compromise rather than a joyful outcome, one must be critical of Adrian rather than see him as a “hero.” It would be very easy to read the engagement between Adrian and Gabrielle as a resolution in a traditional Victorian novel, in which all is set right through heterosexual coupledness. And yet the final scene careens toward an ending in which we have very little knowledge of Gabrielle’s thoughts, except her pity for Joanna’s tragedy. Furthermore, Adrian’s words dominate their discussion, and he even commands Gabrielle: “Give me my answer—yes or no—now, here, at once.”²⁶⁵ These comments clearly indicate that Adrian’s will has become uppermost in this final exchange, and that his voice and perspective are controlling the scene.

Gabrielle’s final words to Adrian would seem to contradict the idea that she feels coerced or conflicted, since his plea for reassurance that she does not accept him from obligation draws from her the answer: “Not under compulsion, not out of pity, *mon ami*; but because I find nature is too strong for me. Because I find I too love.”²⁶⁶ Even if she does not feel pity, however, the manner in which she describes her feeling is not one of assertion or resolve, but rather that of feeling overwhelmed. In this understanding of Gabrielle’s response, I differ from Catherine Delyfer, who more positively argues that “Joanna’s story as told by Adrian has convinced [Gabrielle] that he (unlike Dax) is a fellow feminist and free thinker.”²⁶⁷ By contrast, I contend that Gabrielle’s surrender is far more ambiguous. If we return to Willcocks’s review with which I began my discussion of *Adrian Savage*, we discover that at least one of Malet’s contemporaries

²⁶³ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 468.

²⁶⁴ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 469.

²⁶⁵ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 469.

²⁶⁶ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 470.

²⁶⁷ Catherine Delyfer, “Cosmopolitan Romance and Feminist Aestheticism in *Adrian Savage*,” in *Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays*, ed. Jane Ford and Alexandra Gray (New York: Routledge, 2019), 122. Delyfer’s interpretation follows her assertion that Gabrielle’s affirmation of her own desire represents her individualism, rather than an uncritical following of popular feminist ideas.

understood the darker implications of the conclusion. Willcocks writes that both Joanna and Gabrielle “were hungry, and by a subtle irony that many readers will miss, both are left unsatisfied—though the one goes to death and the other to a lover. Only the man has his will.”²⁶⁸ Savage, primitive man, then, threatens to impede feminist Modernity because he can recognize, but cannot accept, that life for women may go on “with his own great self left out of it.”²⁶⁹ Unlike *Calmady* and *The Far Horizon*, in which the rebellious characters achieve some amount of successful revision of desire and femininity, *Adrian Savage* seems to offer something of a warning, cautioning against complacency when it comes to the cause of women because there are still those in England living in smothering conditions like Joanna, and even the bold, independent widow in Paris cannot yet have her autonomy and also fulfill her sexual desire. The feminist Madonna of the Future must be venerated, while the Madonna in heaven continues to be glorified, so that the independent woman can find the strength to forge her own path in the company of her sisters.

Deadham Hard: Reimagining Womanhood, Profession, and Desire

In the two novels that followed *Adrian Savage*, Malet returned to reimagining what kinds of life narratives were possible for women in the Victorian period. The first of these novels, *Damaris* (1916), marked Malet’s transition from setting her fictions in England or in European spaces to an exploration of British Imperialism in India in 1864.²⁷⁰ The titular protagonist of this novel is a motherless English girl only five years of age, and once again, as we have seen with Malet’s previous novels, the eponymous character does not occupy the greatest narrative attention. This 1916 novel focuses largely on Damaris’s father Charles Verity, who is stationed at Bhutpur (a

²⁶⁸ Willcocks, “A New Tale,” 107.

²⁶⁹ Malet, *Adrian Savage*, 92.

²⁷⁰ Malet visited India from 1894 to 1895. Anna Catherine Priebe notes: “Though there is little record of this visit in Malet’s non-fictional writings, traces of it can be found in most of the novels that followed.” “‘May I disturb you?’: British Women Writers, Imperial Identities, and the Late Imperial Period, 1880-1940” (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2003), 65.

village over a hundred miles from Hyderabad). For the most part, the novel focuses on Charles's flirtation with the married Henrietta Pereira, a woman with calculated charm whose appearance is perfectly constructed for every situation. Damaris, in spite of her young age, also becomes obsessively attached to Henrietta, falling deathly ill when Henrietta returns to England. Damaris's sickness prompts her father's vow that if God will spare Damaris's life, he will remain celibate. Malet followed this novel of sexual jealousy with a sequel, *Deadham Hard: A Romance* (1919), in which Damaris Verity emerges this time as the focus of the story. As a sequel, however, it does not follow a predictable pattern that reveals how its protagonist develops first as an adolescent and then as a young woman who is ready to take her place in the marriage market. Instead, Damaris, who is now seventeen, does not even initially appear to be the central character of this novel, in which she and her father have returned to England, where they live on the family estate, Deadham Hard. It is this far from ordinary sequel that I examine in this chapter because it breaks new ground in the ways in which it addresses a young woman's determination to authorize her agency in pursuing a profession as well as asserting her sexual desires. As the plot unfolds, we learn that Damaris Verity, who is coming of age in the late 1870s and is the heir to Deadham Hard, decides that the only way to satisfy her personal goals is to take up the "writing of books" as her "vocation."²⁷¹ But as we eventually discover, this decision spurs a further realization that the only means through which she can succeed as a writer is to confront the "mysterious and haunting question of sex" and experience her own libidinal yearnings.²⁷²

The structure of *Deadham Hard*, in which it is originally not clear that Damaris is the protagonist, proves strategic because it continues Malet's project of rewriting conventional aspects of the nineteenth-century English novel, which we recognized particularly in *Calmady*. Now, distanced from the Victorian period by two decades, Malet rewrites the plot of Victorian

²⁷¹ Lucas Malet, *Deadham Hard* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1919), 215.

²⁷² Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 491.

female development as one that, at its core, is a sexual awakening. To do so, *Deadham Hard* defamiliarizes features of both the inheritance plot and the marriage plot that are so common in works we generally associate with Victorian realism. Instead, Malet's narrative draws on the considerable resources of the aesthetic romance, as we have already observed in *Calmady*, in order to rethink the personal and professional opportunities for a young independent woman. Damaris's striving for autonomy is noticeably set at a time prior to the popularization of the professional New Woman author in several well-known feminist novels from the fin de siècle. This earlier period allows Malet to produce a history about a mid-Victorian woman's struggle to realize her independent selfhood prior to the more visible advancements that began to take place in women's lives during the final decades of the nineteenth century.

The 1870s are significant for Malet in relation to decisive shifts that took place in fiction. At the time, the aesthetic romances of Ouida were at the height of their popularity. As I pointed out earlier, Malet was a great admirer of Ouida's extravagant prose. It is no accident that it is in Ouida's aesthetic romance *Othmar* (1885) that we discover a character also named Damaris, although she is a figure whose destiny is the complete reverse of Malet's protagonist in *Deadham Hard*. Ouida's Damaris, who is called "a great heiress in her own little way,"²⁷³ falls in love with Othmar, a married man, but she never expresses to him her individual desires, which in private she makes clear when she admits: "I would give my body and my soul to him if he wished for them."²⁷⁴ Her denial of her own longings is so complete that she permanently silences herself by taking her own life. In this regard, she is similar to Joanna, except that Joanna left a record of herself and her longings in her journal. The fact that Malet reimagines the plot of female desire found in *Othmar*, however, is not to say that *Deadham Hard* constitutes an unbending critique of Ouida's fiction. To the contrary, in her 1919 novel Malet deliberately sets out to show through her beautifully textured prose that there are elements of Ouida's romance

²⁷³ Ouida, *Othmar* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885), 1:111.

²⁷⁴ Ouida, *Othmar*, 3:229.

that provide the representative resources that enable her own Damaris to affirm her passions and become “mistress of her powers, [and] self-realized.”²⁷⁵ To be sure, Damaris Verity’s sexual awakening is hardly idealized. We will see that the life events of Malet’s protagonist reveal that the opportunities for both intimacy and professional success remain especially scarce. Nonetheless, Damaris’s decision to pursue a career as an author and embrace her sexual nature constitutes an important claim about the legitimacy of female agency that was still relevant to ongoing debates about women’s autonomy at the time of *Deadham Hard*’s publication.

In order to foreground the important role of inheritance, Malet’s narrative begins with an account of the ways in which the house at Deadham Hard, a fictional town located in Hampshire that also gives its name to the estate, came into the hands of the Verity family. We learn that Thomas Clarkson Verity purchased the house “in the closing decade of the eighteenth century,”²⁷⁶ a timeline that signals that this is not an ancestral home in the traditional sense of an estate belonging to a family for centuries, such as we saw in *Calmady*. Instead, it was acquired at the time of the French Revolution, a period of political upheaval that undermined the *ancien régime*: “the goodly child Democracy was veritably . . . in act of being born among men.”²⁷⁷ That this transformational historical moment is crucial to the family history becomes clear when we learn that Thomas, a humanist, had enthusiastically “hurried off to Paris after the opening of the National Assembly and fall of the Bastille.”²⁷⁸ Disillusioned by the spectacle of the guillotine, however, he returns to England and purchases the house at Deadham Hard, which is the first thing he sees when he sets foot again in his beloved country. From the beginning, then, the narrative makes it clear that Deadham Hard symbolizes refuge from the political tumult of the world. We discover that Thomas, who never married, left Deadham Hard to his nephew

²⁷⁵ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 433.

²⁷⁶ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 3.

²⁷⁷ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 5.

²⁷⁸ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 5.

Charles, Damaris's father. Charles, who was a Commissioner stationed in India and Afghanistan, finds in Deadham Hard the respite he craves from his own experience of political turmoil (especially the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857), just as Thomas did before him.

We will discover, however, that such an isolated place threatens to stunt the development of Damaris, who is dissatisfied with the lack of opportunities for new experiences in this remote location. I argue, then, that Malet's 1919 novel begins with the history of the house because it eventually makes many striking claims about women's independence, claims that emerge largely through the narrative structure rather than overt polemic. By beginning with a chronicle of the family's genealogy, *Deadham Hard* sets in motion Malet's quiet interrogation of the perpetuation of patriarchal structures at home, in England's empire, and, what is more, in the form of fiction itself. Moreover, *Deadham Hard* contests traditional notions of legitimacy. At the most literal level, we have an estate that belongs to a father with one legitimate child (Damaris). Yet we also soon discover that Charles Verity has fathered an illegitimate son, with whom he has no relationship. On his deathbed, after suffering from a heart attack toward the end of the narrative, Charles designates his male offspring as the next in line after Damaris.

One of the most striking ways that Malet reconfigures narrative form in order to challenge assumptions about gender and agency is by structuring *Deadham Hard* to appear initially to have a male protagonist, Damaris's cousin Tom. Tom Verity is Thomas Clarkson Verity's great-great nephew, who comes to Deadham Hard to stay with his uncle Charles and cousin Damaris before moving to Bombay where he will assume an imperial post. With several chapters focused on his visit, the reader is led to believe that Tom's imperial adventures will be the focus of the narrative, an expectation that is reinforced by the closing lines of the first of the novel's four "Books."²⁷⁹ A local ferryman says to Tom: "[I] [w]ish you a pleasant voyage and a rare good picking up of honours and glories, and gold and silver likewise, there across the seas

²⁷⁹ As one reviewer complained in the *Dial*: "The construction . . . has a tendency to lead down blind alleys. Tom Verity, who enters the second chapter with all the attendant circumstance of a hero, holds the scene for fifty pages and then drops out." Unsigned review of *Deadham Hard*, by Lucas Malet, *Dial* 67, no. 801 (October 18, 1919): 350.

and oceans where you're a-going to."²⁸⁰ When *Deadham Hard* was first published in September 1919 not even a whole year had passed since the horrific events of the First World War had come to an end. It is fair to say that the ferryman's statements about the glories of empire may have seemed to Malet's readers to suggest that one of the arcs of history had been from empire to the First World War. Malet's readers in 1919, however, would no longer have taken for granted Tom's notion in the 1870s that he is going to India as a "natural ruler."²⁸¹ Vincent Sherry asserts that "[g]iven the massive scale of casualties in this first mass war, no degree of Victorian optimism could turn the Allied 'victory' in November 1918 into a new writ of legitimacy or restored warrant of authority for British interests of any far-reaching kind."²⁸²

The narrative shift enacted in the second "Book," which supplants Tom with Damaris as the central figure, addresses this concern about the legitimacy of Britain's empire, though from an unexpected direction. The transition in protagonists replaces a history of empire in relation to men's public lives with a private history of what it meant to be an Englishwoman in the 1870s, a woman who possesses aspirations beyond domesticity. In this way, Britain's patriarchal system that underpins the ideology of empire by claiming that only certain people are qualified to exercise agency is undermined on its own soil through a woman who asserts her rights to autonomy, professional work, and sexual expression. What is more, the narrative of a woman's interior development is implicitly granted the same level of importance as the male adventure plot that it replaces.

Damaris first comes into view in relation to her cousin's visit, and although we are not yet aware that she will be the protagonist, it is clear that *Deadham Hard* has very little to offer a

²⁸⁰ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 63. Readers familiar with *Damaris* would know that in spite of that novel's title, the narrative was in fact more about Charles's exploits in India than his very young daughter. These readers would thus be set up to also expect *Deadham Hard's* plot to focus on foreign conquest.

²⁸¹ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 13.

²⁸² Vincent Sherry, "T. S. Eliot, Late Empire, and Decadence," in *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, ed. Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 112.

young woman who is both intelligent and attractive. We learn that Damaris, whose mother died in childbirth, lived with her father in India until the age of six, and thereafter was educated at a boarding school in Paris. Her first encounters with Deadham Hard were on summer vacations when her Aunt Felicia would bring her back to England. This information reveals that, until recently, Damaris had only a distant connection with the estate. Furthermore, she still feels a profound tie to India, explaining: "All my caring for people, all my thinking, begins there."²⁸³ The idea that she is isolated in the family home becomes evident when we learn that she has no intimate companions except her father, with whom she has an unusually close relationship. Little wonder that the visit from her cousin Tom marks a significant change in her routine; as the narrator notes: "Her world, before his advent, was other than that in which she now dwelt."²⁸⁴ Tom attempts to initiate a flirtation with Damaris, and the narrative teases the reader with the possibility that this might be a cousinship plot such as we find in Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866). Cousin marriages were not uncommon among the upper echelons of Victorian culture because they kept property, possessions, and wealth inside the family. We soon perceive, however, that Damaris is sufficiently self-possessed to respond critically to Tom's gallant overtures. Tom, too, realizes that in his interaction with her "he had not been at all a success."²⁸⁵

Once Tom leaves for India, the narrator depicts Damaris for the first time in a style that suggests that her character is more central to the plot than we previously imagined:

Damaris Verity, resting in a wicker deck-chair in the shade of the great ilex trees, found herself alone, free to follow her own vagrant thoughts, perceptions, imaginations without

²⁸³ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 38.

²⁸⁴ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 74.

²⁸⁵ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 58.

human let or hindrance. Free to dream undisturbed and interrogate both Nature and her own much wondering soul.²⁸⁶

Here, we see that the form that Damaris's freedom takes is not the ability to travel to India like her male cousin; instead, her liberty involves her ability to control her own thoughts and make up her own mind. Moreover, she elevates both her "soul" and "Nature" as subjects worthy of her "interrogation." This is a pivotal moment. The transition to Damaris's "own vagrant thoughts"²⁸⁷—ones that implicitly stray from the path that others assume she should follow—suspends the potential marriage plot with Tom and inaugurates a narrative of female interiority and sexual awakening.

It soon emerges that even before she becomes consciously aware of her sexual nature, in her personal life Damaris is already attracted to fictions that explore dissident forms of desire. Malet revises the familiar narrative destiny of the Victorian female protagonist through explicitly staging Damaris's encounter with a genealogy of fiction within the Romantic tradition. Malet's novel, which is itself subtitled *A Romance*, draws into focus a longer history of this fictional genre that extends earlier than the narrative's implicit references to Ouida. In a scene that is the catalyst for Damaris's erotic awakening, Malet not only draws attention to the relationship between women's lives and fictional forms, but she also indicates some of the specific Victorian novels that *Deadham Hard* is revising. On a day that Damaris finds herself alone in the house, she chooses to enjoy her solitude in reading. We learn about Damaris's literary preferences, with the narrator interjecting a tone of mock disapproval, remarking that it is "undeniable" that Damaris found "'Vathek,' more to her taste than 'Amy Herbert'; and, if the truth must be told, 'The Decameron,' and 'Tristram Shandy' more satisfying to her imagination than 'The Heir of Redcliffe' [sic] or 'The Daisy Chain.'"²⁸⁸ These allusions show that Damaris

²⁸⁶ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 67.

²⁸⁷ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 67.

²⁸⁸ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 101-2.

does not enjoy those works that her former governess Theresa Bilson admiringly considers as designed for “the greater preservation of female innocence.”²⁸⁹ The fictions in question are Elizabeth Sewell’s *Amy Herbert* (1844), along with Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853) and *The Daisy Chain* (1856). Both Sewell and Yonge were extremely popular mid-nineteenth-century authors whose realist novels reflect their dedication to Protestant ideals of virtuous womanhood. The inclusion of Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe* is not surprising, not least because this inheritance plot (with its undeserving male heir) had, according to Amy Curse, “a reception such as has been given to no other book in our language.”²⁹⁰ The narrator’s faux-embarrassment over the fictions that Damaris prefers is derived from the nature of the more shocking content discovered in her favoured stories: the bold sexual tales of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (14th century), Lawrence Sterne’s eccentric *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), and the Gothic romanticism of William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786). That Damaris is delighted by the liberties permissible in narratives of male adventure and finds no enjoyment in marriage plots such as those in *Amy Herbert* and *The Daisy Chain* and a novel about a dastardly male heir clearly indicates her personal desire for a destiny other than the one that is supposed to be shaping her own life.

This scene of reading marks a further turning point that leads to the circumstances of Damaris’s emerging eroticism. It is, noticeably, her longing for India that influences her selection of literary material on this occasion, as the narrator notes: “[o]n this particular morning Damaris elected to explore to the Near East, in the vehicle of Eöthen’s virile and luminous prose.”²⁹¹ Here we discover that Damaris is drawn to English writer and historian Alexander Kinglake’s extremely popular travel narrative, *Eöthen*, published anonymously in 1844. Reading *Eöthen* puts Damaris in a contemplative state; the narrator records: “[Damaris’s]

²⁸⁹ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 101.

²⁹⁰ Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Books* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935), 50.

²⁹¹ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 102.

present mood sent her down to the shore to satisfy, or rather further stimulate, her nostalgia for the East by gazing out to sea.”²⁹² These words remind us of Damaris’s dislocation in rural Hampshire and profound attachment to colonial India. In a striking passage, the narrator reveals the cause of Damaris’s restless mood:

the inward tumult of her awakening womanhood, and still more, perhaps, the tumult of awakening talent which had not as yet found its appointed means of expression. She was driven hither and thither by the push of her individuality to disengage itself from adventitious surroundings and circumstances, and realize its independent existence.²⁹³

As this excerpt clearly shows, Damaris is in the process of becoming a woman capable of exercising her autonomy, and we see that her sexual maturity and cultivation of talent are the core developments that will enable her to actualize her selfhood. That reading about the East spurs Damaris’s tumultuous awakening, which in turn initiates her desire to gaze out to sea, also indicates the way in which her exposure to cultures outside England is key to her desire for something beyond the restrictions of middle-class English femininity.

The immediate step that Damaris takes in response to her tumultuous feelings is to “defy established convention”²⁹⁴ and take a solitary trip to a nearby sandbar where she has never been permitted to venture alone. This “apparently most innocuous form”²⁹⁵ of rebellion brings about Damaris’s discovery that she has a half-brother, Darcy Faircloth, who helps her to return home after she has fallen asleep, lost her shoes and stockings, and become worried because the tide is quickly rising. Darcy is a very attractive and highly successful merchant sea captain. Eventually, Damaris learns the details of her father’s illicit liaison with Darcy’s mother Lesbia, the owner of a public house who at the time was married to a much older man. This revelation at first greatly

²⁹² Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 104.

²⁹³ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 104.

²⁹⁴ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 104.

²⁹⁵ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 104.

disturbs Damaris, who is shocked to uncover this evidence of her father's secret past. This episode is significant, however, for it helps bring to consciousness Damaris's own sexual awakening. The narrator records how deeply Damaris is affected by learning of her father's history: "[i]t came too close, laying rough hands not only upon the deepest of her love and reverence for her father, but upon that still mysterious depth of her own nature, namely her apprehension of passion and of sex."²⁹⁶

Once this initiation occurs, the narrative repeatedly draws attention to Damaris's growing sensitivity to the world of eroticism. The detailed accounts of her sensations bring to mind earlier narratives of sexual development such as Kate Chopin's groundbreaking novel, *The Awakening* (1899), which was very controversial in its day. Yet Malet's narration of Damaris's blossoming womanhood also makes a significant departure from these more familiar accounts by revealing, with almost uncomfortable indirectness, that this young woman is already highly erotic. Moreover, given that her social circle is composed primarily of relatives, Damaris's libidinal energy saturates these close relationships, especially with her father, and now, having met her half-brother, it extends to him as well. References to her childhood in India, furthermore, remind us that as a little girl she had an erotic attachment even then: her passionate obsession with her father's romantic interest, Henrietta Pereira. This is one of the key ways that Malet revises the plot of the young Victorian woman: Damaris has always been a very sexual being, complicating the idealization of the pure maiden existing in a state of virginal purity.

I want to focus in particular on Damaris's attraction to Henrietta Pereira, in which we discover the dangers of a female eroticism that is directed at a woman who, like Helen in *Calmady*, is entirely absorbed in herself and has no true affection to offer in return. In *Deadham Hard*, Malet once again presents this form of sexual attachment as completely

²⁹⁶ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 179.

natural, and yet Damaris must ultimately reject Henrietta because she represents a form of womanhood that Damaris does not wish to embody: artificial female agency acquired through sexual manipulation of men. Following her discovery that she has a half-brother, Damaris, her father, and his best friend Colonel Carteret set out on a European trip, spending extensive time in Paris. Once there, Charles unexpectedly encounters Henrietta, and she is subsequently reunited with Damaris. Initially, Damaris still feels an attraction to Henrietta: “Wasn’t her darling Henrietta a being altogether captivating and unique? . . . Henrietta enthralled her eyes, enthralled her affection.”²⁹⁷ Henrietta’s appeal, as we learn, is derived from her “charming” superficiality: she is a person “in which all irregularities and originalities of Nature had suffered obliteration by the action of art.”²⁹⁸ It becomes clear that this instance of cosmetic femininity is rather different from the form that we found in Poppy St. John: it is not representative of true artistry, nor is it united with nobility, but is simply manipulative artifice. Once she makes the discovery that there is no substance beneath Henrietta’s veneer, Damaris feels as if she has been betrayed, and she begins the painful process of detaching herself and surveying Henrietta from a critical distance. Her definitive rejection of Henrietta in the novel’s sequence of final episodes is one of the key developments that marks Damaris’s successful claiming of her own agency. In this scene, Damaris repudiates Henrietta, describing her as “soulless, finished, and exquisitely artificial to her finger-tips.”²⁹⁹

The trip to Paris also brings about another important development for Damaris: her “awakening talent” finds a possible medium for its development. Charles begins work on a project that draws on his experience as a Commissioner in the British Raj: he writes a “history of the reign of Shere Ali.”³⁰⁰ Damaris acts as an amanuensis to her father: the narrator notes that

²⁹⁷ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 224.

²⁹⁸ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 219.

²⁹⁹ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 494.

³⁰⁰ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 205.

her work consists of writing from “dictation, verifying names and dates, [and] checking references and quotations.”³⁰¹ Damaris’s role as secretary to a male intellect marks one of Malet’s many meditations on this figure, one instance of which, of course, we encountered with Joanna in *Adrian Savage*. Furthermore, Malet’s plot brings to mind certain Victorian novels that feature women whose talents are subjugated by men, such as—to give a well-known example—Dorothea Brooke’s arduous transcription of her pompous husband Edward Casaubon’s tiresome work, *The Key to All Mythologies*, in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1871). For both Dorothea and Damaris, it is necessary to be freed from their respective duties in order for each woman to develop her independence. Although after Casaubon’s death Dorothea’s intelligence is not directed into a professional project of her own, in the wake of her father’s demise Damaris will put her literary training toward her own vocational pursuits. Here, then, Damaris’s role as assistant is generative: it shapes the way in which Damaris starts to imagine a future for herself. The narrator notes: “Ambition prodded her on.—For mightn’t she aspire to do it too, some day? Mightn’t, granted patience and application, the writing of books prove to be her business, her vocation?”³⁰² Just as Damaris will inherit her father’s property and replace him as the owner of the estate, so too will she inherit the skill of writing and “replace” Charles as an author. Damaris’s apprenticeship shows that she is acquiring a kind of agency that we are meant to see as associated with a man’s world, but which by way of her awakening sexuality she will possess and wield distinctly as a woman. Damaris’s desire to have a profession, moreover, is another disruption to the marriage plot. Instead of fantasizing about romantic possibilities and nuptial bliss, Damaris imagines a life of professional creative work. Indeed, she is so occupied with her ambition that she fails to recognize that Marshall Wace, the cousin of Henrietta’s husband, is courting her.

³⁰¹ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 214.

³⁰² Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 214-15.

Yet Damaris's eager devotion to assisting her father in fashioning beautiful prose is not matched by an equally energetic abandonment to experiencing her erotic desires. Here, it is necessary to focus on one of the many romantic prospects that the narrative presents for Damaris: Colonel Carteret, who we ultimately discover becomes the object of her desire. Colonel Carteret is a man in his late forties who served with Charles in India. As a little girl, Damaris cared deeply for Carteret, and she thinks of him as "the man with the blue eyes."³⁰³ In this novel of libidinal attachment to relatives, Damaris's potential romantic partners are all closely connected to the family: her cousin Tom, Wace, and Carteret. The latter two, assuredly, are not blood relatives, but Wace is clearly not a contender: the narrator consistently describes the "theatrical and the parsonic" Wace in a mocking tone.³⁰⁴ Carteret, by contrast, is always very kind and gentlemanly, is described as a man with "grace of bearing and of person . . . physical distinction and charm."³⁰⁵ He begins to discover that his feelings for Damaris have shifted into entirely new sensations of attraction and desire. Damaris finds that she has confusing feelings for Carteret as well, but the first time that she fully recognizes her responsiveness to his demonstrations of passion reveals that any personal indulgence in sexuality is likely to endanger her autonomy.

We witness her loss of self-control when, following Carteret's gift of an extravagant string of pearls, she first recognizes her attraction to him, and the narrator notes that "[t]he visible, tangible attributes of the man—as man—presented themselves in fine relief, delighting her, stirring her heretofore dormant senses, begetting in her needs and desires undreamed of until now, and, even now, in substance incomprehensible. She was enchanted, fevered, triumphant."³⁰⁶ In this long scene that narrates Damaris's turbulent emotions, the reader

³⁰³ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 217.

³⁰⁴ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 229.

³⁰⁵ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 331.

³⁰⁶ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 331.

witnesses her transition from exultation to confusion: “this riot of the blood and heady rapture, this conflict of shame and triumph in which the animal part of one has so loud a word to say—she didn’t like it. . . . Neither did she like herself in relation to it—like this unknown, storm-swept Damaris.”³⁰⁷ Here, we see that Damaris does not enjoy feeling overcome with strong desire because her sense of self is overpowered. Damaris’s halting progress toward choosing to embrace her sexuality is due in part to her fear that experiencing her longings will undermine her increasingly daring assertions of independence. I make this point not only to emphasize not only the gravity of Damaris’s conflict with embracing her sexual nature, but also to anticipate my discussion of the ways in which this tension is manifested in *Deadham Hard*’s conclusion, where the immediate result of expressing her passion involves ceding some of her agency to Carteret.

Damaris’s individuality has been developing throughout the narrative, but it is in the novel’s final episodes that she fully embraces her autonomous selfhood. Once they have returned to *Deadham Hard*, Charles, very unexpectedly, has a heart attack. The family physician tends to him, but he is only given a few days to live. Charles makes it clear to Damaris that she will inherit the family property. His death puts Damaris into a state of deep mourning. Eventually, however, she faces her new position, having rapidly become mistress of herself and of the house. She goes out into nature in a deliberate effort to “begin again.”³⁰⁸ She reflects that she needs to take responsibility over her domestic establishment, but she also longs for more to do than simply run the house. The narrator records Damaris’s reflection: “[h]er life had been full, it must find fresh purpose, fresh interest and occupation, in a word, be refilled.”³⁰⁹ It is at this juncture that the excitement she had earlier felt at the prospect of authorship reasserts itself: “[I]terature allured her. She dreamed of wonderful tellings, dreamed of the engrossing

³⁰⁷ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 331.

³⁰⁸ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 500.

³⁰⁹ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 491.

joys of the written word.”³¹⁰ That it has taken Damaris so long to arrive at this point following her initial attraction to authorship (about two years have passed) indicates how critical it was that she be freed from her father’s authority in order to pursue individual action.

Becoming a writer, however, will hardly be a seamless process for Damaris. With her renewed interest in pursuing a literary vocation comes the blunt recognition that she is not equipped for authorship. This revelation occurs when she muses about what kind of fiction she will write, asking herself: “[I]n what form—poetry, essay, history, novel?—The extreme limitation of her own knowledge, or rather the immensity of her own ignorance, confronted her.”³¹¹ Here, she becomes aware that the area of her life that requires her greatest increase in experience is “the mysterious and haunting question of sex.”³¹² The narrative therefore makes a striking claim about female authorship: in order to succeed, the woman writer must act on her eroticism. In this regard, Malet is rewriting George Eliot’s plot in *Middlemarch*. For if, as David Kurnick asserts, “the erotic is the ground of Dorothea’s exclusion from insight,”³¹³ Malet reconfigures this relationship and imagines female desire as the means through which Damaris must acquire the knowledge that she lacks. Moreover, as Damaris muses, she must accept her erotic longings in order to have the chance to “play an individual part in the beautiful, terrible earthly scene.”³¹⁴ Sexual experience is thus shown to have an instrumental purpose, one that facilitates maturity of insight and personal growth, even while making it clear that this wished-for encounter may prove painful and involve risks for a young woman.

Furthermore, counter to the expectations that surrounded marriageable young women of Damaris’s generation—as Regenia Gagnier reminds us: “the official Victorian view of female

³¹⁰ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 491.

³¹¹ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 491.

³¹² Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 491.

³¹³ David Kurnick, “An Erotics of Detachment: *Middlemarch* and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice,” *ELH* 74, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 584.

³¹⁴ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 492.

sexuality was that it did not exist except for purposes of procreation”³¹⁵—the narrative demonstrates that her sexuality has no connection with any inborn yearning to bear children and enjoy motherhood. Instead, Damaris’s erotic passions serve self-expressive and creative purposes, and it is even suggested that they will assist her in meeting her professional goals. Here, we have a formulation about sexuality and art that is aligned with aestheticism. Gagnier has also written about the frequent way in which “art for art’s sake was allied with a defense of sex for sex’s sake, or non-reproductive sex.”³¹⁶ In Malet’s formulation, we have something like sex for art’s sake: a championing of creative productivity that is enabled first by the experience of pleasure. Malet’s narrative makes professional success dependent upon experiencing erotic satisfaction, thereby revealing that the two are necessary corollaries.

The narrator explains why Damaris’s success is intertwined with her sexuality, as we can see in the language that describes the young woman’s return to *Deadham Hard*: “[a]nother Damaris came home to the Damaris who had set forth—a Damaris rested, refreshed, invigorated, no longer a passive but an active agent.”³¹⁷ And once she enters her property, she is immediately confronted by all of its symbolic meaning: “The house was stronger than she. But—but—only stronger, surely, if she consented to turn craven and give way to it?—Whereupon she consciously, of set purpose, defied the house, denied its right to browbeat thus and enslave her.”³¹⁸ This passage dramatizes a struggle for power with the house in which Damaris faces the menacing potential of patriarchal subjugation that threatens to overpower her in spite of the fact that she is now the owner. Damaris is refusing, as the title of this romance implies, this hard deadening of her subjectivity. Just as Damaris took the place of the “hero” Tom as the focus of

³¹⁵ Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 157.

³¹⁶ Regenia Gagnier, “Productive Bodies, Pleasured Bodies: On Victorian Aesthetics,” in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 284.

³¹⁷ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 493.

³¹⁸ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 493-94.

the narrative, she now also takes the place of her father as the mistress of the Hard not only in name, but also as its “active agent.”

Still, in the light of this decisive victory the novel’s final pages offer something of a conundrum for the reader. Damaris boldly takes action on her resolve to experience the world of sex by expressing, that very afternoon, her desire to Carteret. While this is an audacious move, the fact that Damaris’s erotic choice is her father’s best friend—a man almost three decades older than herself and something of a father figure—does not resonate with the same level of defiant autonomy as her other acts of agency leading up to this point. Patricia Lorimer Lundberg, in one of the few scholarly discussions of *Deadham Hard*, laments this conclusion, asserting that such an ending exposes Malet to the criticism that she “lived a life wider and more significant than that she affords her protagonists.”³¹⁹ Anna Catherine Priebe takes a similar view, reading the closing passages as a plain indication that Damaris has chosen “the comparative safety of marriage with Colonel Carteret.”³²⁰ Indubitably, the ending displays the conventionality that Lundberg and Priebe mourn. But this scene requires some further unpacking. Carteret initiates a mutual confession of attraction by declaring: “I love you.”³²¹ After a substantial explanation about the development of his feelings, he discloses that he has been tormented by “[t]he seven devils of desire,” and then declares: “of which you knew nothing, bless you.”³²² Damaris, who has been silent, now cuts him off and counters: “I’m not sure that I do know nothing.”³²³

To be sure, Damaris’s unexpected rebuttal of Carteret’s assumption about her innocence is powerful, but her final words to him, that it is “beautiful” to have him “for quite [her] own,”³²⁴

³¹⁹ Lundberg, *An Inward Necessity*, 374.

³²⁰ Anna Catherine Priebe, “May I Disturb You?,” 73.

³²¹ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 502.

³²² Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 503.

³²³ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 503.

definitely imply the more permanent arrangement that Lundberg and Priebe lament. At the very least, Damaris's dissident eroticism (in relation to her father, her brother, and Henrietta) has been superseded by what promises to be a conventional heterosexual alliance. It is, though, worth bearing in mind that this episode wraps up very quickly, with no opportunity for the narrator to comment upon the prospect of this union any further. Without guidance from the narrator, it remains difficult to determine what tone the scene is striking in relation to the events that have come before. The reader is left to decide whether one is to sense complacency in the union with Carteret, or, at a minimum, be regretful that the ostensibly charming and attractive fiancé is undeniably the best partner that the novel offers. In the end, we are left in suspense, not entirely sure what the future might hold for an unconventional young woman who has tried to lend personal and professional authority to her longings. It remains unknown whether Carteret's hellish "seven devils of desire" will satisfy or destroy this young literary author and female heir who has finally emerged as the sexually assertive protagonist of *Deadham Hard*.

Conclusion

Although Janet Courtney enshrined Malet as a "novelist of the nineties," we have seen that *Calmady*, the full-length fiction that was most decisive in determining this label, far from marking a high point after which Malet's fiction declined, instead inaugurated a wholesale rethinking in her corpus of Victorian notions of womanhood. *Calmady's* affirming representation of non-normative sexualities and unorthodox bodies set the tone for the concerns that Malet explored in her subsequent novels. Furthermore, it should be clear that her conversion to Roman Catholicism in no way heralded a backing down from the bold depictions of taboo subjects contained in *Calmady's* pages. Instead, Malet continued to break ground in

³²⁴ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 503.

terms of the kinds of material that was acceptable for a woman novelist to represent. While we also discover very explicit engagements with certain theological concepts, especially around the figure of the Virgin Mary, Malet uses her critique of Puritanism and her innovative Marianism in order to sanction her rebellious women characters who assert their individuality, claim their eroticism, and pursue opportunities that enable some measure of independence. Malet's rewriting of Victorian womanhood also informed her meditations on the ways in which new female subjectivities could be constructed in the early twentieth century. Even when her setting is the 1900s, she draws on the representational resources of aestheticism and decadence.

In the sequence of novels that we have looked at in this chapter, we have seen that Malet's 1901 novel, set in the mid-nineteenth century, is followed by two fictions that are more invested in the ways in which the turn of the twentieth century was the site of an entanglement of Victorian and modern ideals of womanhood. Then in *Deadham Hard* she returns to reimagining a Victorian past that is reminiscent of *Calmady* in its explicit "Romance" mode. In contrast with her preceding novels, we discover that one distinctive aspect of *Deadham Hard* is that Malet's narrative is occasionally self-conscious about the distance between the narrator and the reader in 1919, and the novel's setting in the 1870s. The significance of this self-conscious reflection on the Victorian past appears at a moment of narrative intrusion that is uncharacteristic of Malet's fiction. In a passage reflecting on Damaris's sexual awakening, the narrator remarks that women who have "rarer intelligence, [and] more lively moral and spiritual perceptions, than those possessed by the great average of her countrymen or countrywomen" can be considered either "handicapped or favoured" by these distinguishing qualities.³²⁵ The handicap, of course, refers to the censure that women experience when they do not conform to traditional ideals of femininity. The narrator then breaks in with commentary of her own: "in mid-nineteenth century the handicap rather than the favour counted even more heavily than it

³²⁵ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 175.

does to-day, though even to-day, as some of us know to our cost, it still counts not a little!"³²⁶

This distinctly female narrator is emphatically pointing out that the conditions of women's lives have certainly improved since Damaris's struggle for autonomy, but the narrator nonetheless simultaneously unites the reader with Damaris through the reality that women still, in many cases, must pay a "cost" for those distinctions that set them apart from those women who simply conform to orthodox expectations. In this passage, then, it is evident that Malet regarded the lives of Englishwomen as connected across the half century that witnessed the securing of married women's property rights and achieving the (partial) suffrage. Moreover, it goes without saying that she believed that a narrative focusing on a woman in the 1870s still had relevance to her audience almost two decades after the death of Queen Victoria. We are thus reminded of how carefully Malet thought about women's lived experiences, the possibilities and restrictions discovered in the milieu of Victorian femininities, and the relevance of narratives of Victorian womanhood to ongoing debates about women's agency and autonomy in the early twentieth century.

After *Deadham Hard*, Malet entered into a new and final phase of her oeuvre. She completed three more novels before her death in 1931, and she left an unfinished manuscript that her adopted cousin Gabrielle completed and published posthumously the following year.³²⁷ The fictions that she produced after the Great War no longer explore womanhood in the nineteenth century, but instead examine the time before, during, and just after the war. In these narratives, moreover, we find a bleaker vision of women's lives than the refashioning of Victorian womanhood that we discover in the fictions that I have discussed in this chapter. For example, in Malet's final completed novel, *The Dogs of Want* (1924), we learn that during the war the protagonist, Barbara Heritage, had a job with a good income. But the return of the soldiers in peacetime led to the loss of her professional position, and she now sees "the dogs of

³²⁶ Malet, *Deadham Hard*, 175.

³²⁷ Lucas Malet (completed by Gabrielle Vallings), *The Private Life of Mr. Justice Syme* (London: Hutchinson, 1932).

want” constantly at her heels. At the end of the narrative, to achieve the security that she cannot attain on her own, Barbara agrees to marry a man whom she does not love. We see, then, that the definitive separation from the Victorian period marked by the Great War was reflected in Malet’s focus on a corresponding shift in the lives of women that disrupted the trajectory from Victorian to modern womanhood. In addition to exploring a new phase in the lives of Englishwomen, in *The Dogs of Want* Malet registers her familiarity with the new generation of women authors, featuring Barbara reading Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* (1922). This contemporary allusion signals that Malet was just as interested in the progress of women in literature as she had been in her remarkable essay in 1888. It is possible that Malet was also quietly indicating that she had not been chastened by a review in the *New York Times* of the novel that she had published the previous year, *The Survivors* (1923), about which the critic had complained: “while not quite so hard to read as Virginia Woolf’s terrible ‘Jacob’s Room,’ [*The Survivors*] yet presents innumerable shocks and irritations and bewilderments.”³²⁸ Although Malet had not chosen to “make it new” in the same manner as Woolf and her modernist contemporaries, we can see in this reviewer’s assessment that Malet had remained an active refashioner of her own style, and had developed a narrative mode that bore comparison with Woolf. It is evident that Malet is an author whose fiction was still as capable of “shocking” her audience in the 1920s as it had done four decades before.

³²⁸ Unsigned review of *The Survivors*, by Lucas Malet, *New York Times*, June 18, 1923, 12.

Chapter Two
Netta Syrett, the Middlebrow Woman Aesthete,
and English Fiction, 1896-1916

[Bridget and Miss Miles] talked of time-tables, of the iniquities of the Third Form, and of the chances of the Examinations, during tea.

“What are you going to do on Monday?” Miss Miles said, as she rose to go. Monday was a holiday in the schools. “Won’t you come to an extension lecture with me in the evening?”

“Thank you. I’ve saved half-a-crown, and I’m going to the Wagner Concert,” Bridget answered smiling, as she shook hands.

—Netta Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault* (1896)¹

In Netta Syrett’s first novel, *Nobody’s Fault* (1896), Bridget Ruan is a protagonist who not only pursues autonomy and intellectual fulfillment, but who also seeks aesthetic experiences and a rich emotional life. A secondary school teacher living by herself in a London flat, Bridget yearns for more to occupy her days than the “time-tables” and “Examinations” referred to in the passage above. In this pivotal scene, her colleague Miss Miles has been encouraging Bridget to attend debates about sexual equality or join a society that promotes women’s rights, but Bridget is unmotivated by these prospects. Bridget, a woman whose highest goal is to be a successful author of fiction, instead craves experiences that will bring her into contact with beauty and art: “I will write—but first I must have life—experience.”² Miss Miles’s final attempt is to invite Bridget to an extension lecture, which was an evening class for people who worked during the day. As we can see, however, Bridget elects to spend her time in a rather different manner: at a Wagner concert.

I begin with this episode because it draws into focus some of the central concerns of Syrett’s fiction that are also foundational to my argument. Bridget and Miss Miles are both single women with professional careers, maintaining their own flats in London. These details

¹ Netta Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault* (London: John Lane, 1896), 107.

² Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 66.

draw attention to what, at the time of the novel's publication in 1896, were all recent developments in the opportunities available to women in England. As Martha Vicinus observes: "Half a century of agitation, work, and education had radically changed conditions for [women]."³ Bridget, in the words of her best friend's father, is "one of the curious developments for which this very remarkable end of the century is responsible."⁴ The novel is deeply invested in exploring the unprecedented modes of self-expression available to a woman in the 1890s, as well as addressing the challenges she faces in her efforts to bring about her personal and professional desires. While her colleague Miss Miles is outwardly similar to Bridget, they have divergent ideas about what constitutes a meaningful existence. Miss Miles finds purpose in belonging to a Humanist group that promotes social reform and supports votes for women. Bridget, however, is not content to spend her free time on social and political causes. Rather, she wishes to embrace "life," exclaiming that she wants "[p]eople—experience—opportunities;—love, perhaps!" and she continues: "a *life*—a real life outside, with joys and sorrows of one's own."⁵ Bridget believes that she will find this kind of meaningful experience by attending a Wagner concert, and as the narrative progresses, we discover that she is correct: enjoying Wagner's music is the catalyst for her erotic awakening, her aesthetic satisfaction, and her artistic success.

This remarkable novel, which I discuss in greater detail below, stands at the start of a long, distinguished, yet critically neglected career. And I want to reflect on the broader scope of Syrett's oeuvre before discussing the full-length fictions besides *Nobody's Fault* that I wish to explore in this chapter. Syrett wrote thirty-eight novels, at least twenty-seven short stories, twenty books for children, a handful of plays, and a literary memoir during a remarkably long career that spanned five decades (1890-1940). Within these various literary forms, Syrett is

³ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 1.

⁴ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 82.

⁵ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 106.

repeatedly interested in portraying the lives of self-assertive women. Her short stories investigate the female psyche. Her first drama, *The Finding of Nancy*, won the Playgoer's Club Award in 1902 for best new play, but due to its controversial portrayal of liberated womanhood (including extramarital sexuality), its lack of a substantial part for a male actor, and its deviation from the kind of realism that was popular in the theatre at the time, it never received more than one performance.⁶ Her books for children include such intriguing topics as the *Story of St. Catherine of Siena* (1910), in which Catherine's unusual authority as a woman in the medieval Roman Catholic Church is highlighted and praised.

When we consider that Syrett wrote almost forty novels, it is striking that, with the exception of her final full-length fiction *Gemini* (1940), every other one of these works features a woman, and even *Gemini* divides the narrative perspective between the central male and female characters. It is clear, therefore, that within every genre to which Syrett turned her hand, her primary preoccupation was with exploring the experiences, desires, professional aspirations, and interior lives of women. It is also the case that, in an overwhelming number of these novels, Syrett is most interested in investigating the period between 1880 and 1900 as a time when women could construct their lives in entirely new ways. Within these decades, Syrett examines several different late-Victorian cultural movements, and explores what each has to offer to her rebellious women characters. Repeatedly, the narratives affirm that aestheticism and decadence are the movements that provide the most satisfying and liberating resources to her protagonists, such as the decadent music of Wagner featured in the opening passage. At the same time, Syrett's prose style does not replicate the formal features of aesthetic or decadent fiction, but is instead in a realist middlebrow register that make her narratives of women's

⁶ For an excellent discussion of this play see Tracy Davis, "The Finding of Nancy," in *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Performance* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012). Mabel Beardsley (Aubrey Beardsley's sister) performed the role of Violet Stuart alongside Beerbohm Tree as Count Karl. Syrett records that the play, which was performed once at St. James's Theatre, received a bad notice from Clement Scott about its immorality, which she believes contributed to the theatre deciding not to give it further performances. In addition, she records that a mother of one of her students (she taught in London at the Polytechnic School for Girls) must have seen the notice, and Syrett was subsequently asked to resign her post, after which she became a full-time writer, and fully dependent on the money that she earned from her writing. See Netta Syrett, *The Sheltering Tree* (London: Bles, 1939), 124-26.

liberation through art and beauty accessible to a wide audience. Although scholarly engagement with Syrett's oeuvre remains limited, within the critical work that examines her fiction, there is a tendency to discuss Syrett as a New Woman author, since her fiction is in a realist style and narrates the lives of unconventional women. This chapter explores how these fictions also reveal that Syrett's women protagonists find the greatest source of personal liberation in the transgressive art of aestheticism and decadence, rather than aligning themselves with social causes like their New Woman counterparts. I examine the manner in which Syrett's narratives repeatedly imagine various ways in which their women characters can refashion aestheticism and decadence for their feminist ends. Moreover, I argue that Syrett's fictions enable us to see how decadence, which is typically associated with male practitioners, was appealing to certain women writers, challenging the traditional notion that decadence is inherently at odds with feminist goals and aims.

Syrett's Feminist Refashioning of Aestheticism and Decadence

Syrett's novels explore the cultures of aestheticism and decadence in ways that make clear that she was intimately acquainted with these movements. Moreover, her representations of these alternative forms of culture demonstrate that her understanding of the relationship between aestheticism and decadence aligns with the ways in which Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer characterize them. Psomiades and Schaffer explain that aestheticism articulates an interest in "artifice, intense experience, the mixing of beauty and strangeness, and the desire to experience life itself as art."⁷ They assert that decadence extends these interests and also includes a "fascination with the unnatural, death, decay, the body, and the exotic other."⁸ This interest amplifies what Arthur Symons, in his foundational 1893 essay on decadence, called its

⁷ Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer, Introduction to *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 3.

⁸ Psomiades and Schaffer, Introduction to *Women and British Aestheticism*, 3.

“spiritual and moral perversity.”⁹ In Syrett’s fiction, aestheticism tends to be more closely aligned with natural beauty, domesticity, and English culture, while decadence represents the more provocative possibilities discovered in pure artifice, the public realm, and French or other foreign works of art. In general, her women characters combine aspects of both movements in order to authorize their unconventional desires, and typically the affirmation of the female body constitutes a crucial revision to the tendency in both aestheticism and decadence to elide corporeal femininity and fixate exclusively on feminine artifice.

At the fin de siècle, Syrett was hardly alone in posing the crucial question of how feminists might engage with challenging forms of art. In the last twenty years, several groundbreaking studies have made clear that many women were strongly drawn to the ideas of art for art’s sake. Less scholarship, however, has explored the attraction that some women also felt to decadent forms of culture. To Talia Schaffer, the women writers who were most strongly noted as aesthetes “chose to participate in a high-art tradition rather than a political movement.”¹⁰ Schaffer, however, finds it difficult to see how decadence, which she associates with a masculinist sexualization of femininity, was of interest to female authors, since she sees the movement as “constructed to exclude women writers.”¹¹ But as Bridget’s decision to go to the Wagner concert makes evident, there were aspects of this potentially misogynist development in art that were of interest to feminist authors. It has, to be sure, taken a while for modern scholars to understand that women writers and intellectuals had an investment in decadence. As Linda K. Hughes has demonstrated, the pervasive notion of decadence “as a kind of exclusive male club”—one shaped, for example, by the works of Baudelaire, Swinburne, and Beardsley—is

⁹ Arthur Symons, “The Decadent Movement in Literature,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 87 (1893): 859. Symons rewrote and expanded this essay in 1900, renaming it *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*.

¹⁰ Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 25.

¹¹ Schaffer, *Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, 45.

undermined by “[w]omen poets of the fin de siècle [who] thought otherwise.”¹² In addition, Joseph Bristow has argued that “several women writers were linked prominently with decadence,” and he has traced the way in which certain women authors who appeared in the *Yellow Book*—the avant-garde periodical published by the Bodley Head—were foundational to making the journal “look as if it were the quintessential organ of these ubiquitously decadent times.”¹³ Syrett’s repeated, careful, and nuanced exploration of the resources that her women characters discover in decadence constitutes an intriguing record of the manner in which one English woman saw in decadence powerful resources for liberating women’s self-expression, creativity, and sexual assertiveness. At the same time, these narratives uncover and reject the misogyny that Schaffer rightly recognizes was also deeply embedded in decadent culture.

In this chapter, I examine five novels that Syrett published between 1896 and 1916: *Nobody’s Fault*, *The Child of Promise* (1907), *Anne Page* (1908), *The Victorians: The Development of a Modern Woman* (1915), and its sequel *Rose Cottingham Married* (1916), which I discuss in the conclusion. I have selected these five fictions because they illuminate Syrett’s commitment to exploring a variety of ways in which women could experience liberation through their encounters with forms of aesthetic and decadent culture. The four novels published in the twentieth century also illustrate that Syrett’s later fictions repeatedly turn to the 1880s and 1890s as a period when a generation of young women discovered their own creativity and critical authority as aesthetes, and could accordingly develop their lives outside the conventional constraints of marriage. Taken together these five novels demonstrate Syrett’s dedication to an accessible middlebrow style. At the same time, they also reveal an increasing confidence in her narrative voice, reflected in her incisive wit.

¹² Linda K. Hughes, “Feminizing Decadence,” in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 119. Hughes’s chapter is about the fascinating poet Graham R. Tomson who later published as Rosamund Marriott Watson.

¹³ Joseph Bristow, “Female Decadence,” in *The History of British Women’s Writing, 1880-1920*, ed. Holly A. Laird (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 85. Bristow’s discussion looks at George Egerton, Charlotte Mew, Ménie Muriel Dowie, and Victoria Cross (Annie Sophie Cory).

The five novels that I explore in this chapter reveal a continuity in Syrett's thematic preoccupations as well as in her prose style, while also demonstrating the numerous distinct ways that she reconstructed aestheticism and decadence toward feminist ends. *Nobody's Fault* tells the story of Bridget Ruan, who, as I have indicated, aspires to authorship, and who finds inspiration in the decadent music of Wagner. At the same time, the novel takes pains to distinguish Wagner's music from a different form of decadence that is associated with a milieu of male authors who indulge in the superficial manipulation of language and treat women as art objects. This elitist kind of decadence is thoroughly denounced as destructive to Bridget's personal longings and professional goals. Syrett's first novel thus demonstrates her interest in negotiating the transgressive potential and the misogynist tendencies of decadence. The next novel I examine, *The Child of Promise*, narrates the way in which the protagonist Natasha's early life in a communist colony offers no personal fulfillment, and she instead finds inspiration in *Jane Eyre* (1847), and eventually in the decadent art and literature that a dandy-aesthete from outside the colony shares with her. Natasha embodies the paradox of possessing an unaffected artifice that makes her appear as if she were fashioned by a decadent artist, but because it is not constructed, her natural female body is foregrounded rather than elided. Her bold sexuality, too, is natural rather than deliberately transgressive, again affirming Natasha's unaffected nature.

In *Anne Page*, the protagonist is a middle-aged woman whose three-year affair with a French artist forms the unexpected basis for her development of a deep empathy for her fellow human beings that is grounded in a love of beauty. Anne identifies with French decadent fiction, but she joins to it her love of beauty in nature, thereby creating a form of aestheticism in which symbolic femininity is invested with an actual female body. Anne's non-linear narrative foregrounds her autonomy rather than placing an emphasis on a romantic trajectory. *The Victorians* returns to the bildungsroman form that Syrett used in *Nobody's Fault* and *The Child of Promise*. In this novel that displays Syrett's maturity of style in her confident wit, she

imagines an aestheticism that is imparted to the protagonist, Rose, by a young woman who is both a romantic friend, and her cultural mentor. Syrett thus refashions Greek love into an intimate connection between women that fosters not only Rose's sexual awakening, but also nourishes her intellectual development, resulting in Rose's successful publication of a novel that features a modernist preoccupation with interiority. Syrett thus locates the modern womanhood of the title within a female homoerotic aestheticism. The chapter's conclusion explores the continuation of Rose's narrative in *Rose Cottingham Married*, and shows how aestheticism helps Rose to reestablish her sense of autonomy after her marriage to a socialist leader threatens to reduce her to little more than a domestic maid. I focus on the novel's culmination at the time in which it was written, depicting what it means for Rose to experience the beginning of the Great War, which amplifies her identity as a mother, and indicates that a profound shift was taking place in women's lives at the time of this military struggle.

The details of Syrett's early writing career reveal that she was publishing her fiction in venues associated with aestheticism and decadence. Her short story, "Thy Heart's Desire," appeared in the second volume of the *Yellow Book* (1894-1897), which, as students of the period know well, was an illustrated quarterly that made an indelible mark when it first appeared in April 1894 with its audacious content and an outrageous cover designed by Aubrey Beardsley.¹⁴ This publication marked Syrett's first alliance with the Bodley Head, the prestigious publishing firm that produced the periodical, and which featured two more of her short stories in its seventh (1895) and twelfth (1897) volumes.¹⁵ John Lane was the Bodley Head's innovative publisher who made a name for himself in the 1890s as a champion of a bold new generation of writers. Lane was not afraid to produce controversial and experimental art and fiction. His list

¹⁴ Beardsley was the art editor for only the first year because in 1895, when Wilde was put on trial for "gross indecency," Beardsley's connection to Wilde by way of his illustrations for Wilde's play *Salome* made him a liability to the magazine.

¹⁵ "A Correspondence," *Yellow Book* 7 (London: John Lane, 1895): 150-73, and "Far Above Rubies," *Yellow Book* 12 (London: John Lane, 1897): 250-72.

included such authors as Oscar Wilde, Richard Le Gallienne, Arthur Symons, and Michael Field (the professional name of the co-authors Katharine Bradley and her niece, Edith Cooper). Lane selected *Nobody's Fault* (1896) as the twentieth volume in his esteemed *Keynotes* series, which was inspired by the sensational success of a collection of short stories by George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne)¹⁶ bearing the title *Keynotes*. Lane commissioned Beardsley, who had created the provocative cover of Egerton's volume, to design the subsequent *Keynotes* books.¹⁷ This remarkable series had a central role to play in British decadence. Kirsten MacLeod notes that decadence "became synonymous" with the Bodley Head, and that the "launching" of the *Keynotes* series was viewed as an indication that decadence had become "an industry of its own."¹⁸ The inclusion of *Nobody's Fault* in this series signals that Syrett's novel belonged to this decadent milieu.

Syrett, the New Woman, and Middlebrow Fiction

Syrett's dedication to writing about women and her investment in fin-de-siècle culture focuses our attention on two deeply significant aspects of her fiction. The manner in which she narrates these topics reveals a further dimension of her oeuvre that is worthy of careful attention: Syrett writes in a style that is direct and realist. This straightforward prose does not seem to correspond immediately with the aesthetic and decadent culture that her women characters enjoy, such as the thrilling music of Wagner, the sensual poetry of Algernon Charles Swinburne, the aesthetic novels of Ouida, and the erotic black-and-white drawings of Beardsley. Given these thematic preoccupations, one might expect Syrett to employ the archaic language, esoteric allusions, and elaborate descriptions of perversity and decay such as we find in

¹⁶ Born Mary, she instead liked to call herself Chav or Chavvy. While she was married to Egerton Tertius Clairmonte she was known as "Mrs Clairmonte," until she divorced him in 1900. She then married Reginald Golding Bright the next year and took on his surname.

¹⁷ Beardsley designed the first twenty-one volumes in the *Keynotes* series.

¹⁸ Kirsten MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 116.

Swinburne; or to follow the prose model of Ouida, whose luscious language in many ways shaped the development of the aesthetic romance. Instead, Syrett deliberately chose to operate within a prose tradition that was unadorned. Her characters dwell in a world of social realism, and discover transformational possibilities in aesthetic and decadent works of literature and art. As I will demonstrate, Syrett's deliberate use of an accessible style made her *thematic* exploration of experimental forms of art available to a readership for whom aesthetic and decadent literary *form* may have otherwise proved unappealing. Syrett thus disrupts the expectation about the manner in which an author might engage with art for art's sake as a key part of her fashioning of a feminist aesthetic decadence.

While the small number of modern critics engaging with Syrett's oeuvre tend to acknowledge that her narratives depict aesthetic and decadent art, they do not, with the exception of Ann L. Ardis, make these encounters a central preoccupation of their respective analyses.¹⁹ Instead, as I mentioned above, Syrett's realism, combined with her exploration of the lives of rebellious women characters, has led most modern scholars to categorize her early writing as New Woman fiction. Jill Tedford Jones, for example, in an early overview of Syrett's professional career, acknowledges Syrett's ties to Beardsley and avant-garde literary circles, but her summaries of Syrett's novels barely mention the role of aesthetic and decadent culture to the self-fashioning of her women protagonists. Instead, Jones is interested in Syrett's feminist themes, explaining that Syrett's protagonists' "drive for individuality and desire for self-realization characterize them as New Women."²⁰ The New Woman, as Sally Ledger has shown, was a fin-de-siècle figure who had a "multiple identity" and was variously "a feminist activist, a

¹⁹ Ardis writes that Syrett's "female characters choose not to identify themselves as New Women rebelling openly against Victorian social norms." She notes that indeed they are "unconventional," but "quietly so." "Netta Syrett's Aestheticization of Everyday Life: Countering the Counterdiscourse of Aestheticism," *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 245.

²⁰ Jill Tedford Jones, "Netta Syrett," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 197, ed. George M. Johnson (Detroit: Gale Research, 1999), 277.

social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, [and] a woman poet.”²¹ And Ann Heilmann has demonstrated that “New Woman fiction established a tradition of feminist political literature written for and consumed by a female mass market.”²² Heilmann’s statement makes clear that the political dimension of New Woman fiction was seen as its most important feature, which is the reason that critics in the 1890s often regarded it as an inferior form of literature because it was perceived as sacrificing its artistic quality for its political message.

At the fin de siècle, the press abounded with criticism of New Woman fiction, condemning it as overly serious and didactic. For example, in 1895 Hugh E. M. Stutfield wrote that New Woman novels were “for the most part merely pamphlets, sermons, or treatises in disguise.”²³ Because New Woman fiction was primarily motivated by a desire to expose the inequalities from which women suffered, rather than from a desire to create a great work of art, this feminist literature has been perceived as distinct from, and even antithetical to, the goals and aims of aestheticism. This idea is foregrounded in the well-known debate that took place in the press in 1894 between the author and women’s rights campaigner, Sarah Grand (Frances Bellenden-Clarke McFall) and the writer of aesthetic romances, Ouida (Marie Louise Ramé). In 1894 Grand published her famous essay, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” which promotes the admittance of women to the public sphere. Ouida made a fiery response in which she opposed Grand, but she began her argument by first noting that Grand’s writing “as a specimen of style forces one to hint that the New Woman who, we are told, ‘has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years’ might in all these years have studied better models

²¹ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1.

²² Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 2.

²³ Hugh E. M. Stutfield, “Tommyrotics,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 157 (1895): 837. Stutfield cites Méné Muriel Dowie’s *Gallia* (1895) and George Egerton’s *Discords* (1894) as representative New Woman fictions; he also mentions Sarah Grand and Iota (Kathleen Caffyn) by name but does not reference any specific titles.

of literary composition.”²⁴ As I will demonstrate, in *Nobody’s Fault* in particular, Syrett went out of her way to distinguish her work from the pamphleterian style of fiction that both Stutfield and Ouida found so objectionable.

That Syrett’s work is often regarded as New Woman fiction is demonstrated in a recent critical engagement with *Nobody’s Fault*. In 2010 Pickering and Chatto published *Nobody’s Fault* (1986) and Syrett’s literary memoir, *The Sheltering Tree* (1939), as the sixth volume in their “New Woman Fiction” series.²⁵ In his introduction, Vybarr Cregan-Reid identifies *Nobody’s Fault* as “the novel of a New Woman by a New Woman, but not exclusively for the New Woman, not being a novel that preaches to the choir.”²⁶ Cregan-Reid is quite right, insofar as this is certainly a novel by a feminist that promotes women’s autonomy. It is equally crucial, however, that the novel’s protagonist, Bridget Ruan, as I pointed out above, progresses toward her feminist ends because of her pleasurable experiences with the decadent music of Richard Wagner. In this chapter, I seek to re-situate Syrett’s fiction as rebellious and unconventional, but I emphasize the crucial alliance Syrett repeatedly narrates between women and art as more foundational to their liberation than involvement in social and political causes.

When critics have not discussed Syrett’s writing as New Woman fiction, the term that has been productively applied to her oeuvre is middlebrow. Middlebrow, to be sure, is a value-laden label that scholars often associate with the way in which Virginia Woolf negatively portrayed it. By the time Woolf wrote her essay “Middlebrow” in 1942, there was a general assumption that fiction of this type was made for leisurely reading and had very little intellectual

²⁴ Ouida, “The New Woman,” *North American Review* 158 (1894): 610. For an excellent discussion about these two essays, see Talia Schaffer, “Nothing but Foolscap and Ink’: Inventing the New Woman,” in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siecle Feminisms*, ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 39-52.

²⁵ There has only been one other scholarly edition of Syrett’s fiction: her play, *The Finding of Nancy* (1902), is included in *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Performance*, published in 2012, and edited by Tracy Davis.

²⁶ Vybarr Cregan-Reid, Introduction to Netta Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010), ix.

value. Woolf described the authors of such fiction as “of middlebred intelligence” who are “go-betweens” and “busy-bodies.”²⁷ By contrast, recent critics have found middlebrow to be a useful term for recovering women’s turn-of-the-century writing that does not fit within the confines of modernism. For example, Kate Macdonald describes the middlebrow as “a stream of cultural productions created in parallel with those of early modernism that had its origins in the late-Victorian period.”²⁸ Macdonald further states that this literature “depicted a consciousness of social change caused by developing attitudes to the role and function of women in society.”²⁹ For Macdonald, then, middlebrow fiction is marked by its connection to a late-Victorian moment as well as its attention to the changing conditions of women’s lives. Both of these are foundational characteristics of Syrett’s writing, making middlebrow an apposite term. Ardis has emphasized that Syrett’s use of a direct, realist style marks her fiction as outside modernism, but this does not imply that Woolf’s critique that middlebrow writing is unsophisticated is accurate. Ardis asserts that Syrett’s “middlebrow Edwardian novels of manners . . . subjected bourgeois political, social, sexual, and aesthetic conventions to critique,”³⁰ and that by pitching her novels at a broader audience than the one implicitly associated with modernism’s avant-garde elite, Syrett’s fiction offers “a counterdiscourse to literary modernism.”³¹ To extend this term to encompass Syrett’s earliest writing removes the limitations inherent in attempting to assign these works exclusively to the genre of the New Woman, the aesthetic, or the decadent. In what follows, I will examine each of the five novels I have selected, and bring to light Syrett’s remarkable contributions to fin de siècle and early twentieth century women’s writing.

²⁷ Virginia Woolf, “Middlebrow,” *The Death of the Moth* (London: Hogarth Press, 1947), 115.

²⁸ Kate Macdonald, “Edwardian Transitions in the Fiction of Una L. Silberrad,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 54, no. 2 (2011): 214.

²⁹ Macdonald, “Una L. Silberrad,” 214.

³⁰ Ann L. Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 126 (the quotation has been interpolated).

³¹ Ardis, *Modernism and Cultural Conflict*, 126.

Moreover, I will demonstrate how her unique refashioning of aestheticism and decadence reveals the ways in which these late-Victorian forms of culture remained a touchstone for her middlebrow feminist protagonists.

Nobody's Fault: Bridget Ruan the Wagnerite, and Female Decadence

The topic of women's literary style is, in part, the subject of the opening of *Nobody's Fault* in the form of a preface that records the outcome of Bridget's narrative. We become aware of the chronology when the first chapter opens by stating that it is "[t]hirteen or fourteen years" before the scene depicted in the opening episode.³² What we discover in the preface, then, encourages us to observe closely certain details of Bridget's development in the main diegesis of the novel. The preface informs the reader that Bridget becomes a successful author, and the nature of the comments made about her work of fiction are particularly influential in light of the discussions that follow within the narrative about activism and aesthetic experience. Gérard Genette writes that the "chief function" of a preface is "*to ensure that the text is read properly.*"³³ The chronology of the narrative shows that Syrett is using the preface to guide the reader's understanding of *Nobody's Fault* without explicitly making an authorial comment.

The preface reveals that Syrett's narrative is in dialogue with fin-de-siècle debates about women's writing, and features an editor named Stevens speaking about a woman's novel. The author of the work that he is reviewing is Bridget, and Stevens declares that the manuscript he read last night "was good; *very* good," and he then contrasts it with the women's writing to which he is usually subjected: "[i]t was a woman's book, not the usual woman's novel with a capital W, though, Heaven be praised."³⁴ He describes Bridget's writing as "[s]trong, but delicate

³² Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 11.

³³ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 197 (italics in original).

³⁴ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 8.

too. No screaming—no rant—but it tells.”³⁵ The characterization of Bridget’s novel in terms of what it avoids—screaming and ranting, coupled with its distinction from being a “woman’s novel with a capital W”—makes clear that Stevens is distinguishing Bridget’s manuscript from the kind of women’s sermonizing fiction that, as we have seen, Hugh E. M. Stutfield complained about. Stevens clearly shares Stutfield’s view about polemical women’s fiction, and therefore he appreciates Bridget’s novel because it “tells,” but does not do so through emotional volatility. Knowing that Bridget will ultimately succeed in becoming a writer, encourages us to pay attention to the stages of her personal and professional development as episodes that inform what kind of author she will become. Although the preface does not indicate the important role that decadence will play in Bridget’s formation, it makes clear that she is not a New Woman writer. This commentary also shapes the reader’s anticipation of the style of woman’s writing that they will encounter in *Nobody’s Fault*, and as I discussed in the introduction, the reader discovers that Syrett’s prose is not polemical, but instead her middlebrow realism makes accessible the story of a feminist aesthete.

As my discussion in the introduction has already made plain, this young woman who has the ambition to be a professional author experiences a profound transformation when she goes to a Wagner concert. Bridget’s experience with Wagner’s music reveals that she finds in his compositions a remarkably liberating form of decadence that affirms her aesthetic longings and awakens her erotic desires. Wagner’s music—which Bridget has never heard before—exposes her to a dramatically different world from the rather conventional and restrained one she has known up to this point. The narrator records that Bridget arrives early to the concert venue, St. James’s Hall, and she sits in the orchestra section. Once the musicians are seated on the platform, we learn that Bridget is thoroughly entranced by her surroundings: “The sound, and the buzz of talk, and the sight of the great lighted hall, with its swaying sea of faces, excited her. Her

³⁵ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 8.

weariness had gone. She sat with eyes alight, and clasped hands, in breathless expectancy.”³⁶ The conductor then takes the stage: “Herr Richter stood bowing, [. . .] There was a lull, the sharp click of the baton, a sudden pause; and then the rocking, breathless rush and swing of the *Walkürenritt*.”³⁷

In this scene, Syrett provides not only details that indicate the thrilling nature of the concert for Bridget, but also ones that make it possible to trace Bridget’s participation in a musical phenomenon in London during the 1880s and 1890s. St. James’s Hall was London’s primary concert venue, and Herr Hans Richter (1843-1916) was a renowned conductor who was known for his striking performances of Wagner’s music; as one critic put it in the *Morning Post*: “[Richter] is unsurpassed as an interpreter of Wagner.”³⁸ During these decades, Wagner’s operas were not widely performed in London, but Richter made the London public familiar with Wagner’s music by performing selections from his works in the format of a concert. Newspaper accounts between 1888 and 1894 reveal that Wagner’s music had become very popular in England’s capital city thanks to what were known as “Richter Concerts.” In 1888, the *St. James Gazette* stated: “Herr Richter has created in England such a taste for Wagnerian music as before the establishment of the Richter Concerts scarcely existed among us.”³⁹ Syrett very deliberately sets her protagonist in the middle of this remarkable concert series that made the music of Wagner—one of the most controversial figures in art from the 1850s to the 1890s—familiar with the London public.

I have dwelt on this episode at some length because encountering Wagner’s music marks a critical turning point in Bridget’s life, freeing her from the woman teacher’s mundane existence and ushering her into a world where she can both artistically and emotionally flourish,

³⁶ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 115.

³⁷ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 115.

³⁸ “Richter Concerts,” *Morning Post*, June 14, 1881, 3.

³⁹ “Music,” *St. James’s Gazette*, May 14, 1888, 7.

especially at a time when women in her profession suffered the pressure of the marriage bar.⁴⁰ Moreover, as I will show, Wagner's music, which Richter popularized, had a very close association in the 1890s with a particular type of decadence. As we have seen, decadence, in Kirsten Macleod's words, is marked by "a fascination with the perverse, the morbid, and the artificial; a desire for intense experience and a seeking after rare sensations."⁴¹ From these remarks, we can see why commentators often regarded Wagner's works as decadent: they contain, as Raymond Furness explains, "morbid" themes, "sultry religiosity," and "death-intoxicated eroticism."⁴²

The care that Syrett takes in describing the concert scene draws into focus why Wagner represents a particular kind of aesthetic that provides Bridget with the resources to assert her autonomy and pursue her artistic aspirations. During the *Walkürenritt*, she is powerfully moved: "Bridget sat motionless, her colour coming and going, her heart beating wildly. It was wonderful—thrilling—almost terrible. [. . .] The magnetism of the vast silent audience seized her, and set all her pulses vibrating."⁴³ The description of Bridget's response emphasizes the alterations that take place in her body, the significance of which becomes clear when a man sitting next to her remarks: "You are a Wagnerite, I see."⁴⁴ This label had become common at the fin de siècle among enthusiastic admirers of Wagner's music. To be a Wagnerite, as Emma Sutton asserts, "was an act replete with political (in its broadest sense) resonance."⁴⁵ To be sure, Wagnerites were a heterogeneous group, but Bridget's reaction aligns her with a specific milieu

⁴⁰ Alison Oram records that upon marriage, women who were secondary school teachers were no longer allowed to work because their husband was expected to provide financial support. *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 9.

⁴¹ Kirsten Macleod, *Fictions of British Decadence*, 2.

⁴² Raymond Furness, *Wagner and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 32.

⁴³ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 115.

⁴⁴ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 116.

⁴⁵ Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.

of devotees of the German composer: her physical reaction maps directly onto Vernon Lee's theory that decadent music was identifiable through the affective response of the listener.⁴⁶ Moreover, Bridget's vibrating pulse unmistakably references Walter Pater's 'Conclusion' to his best-known work of art criticism, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). Pater fixates on the beating of the pulse as a measure of the quality of one's aesthetic experiences, writing that success in life is "getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time."⁴⁷ Pater's "Conclusion," with its glorification of physical experience, caused such an outrage that it was removed from the book's second edition, and it also had a further consequence: as Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham note, it was responsible for Pater's "association with Decadent experimentation."⁴⁸

The process by which Wagner came to be so closely connected with British decadence has its roots in an essay by the experimental French poet, Charles Baudelaire. In 1861, Baudelaire wrote "Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris." Baudelaire lauds Wagner: "No musician excels as Wagner does in painting space and depth, both material and spiritual;" Baudelaire continues: "He possesses the art of translating, by means of the subtlest shades, all that is excessive, immense and ambitious in spiritual and natural man."⁴⁹ Here, Baudelaire emphasizes that Wagner's music gives expression to the physical, sensual world. This influential engagement with the German composer was afterward felt in several transgressive literary works. Just a few years later, Algernon Charles Swinburne's shocking poem, "Laus Veneris" (1866), transformed the *Tannhäuser* myth by affirming that pagan desire is preferable to

⁴⁶ Lee referred to Wagner's compositions as representative of what she termed "morbid" art, and she asserted that decadence in music could be measured by the response generated in the person hearing the performance—such as feelings of "rapture and excess"—rather than in the thematic content or formal properties of the work itself, as would be typical when defining an artistic mode. "Beauty and Sanity," *Fortnightly Review* 58 (1895): 267.

⁴⁷ Walter Pater, "Conclusion," to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 190.

⁴⁸ Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham, "Introduction" to *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 8.

⁴⁹ Charles Baudelaire, "Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964), 117.

Christian devotion.⁵⁰ Baudelaire's impact can also be traced to the writings of poet and playwright Michael Field (the professional name of the co-authors Katharine Bradley and her niece, Edith Cooper), who travelled from England to Bayreuth, specifically to see performances of Wagner's operas,⁵¹ and whose poetry and plays bear the imprint of his pagan, sensual influence. In a letter to Bradley, Cooper writes of the "excruciating [. . .] tragedy of Tristram's love in Wagner's opera!"⁵² She then recalls "Swinburne's fine poem ['Laus Veneris'] when 'Ysonde recounts to Christ her shame.'⁵³ Cooper's progression from Wagner's opera directly to Swinburne's poem makes clear that she recognized an English literary Wagnerism that is implicitly indebted to Baudelaire.

The artist who most closely aligned Wagner with fin-de-siècle decadence was Beardsley, who completed *Under the Hill*: a rewriting of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (composed 1845) that first appeared in the *Savoy* (1896). This 1896 text differs markedly from the uncensored version that the publisher Leonard Smithers issued as *Venus and Tannhäuser* in 1907, and which constitutes one of the most pornographic works to appear within the decadent movement. It was not just Beardsley's interest in *Tannhäuser* that made his name synonymous with decadence, he was arguably best-known for his distinctive, highly erotic, black-and-white drawings which first came to the attention of the public through an article about "Artistic Book Covers" that appeared in Gleeson White's *Studio* (1893).⁵⁴ Among the many memorable images he produced were several inspired by Wagner's operas. As Sutton observes: "[Beardsley] gave Wagner a central place within his own corpus of decadent art, promoting Wagnerism as an iconic cultural

⁵⁰ In 1863, after Algernon Charles Swinburne had sent the French poet his 1862 review of Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*, Baudelaire sent his essay about Wagner as a gift to Swinburne. See Jerome McGann, "Wagner, Baudelaire, Swinburne: Poetry in the Condition of Music," *Victorian Poetry* 47 (2009): 619-32.

⁵¹ The Bayreuth Festival has been held annually each summer since 1876.

⁵² Edith Cooper, Letter to Katharine Bradley, Boscawen Mon., [11 Sept. 1882], in *The Fowl and the Pussycat: Love Letters of Michael Field, 1876-1909*, ed. Sharon Bickle (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 76.

⁵³ Cooper, Letter to Bradley, 76.

⁵⁴ See Gleeson White, "Artistic Book Covers," *Studio* 3 (1893): 15-23.

accessory of contemporary decadents.”⁵⁵ Depicting scenes from Wagner’s operas was a staple of Beardsley’s corpus. In the same year as *Nobody’s Fault* was published, Beardsley produced multiple drawings of *Das Rheingold* (first performed in London in 1882),⁵⁶ depicted characters from *Tannhäuser* (1876), and drew a scene from *Tristan und Isolde* (1882).

This version of Wagnerism had a personal resonance for Syrett, who was a good friend of Beardsley’s sister Mabel, whom she met in London while they were both teaching at the Polytechnic School for Girls. Through Mabel, she also became acquainted with the artist himself. Moreover, as I pointed out in the introduction, Beardsley designed the cover and the title page (Figure 2) of *Nobody’s Fault* as the twentieth volume in the Keynotes series. It is worth pointing out a further detail about these volumes: Macleod emphasizes that the nature of the decadence associated with this series had a “perceived popularity” rather than “catering to an intellectual élite.”⁵⁷ In this way, similar to Richter’s achievement of making Wagner’s daunting corpus accessible to and revered by a wide audience, Keynotes popularized decadence. The inclusion of *Nobody’s Fault* in this series, then, signals that her novel belonged to a literary decadence that was provocative while also being popular. I stress this point because my later discussion will emphasize that the kind of decadence that *Nobody’s Fault* critiques is one that is elitist, rather than being widely accessible.

Bridget’s identity as a Wagnerite recalls Beardsley’s well-known drawing, *The Wagnerites* (1894), which depicts an audience watching *Tristan und Isolde*, but not the performance they are viewing (Figure 3). It is no accident that this is an assembly composed almost entirely of women, the majority of whom are clothed in dresses that expose their shoulders, backs, and chests. Beardsley’s drawing makes women the primary consumers of Wagner, and their bare skin echoes the assertive female sexuality they are seeing on stage. As

⁵⁵ Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism*, 5.

⁵⁶ The two subsequent dates indicate the first time each opera was performed in London.

⁵⁷ MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence*, 116.

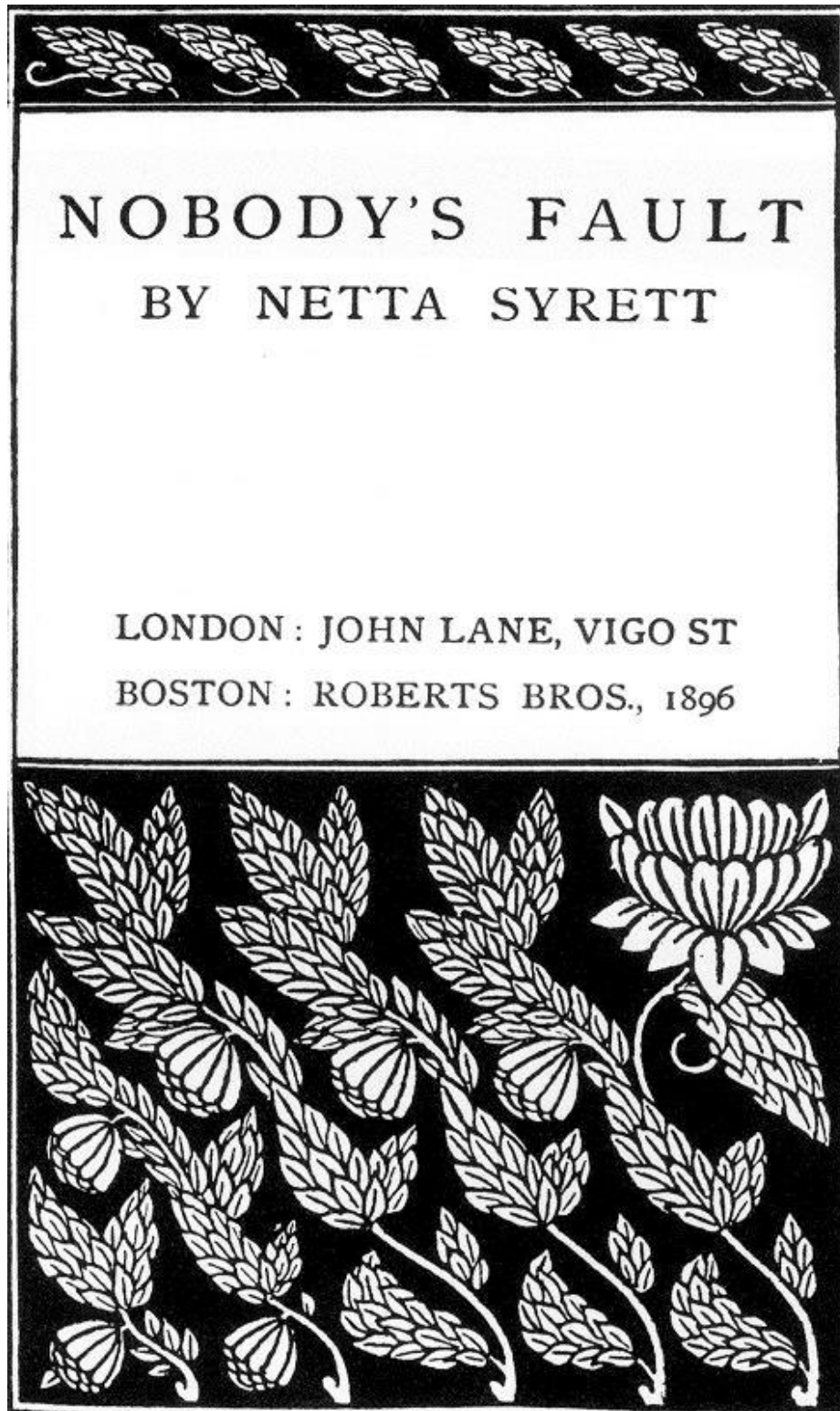


Figure 2. Aubrey Beardsley, title page for Netta Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*. London: John Lane, 1896.



Figure 3. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Wagnerites*. *Yellow Book* 3 (October 1894): 55.

V. & A. Picture Library. © The Board of the Trustees of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Indian ink touched with white, 20.7 x 17.8 cm. E. 15 - 1900.

Brigid Brophy explains, this drawing is Beardsley's "most successful transposition of Wagner's eroticism."⁵⁸ Linda Gertner Zatlin reads these Wagnerite women as having "jaded" faces, and argues that Beardsley is underscoring the "women's self-absorption."⁵⁹ Sutton, by contrast, characterizes them as a "gathering of overtly sensual, knowing women," and argues that Beardsley's opinion of them is not necessarily critical.⁶⁰ Whether Beardsley is critiquing these women or not, it is nonetheless clear that he registered Wagner's appeal for women and the eroticism that the German composer's music aroused. For *Nobody's Fault* to associate Bridget with these figures, then, is not only to link her with avant-garde aesthetics, but also a sensual decadence that affirms women's sexuality.

Assuredly, Bridget is an aesthete, but Bridget's attraction to Wagner's music is distinct from aestheticism: a word the narrator uses to indicate a form of appreciation for beauty that is associated here with domestic interiors and sedate femininity. The narrator remarks on the "aestheticism as understood in Rilchester" that is on display in the Ruan family's home, including "antimacassars tied over the backs of the gilt chairs," and "flights of Japanese fans."⁶¹ Bridget's mother is said to "best exemplify[y]" this aesthetic sensibility: she is a woman who "dressed well," and she is seated next to a "little tea-table drawn up to the fire."⁶² Bridget is decidedly uninterested in this domesticity and the forms of beauty that were propagated through women's handicraft, and instead seeks something more bold, defiant, and provocative.

⁵⁸ Brigid Brophy, *Black and White: A Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 32.

⁵⁹ Linda Gertner Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 2:107.

⁶⁰ Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism*, 99.

⁶¹ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 36.

⁶² Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 37.

Bridget longs for “experience—opportunities;—love, perhaps!”⁶³ Wagner’s music—which Bridget finds “so *awful* and so wonderful”—provides her with precisely these three things.⁶⁴

It is evident that Wagner’s music is a catalyst for Bridget’s erotic awakening. This point becomes clear when Larry Carey, the complete stranger who says to Bridget that she is a Wagnerite, offers to accompany her to the train station. Bridget, who feels weak and light-headed because she went without her lunch, leans upon his arm, and they fall easily into intimate conversation. At the same time as Bridget is drawn to Carey, however, she is careful to point out her independence. When Carey, in “a tone of half laughing raillery,” suggests that “[i]t might have been advisable to bring a mother, to-night,” Bridget protests: “I’m not the sort of girl who requires a chaperon.”⁶⁵ That Bridget does not need Carey’s assistance, however, does not preclude her enjoyment of his kindness and attention. Once she is alone, we learn that Bridget’s erotic responsiveness towards Carey is wrapped up in her experience of Wagner’s art: “[t]he thought of the man who had spoken to her was inextricably woven with her remembrance of the music. The idea that there was anything unusual in her walk with him did not once occur to her.”⁶⁶ Here, the narrator directly links the feelings evoked by Wagner’s music with Bridget’s spontaneous ease with Carey: she gives no thought to the conventions that were supposed to regulate social interactions between the sexes. What is more, we learn of Bridget’s blossoming desires: “Bridget lay awake long that night. [. . .] The music still surged in her brain. It had aroused emotions, vague desires to which she could give no name.”⁶⁷

The second Wagner concert features music that reveals just how closely Bridget’s encounter with decadent music relates to her sexual awakening. When Carey urges Bridget to

⁶³ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 106.

⁶⁴ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 116 (this quotation has been interpolated).

⁶⁵ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 119.

⁶⁶ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 122.

⁶⁷ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 122.

join him at St. James's Hall the following week, he declares: "You'll hear *Tristan und Isolde* then. Magnificent."⁶⁸ Bridget's response—"I oughtn't to; I shall have piles of books to correct next Monday, but I *will*"—indicates the degree to which the first concert has emboldened her to follow her desires.⁶⁹ It needs to be borne in mind that *Tristan und Isolde* was one of Wagner's most decadent music dramas, and is the work that Beardsley's Wagnerites are enjoying. Furness goes so far as to call it "an escape into voluptuous morbidity."⁷⁰ In his notorious 1892 study of cultural and social *Degeneration*, Max Nordau devoted an entire chapter to "The Richard Wagner Cult," and was outraged by *Tristan*, denouncing its "amorous whinings, whimperings and ravings,"⁷¹ and he suggested that only the most innocent of women could witness it "without blushing crimson, and sinking into the earth for shame!"⁷² Syrett, then, is knowingly referencing—and flaunting—what in the 1890s was a prominent fear about female eroticism and the German composer's music, as Sutton observes: "[t]he effects of [Wagner's] music on female Wagnerites were explicitly incorporated into debates about female sexuality and sexual knowledge."⁷³ That Bridget and Carey will hear selections from this music drama clearly marks this as an occasion for the advancement of their mutual sexual interest.

At the same time, Syrett's scene presents a feminist resistance to what had become by the end of the nineteenth century a plot cliché about characters who hear Wagner's music—and especially *Tristan und Isolde*—and submit to their unbridled emotions, falling passionately in love. As Anne Dzamba Sessa records, "[a]n author need only seat hero and heroine at the parlour piano and have them run through passages of a Wagnerian score, and the rest was a

⁶⁸ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 121.

⁶⁹ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 121.

⁷⁰ Furness, *Wagner and Literature*, 40.

⁷¹ Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. from second edition (London: Heinemann, 1898), 181.

⁷² Nordau, *Degeneration*, p. 181.

⁷³ Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism*, 98.

foregone conclusion.”⁷⁴ Bridget, by contrast, does not surrender her self-possession to Carey, even though her affective response to *Tristan’s* love theme—her eyes are “dreamy with the music”⁷⁵—indicates that she remains a Wagnerite. Rather than falling into each other’s arms, the stimulation that Bridget and Carey experience in the concert hall is followed by a ride in a hansom during which they enjoy an animated conversation. The narrator records: “They talked nearly all the way, freely, without reserve.”⁷⁶ The experience is so momentous for Bridget that “[s]he never forgot this drive,” and even later recalls it “[i]n dreams.”⁷⁷ Furthermore, their lively discussion, rather than resulting in Bridget’s extinguishing of her autonomy through surrender to Carey, instead leads to her advancement as an author; for it turns out that not only is Carey an amiable and intelligent man who enjoys decadent music, but also an accomplished writer who urges Bridget to allow him to share her stories with his editor. The successful publication of these short fictions ushers Bridget into a world of artists and aesthetes, revealing that Wagner’s decadent music, rather than leading to her objectification, has facilitated her erotic and authorial assertiveness.

Syrett reserves her criticism of decadence for when it ceases to be available to a wide audience and becomes what Hughes refers to as an “exclusive male club” In *Nobody’s Fault*, this form of masculinist decadence is embodied in a milieu of male authors who indulge in the superficial manipulation of language. We are introduced to this problematic form of decadence when the narrative moves immediately from the second Wagner concert to a scene when Carey

⁷⁴ Anne Dzamba Sessa, “At Wagner’s Shrine: British and American Wagnerians,” *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 273. Among the fictions that stage passionate romantic scenes in response to Wagner’s music are, most famously in the British context, George Moore’s *Evelyn Innes* (1898). Those explicitly referencing *Tristan und Isolde* include Gabriele d’Annunzio’s *The Triumph of Death* (1894), Thomas Mann’s novel *Buddenbrooks* (1900) and his novella *Tristan* (1902), and Arnold Bennett’s *Sacred and Profane Love* (1905). A similar response, but from listening to *Tannhäuser*, is recorded in E. F. Benson’s novel *The Rubicon* (1894). Vernon Lee makes an implicit reference to the spell-binding power of Wagner’s music in her short story “A Wicked Voice” (1890).

⁷⁵ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 132.

⁷⁶ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 133.

⁷⁷ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 133.

returns from having been abroad for five years. Riding in a hansom with his friend Trelawney, the two pass St. James's Hall, and Carey exclaims: "I wonder if there's a Wagner concert on!"⁷⁸ He then asks his friend about "the set" they will encounter at their destination.⁷⁹ Trelawney's response makes it clear that Carey's recollection of Wagner's music contrasts sharply with the environment he is about to encounter: "they'll hurl paradoxes and epigrams at you till you'll begin to doubt your own sanity."⁸⁰ Trelawney then mockingly tells Carey a formula for imitating this kind of speech: "Merely remember what a normal man says when he's asked a plain question—invert it; season to taste with a few passion-coloured adjectives, and serve up as languidly as possible."⁸¹ The violence of 'hurling' epigrams and the 'passion' of the adjectives may seem similar to the powerful emotions expressed by Wagner's music, but unlike the concert, the recipient is assailed by the aesthetic creation rather than invited to experience it. We discover, moreover, that these epigrams and paradoxes are representative of an aesthetic sensibility that has lost interest in the deeply moving pulsations associated with both Wagner and Pater. As we will see below, Syrett's narrative is performing a critique of a decadence that instead takes pleasure only in surfaces and poses.

At the party, Carey finds himself in a fashionable drawing-room populated by women in dresses with 'bright, sheeny folds' and men such as Mr Trilling: "[a] young man with long hair, and very loose-jointed about the knees."⁸² Trelawney's warning to Carey about the "set" is borne out when Trilling remarks: "they are blind to the exquisite snake-like charm, to the subtle glamour of sin, which is the perfect flower of a well-spent life."⁸³ This sentence is an allusion to

⁷⁸ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 137.

⁷⁹ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 138.

⁸⁰ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 138.

⁸¹ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 139.

⁸² Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 142.

⁸³ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 142.

Oscar Wilde's distinctively stylish axioms. In Wilde's 'Preface' to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), for example, we find a series of provocative epigrams about art, such as the following: "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault."⁸⁴ Wilde's statement makes a paradoxical assertion: there is, to be sure, a form of corruption that is charming, but to see ugliness in beautiful art is simply to be a brute. We can tell that Trilling attempts to perform a similar manoeuvre, but he has simply equated sin and charm, and burdened the terms with flashy adjectives. Trilling, in other words, only succeeds in creating an approximation of an astute Wildean epigram. There is, however, no clever twist of paradoxical insight. On reflection, then, one has to question whether Trilling is a parody of Wilde, or if he represents a failure to rise to the very high standards of Wilde's wit. In my view, what Syrett finds reprehensible here is how Wilde's style of speech has been appropriated by those who would like to replicate his finesse, but who fall well short of his incisiveness, which he used to expose the puritanical, utilitarian, smug moralizing of English society.

The man whom we learn Bridget has married, Paul Travers, embodies the perversion and wilful distortion of Wildean aestheticism that was perpetuated in the press at the time of Wilde's trials in 1895. Travers is called a "brilliant" writer in "the thin, sketchy way that's in vogue just now," and Trelawney declares: "he's by way of being the high priest of the elect."⁸⁵ It is not hard to hear in this statement the echo of the terminology that was used in relation to Wilde just one year before *Nobody's Fault* was published. When Wilde's trials for gross indecency led to his sentencing to two years in solitary confinement with hard labour, the *National Observer* thanked the Marquess of Queensberry (whose libelling of Wilde precipitated a perilous lawsuit) for destroying "the High Priest of the Decadents."⁸⁶ Travers, however, is a

⁸⁴ Oscar Wilde, "The Preface," *The Picture Dorian Gray*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

⁸⁵ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 139.

⁸⁶ [W. E. Henley], Editorial, *National Observer*, April 6, 1895, 547.

high priest of a decadence that has been overtaken by ennui, that in its self-obsession has ceased to be self-critical, and that has denied the humanity of women in order to treat them as art objects.

The narrative foregrounds the empty dialogue and languid poses of these decadents and only gradually reveals the consequences for women who are viewed from this elitist perspective. In this episode, we first see Bridget through Carey's eyes: "'She has altered!' was Carey's first conscious thought, after the momentary shock of surprise. 'She is beautiful, but she's changed!'"⁸⁷ He is bewildered to discover that this drawing-room environment has become her *métier*: "[s]he has picked up the tone, knows all the catch-words and the patter."⁸⁸ Bridget's adaptation to this milieu is especially signified through her "languid, even tone,"⁸⁹ which contrasts sharply with the passionate and lively comments that characterized her speech at the Wagner concerts. Once they begin to converse, Bridget reveals that she no longer writes: "One can't do two things at once," and explains: "marriage is looked upon as a *vocation*, remember, and one throws one's whole heart and soul into such a dignified thing as a vocation!"⁹⁰ These pronouncements, which are so incongruous with the Bridget of the previous episodes, are tellingly accompanied by her laughter and a flushed face, indicating that the pose she has adopted is at odds with her inner emotion.

When Bridget returns home with Travers after the party, she exposes the way in which his love of artifice has become misogyny. The first instance of this dehumanizing treatment is revealed in his attitude towards her authorship. When he learns that Carey helped her to publish her stories, he states mockingly: "I—and the world—owe [him] a great pleasure; I can't conscientiously say a great *literary* pleasure, for from what I remember of them the stories were

⁸⁷ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 141.

⁸⁸ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 142.

⁸⁹ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 142.

⁹⁰ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 144.

entirely free from any taint of literary quality whatever.”⁹¹ Travers’s belittling words make evident that he is to blame for Bridget’s abandonment of her literary ambitions. Here, we see that Syrett is cognizant of the way in which a “dominant ‘masculine’ aestheticism”—to use Hughes’s term—tended to appropriate femininity and women’s bodies as symbols of beauty and of art’s autonomy from nature, but gave no thought to the actual lives and experiences of women.⁹² Bridget’s following declaration to her husband encapsulates her experience of his insulting treatment:

You have no love for me—yet you are unwilling to let me go. Because people say—because some people praise my looks, it pleases you to think of me as your property—*yours* exclusively. You have taken care to try to crush everything that is best in me—everything that makes me an *individual*, a *person*—my work, my hopes, my ideals. It is my beauty only you want to keep!⁹³

Bridget’s powerful speech sums up and rejects an obsession with beautiful surfaces that has meant the denial of her humanity.

This critique of Travers’s distorted aestheticism reveals that to be a decadent misogynist is not to have heeded Wilde’s warning in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that a fixation with artifice could lead to dehumanizing treatment towards women. We find this behaviour in Dorian’s cruel words to the actress Sibyl Vane following her deliberately anti-mimetic performance of Shakespeare’s Juliet. As Dorian declares: “I loved you [. . .] because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away [. . .] Without your art you are nothing.”⁹⁴ This kind of misogynist aesthete had also been subjected to very close critical scrutiny in a range of feminist novels ever since Vernon Lee’s *Miss Brown*

⁹¹ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 151.

⁹² Linda K. Hughes, “A Female Aesthete at the Helm: *Sylvia’s Journal* and ‘Graham R. Tomson’ 1893-1894,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 29 (1996): 182.

⁹³ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 154.

⁹⁴ Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, 75.

(1885). Syrett is thus engaging in an on-going debate about the tense relationship of women to both aestheticism and decadence, and emphasizes the necessity to distinguish thoroughly between different forms of decadence.

The narrative goes out of its way to indicate that the self-affirmation, erotic inspiration, and artistic satisfaction that Bridget found in Wagner have not been negated. After she leaves Travers, her first private interaction with Carey witnesses her favourable response to his invitation: “Can’t we go to another Wagner concert together, Mrs Travers[?]”⁹⁵ Although the question sounds innocent enough, Carey’s use of Bridget’s married name is a forceful reminder that she is a woman who has left her husband but is not officially divorced, and she is making plans to return to the site of her romantic beginnings with Carey. Although Bridget’s wish to join Carey suggests that even the mention of Wagner’s music can stir in her the determination to defy convention that it had aroused years before, she consents while also deterring the possibility that it will be another erotically intimate experience, telling Carey that her best friend Helen and Helen’s husband should join them. In this way, she wishes to preserve her independence by guarding against the kinds of romantic feelings that led to her ensnarement by Travers. It remains evident, however, that she desires to return to the kind of existence she was cultivating before she became a wife: “I’ve got back to my old longing for experience—always experience.”⁹⁶ This phrasing has a strongly Paterian ring, and is a return to Pater’s ‘Conclusion’ where he writes that one must always be seeking new experiences: “What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions,” and he further urges that we must keep before us our “sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity.”⁹⁷

As the remaining third of the narrative unfolds, Bridget’s desire to experience art is matched with discussions about free union, and *Nobody’s Fault* continues to link women’s

⁹⁵ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 185.

⁹⁶ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 186.

⁹⁷ Pater, “Conclusion,” to *The Renaissance*, 189.

encounters with art to their sexual autonomy. At the same time, the focus is less explicitly on Bridget's engagement with forms of decadence. Instead, the central preoccupation becomes her developing attachment to Carey, and her formulation of a new approach to romance. In her initial step of rejecting the institution of marriage, Bridget finds that she identifies with a rebellious woman figure that she encountered not through Wagner, but in a controversial modern play: Nora Helmer, the protagonist of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Bridget tells her best friend Helen how she felt when she observed Travers in the park:

Do you remember [. . .] the night we saw the 'Doll's House,' there was a derisive laugh when Nora says, 'I can't stay in the house with a strange man'? How little imagination people have! That's how *I* feel. He is a strange man; I have nothing to do with him.⁹⁸

Bridget is referring to the play's conclusion in which Nora, no longer able to endure the stifling of her individuality, leaves her husband and small children. When the play received its first unexpurgated British performance in London in 1889, it caused a sensation. Nora's departure from her family was considered shocking by more conservative audience members, and Clement Scott, the critic for the *Daily Telegraph*, wrote that to abandon her "innocent children" made Nora "absolutely inhuman,"⁹⁹ and in another review called her an "unnatural [. . .] creature."¹⁰⁰ This bold ending, however, resonated with those New Women who were on the side of abolishing marriage, and Ledger records that Ibsen's attack on narrow-mindedness "struck a strong chord with the bohemian, intellectual audience" who attended the London premiere.¹⁰¹

Bridget's identification with Nora illustrates why she refuses ever again to participate in an institution that she also believes makes women prostitutes to their husbands, as she boldly tells Travers: "I'm no better than any poor woman in the street out there! [. . .] Better? I'm

⁹⁸ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 190.

⁹⁹ [Clement Scott], [review of *A Doll's House*], *Daily Telegraph*, June 8, 1889, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Clement Scott, "A Doll's House," *Theatre*, July 14, 1889, 19-22; cited in Sally Ledger, *Henrik Ibsen*, 2nd ed. (Plymouth: Northcote House, 2008), 3.

¹⁰¹ Ledger, *Henrik Ibsen*, 6.

worse—worse!”¹⁰² Instead, Bridget advocates free union, and when Helen cautions Bridget about the social discrimination she will experience if she does not wed Carey, Bridget insists: “marriage is only a marriage so long as there is love and tenderness on both sides[.] So long as [Carey]’s love and tenderness lasts for me, I shall be his wife.”¹⁰³ Bridget’s support of free union brings the narrative into dialogue with a topic that detractors perceived all New Women as advocating, while in reality it was a divisive issue. Ledger explains that the majority of New Women “had their sights set on constitutional, civic and economic rights rather than on the sexual liberation of women.”¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, several well-known novels of the period characterized New Women as opponents of marriage. Mona Caird’s anti-marriage doctrine was given voice by her protagonist in *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), while Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* (1895) features Sue Bridehead’s forceful denouncement of legal marriage. By contrast, such prominent New Women as Sarah Grand promoted sexual purity and motherhood, and saw free love as a danger to their cause.¹⁰⁵ Bridget, then, occupies the more extreme position on female sexuality, a position that led anti-feminists to associate New Women with decadents due to the sexual permissiveness they observed, and reviled, in both movements. As Linda Dowling has shown, the New Woman and decadent were regarded as “twin apostles of social apocalypse.”¹⁰⁶ But while Dowling seems to think of the decadent as chiefly a male figure, and therefore her analysis presents the decadent and New Woman as sexually antithetical, Bridget offers a synthesis. As a Wagnerite with whom Ibsen’s Nora resonates, she embodies a convergence between Wagner’s decadent erotic womanhood and the rebellious, self-sufficient New Woman.

¹⁰² Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 155.

¹⁰³ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 215.

¹⁰⁴ Ledger, *The New Woman*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ In *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), Grand promoted motherhood and sexual purity. See Ledger, *The New Woman*, 10-11.

¹⁰⁶ Linda Dowling, “The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1979): 447.

The concluding scenes of *Nobody's Fault*, however, reveal that there is an area of the modern woman's life in which Wagnerian decadence and New Woman defiance fall short of offering liberating resources: the responsibility felt towards one's family in conflict with one's personal desires. Bridget's escape from Rilchester has not severed her emotional ties to her parents, and Bridget confides in Carey that the primary reason she endured Travers's treatment for so long was because she knew a divorce would be a blow to her mother: "the thought of [mother] kept me with him three years."¹⁰⁷ When Bridget is on the verge of entering her free union, Bridget's father dies and she is unable to bear the thought of the unhappiness that her unwed state will cause her now-widowed mother.

The final chapter, in which Bridget gives Carey the painful news that she cannot enter into a free union, is accompanied by a shift in narrative tone. Once she has convinced Carey that he cannot persuade her to proceed with their union, Carey leaves and Bridget catches sight of herself in a mirror and questions: "I wonder if I'm going mad?"¹⁰⁸ Bridget's statement of self-doubt is followed by the beginnings of a storm: "A heavy drop fell on one of the vine leaves outside," and then Bridget hears "the first low growl of thunder."¹⁰⁹ When Helen arrives shortly after, we are told that "she almost cried aloud at the sight of [Bridget's] face in the gloom."¹¹⁰ It seems in these final pages that Bridget has entered a space that is realist in its portrayal of the challenges faced by the modern woman, but which also brings to mind the Gothic mode, which dramatizes a fear of female insanity, and revels in gloomy weather.

These Gothic details recall an earlier scene that took place before Bridget's encounter with Wagner's music "made [her] alive again."¹¹¹ In this previous episode, Bridget is reading

¹⁰⁷ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 234.

¹⁰⁸ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 239.

¹⁰⁹ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 239.

¹¹⁰ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 240.

¹¹¹ Syrett, *Nobody's Fault*, 121.

Wuthering Heights (1847), where the narrator records: “The weird, uncanny atmosphere of the story oppressed her with a painful fascination.”¹¹² The mood of Emily Brontë’s novel is mirrored in Bridget’s own environment: “the cold, gloomy parlour, and the dripping of the rain on the window sill.”¹¹³ The concluding pages of Syrett’s novel affiliate themselves with this broader tradition of English women’s fiction. In the end, the narrative urges us to consider what this return to a Gothic atmosphere has to say about Bridget’s ultimate predicament.

As we reflect on Bridget’s destiny, we discover that the life of this Wagnerite has exhausted several dominant narrative trajectories that we find in nineteenth-century fiction: the culminating marriage of the traditional female bildungsroman; the self-deadening of being a woman trapped in a masculinist decadent plot; the social activism of the New Woman; and the defiance of the feminist exalting in free union. The plot that she plans to inhabit (and that thanks to the preface we know she will adopt) is that of a woman whose day is full of obligations—she will be a schoolteacher and she will care for her mother—but one whose satisfaction exists in the freedom to write. In other words, Bridget’s destiny is consistent with that which, ever since she was a schoolgirl writing in a shed while the other girls played games, has been her highest priority: her artistic flourishing. The outcome of Syrett’s first novel, then, is to show that in the 1890s there does not yet exist a wholly satisfactory narrative arc for the feminist who not only enjoys Wagnerian decadence, but also inhabits a middlebrow universe. As the title of the novel makes plain, it is nobody’s fault that Bridget occupies this final situation. Still, the social limits that she must confront need not be seen as an anti-climax or disappointment. *Nobody’s Fault* suggests that becoming a writer of fiction might be the closest a woman can get in the mid-1890s to reauthorizing the destinies of women in real life, as well as—crucially—in the evolving English novel tradition.

¹¹² Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 96.

¹¹³ Syrett, *Nobody’s Fault*, 96.

The Child of Promise: A Natural Love of Artifice, and a Revival of the Art of Lying

The Child of Promise appeared eleven years after *Nobody's Fault*, during which time Syrett had written three further novels and three volumes of fairy tales. This 1907 narrative offers a witty and incisive exploration of various forms of fin-de-siècle culture that shape the life of a young woman who spends her first two decades in a communist colony. In opposition to the utilitarian life of the settlement, she is drawn to forms of beauty and art that she finds in the evocative prose of Charlotte Brontë, and the artifice of decadent poetry and drawing. The narrative addresses serious questions about socialism, desire, sexual autonomy, the morality of lying, and the uses of decadence to a feminist, but with an ease and wit that demonstrate Syrett's purposeful adaptation of a middlebrow style. *The Child of Promise* more fully develops the gently mocking tone that in *Nobody's Fault* punctuated the satirical representation of decadent dandies and provincial townfolk alongside a more serious social realism. In Syrett's 1907 novel, humorous social observation and a knowing camaraderie with the reader are more fully developed and skillfully deployed. For example, in the opening chapter, the narrator describes a meeting that is composed of "[r]eformers, socialists—even as it was darkly whispered—anarchists, though the avowed purpose of the club was reform by the methods of peace."¹¹⁴ Here, Syrett's narrator treats with levity the idea that anarchists are something to be regarded with fear. Then this description of the club is followed by an implicit address to the reader: "It was thirty year ago, yet all the types persist to-day, a trifle modified possibly, yet recognizable at any of the obscure London institutions."¹¹⁵ In this way, Syrett's narrator aligns the reader with the earlier period they are reading about, and encourages their identification with the scene by categorizing these figures as recognizable "types." In addition, the novel ironizes tenets of aestheticism and New Woman writing. One is the idea that lying is the supreme art of fiction, associated especially with Wilde's aestheticism in the "Decay of Lying." Another is women's

¹¹⁴ Syrett, *The Child of Promise* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1907), 5.

¹¹⁵ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 5.

freedom of sexuality, which is in dialogue with the New Woman. The narrative's delivery in a wry tone offers an ironic deployment of the middlebrow realist mode that distances Syrett's work from the narrative styles associated with these cultural movements: the ornate prose of aestheticism, as well as the didacticism that Stutfield and Ouida found so irritating in New Woman writing.

When the critic Harold Williams included Syrett in his study *Modern English Writers* (1918), he praised *The Child of Promise* as Syrett's "strongest novel," describing it as "a tale distinguished by intellectual power, true feeling and vigorous humour."¹¹⁶ By contrast, it met with a strong critical reaction from commentators who disliked its affirmative representation of female sexual expression, and its positive engagement with decadent themes. The *Academy* was especially angered that the protagonist, Natasha, was not a demure Victorian maiden, and wrote that her "true self belonged to blackest Balham."¹¹⁷ Here, the reviewer is referencing a rundown South London neighborhood that the commentator clearly regards as evil. The "true self" that the critic found so repulsive was undoubtedly Natasha's unconventional eroticism, her artistic lying, and decadent tastes. *The Child of Promise* remains provocative for the modern critic because in Syrett's narrative we encounter a refashioning of decadence into a decidedly feminist form. As I will demonstrate, this reimagined decadence emphasizes that Natasha's transgressive erotic and artistic desires are *natural* rather than *perverse*. What is more, the origins of her longing for aesthetic satisfaction and sexual fulfillment originate in a tradition of women's fiction that forms the foundation for her eventual attraction to male-created decadent art. Natasha's love of artifice, her cultivation of the art of lying, and her uninhibited expression of her sexuality, mark her out as a female decadent.

¹¹⁶ Harold Williams, *Modern English Writers: Being a Study of Imaginative Literature, 1890-1914* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1925 [originally published 1918]), 467.

¹¹⁷ Unsigned review of *The Child of Promise*, by Netta Syrett, *Academy* 1827 (May 11, 1907): 465.

In *The Child of Promise*, Syrett's investment in scrutinizing various forms of fin-de-siècle culture, and the ramifications and possibilities that these contained for a young woman, is largely focused on what the narrator represents as the shortcomings of socialism, in contrast with the merits of women's novels and decadent art. Natasha is born into a communist colony, called the Lansing Settlement, that gives her a unique, first-hand perspective from which to test this alternative lifestyle.¹¹⁸ The novel begins by narrating the young adult lives of Natasha's parents, Maurice and Mary, and we discover in the opening pages one of the novel's central themes: the vital relationship between life and art. The narrator informs us that Maurice's book collection is indicative of his interests and pursuits, explaining that "[t]he sight of Thoreau, Walt Whitman, [George Borrow's novel] *Lavengro*, and various socialistic works, in conjunction, is undeniably suggestive."¹¹⁹ Maurice's dedication to the ideals found in these texts draws him into a socialist society in London's East End during the 1870s where he meets Mary, whose father bitterly opposes her socialist interests. Maurice becomes the leader of "an experimental colony in Canada, which is to be conducted on communistic lines."¹²⁰ It is here that Natasha is born, but her mother dies in childbirth, due to inadequate medical care.¹²¹ Mary's dying words are her dedication of Natasha to "the cause," and she urges Maurice: "You will bring her up with that thought always before her, Maurice? Promise me. You won't let her fail?"¹²²

We witness Maurice's fulfillment of his wife's wish when we learn that the greater part of Natasha's life has taken place in Wales, where the colony relocated after only a couple of years

¹¹⁸ Syrett's literary memoir yields little insight into the means by which she had familiarity with socialist ideas. She notes having acquaintances that are communists (225), and she also mentions staying with some families in a colony with very progressive ideas about raising children, and that some of them are socialists, and she recounts how she and a friend were amused by the lack of discipline (269-71). *The Sheltering Tree* (London: Bles, 1939).

¹¹⁹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 4.

¹²⁰ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 29.

¹²¹ Later, we learn that Christian Science is the "popular faith" of one section of the colonists. Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 112.

¹²² Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 34.

in the harsh winters of Canada.¹²³ The Lansing settlement is committed to simplicity and utilitarian principles, and the “use of money [i]s prohibited.”¹²⁴ The view of marriage is that it “should be accomplished without ceremonies. It needed only the will of a man and a woman.”¹²⁵ Everyone in the colony participates in generating the supplies they need because, as Natasha says, they are “supposed to be entirely self-supporting.”¹²⁶ Natasha explains a typical day: “We go out to our bread-labour . . . We work in our allotment gardens. We hoe potatoes and plant turnips.”¹²⁷ That Natasha eventually fulfills her “promise” and becomes an apologist for communism in London is not because she embraces the colony’s beliefs. Rather, she deeply dislikes the way of life in the colony, but she does not wish to disappoint her father, and so devises her escape by posing as an advocate for the cause. This position enables her to secretly construct the life she has craved, which includes all of the things she desires in direct opposition to communism: beautiful clothing, private possessions, decadent fiction, delicious food, romantic opportunities, and aesthetic culture.

Natasha’s love of possessions constitutes one of her most foundational rejections of the colony’s ideals. She emerges as the protagonist when the narrative moves from her birth to her life as a sixteen-year-old young woman, and it becomes clear that she finds the simple, utilitarian life of the settlement unappealing. Natasha evinces no interest whatsoever in her father’s cherished literary works, and she publicly expresses her feeling that the authors revered by the colony—Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau—are “boring.”¹²⁸ Moreover, she does not enjoy the communist principle of sharing: “I love possessions. I hate to have things in common. It spoils

¹²³ The narrator notes that twenty years later a group of Russians will succeed the English colony. Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 9.

¹²⁴ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 9.

¹²⁵ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 9.

¹²⁶ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 83.

¹²⁷ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 78.

¹²⁸ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 54.

them.”¹²⁹ She maintains a secret store of personal treasures, including one that draws into focus Syrett’s commentary on socialism: a pair of red shoes that her friend Seigfried has secretly made for her. It is worth noting that the narrator comments on his name and those of other boys in the colony, Tristan and Lancelot, explaining: “Wagner[,] being for some reason insolubly connected with latter-day socialism, the babes of serious mothers naturally failed to escape his influence.”¹³⁰ Natasha’s love of her shoes emphasizes the nature of her disdain for the colony’s ideals. She explains: “I think shoes are pretty. I hate sandals; they’re so sloppy.”¹³¹ Through Natasha’s comment about sandals, Syrett is alluding to The Fellowship of the New Life, founded in 1883 by Edward Carpenter, among others, and from which the Fabian Society developed the following year. The Fellowship promoted the adoption of “rational dress,” which included the making and wearing of sandals as part of a simpler life.

Natasha, however, is unimpressed by what she perceives as merely ugliness, and she also dislikes the colony women’s dresses: they “wear this woollen stuff right up to the neck, and it’s hideous.”¹³² Here, Syrett is referencing Dr. Jaeger’s Sanitary Woollen Clothing System, which George Bernard Shaw popularly promoted. Natasha, instead, has made herself a dress of “white chemisette”¹³³ with a neckline that shows her throat and chest. Natasha’s criticism, however, is not simply a matter of aesthetic preference, but points to a larger critique of the society’s communism: Natasha’s concern about sloppy sandals and woollen dresses that hide the female body highlights the way in which femininity and female eroticism are masked or obscured. One of the specific figures to whom Syrett’s narrative might be directing its criticism is Carpenter,

¹²⁹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 53.

¹³⁰ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 88. Emma Sutton records that in George Bernard Shaw’s estimation, Wagner’s *Ring* was a “socialist allegory of the evils of late nineteenth-century capitalism.” *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism*, 1. By contrast, she notes that both Marx and William Morris had denounced Wagner (120).

¹³¹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 61.

¹³² Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 83.

¹³³ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 83.

whom Ruth Livesey characterizes as “the most articulate voice within the Fellowship [of the New Life].”¹³⁴ Carpenter was vocal on the question of sandals, urging the need to free one’s feet from the capitalist encasement of shoes, and further remarking that shoes “[e]ffeminized” the feet.¹³⁵ Carpenter is clearly disturbed by what he perceives as the power of certain garments to feminize the wearer. This is precisely, however, why Natasha enjoys her red shoes, which are decorative and not utilitarian. Moreover, when it comes to her wish for dresses with low-cut necklines, the emphasis on femininity and its erotic power is foregrounded. Natasha, therefore, subjects the culture of the New Life to her own aesthetic evaluation, which elevates her alternative understanding of female beauty.

The women’s high-necked dresses are a microcosm of the colony’s attitude toward sexuality. Assuredly, the colony believes in free unions, which was the arrangement between Natasha’s parents. Erotic passion, however, while regarded by the colony as natural, is also minimized and treated as inferior to abstinence. When Natasha explains that children in the society attend lectures, she states that the subject matter is frequently sex, and “what a hindrance it is to a person’s spiritual progress. And how the highest life is the celibate life.”¹³⁶ A subsequent scene reveals the disapproval of a visiting colony leader when he observes that the young men of the village give Natasha special treatment, and that she responds flirtatiously. When he expresses his concern in private, one of the women leaders, Anna Delyanof, explains: “We thought that by bringing up boys and girls together—by careful lectures addressed to them separately as they approached maturity—we could eliminate foolishness and pernicious

¹³⁴ Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105.

¹³⁵ Edward Carpenter quoted in Livesey, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism*, 106. Livesey also discusses how Carpenter championed homosexual love between virile, manly men, which he saw as at odds with “sensuous consumption and effeminacy,” 12.

¹³⁶ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 79. It is unclear what communist movement Syrett may be referencing with this emphasis on celibacy. A group of communists in England in the eighteenth century called Shakers enforced celibacy. I cannot discover, however, a group that promoted free unions while believing celibacy was superior.

flirtation. I am bound to say that Natasha has shaken my theory.”¹³⁷ The 1890s were the beginning of co-education in progressive schools in England, such as Bedales, which was founded in 1893 and began co-education in 1898. One of the aims of co-education was to normalize sex and make it less intriguing by “lift[ing] the suppression, secrecy and ignorance surrounding sex.”¹³⁸ The colony also shares this co-educational aim, but Natasha clearly represents the irrepressible power of female eroticism in spite of the colony’s efforts to contain it.

The colony’s elevation of celibacy and discouragement of flirtation point to a fear of eroticism as a powerful impulse that could prove destructive to the ideals of sharing all things in common and living harmoniously. In this way, the colony differs from the Fellowship of the New Life, which, as Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks record, was “preoccupied with sexual pleasure.”¹³⁹ The colony’s attitude toward eroticism instead bears closer comparison with William Morris’s treatment of sexuality in *News From Nowhere* (1890). Like the Lansing Settlement, the inhabitants of Morris’s fictional utopia, Nowhere, believe in free love, but in contrast with the Lansing colony, Nowhere does not glorify celibacy. At the same time, in Nowhere, erotic desire remains the primary source of jealousy, and even violence. The protagonist-visitor to Nowhere is told by one of the inhabitants: “love is not a very reasonable thing, and perversity and self-will are commoner than some of our moralists think.”¹⁴⁰ In order to illustrate the truth of this statement he remarks: “only a month ago there was a mishap down by us, that in the end cost the lives of two men and a woman, and, as it were, put out the sunlight for us for a while.”¹⁴¹ The disruptive power of Natasha’s sexuality certainly aligns with this view,

¹³⁷ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 92.

¹³⁸ Robert Skidelsky, *English Progressive Schools* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 46.

¹³⁹ Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto, 1977), 10.

¹⁴⁰ William Morris, *News From Nowhere*, ed. Stephen Arata (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003), 84.

¹⁴¹ Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 84.

but by contrast, Syrett's narrative demonstrates that to deny desire is self-deadening, and instead, erotic longing is just one of several forms of desire that women (and men) should be empowered to pursue. Natasha embodies the revolt of desire against the colony's attempt at its suppression in several forms: she longs for possessions, beauty, individuality, privacy, good food, stimulating conversation, and sexual fulfillment. Moreover, the danger of disciplining individual desire is plain to see: Natasha observes that most of the members of the colony have simply been indoctrinated and do not have any original ideas or passionate opinions. It is this lack of individualism that inspires Natasha to say: "All the people here are so *earnest*, and obvious, and ethical, and dull."¹⁴²

Natasha, by contrast, has cultivated her personal, aesthetic tastes through reading. Unlike the male authors revered by the colony, she prefers Charlotte Brontë's pioneering Victorian woman's narrative, *Jane Eyre*. Syrett's narrator emphasizes just how critical Brontë's prose is to Natasha's awakening aesthetic sensibility and sexual desires by not only describing which chapter of *Jane Eyre* that Natasha is reading aloud to Seigfried, but also including a lengthy quotation from Brontë's chapter. The selected passage is one of pure description, giving rich details of the drawing-room of Thornfield Hall, which readers will remember is the home of Jane's employer, Mr. Rochester. Such details include "crimson couches" and "sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red."¹⁴³ This excerpt is followed by Natasha's own rapturous meditation, in which she expresses her personal desires at great length, and in terms that echo the sumptuous detail from Brontë's narrative:

"I should like to lie on a large fluffy rug in front of a fire in that room, with a heap of lovely exciting books like 'Jane Eyre' all round me, and then when I was tired of them, I

¹⁴² Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 117. This point bears comparison with *News From Nowhere* as well, for the inhabitants of Nowhere do not experience the wide range of emotions that the visitor, Guest, expresses during his visit. In his introduction, Stephen Arata explains: "The very complexity of [Guest's] emotion distinguishes it from any likely to be felt by the inhabitants of Nowhere, whose desires are always frank, whole, self-evident, and capable of being met," Arata, Introduction to *News From Nowhere*, 33.

¹⁴³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, quoted in Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 57.

should ring the bell, and footmen with powdered hair would come in, and bring me delicious things to eat and drink. Oysters, and caviare, and truffles, and ice-pudding, and champagne, and Benedictine.”¹⁴⁴

This passage demonstrates the way in which Brontë’s fiction provides Natasha with a possible script for her future life: one in which her pleasure is central. She is able to picture an existence outside the colony through Jane’s distinctive narration of female subjectivity, with which Natasha closely identifies. In spite of the ties to Russian realism and socialism signified through her own name (Natasha Rostova is a central character in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* [1867]), she chooses the Gothicism and descriptive beauty of Brontë.

In addition to reading Brontë, Natasha has a connection to women writers of the Gothic mode by way of her mother, who is named Mary Godwin, a name that we are told Mary delights in: it “caused her lively satisfaction, since it was the name of a woman whose character and example she revered.”¹⁴⁵ This statement points to an unconventionality in Natasha’s mother, for while Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley was respected for her skill as the author of *Frankenstein* (1818), her romance with Percy Bysshe Shelley and pregnancy by him (while he was married to another woman) was still, at the end of the nineteenth century, regarded as scandalous. When Matthew Arnold read Edward Dowden’s lengthy 1886 biography of Percy Shelley’s life, he wrote that in it he discovered “a Shelley who, to speak plainly, disgusts,”¹⁴⁶ and Arnold wished that the time to relate the truth of Shelley’s life “had never come.”¹⁴⁷ One certainly did not, therefore, expect a young lady from a socially prominent family to esteem the “character and example” of Shelley’s wife. These examples are plainly situating Natasha’s sexual subjectivity in relation to the unconventional forms of femininity that we associate with the

¹⁴⁴ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 57.

¹⁴⁵ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew Arnold, “Shelley,” *The Last Word*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), 323.

¹⁴⁷ Arnold, “Shelley,” 306.

author of *Frankenstein* and with the protagonist of *Jane Eyre*. Even though it is evident that these women authors have very different political backgrounds, what is important for Natasha is that her mother was proud of a woman who fulfilled her sexual desires, and that we find in the passage of *Jane Eyre* the sensual indulgence and self-expression that the colony discourages. These interests create a distinctly female literary genealogy that is defined against the all-male group of authors whose writings the sexually suppressive colony's ideals are founded upon. Furthermore, Natasha's specific interests in women's literary history provide the platform for exploring a different kind of alternative art: male decadence.

The scene in which Natasha first becomes intrigued with decadence takes place following her rapturous reading of *Jane Eyre*. Brontë's novel not only heightens Natasha's wish for beautiful possessions and a life of pleasure, but it provides her with a model of sexual attraction. As we have seen, the passage about Thornfield Hall inspires Natasha to fantasize about sitting in a beautiful room, but there is a further detail about this setting that is important: her imagined enjoyment will culminate when a man arrives. Natasha explains that she would go "upstairs into a heavenly bedroom" and "put on an evening dress," and arrange her jewels, and then she would "go downstairs again and wait for some one."¹⁴⁸ Like Jane, she certainly desires male romantic companionship, but in her next statement she makes it clear that the nature of that companionship is not to be of the type to which Jane is attracted: "*not* Mr. Rochester—some one quite different, some one who would be amusing and make me laugh."¹⁴⁹ Natasha thus rejects Rochester's form of literary manhood: brooding, serious, rugged, and demanding. The kind of man who stirs her longing is instead a type for which she has no literary precedent. But she imagines him as "a man who gave one the sensation that life was wonderful and thrilling."¹⁵⁰ The narrator continues: "A man who approached [life] eagerly, boyishly perhaps, yet in no

¹⁴⁸ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 57.

¹⁴⁹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 57.

¹⁵⁰ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 77.

childish spirit. For him the cup of life sparkled to the brim, and was drunk in feverish haste.”¹⁵¹ Natasha is about to make the acquaintance of such an individual: Valentine Desmond, who is a decadent dandy. The narrative thus introduces a romance, but it is a romance with a twist. Before Val meets Natasha, we learn that he is a recent Oxford graduate. He is a character who in many ways calls to mind the wit and imagination of the Irish aesthete, Oscar Wilde. This is especially evident when Val’s mother recounts to a friend that her son “says he’s going to ‘live’—to make an art of life.”¹⁵² Moreover, the fact that Val, like Wilde, is Irish, is emphasized when the narrator wishes to distinguish him from the typical Englishman: “He possessed the faculty, in Englishmen almost non-existent, of seeing life picturesquely, of entering consciously into an atmosphere of glamour, and enjoying it with the self-consciousness of the artist who creates a world other than this.”¹⁵³

Once we fully understand that Natasha’s vision for her life is grounded in Brontë’s narrative, her connection with male decadence emerges. Val, who is staying in the country at a friend’s house party, takes a long walk and happens upon Natasha. We recognize from his perspective that the identity she has constructed for herself in defiance of the colony aligns her in many ways with a particular kind of decadent art. When Val first glimpses Natasha, he is bewildered: “She’s a Watteau shepherdess in a Beardsley drawing.”¹⁵⁴ Here, Val has in mind the eighteenth-century French artist Antoine Watteau who was known for his colorful pastoral scenes, but the placement in a “Beardsley drawing” suggests that something about the style of Natasha’s appearance has a greater affinity with Beardsley’s eccentric black-and-white illustrations. Val muses: “Is it her hair that’s so Beardsleyan? . . . Or the shape of her face,

¹⁵¹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 77.

¹⁵² Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 43.

¹⁵³ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 73. This conception of the artist echoes Wilde’s sentiment: “No great artist sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be an artist.” “The Decay of Lying,” *Intentions and The Soul of Man* (London: Methuen, 1908 [first published 1889]), 47.

¹⁵⁴ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 72.

perhaps?”¹⁵⁵ And later he notes that in addition to these traits, her eyes also make her look like a Beardsley drawing: “Her green eyes, and the way they’re set—rather slanting.”¹⁵⁶

That Natasha’s appearance has such a close affinity with Beardsley’s drawings would suggest that this is an instance of Wilde’s theory that “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life.”¹⁵⁷ Natasha, however, looks this way without having ever seen any of Beardsley’s artworks. She is not, therefore, *imitating* art, but rather she looks as if she *naturally* belongs in a decadent drawing. The paradox of Natasha’s unaffected artifice is again emphasized in Val’s observation that “[t]here was in all her movements, as well as in her manner, a rare, a tantalizing mixture of qualities. She walked with the freedom of a creature absolutely unused to the restraints of civilization. Yet in all her movements in some subtle fashion there was also the languorousness, the slow grace of artificiality.”¹⁵⁸

If decadence is, in Hughes’s phrase, “a cult of artifice in art and literature,”¹⁵⁹ characterized by its denial of the authority of, and self-differentiation from, nature, then Natasha’s unconscious artifice complicates and challenges this separation. Furthermore, if the problem with a “dominant ‘masculine’ aestheticism” is that it uses women’s bodies to symbolize art’s autonomy from nature, and therefore treats women as objects rather than human beings (as we saw in *Nobody’s Fault*), then the way in which Syrett undercuts the severing of art from nature also has important ramifications for Natasha’s subjectivity. In Natasha, art and nature become inseparable, which means that she can look like art, while retaining her personhood. Before Val first speaks to Natasha, he believes that her intrigue will be limited to her looks:

Her voice wouldn’t go with her appearance, of course. One was always disappointed.

¹⁵⁵ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 72.

¹⁵⁶ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 73.

¹⁵⁷ Oscar Wilde, “The Decay of Lying,” *Intentions and The Soul of Man*, 56.

¹⁵⁸ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 76.

¹⁵⁹ Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), ix.

But strangely enough it did. Val began to be enormously interested, not to say excited.”¹⁶⁰

Natasha, Val is surprised to discover, possess not only a strikingly decadent surface, but also a substance that is not captured merely in the tone of her voice, but which the remainder of the scene reveals is located in her intelligence and humour. In this way, she defies what Wilde’s dandy-misogynist Lord Henry Wotton claims when he declares: “Women are a decorative sex. They never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly.”¹⁶¹

With her effortless artifice, it is not surprising to learn that Natasha is attracted to the artificiality that she discovers in decadent poetry, prose, and art. When Val meets Natasha for the second time, he brings with him the decadent literature and drawings that Natasha’s witty speech and appearance recollect. Both Baudelaire and Beardsley constitute the chief practitioners in Natasha’s decadent education, and Verlaine and Wilde are also named, reinforcing that this is a male decadence of French and British genealogy. It is worth considering a passage in which Val converses with a female friend and describes Natasha in terms of her remarkable individuality, which he identifies in her self-constructed decadence, and decadent tastes:

[T]he odd thing about her was that she hadn’t accepted her surroundings. . . . It was her background, of course. . . . But on that background she had made an embroidery of her own. Such a curious one. So modern, in our sense of modernity. So—I was going to say so decadent even. By instinct, she belonged with one part of her nature at least, to all that’s artificial—exotic. . . . I used to lend her books. It was strange how she picked out all the modern elaborate artificial prose and poetry, and *loved* it.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 73.

¹⁶¹ Wilde, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, 42.

¹⁶² Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 152.

In Val's account, it is clear that Natasha is an artist: her self-construction is likened to the handiwork of embroidery, a word which also bears the additional meaning of embellishment or elaboration, indicating that what she has added to her communist background is something of lovely improvement. It is striking that Val labels Natasha's inclinations as both "modern" and "decadent," almost equating the two within the passage, and highlighting the way in which Natasha combines her "modern" autonomous womanhood with the artificiality of decadence.

Natasha's unconscious artifice has an intriguing counterpart in her intuitive expression of her erotic desire. She is enthralled by Val's appearance in his aesthetically pleasing clothing, she is thrilled by his witty conversation, and she delights in what the narrator calls "the Irishman's gift for brilliant monologue."¹⁶³ After many meetings spent enjoying art and engaging in banter with him, Natasha declares: "I love you so much."¹⁶⁴ After she has made this simple, direct statement, she presses her lips against his neck. The narrator records Val's response: "He looked down upon the face of a woman from whom for the time, everything but the primary passion of love had vanished. And she was not ashamed. He could see that. She was only waiting to be assured that he also loved, to accept her happiness with innocent abandonment."¹⁶⁵ Here, Val's observations make plain that there is nothing vulgar or improper about Natasha's sexuality—it is purely the natural extension of her feelings. That Val notices an absence of shame in Natasha's erotic desire accentuates what the novel later makes clear about a middle-class Victorian view of female sexuality. When Natasha goes to live with her aunts in London, we witness one of them declaring: "I don't think girls can be too innocent."¹⁶⁶ And when Natasha speaks the phrase "sexual matters," the narrator records that "[b]oth ladies started violently. The word did not exist in their vocabulary, and its utterance had the effect of a pistol shot."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 106.

¹⁶⁴ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 110.

¹⁶⁵ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 110.

¹⁶⁶ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 135.

Natasha's positive view of her sexual nature in the scene with Val, is thus clearly a violation of the ways in which women were expected to guard themselves from the perceived corruption of sex. Natasha transgresses even further with Val when they consummate their longing in her hut, and she experiences no emotion besides bliss. We see, then, that the colony's teachings about sex, while reductive, have enabled Natasha to regard her own sexuality as completely natural, and, assisted by *Jane Eyre* and decadent poetry, to value her erotic expression.

Even while Natasha so naturally expresses her eroticism by initiating a sexual encounter with Val, she is also preparing to present a highly constructed identity to the world outside the colony. She tells Val: "I'm going to be the greatest living orator for the people. I'm going to be the inspired preacher of the Simple Life, and the infamy of luxury, and the importance of Jaeger."¹⁶⁸ When Val questions why she would advocate a cause that she obviously despises, she explains: "It's a way out . . . The only way for me. I can't live like this for ever."¹⁶⁹ Natasha's conversations with Val not only assist her in developing the kind of clever rhetoric that she requires in order to be a great speaker, but also equip her with the skills to turn her oration into pure performance. In their first conversation, Natasha tells Val: "I like the way you talk . . . It's the sort of way I always want to talk—only no one understands it here, so I get no practice."¹⁷⁰ Natasha is referring to his mock-gravity, his powers of description, and his witty quips. The first glimpse that we have of Natasha's persona as an artistic orator occurs when the narrator states: "all the time, like one of Shakespeare's heroines, her sex was masquerading in the doublet and hose of advanced ethical theories."¹⁷¹ Here, the narrative begins to engage more explicitly with ideas about art as anti-mimetic, or what Wilde termed "Lying" as the "proper aim of Art."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 135.

¹⁶⁸ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 76.

¹⁶⁹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 80.

¹⁷⁰ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 75.

¹⁷¹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 97.

Wilde bemoans the “Decay of Lying” in aesthetics, which has come about due to a deluded idea that art is an imitation of nature. It is in this essay that we discover Wilde’s well-known phrase about life imitating art already quoted above.

Wilde’s concept of artistic Lying exists on a continuum with the typical notion of lying as a form of speech, which in Wilde’s essay is described as “[l]ying for the sake of gaining some immediate personal advantage, for instance—lying with a moral purpose, as it is usually called.”¹⁷³ Natasha’s lying begins in this category, initially purely from her desire to leave the life of the colony that she finds so oppressive. But to this incentive is added another powerful motive brought about by Val’s failure to return to the colony after they consummate their love. As readers, we have eventually learned that when Val returned to his hotel he was called away to attend his dying mother and was unable to inform Natasha before his departure. By the time he comes back, Natasha has already moved to London, and the rest of the settlement, which had been coming to a critical division, has been disbursed in order for its members to join other colonies. What is more, Natasha only knew Val by his Christian name, and he insisted on calling her Mélusine, the “snake fairy,”¹⁷⁴ making it impossible for them to use other methods for finding each other. Natasha was devastated by Val’s unexpected departure, and she resolved to become such an excellent orator that her popularity would one day bring Val across her path: “I’ll be great. I’ll be some one he can’t ignore when I meet him again. And I *shall* meet him if I’m great enough.”¹⁷⁵

Over time, this wish for excellence grows to have a stronger affinity with what, in Wilde’s essay, is identified as “[t]he only form of lying that is absolutely beyond reproach.”¹⁷⁶ That is,

¹⁷² Wilde, “Decay of Lying,” 56.

¹⁷³ Wilde, “Decay of Lying,” 51.

¹⁷⁴ Val says: “I’ve thought of the name you *ought* to have. I wouldn’t hear the real one for the world. You are Mélusine. You’ve just stepped out of a fairy-tale. A French fairy-tale, of course. You’re the snake fairy. The witch-princess in a *conte bleu*. And I’m the Prince. I insist on being the Prince.” Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 85.

¹⁷⁵ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 142.

“Lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is, as we have already pointed out, Lying in Art.”¹⁷⁷ While it must be noted that for the duration of time that Natasha performs her proselytizing identity it never becomes entirely severed from her original motivations, her Lying also increasingly becomes a highly polished form of Art: “I became to all intents and purposes, an actress. The platform was my stage.”¹⁷⁸ She takes special delight in subtly revealing what she deems to be the ridiculousness of the colony’s beliefs: “how often she faced her audience in a spirit of mocking, or savage irony. . . . [W]hen she had succeeded in arranging her phraseology to convey a *double entendre* of sufficient subtlety to escape unchallenged, she had secretly exulted.”¹⁷⁹ Natasha thus becomes a master at manipulating language, and she turns the earnest sincerity of socialism into nothing more than perfectly executed surface. A man who knows Natasha’s true beliefs tells a friend who is convinced that Natasha’s powerful speeches must be genuine, that they are “[a]rt . . . Sheer, wonderful art.”¹⁸⁰

Ultimately, however, Natasha does not want to sustain this lifestyle in which she must constantly produce a conscious artifice, rather than her intuitive artistry. When her father dies, she chooses to end her performances, but she is troubled that her lying had extended to declaring her sincerity to her father while he was on his deathbed. However, she expresses no repentance: “And why pretend to myself that I regret? I do not. I am unhappy; I can’t justify what I did, that’s another matter. I sinned, if you like; but I do not repent.”¹⁸¹ Natasha, then, feels remorse at having deceived her father, but otherwise she recognizes her artistic Lying as something that does not require atonement. She has, moreover, become such an accomplished

¹⁷⁶ Wilde, “Decay of Lying,” 53.

¹⁷⁷ Wilde, “Decay of Lying,” 53.

¹⁷⁸ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 267.

¹⁷⁹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 188.

¹⁸⁰ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 245.

¹⁸¹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 296.

performer that she considers supporting herself as an actress. Ultimately, however, she does not wish to continue a career on the stage. Although she does not explicitly say why, it is clearly for the same reason she does not wish to continue to spend every day in the studio of an artist who is obsessed with her as an object of his art and of his sexual desire: “I don’t want to live in an atmosphere of artificiality. But I like it to be *there*.”¹⁸² The first part of this statement may sound as if Natasha has ceased to enjoy the artifice that so greatly delighted her as a young woman. But, the next comment makes it plain that she still delights in Lying in art: she simply prefers, however, not to dwell constantly in a space in which that art has been severed from nature.

In these circumstances, it comes as no surprise that we encounter an explicit comment about the relationship between the form of fiction and the form of life. This is, after all, a narrative in which a socialist colony that should be a utopia is instead so dull and boring that a woman who longs to be in a Gothic narrative and looks like a Beardsley drawing escapes by means of the performative language she perfects from reading decadent literature and conversing with a dandy. Val learns that his dear friend Julie is the sister of Natasha’s mother Mary, and he declares:

It’s frightfully melodramatic, of course. I wonder you have the courage to face the situation. The aunt discovers the long-lost niece! My dear lady, it’s shocking to all one’s entirely erroneous prejudices about realism. Of course the truth is that life’s not realistic. It’s just flagrantly, wildly melodramatic. [...] All the exceedingly expensive machinery is provided, so you don’t suppose the actor manager intends his cast to play reticent little Henry James comedies?¹⁸³

This passage is significant for the way in which it rejects the idea that realism in art is a true reflection of life. It also draws attention to the form of *The Child of Promise* itself, in which this

¹⁸² Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 268 (italics in original).

¹⁸³ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 287.

“frightfully melodramatic” event is taking place. Val’s comment encourages the reader to reflect on the manner in which the narrative incorporates sensationalist, melodramatic, Romantic, and decadent settings and plot developments, all of which are delivered in a straightforward middlebrow prose style. The reader is thus presented with these motifs from anti-mimetic genres in a manner that takes for granted that they are completely believable in the life of Natasha. Moreover, Val’s comments bring to mind melodramatic novels of the 1860s, such as Ouida’s elaborate romances, which both Oscar Wilde and Max Beerbohm recognized as influential on their own aestheticism, and are thus part of the genealogy of the decadent fictions that Natasha and Val enjoy.¹⁸⁴ The history of this anti-mimetic fiction can of course be traced even further back to the Gothic novel, which through *Jane Eyre* and Mary Godwin is the origin of Natasha’s Romantic—rather than realist—aspirations for her life.

Among all of these genres, melodrama is the one that has the closest connection with Val’s reference to the “actor manager,” since this performative style has its origins in theatre. Val’s comment dismissing Henry James’s “reticence” is a reference to James’s theatrical failure when *Guy Domville* was performed at St. James’s Theatre in 1895 and was jeered by the audience. Rather tellingly for Val’s commentary, the next play put on by the St. James’s Theatre was Wilde’s *Importance of Being Earnest*. Wilde’s drama features Ernest, who readers familiar with the play will remember is a character who thinks he is lying about his identity, only to discover that he has been telling the truth all along: his Lying was actually realism, so to speak. Val’s comments, then, urge us to reflect on *The Child of Promise* as a narrative filled with developments that might appear to be improbable but are completely realistic because life is melodramatic. Furthermore, as is evident in the case of Natasha and Val, life can be lived as if one were in a Brontë novel or a Beardsley drawing.

¹⁸⁴ Wilde, of course, uses the term “melodrama” pejoratively in to talk about drama, calling melodramas an “imitative” medium in which the characters “talk on the stage exactly as they would talk off it,” and which he says aim at producing “an impression of reality.” “The Decay of Lying,” 175. This definition clarifies that for Wilde, melodrama aims at realism, whereas Syrett is thinking about it as a genre which is usually regarded as exaggerating emotion and filled with improbable coincidences.

Once Natasha has ceased making a career of artistic lying, the narrative more fully returns to the romance plot. It is necessary to sketch briefly the way in which this narrative trajectory has developed in the intervening period. After five years, Natasha succeeds in her strategy to attract the notice of Val. By this time, however, she has become familiar with the way in which men take advantage of women sexually, and she is convinced that this must account for Val's disappearance. When they meet, therefore, she carries on her performance of her new identity: "She looked full at Desmond and bowed, graciously, conventionally, as a woman bows to a stranger presented to her for the first time."¹⁸⁵ Val is frustrated many times in his attempts to explain to Natasha the true circumstances of his departure, and only very slowly does she accept that she still loves him. The turning point in their romance occurs, tellingly, in relation to Baudelaire's poem, "Les Bienfaits de la Lune." In their secret meetings at the colony, Val had recited this poem, telling Natasha that its description of the moon leaning over a child and "déposa ses couleurs sur ta face"¹⁸⁶ was about her. In this later scene, Natasha is reading Baudelaire's poem to herself, and when Val inquires what she is reading, she pretends not to remember the poem's early role in their relationship and asks whether he is familiar with it. Val responds by reciting, "in a whispered voice," a line he used in order to explain Natasha's Beardsleyan green eyes and pale skin: "*Tes prunelles en sont restées vertes, et tes joues extraordinairement pales.*"¹⁸⁷ That this poem is the turning point in the renewal of their more intimate understanding makes evident that Natasha is still engaged in a decadent romance, but it is one that the narrative has reimagined even further. Val, who had shown his inclination to be careless of other people's emotions—which led to his feeling of obligation to marry his wife since she believed he loved her—has had to undergo a change so that he is less similar to the

¹⁸⁵ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 182.

¹⁸⁶ Arthur Symons translates this: "paint[ing] her colours upon your face." Baudelaire, "The Favours of the Moon," *Baudelaire: Prose and Poetry*, trans. Arthur Symons (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1926), 65.

¹⁸⁷ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 304. Symons translates this: "That is why your eyes are green and your cheeks extraordinarily pale." Baudelaire, "Favours of the Moon," *Baudelaire: Prose and Poetry*, trans. Symons, 65.

narcissistic dandy whom Syrett chastised in *Nobody's Fault*. Val's reformation is largely indicated by his application of his training as a barrister and his self-perfected persuasive speech to running for an office as a parliamentary candidate (in East Merionethshire in Wales [213]). His precise political convictions are not detailed. Instead, we understand that Val has embraced an honesty and moral uprightness that elevate him above the typical bribery and self-aggrandizement of his political peers. Val, then, has become an appropriate partner for Natasha, and when Baudelaire's poem sets in motion their renewed romance, he does not allow his political career to prevent him from taking the risky step of leaving his wife and entering a free union with Natasha.

The novel's final chapter reveals that the desire for beauty and pleasure that was fostered in Natasha from reading Brontë's narrative has remained foundational to her personal aspirations. In this final scene, it is clear that the life she has created is the one she imagined when she first read *Jane Eyre*. The narrator describes the lovely room that she has arranged: "She lay in her favourite attitude curled up on the sofa, against a heap of purple cushions. . . . The firelight played over a bowl of violets on a low table at her elbow, on the books which lined the walls, on the fresh chintz at the windows."¹⁸⁸ In this final image, Natasha has also attained the culminating element that had crowned her vision: instead of Mr. Rochester, she has the company of a "boyish man" in the figure of Val, who "sat on the floor at her feet."¹⁸⁹ Natasha, then, has drawn from the alternative script she discovered in Brontë, but she has incorporated into that script elements of decadence, including her unconventional erotic longing for a reformed dandy.

¹⁸⁸ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 341.

¹⁸⁹ Syrett, *Child of Promise*, 341.

Anne Page: Aesthetic Sexuality and the Art of Sympathy

Anne Page (1908) addresses many of the same questions that were explored in *The Child of Promise* about the woman aesthete's relationship to masculine aestheticism and decadence, and the role of the female body within a movement that privileges feminine artifice. From the opening passages of *Anne Page*, however, we are presented with a woman aesthete who models a reimagined relationship between femininity and art that is distinct from *The Child of Promise*. Most crucially, where Natasha possessed an artifice that was paradoxically natural, Anne Page raises nature to the level of art, thereby constructing an aestheticism that is dependent on nature, which includes the material female body, which undercuts the tendency in aestheticism to use femininity to function purely symbolically.

Syrett's 1908 novel begins with a long description of the titular protagonist's garden, its flowers and its walks, and the "lavender garden" in which Anne is found sitting. The narrator then elaborates the details of her clothing: "She wore a dress the colour of which, in its shades of grey-green and purple, might have been suggested by the lavender in the borders [of the flower beds]. It was a graceful flowing dress; beautiful naturally, inevitably. Anne Page possessed the gift of surrounding herself with everything that was exquisite, as simply as a flower surrounds itself with leaves and dainty buds."¹⁹⁰ This description draws our attention to the defining features of Anne's aestheticism. Anne's "flowing," "natural dress" situates her within the aesthetic dress movement of the 1870s and 1880s that valued a more natural shape than the artificial figure achieved with earlier crinolines and resisted the arrival of bustles. This dress movement, Kimberly Wahl records, originated in "artistic circles" and crossed over to "mainstream fashion culture," and made use of colors that were "natural and soft,"¹⁹¹ which is apparent in the hues of Anne's dress. The relationship between nature and beauty that we see in

¹⁹⁰ Syrett, *Anne Page* (New York: John Lane, 1909), 4.

¹⁹¹ Kimberly Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013), xi.

Anne's clothing resonates with Wahl's description of the way in which aesthetic dress perpetuated an idealized form of nature: "[t]he selective appreciation, absorption, and artful application of nature in Aestheticism for the purpose of locating and consuming beauty conflated naturalism with an idealistic, almost pantheistic vision of the natural world."¹⁹² This pantheistic vision of nature matches exactly with a later scene in *Anne Page*. When a group of French artists first see Anne, who is carrying "a heap of flowers," one of them remarks: "It's some garden goddess or other. Flora. Yes, that's it,—Flora."¹⁹³ This notion that Anne is the goddess of flowers reinforces the comparison that we already observed when Anne was equated with an exquisite flower, a comparison that solidifies the keynote of her aesthetic identity: her artistry is "natural" and "inevitable." As Ardis explains: "Art is figured in *Anne Page* as a collaboration with nature rather than an alternative to it."¹⁹⁴

As I have already noted, this aesthetic sensibility reveals that Syrett was considering questions about the woman aesthete that she addressed in *The Child of Promise*, but in *Anne Page* she imagines a different kind of feminist aestheticism. The distinction between these forms of aesthetic femininity, in addition to their relationship with nature, is borne out by the two kinds of art with which each protagonist is associated. Natasha, as we saw, possesses an artifice that is decidedly decadent and which makes her appear as if she should be in a Beardsley drawing. Anne, by contrast, is compared multiple times with flowers, her beauty is described in relation to Pater's discussion of the Mona Lisa, and she is equated with Botticelli's Madonnas, tying her to a tradition of female beauty consecrated in the Old Masters. Moreover, *Anne Page* draws on a genealogy of aesthetic and decadent literature that is separate from that which *The Child of Promise* explores, but which also provides the woman aesthete with alternative ways of realizing aesthetic satisfaction and sexual fulfillment. In *Anne Page*, Syrett also engages with a

¹⁹² Wahl, *Dressed as in a Painting*, 20.

¹⁹³ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 131.

¹⁹⁴ Ardis, "Aestheticization of Everyday Life," *Women and British Aestheticism*, 243.

different debate about art for art's sake: Anne's narrative revises an earlier understanding of aestheticism as ethically irresponsible, such as we find in Vernon Lee's critique of the selfish male aesthete in *Miss Brown*. Not only, as we saw in relation to *Nobody's Fault*, did Lee uncover the potential for misogyny in aestheticism, she also warned against the way in which a worship of beauty could permit callousness toward human needs, exemplified when the aesthete Walter Hamlin praises the picturesque beauty of a section of his estate that is occupied by poor and sickly tenants, and refuses to entertain the idea of improving their lives by creating a factory in which they could work: "I would rather die than spoil that beautiful peaceful bit of ground."¹⁹⁵ By contrast, Syrett forges a new relationship between beauty and sympathy, revealing that Anne's pursuit of aesthetic experiences and sexual pleasure, rather than benefiting only herself, increases her sympathy for others, thus demonstrating that aestheticism can function as a stimulus to increased care for other people. Although Anne draws on French fiction associated with decadence, her emphasis on the collaboration of art with the natural world, combined with her worship of a kind of beauty that has no interest in decay or perversion, marks her out as an aesthete rather than a decadent.

When the novel opens, Anne is in her fifties, a single woman leading a simple life in the Warwickshire village of Dymfield. Her name, of course, is taken from Shakespeare's character in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and, as a French painter declares: "Warwickshire is Shakespeare's county."¹⁹⁶ These associations solidly connect Anne with an English literary tradition, but as I will demonstrate, it is in French literature that she discovers a transgressive aestheticism with which she identifies.¹⁹⁷ Before she becomes acquainted with French ideas about art, however, Anne's life is unremarkable: she leads a bland existence caring for her widowed father until he

¹⁹⁵ Vernon Lee, *Miss Brown* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1884), 3:206.

¹⁹⁶ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 129.

¹⁹⁷ Ardis has demonstrated that Syrett dissociates Shakespeare from ties to effeminacy at the fin de siècle that were solidified through Wilde's figuration of a homoerotic Shakespeare. Syrett instead connects the bard with femininity. See "Aestheticization of Everyday Life," *Women and British Aestheticism*, 230-50.

dies in her thirtieth year, and she then goes to live with her sickly aunt. Before moving, Anne writes in her diary: “Nothing has ever happened to me. Nothing will ever happen now. It is not surprising. I am very plain, and nothing happens to a plain woman who is also poor.”¹⁹⁸ When her aunt dies, however, Anne finds that she is the heiress of her relative’s money and estate, which allows her to pursue her own desires. The narrator notes that during the five years she lived with her aunt, Anne read widely, but did not experience life for herself: “Like the Lady of Shalott, she sat weaving her tapestry of dreams before a magic mirror in which the pageant of the world was nothing but a reflection.”¹⁹⁹ The narrative emphasizes that Anne’s reading consisted of a tradition of male-authored English fiction: she loves the poetry of Herrick, and she is well versed in Chaucer, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, and Shelley. Anne’s literary background, then, is solidly English, but later in her life when she explicitly reflects on her aesthetic and erotic choices, in every instance it is in connection with a French author: Joris-Karl Huysmans, Théophile Gautier, and Charles Baudelaire.

The importance of French art to Anne’s self-flourishing and awakening eroticism is initially demonstrated in the way in which the visit of a group of French artists completely alters her self-perception, enabling her to recognize her own beauty, skill as a conversationalist, and aesthetic capabilities. Anne becomes acquainted with these artists when they visit her aunt, who knew the mother of one of the men. One of them, François, greatly admires Anne, and they develop a warm friendship. Eventually he paints Anne’s portrait and decades later still considers it his greatest work: “that picture’s been painted eighteen years, and I’ve never done anything to touch it since.”²⁰⁰ Another artist, René, sparks Anne’s attraction and erotic desire, which provokes her unprecedented decision to follow him to Paris in order to conduct an affair with

¹⁹⁸ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 56.

¹⁹⁹ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 98. The allusion to the Lady of Shalott of course comes from Tennyson’s poem of that title (1832, revised 1842), which is about mimesis in art, as well as direct versus vicarious experience.

²⁰⁰ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 127.

this man who is only twenty-seven: a decade her junior. The positive representation of this romance is very bold since René wants to marry Anne, but she refuses, choosing to be his mistress instead. She is also the one to end the affair after three years, after which she travels through Europe, and then returns to her simple life in the English village, which is occasionally punctuated by visits from François.

I have been recounting the events of *Anne Page* in chronological order, but the narrative presents Anne's story through a strategic non-linear structure. As the two novels we have already examined in this chapter attest, Syrett's interest in the development of new kinds of female subjectivities at the fin de siècle often takes the form of chronicling the linear trajectory of a woman's development from childhood into adulthood. By contrast, in the first chapter of *Anne Page* we are told that Anne "was not a young woman. She had indeed travelled quite far on the road that leads from youth to death."²⁰¹ What follows is an account of Anne's life in middle-age that is interspersed with earlier episodes primarily recounting the critical turning point brought about by the French artists. Occasionally, we also learn of Anne's childhood and life as a young woman through her memories and her return to her diary entries. And finally, in addition to the third-person narrator's account, Anne's "French period" is also narrated by François, whose commentary serves to make clear that Anne's application of aestheticism to her life has turned that life into a kind of art. In this 1908 novel, non-linearity is crucial to the record of a woman aesthete's life because it shifts the emphasis away from the trajectory of the romance plot, and reinforces Anne's identity as a complete individual who is not dependent on a man.

A review in the *Academy* points to a further aspect of the relationship between form and content in *Anne Page* that draws attention to Syrett's strategic use of her middlebrow realism. The critic considered the style of Syrett's prose to be completely at odds with her topic: "In her latest novel Miss Netta Syrett's manner is at direct variance with her matter. The former is

²⁰¹ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 4.

almost cloyingly sentimental, the latter almost brutal.”²⁰² The reviewer elaborated: “in Miss Syrett’s case the ugliness of her story is accentuated, and in places rendered positively repellent, by a method of narration so utterly unsuited to its subject.”²⁰³ The reviewer’s claim that the narrative manner is “sentimental” points to the way in which Anne’s garden, her home, and herself are all described as lovely and appealing. The reviewer cannot reconcile that this initial impression of Anne as a gracious middle-aged woman also encompasses the story of a bold affair initiated by this same woman. These comments, then, draw attention to Syrett’s strategic use of a style that the reviewer, at any rate, associates with narratives about innocuous femininity, but which Syrett deploys to win the reader’s approval of her protagonist, making it more difficult to condemn and dismiss the revelation of her full character. That *Anne Page* succeeded in winning admirers, and likely the novel’s protagonist as well, would seem to be indicated by its increasingly large print runs in the few years following its first publication by the esteemed publishing house, Chatto and Windus: from 3,000 copies its first year, to 25,000 printed in 1910, and almost 27,000 in January of 1911.²⁰⁴

Anne Page, as I have already noted, draws primarily on French literature in relation to the ways in which the protagonist deviates from traditional womanhood. When it comes to Anne’s artistic appearance, however, she is associated explicitly as well as implicitly with Pater’s art criticism.²⁰⁵ Notably, it is a French artist, François, who engages with Pater, constituting another instance of the productive engagement between French and English forms of aestheticism that we also find embodied in the stimulating friendship between the English Anne and the French painters. François, in the scene where he references Pater, has known Anne for

²⁰² Unsigned review of *Anne Page*, by Netta Syrett, *Academy* 1879, May 9, 1908, 767.

²⁰³ Unsigned review of *Anne Page*, *Academy*, 767.

²⁰⁴ *Anne Page* was the first of Syrett’s novels published by Chatto and Windus, but over the next nine years they printed seven more of Syrett’s titles.

²⁰⁵ Pater, of course, went out of his way to engage with French art, as Patricia Clements notes: “Pater’s major allegorical works . . . all attach a special, originating, importance to French literature.” *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 77.

twenty years, and he explains her beauty to one of her village friends: “Beauty, the truest beauty, is an art. A subtle blend of many powers, mental and moral, which result in a mastery of the physical qualities. A knowledge of them, a perfect handling, a moulding of them to the ideal of the spirit. Do you remember what your critic Pater, says of *Mona Lisa*?”²⁰⁶ François’s description of Anne’s loveliness invests her with the agency of the artist, attributing true beauty to interior qualities that are then manifested in the flesh. At the same time, since Anne is her own canvas, her beauty also makes her into an object of art. When François then recites a passage of Pater’s monumental work of art criticism, *The Renaissance*, it establishes even further the theory of aesthetic subjectivity and objectivity that the narrative is advancing: “[Pater] is speaking of the portrait—which is lovely, according to the spirit rather than the flesh, and he says, *’It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries, and exquisite passions.’*”²⁰⁷ François thereby asserts that Anne is the artistic embodiment of the ideal that the Mona Lisa represents on the canvas; her artistic tastes and lovely nature manifest themselves on her skin so that Anne is a live piece of art: one whose beauty originates from within.

Syrett is not content, however, to adopt Paterian aestheticism uncritically. Instead, François’s identification of Anne with the Mona Lisa is revised by the opinion of a woman untutored in art criticism. She declares that an association François has already made between Anne Page and the natural world is more accurate than the subsequent comparison to a work of art. In this earlier statement, François said: “[Anne] has *acquired* her beauty—secreted it, in the same marvelous way that from hidden cells a rose draws its colour and its sweetness.”²⁰⁸ This description still utilizes the Paterian terminology of cells secreting beauty, but the application to a flower rather than to a work of art is crucial for the way in which it connects Anne’s aesthetic

²⁰⁶ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 26.

²⁰⁷ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 26-27.

²⁰⁸ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 22.

loveliness to nature rather than to artifice. The narrative's careful deployment of Pater's prose, as well as its modification, suggests that an aestheticism that figures femininity as only a matter of signification is insufficient for the woman aesthete who possesses a material female body, one that possesses the "nature" that artifice tries to occlude. Kathy Alexis Psomiades argues that Pater's discussion of the Mona Lisa is an example of an aesthetic erasure of the female body. In Psomiades's assessment, this erasure occurs because the Mona Lisa is turned into a medium through which men can pass desire back and forth in the representation of form: "[f]emininity has become dispensable."²⁰⁹ Syrett's revision, then, returns the female body to the object of aesthetic contemplation so that femininity is *necessary* to the artistic beauty that is achieved.

A further amendment of an explicitly male aesthetic preference for artifice over nature occurs when Anne makes a comparison between herself and Des Esseintes, the supreme aesthete of Huysmans's decadent masterpiece, *À rebours* (1884). Anne is talking about working in her garden, and she remarks: "It reminded me this morning of an elaborately arranged 'sensation' scheme, planned by that madman in *À rebours*. Only of course, he would have despised such a homely natural flower as the hollyhock."²¹⁰ First, Anne's reference to Des Esseintes indicates that she sees herself as participating in an aesthetic milieu. She specifically identifies with Des Esseintes's passion for intricate design and the effort required to achieve a perfect artistic effect. At the same time, she distinguishes herself from this "madman"²¹¹ by alluding to his passion for hot-house flowers, such as the *alocasia metallica* (known colloquially as "elephant ear") about which Des Esseintes declares: "It was the supreme masterpiece of artifice."²¹² Anne, by contrast, loves "homely natural" flowers, such as the hollyhock, which is

²⁰⁹ Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 200-201.

²¹⁰ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 81.

²¹¹ G. A. Cevalco notes that when *À Rebours* was first published, its protagonist was viewed as "a lunatic and maniac of a complex sort." *The Breviary of the Decadence: J.-K. Huysmans's À Rebours and English Literature* (New York: AMS Press, 2001), ix.

²¹² Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 2003), 85.

abundantly found at English cottages, is easy to grow, and can even serve utilitarian purposes: the stem can be used as firewood, and the roots have medicinal properties. Anne's artistic schemes, therefore, affirm nature's beauty. The productive role of nature in Anne's aestheticism is also the reason that François considers her artistry as superior to that of the French painters. When François recalls the day he and his fellow artists met Anne, he emphasizes that the four men were ambitious to do great things. He reveals, however, that in the intervening decades all four artists have entered the commercial world, succumbing to the pursuit of financial gain. By contrast, he notes: "after all Anne, it's you who have made an art of *life*. You're the only real success."²¹³ Anne's triumphant aestheticism bears comparison with another woman aesthete, Christina Rossetti, whom Psomiades argues "insists on an aestheticism more perfect than her brother's [Dante Gabriel Rossetti], one that does not traffic in the market, one whose lushly beautiful objects are not for sale."²¹⁴ This is also true for Anne, who—although she prioritizes the creative productivity of René when it comes to their romance—emerges as a superior artist because in so doing, she raises life to the highest artistic medium.

Anne's aestheticism makes the female body central to her collaboration of art and nature, but the argument on behalf of satisfying that body's sexual desires is grounded entirely in aestheticism. In this way, *Anne Page* explores a different form of sexual permissiveness than the emphasis in *The Child of Promise* on erotic expression as natural. One of the ways that the narrative applies the concept of art for art's sake to sexuality is literal: the object of Anne's desire, René, is an artist whose creativity is regarded as more valuable than adherence to a moral code. François stresses to Anne that if René were to become absorbed in one woman, he would be in danger of that love taking the place of his devotion to art. He cautions: "Think! His whole existence! What becomes of his work if it's merged in the life of one woman? Why it goes

²¹³ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 40.

²¹⁴ Psomiades, *Beauty's Body*, 102.

to pot, of course.”²¹⁵ First, it must be acknowledged that this idea is certainly problematic in that it adheres to a Romantic conception of the autonomous male artist whose creativity is thought to exempt him from typical human obligations. At the same time, Anne’s acceptance of this worship of creative genius allows her to consider a sexual relationship with René in which she disregards conventional morality and instead applies a purely aesthetic evaluation.

The scene in which Anne tells René that she wishes to be his mistress fully demonstrates her bold authorization of her sexual satisfaction. When René proposes marriage, she throws out this conventional script and takes charge of the conversation, beginning with her response: “No, René.”²¹⁶ She then tells him: “I will never marry you. But if you want me, I will stay.”²¹⁷ René is baffled, and tells her: “You’re saying awful things. Not from my point of view, but as an Englishwoman. *Mon Dieu!* as an Englishwoman with the fear of Mrs. Grundy if not the fear of God before her eyes!”²¹⁸ René’s words convey that Anne’s proposal is shocking, and especially because of her identity as an Englishwoman, a point that casts into relief why, as I will examine, she must look to French literature to find a model for assertive female sexuality. Anne, however, is unmoved by René’s concern: “You think I ought to feel I’m doing wrong? Perhaps I ought. But I *don’t* feel it, René.”²¹⁹ Anne is able to make this assertion because prioritizing the integrity of René’s art frees her from weighing her actions by the respective religious and social moral codes to which he refers.

In addition to René’s identity as an artist, Anne thinks of their romance itself in terms of its beauty. In part, we witness this idea in her resolve to end the affair as soon as the original passion begins to wane, because she does not want the beauty of their romance ever to be

²¹⁵ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 176.

²¹⁶ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 213.

²¹⁷ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 213.

²¹⁸ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 216.

²¹⁹ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 216.

diminished. After Anne has spent three years with René, she senses that a shift in his feelings has occurred, and she prepares to leave while he is on a short trip. It is at this point that she makes a brief but poignant comparison between herself and Gautier's bisexual protagonist from *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835), a novel considered outrageous for its frank depiction of sexuality, and especially for the queer eroticism generated by the cross-dressed Madeleine, to whom a man, d'Albert, is attracted long before she reveals she is a woman. This subversive novel was held in high regard by British aesthetes such as Swinburne, Wilde, and Symons.²²⁰ In 1878, Swinburne published a sonnet about *Mademoiselle de Maupin*: "This is the golden book of spirit and sense, / The holy writ of beauty."²²¹ In 1890, Wilde quoted these words when writing about the personal significance he discovered in Pater's "beautiful and suggestive essays on the Renaissance,"²²² thus endowing an English text with the same power that Swinburne attributed to Gautier's novel. In 1898, Beardsley's six drawings illustrating *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (he had been working on these in 1897) were published posthumously by Leonard Smithers, including one depicting Madeleine in her men's clothing.²²³

Mademoiselle de Maupin features significantly when Anne meets Francois in his study to inform him of her departure. At this point she returns his copy of Gautier's novel. She tells him: "It's very different from my story, isn't it? But the way she found, I had already discovered

²²⁰ Although the fictions of Gautier belong to the school of French Romanticism, his work was regarded as foundational to French symbolism, and Arthur Symons, when he rewrote and expanded his essay "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893) as *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1900), discusses Gautier in relation to the primary authors. In his further revision of the essay in 1919, Symons devoted a complete section to Gautier, and one to Baudelaire. Gautier's Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was a powerful declaration of art's autonomy from morality, making it a foundational articulation of the ideas of art for art's sake.

²²¹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Sonnet (with a Copy of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*)," reprinted in *Algernon Charles Swinburne: Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 170.

²²² Oscar Wilde, "Mr. Pater's Last Volume," *Speaker*, March 22, 1890, 319.

²²³ Zatlin notes that initially, Beardsley had planned thirty-two illustrations for an edition of *Maupin* in the original French. After initially sharing the idea with his publisher Leonard Smithers, Beardsley realized that "Smithers lacked funds to publish the edition the way Beardsley wanted it done," but he worked on the illustrations nonetheless, and in 1898 Smithers published *Six Drawings Illustrating Théophile Gautier's Romance "Mademoiselle de Maupin" by Aubrey Beardsley*. Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 2:340.

for myself before I read the book. It's the right way. In my case, the only way."²²⁴ Anne is referring to the novel's striking ending in which Madeleine, after a blissful night spent with d'Albert, the man who is in love with her, followed by an ecstatic morning with Rosette, the woman who adores her, leaves them both behind. Madeleine sends a letter to d'Albert explaining her actions: "You have possessed me entirely and unreservedly for an entire night. What more do you want? . . . It might last six months, two years, even ten if you like, but everything has to come to an end. You might hang on to me for the sake of appearances or because you didn't dare tell me to go. But what's the good of reaching that point?"²²⁵ Madeleine reasons that because she and d'Albert have already attained perfection in pleasure, there is no need to mar it by drawing it out until the beauty has disappeared. Although *Anne Page* is far more reserved in its descriptions of sexual encounters than Gautier's novel, Anne's identification with the French author's erotically assertive, queer protagonist demonstrates that her understanding of sexual expression is highly unusual for a middle-class Englishwoman. Moreover, her reference to the way in which Madeleine conducted her intimate encounters indicates that Anne similarly sees her affair as resting on the worship of beauty. That Anne discovers a female model for her sexuality in a novel revered by male decadents reveals yet another instance of the way in which her engagement with these ideas about art reinforces the female body and femininity as more than merely form. Madeleine's cross-dressing allows for a male homoerotic fantasy in which the materiality of the female body is forgotten in a fixation on the apparently same-sex desire that her disguise elicits from d'Albert. Anne, however, returns attention to the female body hidden by Madeleine's male clothing, thereby reinforcing the significance that these assertive actions are performed by a woman. Anne, then, has appropriated this transgressive figure, and used Madeleine to strengthen her own unorthodox sexuality. François's account of Anne's romance reinforces the idea that it is a type of art, and he

²²⁴ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 252.

²²⁵ Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, trans. Helen Constantine (London: Penguin, 2005), 334.

attributes its beauty to Anne: “Anne is an unconscious artist, . . . It was the most beautiful love affair I have ever known.”²²⁶ It is therefore Anne who exercises her agency in the affair—remaining a subject, rather than being turned into only an object, of desire.

Anne’s artistry, self-assertion, and autonomy align her with qualities we associate with male aesthetes. She has inserted herself into a tradition that connects Gautier, Swinburne, and Wilde. But she is very different from the kind of decadent artist whom we find, for example, in Des Esseintes, who literally secludes himself from society in a house designed to heighten his enjoyment of artificial pleasures, with a dining room modeled like the cabin of a ship, and rooms filled with, among other things, a variety of perfumes, a collection of art, and a selectively stocked library. He exists in a world of narcissistic preoccupation with his appetites and desires. Anne, by contrast, unites the disregard for social censorship that characterizes her aesthetic sexuality with a sincere sympathy for her fellow human beings. In *Anne Page*, Syrett explores an alternative configuration in which aesthetic satisfaction is a stimulus to sympathy.

We first get a glimpse of this unexpected combination of aestheticism and sympathy when François’s friend and art collector, the Vicomte de Montmédy, states that Anne is “[s]omething between a Botticelli Madonna and a pagan goddess.”²²⁷ This comparison draws on two paradigms of womanhood, both which have significant connections with aestheticist art. First, Anne’s affinity with pagan goddesses associates her with Hellenism, an idealization of Greek culture that appealed to aesthetes because, as Stefano Evangelista explains, it offered an “aesthetic ideal” that “exalts the imagination and the figure of the artist and vindicates a place for high art in the midst of the age of science.”²²⁸ In Hellenism, the pagan goddesses are esteemed for their physical beauty, overt sexuality, and power. We find praise for these qualities,

²²⁶ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 230.

²²⁷ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 132.

²²⁸ Stefano Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 12.

for example, in the poetry of Swinburne, such as “Hymn to Proserpine” (1866). In part, then, Anne is a sensuous woman who is unconstrained by religious restrictions. But at the same time, Anne is a “Botticelli Madonna.” We find in Pater’s chapter on Botticelli in *The Renaissance* an enlightening discussion of these female figures. Pater talks of the way in which their “unique expression and charm”²²⁹ differentiates them from depictions of the Virgin as divinely set apart from the concerns of the world. He explains that Botticelli’s Madonnas are unique because the artist’s “morality is all sympathy.”²³⁰ Pater elaborates that Botticelli is not interested in “untempered goodness” or “untempered evil,” but “with men and women, in their mixed and uncertain condition,”²³¹ and asserts that Botticelli’s Madonnas display this same identification with, and interest in, humanity. Anne’s graciousness toward her fellow human beings bears out this comparison with Botticelli’s Madonnas, which is why her neighbors constantly seek her advice and comfort. In this alliance of pagan and humanist, then, we find that Syrett has imagined an aestheticism that answers Vernon Lee’s critique of the selfish male aesthete.

Anne does not, however, simply unite the two qualities associated with these distinct forms of womanhood. Syrett’s narrative goes further and asserts that the experience Anne gleans from pursuing erotic pleasure is what *enables* her to be sympathetic. The opening chapters of this 1908 novel foreground Anne’s destiny as a woman who is cherished in her small English town for her hospitality, warmth, and wisdom. Later, we discover that two people in the town have learned of Anne’s history. One of them is the Vicar of Dymfield, George Carfax, whom Anne thinks of as a man who “violently expressed scorn of everything but muscular Christianity and common sense.”²³² It is not surprising to discover that Carfax, a disciple of Charles Kingsley’s manly religion that intensified traditional gender norms, regards Anne’s affair as

²²⁹ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 44.

²³⁰ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 43.

²³¹ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 43.

²³² Syrett, *Anne Page*, 276.

reprehensible. In the novel's penultimate chapter, he goes to inquire about the truth of Anne's romance. Anne gives a frank account, and she concludes: "I lived with [René] for three years. The memory of those three years has lasted with me to this day, and has made me a woman so proud and happy that if my deep content has overflowed, and reached the lives of others, it is no credit to me. I simply can't help caring for people, because by the mercy of Heaven, I have loved and been loved."²³³ Anne makes the unexpected assertion that her kindness and caring is the result of her ongoing happiness from having been an artist's mistress. To put it another way, pursuing her sexual desires through the worship of beauty has enabled Anne to be a non-judgmental and sympathetic listener to the cares and hardships of others. She makes sure there is no possible doubt as to her satisfaction with the *method* by which she attained these three happy years when she cautions: "Don't imagine you see before you the sinner that repenteth. She has never repented. She never will repent."²³⁴ Carfax's response is to say simply, "[f]orgive me," and he continues, "[y]ou—have shown me I had no right to judge."²³⁵

The extent to which Anne's affair rejected the chaste English femininity assumed to be attached to the appellation "sweet Anne Page," is further emphasized through her identification with Baudelaire's poetry. Once Carfax has departed, as if to reinforce that she does not repent of her romance, she takes up a "poem she loved": Baudelaire's "Le Balcon" (from *Les Fleurs du mal*).²³⁶ The first two stanzas of this six-stanza poem are reproduced in full within the text. Then the narrator records that Anne repeated a line: "*Nous avons dit souvent d'impérissables choses*" ("We have often said strange things imperishable"²³⁷) and that it is of "these 'imperishable things' she was thinking."²³⁸ Anne thus aligns herself with the speaker of the poem, who is

²³³ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 304-5.

²³⁴ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 305.

²³⁵ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 306.

²³⁶ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 311.

²³⁷ Arthur Symons's translation in "The Balcony," *Baudelaire: Prose and Poetry*, 135.

remembering the sensual time that he spent with a lover. Anne is thinking of those things that outlast “the lust of the eyes.”²³⁹ She is clearly recalling the time she spent with René and the enduring happiness it gave her. While Anne’s recorded thoughts in relation to the poem are fairly tame, the reader familiar with *Les Fleurs du mal* will understand that her identification with the speaker of “Le Balcon” is a provocative maneuver. It is perhaps strategic that only the first two stanzas are included, for the poem becomes more explicitly erotic and decadent as it progresses. That Anne turns to Baudelaire in this scene, then, subtly asserts her alignment with a provocative poetry that she transposes in order to affirm female sexual expression.

Through Anne Page, Syrett undermines the association of feminine sweetness, sympathy, and beauty with innocence and modesty, asserting instead that these qualities can be allied with female independence, erotic assertiveness, and unconventional sexual fulfillment. Anne finds in French decadent fiction narratives that affirm the worship of beauty and unconventional erotic expression with which she identifies. Through that identification, she is also performing an act of re-construction, because she joins to these male-authored artifice-obsessed fictions her female body and her love of beauty in nature. Anne, therefore, constructs her own feminist aestheticism. Syrett gives us a narrative that has associations with the decadence and sexual transgression of the fictions of Huysmans, Gautier, and Baudelaire, but narrating these details in her middlebrow style decouples them from the male practitioners of this decadent mode and embeds them instead in a form frequently associated with women writers and women’s readership. In *Anne Page*, then, we discover an innovative refashioning of a genealogy of French male art and fiction for a woman’s affirmation of beauty and sexuality.

²³⁸ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 311. “Le Balcon” first appeared in *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1857.

²³⁹ Syrett, *Anne Page*, 312. These translations are quotations directly from *Anne Page*.

The Victorians: Modern Womanhood and Female Homoerotic Aestheticism

In Syrett's 1915 novel, the power of aesthetic fiction remains central to the narrative, but the English literary tradition emerges as the protagonist's most significant context. The title of Syrett's fiction, *The Victorians: The Development of a Modern Woman*, posits an unexpected relationship between modern womanhood and the period that ended with Queen Victoria's death in 1901. For its time, the apposition of Victorians and modernity is quite unusual, not least because Victorian as a periodizing term had begun to accumulate several negative connotations by 1915. While at the end of the nineteenth century the adjective Victorian, which had only come into use in relation to literature in the early 1870s,²⁴⁰ had a triumphant ring, Joseph Bristow has shown that for the following generation, the "word Victorian transmogrified from acclamation to defamation."²⁴¹ Bristow records that even before the Great War, the reputation of the Victorians had sunk to "abyssal depths."²⁴² We have only to think of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918)—the idea for which Strachey had "hit on" in 1912²⁴³—to understand the rather deprecating flavor the term had acquired in the 1910s. Mrs. Humphry Ward, whose grandfather Thomas Arnold was one of the victims of Strachey's wit, was angered by the "praise—for the most part unqualified" that Strachey's book was receiving.²⁴⁴ The anonymous writer for the *Athenæum* may very well have had her in mind when he wrote that "Eminent Victorians' may be taken as the acid test for Victorianism. Immerse a Victorian in it; he will turn blue."²⁴⁵ Such a

²⁴⁰ As Joseph Bristow notes: "the entity called Victorian literature began to take shape in the early 1870s when Edmund Clarence Stedman published several essays that would form the basis of the comprehensive, if somewhat undisciplined, *Victorian Poets* (1875)." "Why Victorian? A Period and its Problems," *Literature Compass* 1 (2004): 4.

²⁴¹ Bristow, "Why Victorian?," 9.

²⁴² Bristow, "Why Victorian?," 9.

²⁴³ John Sutherland, Introduction to Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xi.

²⁴⁴ Mrs. Humphry Ward, letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, July 11, 1918. Quoted in Sutherland, Introduction to Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, xv.

²⁴⁵ A. L. H., "Literary Entertainments," review of *Eminent Victorians*, by Lytton Strachey, *Athenæum* 4668 (October 17, 1919): 1031.

statement suggests that a definitive line separated the Victorians from a new generation that had succeeded the “earnestness” that Strachey repeatedly attributes to the inhabitants of the nineteenth century.

What is striking about Syrett’s title, then, is that it wants to attribute modernity to the preceding era, asserting precisely the opposite relationship between the two periods. A clue as to why the same reading public were receptive to Syrett’s rather different representation of the Victorians is found in the tone of her writing. When discussing *The Child of Promise*, we saw the way in which Syrett’s narrator established a camaraderie with the reader and adopted a playfully critical attitude toward narrow-mindedness. In *The Victorians*, too, Syrett never becomes overly serious about the past that she is narrating and instead employs a light, witty voice. The reviewer for the *Bookman* encapsulates this balance of qualities: “The way in which the author conveys all this environment without growing dull under the weight of it is a triumphant tribute to her powers of humour and her buoyancy of mind.”²⁴⁶ The *Athenæum*, also, took note of her style, saying that the narrative was informed by a “comprehensive” and “humorous ... sympathy.”²⁴⁷ Syrett does not exemplify, in other words, the negative characteristics of the Victorians that their successors found so irritating. Where Strachey’s humor is at the expense of the Victorians, Syrett’s makes space for her protagonist to reject certain Victorian norms and construct in their place a daring new identity, if, nonetheless, one that Syrett reveals is still fundamentally linked with rebellious forms of culture that blossomed in a fin de siècle context.

Given the trajectories of Syrett’s earlier fictions, it is no surprise to discover that the protagonist of *The Victorians*, Rose Cottingham, is a modern woman whose identity has been shaped by her encounters with aesthetic fiction and culture during her formative years in the 1880s and early 1890s. The protagonist’s given name, moreover, subtly joins aestheticism and modernity together. As we saw in *Anne Page*, the rose was often singled out in art for art’s sake

²⁴⁶ Unsigned review of *The Victorians*, by Netta Syrett, *Bookman* 49, no. 290 (November 1915): 60.

²⁴⁷ “For Girls,” unsigned review of *The Victorians*, by Netta Syrett, *Athenæum* 4596 (November 27, 1915): 402.

to stand for rich beauty and sensuality.²⁴⁸ At the same time, Rose was not a common name during the late-Victorian period, suggesting that there is something innovative about it. The generative relationship between late-Victorian aestheticism and modern womanhood that the title posits, is further reinforced in the cover illustration featured on T. Fisher Unwin's six-shilling edition of Syrett's 1915 novel (Figure 4). The image adorning this volume features a solitary woman holding a fan, with a black-and-white tiled floor in the foreground. The sparing use of color and the woman's elongated neck and bare chest recall Beardsley's monochromatic drawings. The primary additional color, a soft lemon yellow for the woman's dress and fan (with a few red dots suggesting rosebuds), is almost certainly an allusion to the "yellow nineties": the period in which the novel culminates. In this illustration, the artist has given form to the aestheticism that shapes Rose's self-construction so profoundly that, when she becomes acquainted with a group of London aesthetes who are clearly patterned on the Yellow Book set, one of them remarks: "You *must* know that you're exactly like a Beardsley?"²⁴⁹ This comparison, which is taken up in much greater detail in the novel's sequel, *Rose Cottingham Married* (1916), encapsulates the way in which *The Victorians* equates a femininity shaped by aestheticism with the figure of the modern, autonomous woman. Unwin's marketing of *The Victorians* in this six-shilling edition was designed to appeal to a popular audience. At the same time, Unwin was not simply a commercially driven publishing house, but as Clare Gill notes, "Unwin was a risk-taking publisher" that selected works "on account of their perceived literary merit."²⁵⁰ Unwin's

²⁴⁸ The rose had symbolic significance for other writers of the period as well. Oscar Wilde used the word "rose" thirty-three different times in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to describe the beauty and sensuality of the aesthetic settings in which his characters dwell. In the poems of W. B. Yeats the rose carried massive symbolic weight, but one of its chief meanings was ideal beauty. Yeats had published a collection of poems in 1893 titled *The Rose* (Syrett would have been familiar with Yeats's fiction at least from the fact that they both wrote for *The Yellow Book* in Volume 13 [April 1897]). In addition, another *Yellow Book* writer, George Egerton, published her epistolary novel *Rosa Amarosa* in 1901, in which the protagonist, Rosa, writes that Art is necessary to a satisfying life. Rosa also rejects censorship of literature that portrays the facts of life, such as sexuality.

²⁴⁹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1915), 362. *The Victorians* was published as *Rose Cottingham* in the American edition brought out by G. P. Putnam. As I do not have access to the Unwin edition, my citations are to the American edition, but in my discussion of this novel, I refer to the title of the British edition.

²⁵⁰ Clare Gill, "Olive Schreiner, T. Fisher Unwin and the Rise of the Short Fiction Collection in Britain," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 55, no. 3 (2012): 324. Unwin's list of authors included Olive Schreiner (*Dreams*

selection and marketing of Syrett's novel points to the way in which her fiction remained appealing to publishers of cutting-edge literature, but her witty, middlebrow style continued to make her narratives appealing to a wide audience.

A further important piece of textual apparatus provides a clue about the ways in which Syrett has transitioned from a writer of the "yellow nineties" to a novelist of the 1910s. Syrett dedicates *The Victorians* to William Somerset Maugham, with whom she became friends in 1903.²⁵¹ In her memoir, Syrett records that when she met Maugham, "his first play, *The Man of Honour*, had just been produced, and his future fame still awaited him."²⁵² She adds that "[o]f such a much-discussed man it is unnecessary to say anything here, except that he is still my friend."²⁵³ In these comments, we learn not only about the close nature of the friendship between Maugham and Syrett, but also are reminded of the great popularity Maugham achieved in his lifetime, and therefore the significance of their intimacy within the context of literary history. Maugham's biographer, Robert Calder, records that in 1909 Maugham had written to his agent to inquire about having Syrett adapt his popular play, *Penelope*, into a serial publication (a request that apparently never came to fruition).²⁵⁴ Calder also rather tentatively suggests that "Maugham may have had [Syrett] partly in mind when creating the character of Norah Nesbit in *Of Human Bondage*,"²⁵⁵ which was published the same year as *The Victorians*.

[1890], *Dream Life and Real Life* [1893], *Thoughts on South Africa* [1923], *Stories, Dreams and Allegories* [1923]), Ford Madox Ford (*The Shifting of the Fire* [1892], *The Brown Owl* [1892], *Provence* [1935], *Vive le Roy* [1937]), John Galsworthy (*From the Four Winds* [1897], *The Land: a Plea* [1918]), and W. B. Yeats (*The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics* [1892], *The Land of Heart's Desire* [1894], *Poems* [1895]).

²⁵¹ Ada Levenson was also a good friend of Maugham's, and in 1908 she dedicated to him her second novel, *Love's Shadow*.

²⁵² Syrett, *Sheltering Tree*, 127.

²⁵³ Syrett, *Sheltering Tree*, 127.

²⁵⁴ Robert Calder, *Willie: The Life of W. Somerset Maugham* (London: Heinemann, 1989), 84.

²⁵⁵ Calder, *Willie*, 84. Calder describes Norah Nesbit as "the older woman who offers a maternal and supportive friendship to Philip," who is the protagonist, 84. Calder emphasizes Syrett's seniority to Maugham, which is the basis of his comparison of Syrett with Nesbit.

Syrett's dedication signals that she is connected with the popular literary scene of the 1910s. What is distinctive about her novel, however, is that it returns to the fin de siècle.

The Victorians reveals that the modern woman is one who pursues independence and constructs her identity in relation to art. This is a female bildungsroman that sketches out the career of a woman who wishes to be an author. *The Victorians* culminates, as does *Nobody's Fault*, in the protagonist's successful publication of a novel. The story of a young woman at the fin de siècle who eventually becomes an author is a theme we find in several women's narratives at the turn of the century, including Ella Hepworth Dixon's *Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), George Paston's *A Writer of Books* (1898), and Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899). Syrett's title certainly echoes Hepworth Dixon's novel, and although Syrett wrote her fiction twenty years later, both narratives locate the origins of modern womanhood in the 1890s. In addition, for both Hepworth Dixon and Syrett, the modern woman is a literary woman, whose desire to write is a defining aspect of her self-assertion and autonomy. Hepworth Dixon's model of advanced womanhood places the greatest concern on the need for women to have "a kind of moral and social trades-unionism,"²⁵⁶ and the protagonist, Mary Erle, longs for an emotionally fulfilling marriage. By contrast, Syrett's modern woman is a rebellious feminist aesthete who eschews romance for independence. Twenty years after Hepworth Dixon had explored what it meant to be a "modern woman," Syrett returned to the question and linked modernity not with social reform, but with a liberating, woman-authorized aestheticism.

Syrett's narrative opens on a day in the early 1880s when Rose, who was born about 1874, is turning nine. She is an orphan who, along with her younger sister Lucie, is cared for by her grandmother, Mrs. Lester, who believes the only suitable vocation for a woman is marriage. The first several chapters detail the way in which Rose feels stifled in the "sheltered backwater of existence represented by Glencove,"²⁵⁷ the Devonshire sea-side town in which they live. Rose

²⁵⁶ Ella Hepworth Dixon quoted in "The Book of the Month," *Review of Reviews*, July 10, 1894, 71.

²⁵⁷ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 98.

longs intensely to go away to school like her neighbor, Geoffrey Winter. Geoffrey's mother, Mrs. Winter, cares deeply for Rose, and appreciates her intelligence, desire to learn, and independent spirit. She acts as a mentor and friend to Rose, and their bond represents an early example of a kind of female intimacy that will also be definitive for Rose's development as an adolescent. When Rose turns twelve, Mrs. Winter helps to convince Rose's grandmother to send Rose to London to attend Quayle College, a girl's boarding school, and Rose feels that at last, "life" is "beginning."²⁵⁸ Here, Rose meets a highly cultured young woman named Helen Fergurson. Helen, whose father is a well-known professor, introduces Rose to the Arts and Crafts movement, socialist ideas, and aesthetic literature. After she finishes her high school education, Rose becomes acquainted with a group of London artists, who in the novel's sequel we discover are contributors to the Purple Book, Syrett's humorous renaming of the *Yellow Book*. Thrilled with a life of culture and intellectual pursuit, Rose refuses an offer of marriage from her childhood friend Geoffrey, and focuses instead on her wish to publish a novel.

In her 1915 novel, Syrett looks backward to the same setting represented in *Nobody's Fault*, but this time her account of a young woman's development includes a far more intimate narration of female sexual awakening. Moreover, Syrett's novels that I have discussed so far have examined the way in which heterosexual romance plays a central role in each woman character's respective plot. *The Victorians*, by contrast, reveals that Rose's sexual blossoming comes about in relation to an erotic female friendship, and while she flirts with a Wildean dandy whom she meets at a gathering of aesthetes, their relationship remains nothing more than witty bandying. This lack of heterosexual romance was noted by the critic for the *New York Times*, who wrote that *The Victorians* "end[s] with the love story yet to come."²⁵⁹ What is more, female friendship is also the means by which Rose becomes acquainted with aesthetic culture, rather

²⁵⁸ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 99.

²⁵⁹ "Life Seen Through the Lens of Humor: George A. Birmingham in *Gossamer* and Other Writers of Current Fiction Portray Human Weaknesses and Shortcomings with a Kindly Touch," unsigned review of *Rose Cottingham*, by Netta Syrett, *New York Times Book Review*, February 13, 1916, BR49.

than by way of a male emissary such as we discovered in Larry Cary, Valentine Desmond, and the group of French male artists in *Anne Page*. In this way, Syrett imagines an aestheticism in which women exercise even greater authority, and in which they possess autonomy from men.

It makes sense to focus initially on the conclusion to *The Victorians* that depicts Rose's publication of a novel because its commentary on female authorship in the 1890s brings to light certain significant aspects of Syrett's narration in 1915. In many respects, the conclusion's intense investigation of Rose's reflections on her life when constructing her novel makes it an episode of metafiction. As Patricia Waugh defines it, metafiction "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."²⁶⁰ This topic becomes central to the narrative when Rose travels to France where she experiences an "unformulated craving" that takes "shape and resolve[s] itself into a desire to write."²⁶¹ In response to this yearning, the narrator records that "Rose began her novel, for her own pleasure, and because she must."²⁶² To compose the novel, Rose imagines "a character whose outward circumstances were utterly unlike her own, but whose thoughts and emotions were hers."²⁶³ Once Rose has completed this work of fiction, she sends it to Helen, who, without Rose's knowledge, takes it to a publisher whom the narrator describes as "the fashionable middleman between the cult of the moment and its receptive public."²⁶⁴ Although we are told many details about Rose's work of fiction, we never learn its title, and no passages from it are included within the narrative.

In general, the critical response to Rose's novel is laudatory, praising its innovation. But for this same reason, Mrs. Lester does not enjoy her granddaughter's narrative. Mrs. Lester's

²⁶⁰ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1984), 2.

²⁶¹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 379.

²⁶² Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 380.

²⁶³ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 380.

²⁶⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 392.

comments identify two of the defining aspects of Rose's work of fiction. Mrs. Lester thinks: "A novel, if one must waste one's time over such a thing, should deal with hairbreadth adventure and, above all, with romance; and evidently Rose had no idea of romance."²⁶⁵ Mrs. Lester clearly has in mind the most popular genres of Victoria fiction, but Rose has thrown out any emphasis on adventure and romance. In their place, she has focused on her protagonist's developing subjectivity, which Mrs. Lester draws attention to when she confides in a friend that "[i]t was not her idea of a novel, this description of an uneventful life, and this everlasting prying into people's minds."²⁶⁶ By contrast, the enthusiastic reviews of Rose's novel embrace the narrative's focus on interiority as an example of a "fresh" new style.²⁶⁷ The narrator emphasizes that Rose's work of fiction is part of a "new movement" in literature that was "many-sided" and appealed to a wide audience. This stress on interiority suggests that this is an early form of modernist fiction which reached its full flourishing in the "plotless" novels that constitute Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, the first installment of which appeared the same year as *The Victorians*. Given the association with modernist interiority, it is curious, then, that the narrator also comments that the novel Rose publishes in the 1890s, if it had appeared "to-day," would have "attracted very little attention, but Rose was fortunate in the hour of her literary debut. It was the hour of the apotheosis of youth."²⁶⁸ The narrator elaborates that Rose's 1890s novel is "fresh—utterly unsophisticated."²⁶⁹ These narratorial interjections are significant because they are commenting on certain decisive shifts that are taking place in fiction between the 1890s and 1910s. Although Rose's fictional style possesses qualities that resonate with Richardson's form, the narrator also sets her novel apart from the kinds of fictions that came to prominence in the 1910s when this

²⁶⁵ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 395.

²⁶⁶ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 395.

²⁶⁷ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 393.

²⁶⁸ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 392.

²⁶⁹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 393.

interior style had been more fully developed, such as in the short stories of Katherine Mansfield. It is possible that when describing Rose's literary style, Syrett has in mind fictions that appeared in the *Yellow Book* by women writers such as George Egerton, Charlotte Mew, and Ella D'Arcy, whose short stories are all marked by an attention to narrating interiority. However, an author such as Virginia Woolf who came to be thoroughly associated with interior narration in the 1920s, did not see herself as connected with these authors of the 1890s, which is clear from her well-known assertion that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed,"²⁷⁰ indicating that a fundamental shift had taken place that separated the periods before and after 1910. In addition, when constructing a history of women writers of fiction in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf pointedly ends her discussion with George Eliot, remaining silent about the enormous amount of women writers who had published between 1880 and the beginning of her own career in the 1910s. Syrett was most certainly aware in the 1910s of a growing sense of separation that the younger generation felt between themselves and their fin-de-siècle predecessors, a point that she makes explicitly in her fiction in the 1920s.²⁷¹

It is also worth noting that while the details of Rose's life are in many ways drawn from Syrett's experience at a boarding school in London and then as a member of the *Yellow Book* set, Rose's literary style seems to be distinct from the middlebrow realist prose that Syrett employed in the 1890s, and which she also uses in *The Victorians*, though with an increased confidence, control, and sophistication. Syrett therefore employs her middlebrow prose to record the emergence of a kind of women's writing that is separate from her own. This style perhaps tells us something about Syrett's professional life, for while her decision not to participate in various literary trends has contributed to her critical neglect, her prose remains accessible and consistent across her five-decades-long career, even while the content of her narratives is so

²⁷⁰ Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," *The Hogarth Essays*, 1928 reprint (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 5.

²⁷¹ In *Portrait of a Rebel* (1929), for example, Syrett uses a Prologue to indicate the way in which younger novelists of the 1920s write about the Victorian period as if there was no such thing as the women's movement.

frequently invested in specific artistic movements from the nineteenth-century. Syrett may not have experienced the “Fame” that the title of the novel’s final chapter claims for Rose’s literary triumph, but Syrett’s fiction was consistently well-reviewed, and she retained an audience for five decades.

Even though it is written in this very lucid middlebrow style, *The Victorians* is remarkably self-conscious about the ways in which it addresses the creation of modern fictional narrative. This point becomes clear when we become aware that Rose is vividly conscious that while the favorable notices of her novel consistently laud her story for being true to life—“they reiterated praises of its simplicity, its fidelity to life, its value as ‘a human document’”²⁷²—she has suppressed much of the “fidelity” to a young girl’s existence that she could have included:

The young girl she had drawn, though up to a certain point true to life, was true to that point and no farther. There were omissions, suppressions; there were reticences which her creator neither dared nor wished to overpass. To be more exact, it was her shyness which dictated to Rose this policy of reticence, of suppression and omission even while the spirit of truth that was in her clamoured for avowal. Yet how to make avowals which would seem to make her heroine shameful? How could she be on the whole a “nice girl” and yet sometimes a prey to infamous thoughts and desires? And yet, with her intimate knowledge of the young woman in question, Rose was quite sure that she *was* on the whole a “nice girl,” in spite of many unstated things for which she blushed for her—*really* blushed—so well she knew the workings of her mind and emotions.²⁷³

²⁷² Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 393. In *Rose Cottingham Married*, this novel is again called “a human document” (70), this time by Professor Fergurson. At the *fin de siècle*, a fiction having the qualities of “a human document” was highly valued, as is also seen in Dorothy Richardson’s *Honeycomb* (1917), where the protagonist, Miriam Henderson, reads W. H. Mallock’s novel, *A Human Document* (1892), and cherishes it. For Mallock, a human document is a text (fictional or nonfictional) that is true to life, including representing transgression from traditional moral codes, so he champions the accurate representation of the seamier sides of life in fiction on the grounds that literature should be true to life. Mallock, *A Human Document* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1892), 11. This theory of fiction is of course at odds with aestheticism’s rejection of moral restrictions on the grounds of art’s autonomy from life, rather than its mimetic fidelity.

²⁷³ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 393.

Here, we see Rose's dilemma. In order to represent her protagonist's interiority honestly, it would have been necessary to include her own "infamous thoughts and desires." Rose, however, fears that this would make her character "shameful" in the eyes of the reading public, since a "nice girl" is not supposed to have the kinds of longings that need suppressing. This lengthy passage also sets up a distinct contrast between what Rose includes about herself in the novel that she writes, and the details about Rose's life that are *not* suppressed in Syrett's narrative. As readers, we are aware that the nature of the material of which Rose is ashamed is sexual. In the 1890s, Rose desires to write something "real"²⁷⁴ about a young woman, but she nonetheless withholds several details. In 1915, however, Syrett includes that woman character's potentially compromising thoughts and wishes. The emphasis on Rose's omissions, then, brings to light the significance that Syrett attached to her own representation of Rose's sexual awakening in *The Victorians*.

Rose's erotic and aesthetic development is precipitated by works of fiction that she encounters when she goes to live at Quayle College. Her literary journey begins with standard Victorian writers such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot. At Quayle College, there are strict limitations on what the female pupils are allowed to read, so that even seemingly innocuous canonical novels acquire a flavor of transgression: "Rose's acquaintance with *David Copperfield*, *Villette*, and *Vanity Fair* was clandestine, and all the more precious for the circumstance."²⁷⁵ Early on, then, the act of reading is associated for Rose with privacy, as well as with subversive behavior. This phase in Rose's exposure to literature is followed by a fad in her school for reading sentimental novels: "it became the fashion to read sad books and cry over them."²⁷⁶ Rose attempts to follow this trend by reading the fictions of Florence Montgomery, whose "pathetic

²⁷⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 379.

²⁷⁵ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 149.

²⁷⁶ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 153.

tales”²⁷⁷ feature society ladies who minister to the poor and are ideals of virtue and piety. Montgomery’s fictions were notorious tear-jerkers, an experience that was apparently widely enjoyed, as she was a popular writer from the 1870s through the 1890s. In *A Very Simple Story* (1870), Montgomery depicts a little child’s delight in her sweet mother, who is described as a woman with golden hair that sunbeams ripple on “as if they loved to rest on anything so bright and fair.”²⁷⁸ And gazing at her mother, the child Maye queries: “I wonder why everything about mother, is so much prettier and nicer than anywhere else.”²⁷⁹ The mother’s attendance on a little boy who turns out to have scarlet fever results in her contracting the illness, and she dies an example of saintly virtue. Rose also reads the fiction of American author Susan Warner, whom Jane P. Tompkins records was “extravagantly”²⁸⁰ praised before the Civil War. Warner’s *Queechy* (1852), which is very popular at Rose’s school, narrates the life of an orphan girl who learns to farm in order to support her adopted family, and in the process she develops an unflinching trust in God. However, the “revulsion of feeling”²⁸¹ that Rose experiences from reading Warner’s and Montgomery’s respective works leads to her rejection of their conventional plots of female virtue and self-sacrifice.

By contrast, Rose becomes captivated by narratives in which the women are paragons of sexual assertiveness, rather than virtue, which she discovers in the “lurid adventure”²⁸² of Ouida’s novels. Although Ouida’s popularity as a novelist had started to decline by the late 1880s when this episode takes place, she had a formidable reputation. The narrator records that Rose “devoured the works of ‘Ouida’ and derived infinite gratification from the fact that

²⁷⁷ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 153.

²⁷⁸ Florence Montgomery, *A Very Simple Story* (London: W. Kent, 1870), 9.

²⁷⁹ Montgomery, *Very Simple Story*, 31.

²⁸⁰ Jane P. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 17.

²⁸¹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 153.

²⁸² Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 153.

according to [her friend] May Robinson, not only were they ‘frightfully improper,’ but their discovery meant instant expulsion for her and for every girl who had turned their poisonous pages.”²⁸³ The narrator does not include specific titles for the works Rose is reading, but it is likely that some of these “poisonous pages” would have been encountered in two of Ouida’s most popular fictions: *Under Two Flags* (1867) and *Moths* (1880). We learn that from reading Ouida, Rose discovers what it means to have a “wild passion,”²⁸⁴ a theme that appears repeatedly in Ouida’s novels. *Under Two Flags* narrates a romance between the androgynous soldier Bertie, who is also called Beauty, with a temper characterized as “serene effeminate insouciance,”²⁸⁵ and Cigarette, a gamine woman who lives in the soldiers’ barracks, and whom Bertie thinks of as a “gallant boy.”²⁸⁶ *Moths*, by contrast, features one of Ouida’s mondaines: a powerful, sophisticated woman who exercises sexual influence over men. In both novels, sexuality and gender proliferate in a variety of non-normative forms. As we are already aware, Ouida represents a female origin for the genealogy of British aesthetic fiction as traced by Wilde and Beerbohm. Reading Ouida, then, constitutes the beginning of Rose’s exposure to aestheticism, as well as her acquaintance with eroticism. It is worth noting that one year later, Dorothy Richardson’s *Backwater* (1916) would contain a parallel scene of secret reading, in which Miriam Henderson devours Ouida’s novels by candlelight. For both women, Ouida’s works are tied to insubordinate sexual desire.

Arguably, the most insubordinate desire is lesbian passion. Rose’s experience of intense romance comes through her infatuation and friendship with a new girl at school. The narrator records: “Undoubtedly the greatest event in Rose’s school life was the coming of Helen

²⁸³ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 153-54.

²⁸⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 156.

²⁸⁵ Ouida, *Under Two Flags* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867; London: Chatto and Windus, 1910), 106. Citations refer to the Chatto and Windus edition.

²⁸⁶ Ouida, *Under Two Flags*, 117.

Ferguson.”²⁸⁷ The nature of the relationship between the two girls has a powerful literary resonance. Rose’s friendship with Helen takes the form of an erotic rewriting of Charlotte Brontë’s famous pair of female friends, Jane Eyre and Helen Burns. As readers of *Jane Eyre* will recall, Jane develops a close companionship with Helen that represents affection and loyalty. Jane and Helen’s friendship is notable for its intimacy, and we find examples of their emotional closeness reflected in their tender physical affection, such as the following detail: “Resting my head on Helen’s shoulder, I put my arms round her waist; she drew me to her, and we reposed in silence.”²⁸⁸ There are certain parallel episodes of female friendship that occur in *The Victorians*. Not only does Rose’s friend Helen share the given name of Jane Eyre’s companion, but just as Jane is punished for breaking a slate by not being allowed to talk with the other students, Rose is given the same punishment for her lack of tidiness. Like Helen Burns, Helen Ferguson disobeys this order and speaks with Rose anyway. While the circumstantial details are a definitive echo of *Jane Eyre*, Helen Ferguson is nonetheless different from her Brontëan namesake, having a defiant spirit rather than one of submissive fortitude. Moreover, the descriptions of Rose’s feelings for Helen Ferguson have a more explicitly romantic tone than those used to characterize the tie between Jane Eyre and Helen Burns. The narrator refers to Helen as Rose’s “beloved,”²⁸⁹ and we are told that “Rose was in a state of blissful infatuation which made every hour of the day a romance.”²⁹⁰ Rose’s attraction to Helen is characterized in ways that sound distinctly like a man’s erotic feelings for a woman: “it was [Helen’s] delicate, elusive beauty, and her slow, curious smile which ravished the younger girl.”²⁹¹ The use of the word “ravish” here carries with it the unmistakable association of aggressive sexuality. It is also

²⁸⁷ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 159.

²⁸⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Michael Mason (London: Penguin, 2003), 82.

²⁸⁹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 169.

²⁹⁰ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 164.

²⁹¹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 184.

important to notice the emphasis the narrator places on their age difference, in spite of the fact that Helen is only one year older than Rose. Helen's small seniority is magnified by the vast disparity between Helen's robust education and first-hand knowledge of the world, and Rose's narrow and limited understanding due to her sheltered upbringing.

It is Helen's thorough acquaintance with art, and her first-hand knowledge of contemporary cultural movements, that fascinates Rose. Once the two girls become close friends, the motherless Helen brings Rose to her father's home for overnight visits, and Rose becomes more fully acquainted with the life of culture that Helen has known since birth. Helen's father is in "the movement," which is described as "a movement some years antecedent to the Beardsley era, and though it definitely included art as part of its intellectual programme, it was approached in a spirit differing greatly from that in which its later devotees worshipped at the shrine."²⁹² We can notice the distinction the narrator is making between the "Beardsley era" and Professor Fergurson's period through certain details of the family's home, such as the Morris wallpaper and Morris furnishings, and a printing press in one of the rooms. Moreover, the Professor is part of a group called the Human Progress Society that has "At Home's" to discuss art and the improvement of the working class. In line with this socialist dimension, Rose is given books to read such as *Looking Backward* (1888)—the utopian science fiction novel by American writer Edward Bellamy—and *Merrie England*, which is most likely the collection of essays about socialism by Robert Blatchford published in 1893.²⁹³ Rose is intellectually stimulated by the ideas of this movement and she enjoys that it is tied with an appreciation of beauty, but at the same time she finds much of socialism to be dull, recalling Natasha's critique in *The Child of Promise*. By comparison, however, her later acquaintance with the aesthetes who contribute to the Purple Book is vastly more thrilling: the chapter in which she attends her first gathering of

²⁹² Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 211.

²⁹³ Following the novel's timeline, it would be about 1890 when Rose reads these works; so, if Syrett is referring to Blatchford's collection, she is doing so prior to its actual publication in 1893.

aesthetes and decadents is appropriately titled “Finding Her World.” In the sequel to *The Victorians*, *Rose Cottingham Married*, we find that Rose experiences a profound struggle between her attraction to socialism’s professed Humanist purpose of improving lives, and the thrill she experiences by contrast in the society of artists and aesthetes.

The significance of the companionship between Rose and Helen becomes more apparent in light of the narrator’s assertion that the romance between the girls is of a non-physical nature: “Less than justice has been done to certain friendships of youth in which the participants all unconsciously are lovers, but lovers dwelling in the Golden Age, innocent and ignorant as babes in Paradise.”²⁹⁴ Some careful unpacking is required to appreciate fully the implications of this brief but poignant comment. First, we need to focus on the representation of women’s friendships in Victorian novels. Sharon Marcus has established that passionate female friendships in Victorian England were not regarded as transgressive, but rather as reinforcing the woman’s femininity, and in several novels, such friendship helps to bring about a satisfying marriage for one of the women.²⁹⁵ Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton’s research demonstrates that fictional depictions of female friends became more troubled in novels at the fin de siècle due to a growing uneasiness with the slippery lines between platonic and erotic intimacy. In spite of this increased discomfort, however, Oulton points out that New Women writers still succeeded in deploying plotlines about romantic female friendships without receiving hostile reviews.²⁹⁶ The nature of these romantic bonds became more explicitly sexual in fiction of the early twentieth century, and by the time Syrett was writing *The Victorians* in 1915, the boarding school novel had become a lesbian novel, as seen, for example, in Ivy Compton-Burnett’s first long fiction,

²⁹⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 164.

²⁹⁵ See Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 54-62, 73-81.

²⁹⁶ Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 142.

Dolores (1911), and in the French writer Collette's *Claudine à l'école* (1900).²⁹⁷ In *The Victorians*, the narrator's statement that Rose and Helen are "innocent" lovers reveals that it was necessary to make a distinction between a physically chaste romance between women, and one that involved eroticism. That the women are "lovers," however, is a comment that actually maintains blurriness even while the narrator appears to remove the need for concern, and as the girls grow older, this blurriness is magnified.

The other crucial context for Syrett's unconscious lovers allows us to recognize the full significance of this intimate friendship to Rose's development as an aesthete. The narrator's pointed distinction between the girls' ages, combined with Helen's knowledge of culture, draws into focus the way in which their relationship is a feminized version of Greek love: the love of an older and younger man that Wilde famously defended when he was on trial for committing acts of gross indecency. Just as Hellenism provided a historic ideal for glorifying art, it also offered an idealized example of erotic male friendship. This kind of male homoerotic bond was found, for example, in Plato's *Symposium*, and Linda Dowling explains that it represented "pure intellectual commerce between male lovers which brings forth art, philosophy, and wisdom itself."²⁹⁸ Syrett offers a female homosocial equivalent to this exclusively male model of intimate friendship. Syrett thus unites the tradition of women's writing represented by Brontëan female friendship with an eroticized cultural education found in male aestheticism. Syrett weds these two traditions in order to fashion a feminist aestheticism distinct from her previous explorations of women and art for art's sake. While Rose's maturation means that she eventually stops idolizing Helen and they become equals, the importance of female friendship is never replaced by a heterosexual attachment.

²⁹⁷ In her novel, *The Day's Journey* (1906), Syrett's narrator briefly discusses romantic friendships between women. The narrative represents a woman character, Philippa, as having had "romantic friendships with women of property" in order to get money from them in the same way that she has affairs with men. Syrett, *Day's Journey* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1906), 146. This mercenary model of romantic friendship between women is represented in a negative light in the novel.

²⁹⁸ Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), xv.

Syrett's revision of the Greek ideal of male friendship includes transposing the eroticism that was at its core into a female homosocial passion. The most critical development in Rose's sexual awakening takes place as a result of Helen exposing Rose to the poetry of Algernon Charles Swinburne in the form of a gift of his *Poems and Ballads*. When Swinburne's volume had originally appeared in 1866, it ignited an enormous controversy, in large part because of its celebration of decadent sexuality, together with its rejection of Christianity in favor of paganism. In "Anactoria," to take one of the volume's signature poems as an example, the dramatic speaker is Sappho, who wants to achieve complete union with her female lover, Anactoria, by consuming her body and turning her cries of pain into poetry, desiring that "in my flesh thy very flesh [were] entombed!"²⁹⁹ Such statements of perverse desire aroused outrage, with the *Athenæum* calling the verses "prurient trash" and declaring that Swinburne was "unclean for the mere sake of uncleanness."³⁰⁰ And the *London Review* said that it was "in many of its constituents . . . utterly revolting" and claimed that Swinburne had "a diseased state of mind."³⁰¹ The head of Moxon, Swinburne's publisher, was so frightened by the venomous response that he withdrew the book. Swinburne had John Camden Hotten reissue the book later that year, and the controversy continued. "Anactoria" also alerts us to the way in which Swinburne is interested in classical Greece, but rather than Plato, he finds a model for same-sex desire in the lesbian lyricist Sappho, who he draws on as an ideal model for erotic poetry.

Swinburne's shocking verses, transmitted to her by Helen, draw out a complex erotic response in Rose. The ways in which Swinburne's volume initiates the next stage of Rose's erotic awakening are revealed in the following passage:

²⁹⁹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Anactoria," *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 96: line 114.

³⁰⁰ Unsigned review of "Poems and Ballads," by Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Athenæum* 2023 (August 4, 1866): 137.

³⁰¹ "Mr. Swinburne's Poems and Ballads," unsigned review of "Poems and Ballads," by Algernon Charles Swinburne, *London Review* 13, no.318 (August 4, 1866): 130.

[The poems] were, as she discovered, remembering at the same time Helen's description, "all about love," and their immediate effect was to kindle a flame in her hitherto quiescent imagination with regard to the passion. Here was a realm till now ignored by her, a world in which "wild kisses" and wilder embraces seemed the sole occupation of its denizens; a world of thrilling experiences, of unimaginable joys. Always sensitive to words, she lingered over the langorous, beautiful cadences of the poems, and in the daily constitutional, walked to the music of "Dolores" or the "Hymn to Proserpine."³⁰²

Here, the narrator makes it plain that the wild, thrilling content of Swinburne's poems is inseparable from Rose's sensitivity to their form: she is enchanted by the "languor" of their prosody. That Rose daily walks to the music of Swinburne's poetry establishes how thoroughly she is immersed in the decadent mode of his verses. Moreover, the two poems that the narrator names throw light on why Rose is so moved by *Poems and Ballads*. In "Dolores," the speaker praises a sadomasochistic goddess whose love of pain Swinburne emphasizes in order to construct her as a pagan counterpart to the Virgin Mary, whose Catholic title, "Our Lady of Seven Sorrows," Swinburne also applies to Dolores. The poetic speaker praises Dolores's body and sexuality, and he emphasizes the purely physical nature of her desire: "Ah beautiful passionate body / That never has ached with a heart!"³⁰³ Similarly, in "Hymn to Proserpine," the poetic speaker glorifies the Roman goddess as superior to the Virgin Mary because of Proserpine's sensuality and beauty: "For thine [Mary] came pale and a maiden, and sister to sorrow; but ours [Proserpine], / Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of flowers, / White rose of the rose-white water."³⁰⁴ It is evident, then, that in these poems Rose finds a

³⁰² Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 280.

³⁰³ Swinburne, "Dolores," *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, 121: lines 81-82. Kathy Alexis Psomiades writes that "[i]n 'Dolores's' endless rhythmic stanzas sexuality may be saved from the forces that would repress and abuse it. Art becomes sex made free." *Beauty's Body*, 71.

³⁰⁴ Swinburne, "Hymn to Proserpine," *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, 103: lines 81-83.

glorification of female sexuality that elevates women's passion above the chaste femininity that was idealized in middle-class Victorian culture.

Repeatedly engaging with Swinburne's poetry brings about a further awakening in Rose, in which she goes beyond merely reciting words about sensual passion and responds with her body. Rose experiences an intense restlessness as a result of reading *Poems and Ballads*, and she makes sense of this "malady"³⁰⁵ as a desire for romance. She does not believe, however, that the fulfillment of this longing is possible because her perception of herself as plain and unremarkable leads her to think that she would not attract erotic interest. One evening, her "malady" takes a more intense form and she becomes frenzied. In this state, she removes her clothing and puts on a low-cut red dress and places an ornament in her hair. She then surveys herself in a mirror: "Certainly she looked very different from her normal self, the self over which she habitually despaired."³⁰⁶ Looking at her reflection, she discovers another "self" who appears unfamiliar to her, and which more closely embodies the type of sensual womanhood that her reading of Swinburne has caused her to desire. Rose, however, is still not entirely satisfied with the version of herself in the red dress, a feeling that leads her to an even closer examination of her body:

For a while she stared at herself irresolutely, then with another breath-taking impulse she unfastened not only the dress, but all her other clothes, throwing these hastily from her on to the bed. In a moment she stood, a slim, white figure, erect in the midst of the crimson circle made by the dress which had fallen round her feet. Then, indeed, she was beautiful, and she knew it. Her body, at least, was beautiful—even in its immaturity; straight and slender as a tall lily, and almost as white and fine in texture. She smiled

³⁰⁵ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 285.

³⁰⁶ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 286.

triumphantly. . . . Lovers, she supposed, must see the women they loved—like this? Of course! There was Swinburne’s poetry.³⁰⁷

It is, then, when Rose has stripped away the layers that adorn and hide her physical form that she is able to recognize her beauty. Her triumph leads her first to comprehend her subjectivity in a new manner, but one which leads her quickly to imagine herself as the object of someone else’s desire. In this way, she moves rapidly from seeing herself as a subject who is attractive, to imagining herself as the object of someone else’s admiring gaze.³⁰⁸ Even before she turns consciously to Swinburne’s poetry to confirm that a lover would see her naked body, the description of her bare form has already recollected Swinburne’s language: the “slim, white figure, erect in the midst of the crimson circle” brings to mind the way in which Proserpine’s sexual experience (in contrast with the Madonna’s virginity) is signified through the flowers in her hair that are “white rose.” Rose’s white body that reveals her beauty also reveals her sexual desirability.

This scene of disrobing is assuredly one of the details that Rose leaves out when she writes her novel. But Rose’s embarrassment is not limited to this future point when she chooses to conceal her desires from the reading public. Rather, she suffers the immediate consequence of an upbringing in which female sexuality is looked upon as shameful. Her triumph in front of the mirror lasts briefly, and then the sound of someone approaching her room redirects her thoughts to the impropriety of her nakedness. In her discomfort, she becomes self-critical: she imagines that none of the other girls at the boarding school would be able to relate to her

³⁰⁷ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 286-87. The descriptive language in this passage resonates with some of the most striking phrases from Swinburne’s erotic poetry. The female body’s whiteness is something Swinburne luxuriates in, including in the third line of “Dolores” which emphasizes the goddess’s “white limbs,” *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, 110: line 3. Swinburne also delights in contrasting the whiteness of the body with redness, which in the fourth line of “Dolores” is in the form of a “red mouth” 110: line 4. A similar effect of contrasting these colors is achieved by the “crimson circle made by the dress” that encircles Rose’s white body. It is thus clear that the narration of Rose’s scene of disrobing is enabled by the language of Swinburne’s poetry.

³⁰⁸ In Lucas Malet’s *History of Sir Richard Calmady* (1901), there is a remarkable scene of female autoeroticism. The seductive Helen de Vallorbes exults in her naked image in a mirror. In Malet’s novel, her woman character’s self-appraisal is one of narcissistic indulgence. In Rose’s case, her self-assessment leads to self-knowledge.

experience because she assumes that, in contrast with herself, they all have “pure minds.”³⁰⁹ However, there is an exception to the distance that she envisions between herself and her classmates. Rose acknowledges that in the midst of her erotic thoughts she feels close to Helen: “in some perverse fashion it was Helen who seemed nearer to her in her shame and self-
abhorrence than any of the simple, innocent girls of whom she had previously been thinking. It was Helen who had sent her the *Poems and Ballads*.”³¹⁰ Here, the word “perverse” has a significant resonance. In late-Victorian sexological writings, such as we find in the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, the word “perverse” is used to indicate “*feeling for the same sex*.”³¹¹ This attraction was distinguished from “perversion,” which went beyond feelings of desire, or even acting on those desires, to indicate a person who was “inverted,” which Merl Storr explains meant “such a transformation of one’s entire sexual being that the latter no longer corresponds . . . with one’s physical sex.”³¹² The “perversity” of Rose’s feeling, then, is signaling a same-sex eroticism kindled through the complicated channels of connection initiated by Helen’s gift of the provocative poetry.

This episode marks a shift in the nature of Rose’s feelings for Helen from the narrator’s earlier reassurance that Rose and Helen were “lovers” who existed in a paradise in which they had not tasted the forbidden fruits of desire. To be sure, the narrative never suggests that the women have a physical encounter, but Rose’s feeling of closeness to Helen in the midst of her shame reveals that the “innocence” the narrator had earlier emphasized can no longer be used to characterize Rose, and by implication, Helen, since she is the one who knowingly gave Rose the poetry. *Poems and Ballads*, then, has become a vehicle for the circulation of female

³⁰⁹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 287.

³¹⁰ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 287.

³¹¹ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, quoted in Merl Storr, “Transformations: Subjects, Categories and Cures in Krafft-Ebing’s Sexology,” *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, ed. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 15.

³¹² Merl Storr, “Transformations,” *Sexology in Culture*, 17.

homoeroticism, a reversal of the manner in which the female form in men's art provided a way for men to circulate male homosexual desire (such as we have seen in Pater's discussion of the Mona Lisa).

In *The Victorians*, Syrett has imagined an aestheticism that is uniquely female by placing the role of cultural instruction in the hands of a woman, and indicating that this education is also the means for transmitting erotic knowledge. Syrett therefore complicates the role of male authority in the realm of art for art's sake, as well as in the development of female sexuality by rewriting the model of Greek love as an erotic female bond that nurtures intellectual and artistic development. In *The Victorians*, twenty years after Wilde's trials in which he defended "the love that dare not speak its name,"³¹³ Rose recalls Wilde's name as the first in a list of figures who stand for her new acquaintance with decadent aestheticism: "[Rose] fell asleep at last in the carefully darkened room, and a throng of confused memories haunted her dreams, in which were spoken names that seemed significant: Oscar Wilde, Beardsley, Arthur Symons, Max—someone."³¹⁴ But more than naming Wilde, *The Victorians* asserts that the model of aesthetic and erotic connection that he defended in 1895 did not belong exclusively to men, but was equally available to the creation of a feminist aestheticism.

Conclusion: *Rose Cottingham Married*, the Great War, and New Directions in Modern Womanhood

It is worth remarking that for an author who published thirty-eight full-length fictions, Syrett wrote all stand-alone novels with one exception: her sequel to *The Victorians*. In *Rose*

³¹³ During the first trial against Wilde, the *Chameleon*, a literary magazine based in Oxford to which Wilde had contributed a list of aphorisms, was frequently referenced, including a poem by Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas that appeared in its pages. This poem, "Two Loves," concludes with the line: "I am the love that dare not speak its name." When Wilde was questioned as to whether he wanted to comment on this line, he responded by defending the nameless love as "noble," "fine," and "beautiful," explaining that it cannot speak its name because it is "so much misunderstood." Quoted by Lucy McDiarmid in "Oscar Wilde's Speech from the Dock," *The Wilde Legacy*, ed. Eiléan ní Chuilleanáin (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 122.

³¹⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 368.

Cottingham Married, the title signals that the focus on same-sex love that dominated the first novel has been replaced by traditional heterosexual romance, an arrangement that, as I will show, Rose does not find satisfactory. A significant amount of the narrative is set in the 1890s, but we also witness Rose's life in the early twentieth century, and her story ends at the present time of writing, which takes place during the middle of the Great War.³¹⁵ In this sequel, Syrett considers what it means for a woman who had found her literary voice, independence, and artistic confidence at the fin de siècle to continue to actualize her autonomy in relation to art in the ensuing decades up to and including the outbreak of war. The first mention of the threat of conflict does not occur in *Rose Cottingham Married* until within twenty pages of the novel's end, and the episode in which the war is being fought only occupies the final chapter. The reviewer for the *Bookman*, who otherwise praised Syrett as a novelist who "has the power of grasping the essentials of a character," and called her "a master of clever dialogue," nonetheless was critical about the presence of the Great War in *Rose Cottingham Married*: "somehow, one feels in the scheme of her story the war has no real and vital significance. It is used to solve a problem rather than culminate a drama—the inevitability of all true tragedy is missing."³¹⁶ This is not, in other words, a novel that makes the war its primary focus, and perhaps the reviewer believes the tragedy is missing because the military conflict remains a backdrop to Syrett's central preoccupation with Rose's personal fight to maintain her independent identity, which, when she is first married, is almost entirely subsumed by her role as a wife.

In this sequel, Rose falls under the spell of the powerful oratory of the socialist speaker John Dering, whom Syrett has already introduced briefly in *The Victorians*. Rose hears him speak at the Fergusson's home, and his presence is described as "magneti[c]."³¹⁷ Rose feels that

³¹⁵ By comparison, it is worth noting that Malet's only novel with a full-length sequel (Malet had written a novella-length sequel to *The Far Horizon* that continues the story of Poppy St. John, "The Courage of Her Convictions" [1909]) was also written during the Great War. During this time of national upheaval, both Malet and Syrett produced fictions in which they reflected on women's lives during the Victorian period that are self-conscious about the relationship of the author's present time to this earlier moment.

³¹⁶ C. S. Evans, "Three War Novels," *Bookman* 52, no.307 (April 1917): 25.

there is “some compelling influence which radiated from his personality and made him show like a flame in a dull room.”³¹⁸ The effect on Rose is that she sits “spellbound, all her generous instincts aflame and tortured as he talked of the homes he had seen that day.”³¹⁹ In *Rose Cottingham Married*, she again hears Dering speak and becomes impassioned for the socialist cause, and also for Dering, whom she marries in spite of her misgivings. Thus follows great misery for Rose, who realizes that marriage has obliterated her autonomy: “R C had disappeared, blotted out in a mist which seemed to have arisen mysteriously for the purpose, and out of the same bank of haze there emerged Rose Dering—Mrs. John Dering.”³²⁰ After two years, Rose is on the verge of leaving John, until she discovers that she is pregnant. She has a boy and names him Dick. She endures their marriage, but years later she admits to herself that she wanted “more than John would ever achieve; he could never satisfy her intellectually. Never could he be anything but superficial.”³²¹

At the heart of *Rose Cottingham Married* is a scathing critique of a form of socialism that refuses to make the equality of women a central concern and instead focuses exclusively on the advancement of working-class men. Initially, Rose imagines that she will work alongside her husband for the cause, and she feels convinced that it is worth sacrificing her own literary career: “But life is so much more important than books, isn’t it? And while there’s so much misery and injustice in the world, it seems so selfish and—and trivial to sit down and write stories.”³²² Her efforts to work as her husband’s equal, however, are met with the belief that her role should be purely domestic, and that there is no room for the promotion of women’s rights,

³¹⁷ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 232.

³¹⁸ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 232.

³¹⁹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*, 231.

³²⁰ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1916), 222.

³²¹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 430.

³²² Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 157.

as John declares: “The woman question should and can wait till more pressing matters are put right.”³²³ For Rose, however, there is no more pressing question than whether she will continue to be subjected daily to the demands of her husband at the expense of not only her own career but also her autonomy. Once she realizes that she has no possibilities for meaningful work if she continues to labor for the socialist cause, she returns to the artistic circles that she had previously frequented. Rose discovers that the Purple Book has ceased publication, and she notes that a man with whom she had previously flirted, Jack Colquhoun, laments “the passing of the Age of Artificiality.”³²⁴ This is now the 1900s, and Rose is recognizing that a shift has taken place within these aesthetic circles, but she still finds that life in this environment is “a whirl of gaiety.”³²⁵ She ultimately discovers that the art and literature that she had temporarily considered frivolous offers her the meaningful existence she desires: “Once more she heard and took part in discussions on new books, new pictures, new music, and with a thrill almost guilty, acknowledged to herself that *these* were the things which truly interested her!”³²⁶ Directly following this revelation Jack tells her: “I’ve found you again.”³²⁷ In response she asserts: “You haven’t found me. I’ve found myself.”³²⁸ Syrett thus links Rose’s acknowledgment of how greatly she values art and beauty with her ability to articulate her self-discovery. Moreover, Rose also makes clear through her refutation of Jack’s claim to having found her that what had been true about female aesthetic authority in *The Victorians* still remains the case: Rose’s relationship to

³²³ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 260.

³²⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 334.

³²⁵ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 334.

³²⁶ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 331. Syrett’s own situation in 1916 had provoked similar questions about the value of writing novels in the face of social strife: in her case, the military catastrophe of the Great War. She records in *The Sheltering Tree* that she was unable to secure substantial volunteer work for the war cause, and as a result: “I was driven to go on writing novels. It seemed a futile occupation in the midst of a world war, but I’m glad to think of certain letters I received from men at the Front, perfect strangers to me, thanking me for the pleasure and distraction my books had given them. Such letters made me feel slightly less useless.” *Sheltering Tree*, 233. Rose’s worry that her aesthetic pursuits are frivolous in the face of social inequity reflects this same concern, if on a different scale.

³²⁷ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 331.

³²⁸ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 331.

aestheticism and to herself requires no form of male mediation. Furthermore, this rediscovery of her independence leads directly to her renewed wish and ability to write novels. Reflecting on her writing career several years later, the narrator tells us that Rose “was glad of her success, and still more glad that of late years some of her writing had come a little nearer to her own standard of excellence.”³²⁹

These narrative details, which fill the bulk of the novel, are a powerful testimony to the transformative power of art and beauty. They demonstrate that even a woman who makes a disappointing marriage can reestablish herself as an aesthete and have a fulfilling existence. The novel’s final pages, however, reveal that the security of Rose’s identity is again challenged when England enters into war. In some ways, Rose’s decision to favor art is vindicated in contrast with John’s socialism, which is rendered irrelevant with the outbreak of the military conflict. It is also the case that, whereas John’s brand of socialism only valued women because they “ministered to the material needs of men,”³³⁰ the war magnifies the unique value of women as mothers. Up to this point in the narrative, Rose has enjoyed being a mother, but her delight in returning to writing fiction and to associating with London literary circles has received the greatest narrative attention. With the onset of the conflict, however, her identity shifts in emphasis from aesthete to mother. The stress on motherhood was certainly current in feminist writings at the time. In 1911, Olive Schreiner, had argued that women maintained a unique relationship to war because they maintained both an aesthetic and an ethical form of care toward the men who were fighting, explaining that “[m]en’s bodies are our woman’s works of art.”³³¹ In the same way, Rose’s profile as an artist is transmuted into her role as a literal creator of human life. Schreiner goes on to conclude that since women have created the lives of men, if women were given

³²⁹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 436.

³³⁰ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 247.

³³¹ Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911), 174.

“power of control”³³² they would not easily sacrifice men’s bodies in war. By contrast, when Rose is faced with this dilemma, she gladly encourages her son, who has always wanted to be a soldier, to participate in the struggle. Nonetheless, it is the idea that Schreiner articulates when she characterizes women as those “who supply [war’s] most valuable munition,”³³³ that allows Rose to become an active participant in the war effort. Moreover, the fact that Rose is making a *personal* sacrifice is symbolically represented: Rose discovers that an ailment she has been suffering is life-threatening at the same time as men are called upon to fight for their country. Learning that she must undergo an operation, she nonetheless keeps this information hidden from her son: “The only thing she could do to help the cause for which he was going to risk his life, was to put no hindrance in his path. Because she might die, Dick should not be a less efficient soldier. She swore it to herself.”³³⁴

The new satisfaction that Rose discovers in motherhood requires further negotiation as the narrative draws to a conclusion. Not long after we learn that Dick has been sent into battle, his parents receive a report of his heroic death. The horrific news understandably is a great source of shock. With Dick’s demise, the new emphasis Rose has placed on her motherhood is momentarily unstable. Witnessing John’s grief, however, she must now necessarily serve as a figurative mother to her husband:

She stroked [John’s] hair with trembling hands, oblivious of everything but the need to comfort, to reassure him, and when she saw the frightened despair die out of his face, she smiled, brilliantly, triumphantly. It was the crowning moment of her life, this realization of his dependence on her. In its blinding light her whole existence with him

³³² Schreiner, *Woman and Labour*, 174.

³³³ Schreiner, *Woman and Labour*, 178.

³³⁴ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 473-74.

was vindicated. She had stood by him, and he needed her. While John lived, she would never cease to be a mother.³³⁵

In this passage, we see that exerting maternal care toward her husband is the crowning moment of Rose's life. Perhaps this achievement arises because, after years of attempting to show John how valuable she could be to his socialist work, she now sees clearly that he is not the self-sufficient man he purported to be. At this juncture, she understands that the role she once attempted to perform is one that she has at last accomplished, albeit in a different manner than she had originally imagined. Since Dick has performed an important role in service to his country, it appears that Rose feels vindicated in remaining with her husband. What is more, this passage indicates how greatly Rose's identity as a modern woman has shifted across the course of two decades: from an unmarried writer of cutting-edge fiction in *The Victorians*, to a wife and mother whose failed marriage inspires her to continue writing novels. And from the triumph she had experienced in publishing her first work of fiction she has, through *Rose Cottingham Married*, achieved a triumph in the form of motherhood. As a result, the world of the 1890s has been transformed. The woman of the fin de siècle who authored a novel without adventure or romance, now has to rethink what it means to be a professional writer, a wife, and a mother in the face of war.

Syrett wrote *Rose Cottingham Married* at the halfway point of her career. She went on to write another fiction dealing with the Great War, *The Wife of a Hero* (1918), which takes a critical view of war marriages. It is noteworthy that Syrett's final novel, *Gemini* (1940), narrates the romance of a man and woman who survived the Great War, and the woman's twin sons from her first husband (who was killed in battle) become fighter pilots in World War II and also lose their lives. In this wartime novel, the woman protagonist's identity as a mother is again central to the narrative, aligning it with the conclusion to *Rose Cottingham Married*. Between these

³³⁵ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 480.

fictions, however, Syrett returned to the preoccupations that had characterized the first half of her professional life: defiant women in the Victorian period refashioning their subjectivities through encounters with transgressive art. Even in these novels that she was writing at the end of the Great War and up to and including *Gemini*, her style remains unaffected by the modernism that was developing around her, retaining continuity with her original approach: narrating realistic women's stories in a straightforward style, but within that form, exploring the liberating possibilities discovered in beauty and art.

As Syrett became increasingly distanced from the *fin de siècle*, her writing shows a greater awareness of her fictions as records of women's experiences in the nineteenth century that ran counter to the impression that the younger generation had acquired about Victorian women's lives. In her memoir, she records that she had recently read several novels "dealing with the terribly restricted life led by women whose youth coincided with mine," and she elaborates that "[i]n writing of the Victorian era the younger novelists seem to have forgotten that what is known as the 'Woman's Movement' was in the 'eighties already well recognized, and in the 'nineties in full swing."³³⁶ She states that this is the primary motivation for composing her memoir: "I began to think that perhaps a counterblast to this picture might conceivably be due."³³⁷ Even a decade before this autobiographical account, however, Syrett's novel, *Portrait of a Rebel* (1929), had provided a self-conscious "counterblast" in fictional form. In the novel's Prologue, we learn that Pamela Thistlewaite, who was born in the 1840s, has died at the age of eighty-six, with the notice of her death in the *London Times*. The Prologue sketches various reactions that the news provokes, and concludes with the response of a "girl with an Eton crop, lounging in an arm chair."³³⁸ This "novelist of two and twenty" declares: "Eighty-six. Lord! she must have been born ages ago, in Victoria's reign. Beastly dull time to live in, poor soul! What a

³³⁶ Syrett, *Sheltering Tree*, 5.

³³⁷ Syrett, *Sheltering Tree*, 5.

³³⁸ Syrett, *Portrait of a Rebel* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1930), 1.

mouldy life she must have had.”³³⁹ The narrative that follows, however, is anything but “dull” and “mouldy”: the unmarried Pamela gets pregnant, she raises her own child and her sister’s child when her sibling dies in childbirth, she opens a bookshop, holds meetings about women’s rights, has a love affair with a man married to a woman who is in an insane hospital,³⁴⁰ and poses for Pre-Raphaelite artists who love her red hair. Pamela achieves professional success, motherhood, and romantic love, all while remaining single. It becomes clear by the end of the novel that the “Eton-cropped” girl is in fact much more indebted than she might imagine to her Victorian predecessors. In later novels like *Portrait of a Rebel*, as well as in her memoir, Syrett is creating a counter-record of nineteenth-century women’s lives. This is a project, as I hope to have shown in this chapter, that began in 1896 with *Nobody’s Fault*.

³³⁹ Syrett, *Portrait of a Rebel*, 2.

³⁴⁰ This episode, like the friendship between Rose and Helen in *The Victorians*, is one of several instances in which Syrett rewrites a scenario or relationship taken from *Jane Eyre*. This time, the narrative explores a dynamic similar to Mr. Rochester’s marriage to a madwoman that prevents him from getting married to Jane, but in this case, Pamela sympathizes with the man’s situation and happily enjoys being his lover.

Chapter Three

Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*: Women's Fiction, Aestheticism, and the Early Twentieth-Century English Novel

Pointed Roofs, the first book in Dorothy Richardson's thirteen-volume roman-fleuve *Pilgrimage* (1915-1967), was not only published in the middle of the Great War but also in the same week in which Syrett's *The Victorians* appeared in print. On 2 October 1915, the *Athenæum* advertised the two novels in sequence, owing to the alphabetic closeness of the respective authors' last names (Figure 4). The very brief synopses provided for each novel indicate a point of overlap between their individual narratives. *Pointed Roofs* is characterized as "[a] tale of a girl's life in a German school," and Syrett's novel is summed up as "[a] study of the development of the heroine in her home, at school, and in literary society of the nineties."¹ These descriptions of course indicate that both *Pointed Roofs* and *The Victorians* are concerned with the lives of young women within an educational setting. The summary of Richardson's novel could also have pointed out that the "girl's life" that it narrates is set in the same decade in which Syrett's fiction is interested, although limited to a single year: 1893. As a consequence, Richardson's first novel is a work that focuses our minds on the fin de siècle. However, although *Pilgrimage* shares a commitment to the same period that preoccupies both Syrett's and Malet's respective fictions, Richardson's writing style is completely different from the prose forms that we encounter in the works of these two other novelists. Instead, in what Richardson called her first chapter-novel, we find a truly distinctive modernist style, one that self-consciously and deliberately diverges from established types of fiction.

We can see this unconventional style, which Richardson devised for the purpose of representing a young woman's consciousness, in the opening episode of *Pointed Roofs*. The

¹ "Books Published This Week," *Athenæum* 4588 (October 2, 1915): 229.

HUSBAND.

Richardson (Dorothy M.), POINTED ROOFS, 6 /
Duckworth

A tale of a girl's life in a German school, with
an appreciatory Introduction by Mr. J. D.
Beresford.

Syrett (Netta), THE VICTORIANS, 6 /
Fisher Unwin

A study of the development of the heroine in
her home, at school, and in literary society of the
nineties.

Warden (Florence), THE LOVELY MRS. BEMBERTON

Figure 4. "Books Published This Week," *Athenæum* 4588 (October 2, 1915): 229.

seventeen-year-old Miriam Henderson has taken it upon herself to earn some money in the wake of her middle-class father's financial failure by securing a position teaching English in a girls' boarding school in Germany (details which the first-time reader, however, does not yet know at this point). In this scene, we have accompanied Miriam as she walks upstairs and goes into her bedroom, where she reflects on her departure the next day: "There was nothing to look forward to now but governessing and old age. Perhaps Miss Gilkes was right. . . . Get rid of men and muddles and have things just ordinary and be happy. 'Make up your mind to be happy. You can be *perfectly* happy without anyone to think about. . . .' Wearing that large cameo brooch—long, white, flat-fingered hands and that quiet little laugh. . . . The piano-organ had reached its last tune. In the midst of the final flourish of notes the door flew open. Miriam got quickly to her feet and felt for matches."² In this passage, there are several indications that the third-person narrative perspective merges with Miriam's interior consciousness, in such a way that no narrator stands dispassionately outside Miriam's awareness of the world. For instance, we are not told the identity of Miss Gilkes, since Miriam already has this knowledge, and because Miriam is not consciously narrating the novel's events to the reader, no explanation is given. In addition, the statement that is placed in quotation marks is not attributed to anyone, although we can infer that Miriam is recalling something that Miss Gilkes once said. We are also left to conclude that the person wearing the brooch and possessing long hands is Miss Gilkes herself. Furthermore, the unusual use of ellipses represents the pacing of Miriam's thoughts, which we would be unlikely to encounter in a traditional third-person narrator, one who assumes omniscient control of the story they are telling. Here, then, we see several of Richardson's bold stylistic innovations, ones that in 1918 her contemporary May Sinclair influentially characterized as "stream of consciousness," a term that I will shortly focus on in greater detail.

² Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* (New York: Knopf, 1938), 1:16-17.

At the same time, this passage draws attention to one of the central themes of *Pilgrimage*: the destiny of the woman who must work, and the question of where, if at all, romance with a man might fit into this picture. Moreover, Miriam's first thought in this extract is striking for the insight that it provides into her perspective on her prospects as a young woman in 1893. Her expectation that life will be nothing more than "governessing and old age" connects her with an earlier generation of middle-class women whose professional opportunities were severely limited to private teaching in well-off households. Furthermore, the occupation of governess was still a common form of employment for women at the fin de siècle, as attested to in an article published in Murray's Magazine in 1889, which records that "since the beginning of the present century governesses have taken their places as a recognized factor in our social economy, and the profession of a private teacher has remained ever since the most important of the few ways of earning a livelihood at present open to women."³ In principle, Miriam's rather dire view on her future contrasts with that of the independent-minded New Woman, who was flourishing in the 1890s, and fighting for the expansion of women into several professions from which they had previously been barred. We discover throughout *Pilgrimage* that part of Miriam's development is her recognition of these professional opportunities, and eventually her self-identification as a New Woman: in *Honeycomb* (1917), the third chapter-novel in the series, when she discovers this liberated, cigarette-smoking figure, she claims her affiliation: "I suppose I'm a new woman—I've said I am now, anyhow."⁴ Miriam's pursuit of new forms of work and independent living situations is an indication of her modernity. That Miriam initially, however, imagines her life in ways that create an affinity between herself and her Victorian predecessors will be a central focus of this chapter.

In what follows, I explain that Miriam's development of her autonomous subjectivity is largely brought about through her engagements with forms of Victorian culture, and especially

³ Alfred W. Pollard, "The Governess and Her Grievances," *Murray's Magazine* 5, no. 28 (April 1889): 505.

⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:436.

aestheticism. I then provide an overview of the early reception of *Pilgrimage*'s first volumes and situate Richardson's experimentation in relation to her contemporaneous fellow innovators, Marcel Proust and James Joyce. I next focus attention on the role that the category of the everyday plays in Richardson's formal strategies, her feminist energies, and her interest in the ways in which the resources of aestheticism enable Miriam to reconceptualize what are otherwise merely the mundane details of the life of a woman who must make her own living.

***Pilgrimage* and Victorian Culture**

Miriam realizes her modernity, in part, through reflections on earlier Victorian women's fiction. As she works toward a more independent sense of her subjectivity, Miriam identifies with narratives that record women's struggle to resist customary social expectations about femininity, especially through the novels of Charlotte Brontë and Ouida (Marie Louise Ramé). I wish to emphasize this interest in women's fiction because the focus of recent scholarship would suggest that Richardson was only interested in addressing the literary works of male authors. In particular, Richardson's several references to Henry James in her personal and critical writing, as well as in *Pilgrimage* itself, have been a frequent focus of discussions about Richardson's style, such as Mhairi Pooler's emphasis that "[s]tyle for James is a means of *rendering* rather than subordinating meaning," which she states is also true of Richardson's "overtly stylised prose."⁵ While this perspective is entirely accurate, such discussions repeatedly overlook the less overt connection between Richardson's achievement and her women precursors. It appears that these critics have taken Richardson at her word, when in her Foreword to the Dent/Knopf 1938 edition of *Pilgrimage*, her own critical remarks put her writing into dialogue with a tradition of exclusively male fiction. There, Richardson claims that in 1911, when she decided to write a novel, that all the contemporary realist authors "happened to be men,"⁶ a situation that

⁵ Mhairi Pooler, *Writing Life: Early Twentieth-Century Autobiographies of the Artist-Hero* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 167.

occasioned her influential assertion that with *Pilgrimage* she was “attempting to produce a feminine equivalent of the current masculine realism.”⁷ Furthermore, her broader discussions of the development of realist fiction—beginning with Honoré de Balzac, “the father of realism”⁸—and of innovations in fiction contemporaneous with her own (she points out that Marcel Proust was thought of in 1913 as the “earliest adventurer”⁹ of a new style) remain solely about male writers. Although Richardson fails to mention a single woman author, the narrative that follows reveals that women’s fiction plays a pivotal role in Miriam’s development. A clue to Richardson’s silence in the Foreword may be that her discussion deals explicitly with a realist tradition, but the women’s fictions that Miriam most enjoys participate in the modes of the gothic romance and the aesthetic novel. In this second genre, we uncover another aspect of *Pilgrimage* that has been critically neglected, and which I will explore extensively in this chapter: Miriam’s passionate responsiveness to forms of aesthetic culture.

In various overt and subtle ways throughout *Pilgrimage*, we are made aware that Miriam is engaging with art for art’s sake, beginning with her sensitive responsiveness to music in *Pointed Roofs*, her obsession with the lush romances of Ouida in *Backwater* (1916), her rejection of conventional notions of morality in art and life in relation to W. H. Mallock’s *A Human Document* and Oscar Wilde’s trials in *Honeycomb*, her preoccupation with the music of Wagner in *Interim* (1919), and her thrill in reading the essays of Maurice Maeterlinck in *Deadlock* (1921). In particular, I focus on the ways in which Miriam’s encounters with Pre-Raphaelite, aesthetic, and decadent culture have a profound influence on her evolving ideas about art, her development as a desiring subject, and her ongoing negotiation of her gender identity. Moreover, Miriam seeks for beauty in everyday experiences, ones that often lead her to

⁶ Richardson, “Foreword,” *Pilgrimage*, 1:9.

⁷ Richardson, “Foreword,” *Pilgrimage*, 1:9

⁸ Richardson, “Foreword,” *Pilgrimage*, 1:9.

⁹ Richardson, “Foreword,” *Pilgrimage*, 1:11.

moments of “ecstasy” of the kind that for Walter Pater constituted “success in life.”¹⁰ Furthermore, I argue that the narrative form of *Pilgrimage* is related to aesthetic fiction in ways that have remained obscure because Richardson’s literary experimentation is so striking. Miriam’s developing sense of her subjectivity is strongly connected with her aesthetic experiences, a point that reminds us of the crucial significance of Richardson’s setting of the first half of her thirteen-volume roman-fleuve in the 1890s. In this chapter, I examine for the most part aspects of *Pointed Roofs*, with reference to the five succeeding novels through *Deadlock*. Taken together, these novels span the period between 1893 and 1901: the last eight years of Queen Victoria’s reign. Although I will be looking largely at her experiences as a governess, by 1901 Miriam has established herself as an entirely independent woman who is employed in London as a dental secretary, rents a room in a boarding house, occupies the streets and public spaces of the city, and turns down an offer of marriage in favor of maintaining her autonomy.

Critical Assessment and Richardson’s Innovative Narrative

That Miriam embarks on her pilgrimage during the fin de siècle was not uppermost in the majority of critics’ minds when they first encountered Richardson’s formal innovations in 1915. Richardson’s unprecedented style was the most arresting, and arguably most demanding, feature of her work from the very moment it appeared from the publishing house founded in 1898 by Gerald Duckworth, which was known for supporting several avant-garde authors, including Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, and the Sitwells—Edith, Osbert, and Sacheverell. As the reviews indicate, the freshness of the style was extremely exciting to some, while to others it could be very discouraging. John Middleton Murry, best remembered as an influential modernist critic, wrote the first review of *Pointed Roofs*. He characterized it as “an utterly personal book,” an assessment that we discover means that he found it lacking in any “real

¹⁰ Walter Pater, “Conclusion,” to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 189.

significance.”¹¹ He rightly perceives that Richardson’s aim is to develop a feminine form of fiction, but he asserts that this effort “has been far more significantly attempted by Mrs. Virginia Woolf in *The Voyage Out*.”¹² Murry’s unfavorable comparison with Woolf’s novel, which Duckworth had published earlier that same year, indicates that from the very beginning Richardson and Woolf were perceived as authors with a similar aim in developing a new kind of female fiction. The comparison is also somewhat surprising, given that Woolf’s style in her early career was far more traditional than the more experimental techniques that she developed in 1922 with *Jacob’s Room*.

By comparison, the *Saturday Review* deplored Richardson’s minute investigation of a woman’s interiority, and brought against Miriam the charge of pathology: “The book is a charted dissection of an unsound mind. It lays bare the workings of a sick imagination in a girl of 17 years. There is no plot, no love motive. Every interest is made subservient to the pathological.”¹³ For this critic, the experimental style could only be rendered intelligible as a representation of insanity. Meanwhile, although the *Pall Mall Gazette* did not deem Miriam to be neurotic, it was nonetheless critical of her mind, calling *Pointed Roofs* a “mass of vagrant veracity” with “no hint of consecutive thought.”¹⁴ These observations bring to the fore the way in which the narrative refuses to be sequential. Miriam’s thoughts appear to be disconnected because Richardson is attempting to capture the nature of interior consciousness. This focus on interiority, too, led this critic to echo the *Saturday Review*’s comment that “[t]here is no ‘plot’,”¹⁵ a statement which was to be repeatedly used in relation to *Pilgrimage* throughout its publication. Whether condemned or lauded for its lack of plot, Richardson’s resistance to this convention was sustained across all

¹¹ John Middleton Murry, “A Feminine Novel,” *Daily News and Leader*, September 22, 1915, 6.

¹² Murry, “A Feminine Novel,” 6.

¹³ “An Original Book,” unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 120, no. 3129 (October 17, 1915): vi.

¹⁴ Pendennis [pseud.], “New Novels,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 28, 1915, 6.

¹⁵ Pendennis [pseud.], “New Novels,” 6.

thirteen installments of *Pilgrimage*, and was foundational to her revision of earlier fictional modes.

When not being criticized for its lack of action, the setting of the greater part of the novel in Hanover was the object of critique. Several of the reviews expressed an anti-German sentiment, one that, given the war-time publication of *Pointed Roofs*, prevented an appreciation of Richardson's innovation. The *Liberal Westminster Gazette*, for example, opined in exaggerated terms that "Miriam constructs a firm admiration for almost every German thing," and asserted that the novel's events were not "charged with enough meaning" to hold "that patience in the reader which Miss Richardson's very clever methods undoubtedly deserve."¹⁶ There were also, however, several positive reviews that appreciated Richardson's clever innovations. The *Observer*, for instance, proclaimed that "the whole is clear with a clarity as keen as the gables of the charming 'pointed roofs,'" and pronounced the novel unforgettable.¹⁷ In the *Tatler*, the reviewer Richard King devoted almost a full page to *Pointed Roofs*, announcing that the volume was "remarkable enough to merit special consideration. The most extraordinary thing about it is its literary style."¹⁸ King, although believing that Richardson's prose was at times "strained and artificial," ultimately concluded that the novel was "full of astounding cleverness," and he eagerly looked forward to the next installment.¹⁹ The reviewer for the *New York Times* expressed a similar sentiment: "We await with hope, and not a little fear, the record of [Miriam's] further unfolding, as we would await that of a real girl."²⁰ He went on to note: "The

¹⁶ "New Novels," unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson, *Westminster Gazette*, October 30, 1915, 3.

¹⁷ "A Fine New Novel," unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson, *Observer*, October 3, 1915, 5.

¹⁸ Richard King, "Novelty," review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson, *Tatler* 744 (September 29, 1915): 414.

¹⁹ King, "Novelty," 414.

²⁰ "A New Trilogy of English Life: Miss Richardson's First Novel of a Governess's Adventures," unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson, *New York Times*, December 31, 1916, 577.

more we muse upon what Miss Richardson has achieved in this book the more remarkable does it seem.”²¹

Richardson’s accomplishment in *Pointed Roofs* was certainly remarkable, and the novel appeared at about the same time as the publication of two other ground-breaking full-length fictions that also experimented with rendering consciousness. In France, the first installment of Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* was published in 1913, the same year in which Richardson finished writing *Pointed Roofs*. *Pilgrimage* is frequently compared with Proust’s series because the way in which both works narrate the interiority of a single character during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, in both series we discover new narrative approaches to the representation of consciousness in relation to time. In this regard, it is necessary to consider the importance of Henri Bergson’s theories of temporality, which were not only influential but also popular at the fin de siècle and the years leading up to the war.²² Bergson privileges time over space, as the “dimension in which life actually occurs,”²³ a dramatic reconceptualization of time that allows him to defend free will, to champion the human spirit over the materialism of his age, and to conceive of art as not only the art object but also the experience of it as well. In particular, Bergson’s notion of *durée*, which Mary Ann Gillies summarizes as “internal time, the time of active living,”²⁴ has an affinity with the manner in which the reader experiences Miriam’s consciousness. As Gillies explains, Richardson “devis[ed] a new fictional form that might accommodate the radically different time of the inner world.”²⁵ Although Richardson claimed that she “was never consciously aware of any specific influence”

²¹ “New Trilogy of English Life,” *New York Times*, 577.

²² In the case of Proust, the two men were acquainted: Bergson married Proust’s second cousin, and Proust was the best man at the wedding. See Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 9.

²³ Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 10.

²⁴ Gillies, *Bergson and British Modernism*, 11.

²⁵ Gillies, *Bergson and British Modernism*, 152.

such as Bergson's,²⁶ the great popularity and wide dissemination of his theories would mean that for a woman so attuned to every branch of human inquiry as Richardson, she would most certainly have been acquainted with his transformational philosophy. Suzanne Guerlac notes Bergson's wide literary influence. She, along with several other critics, acknowledges that T. S. Eliot attended Bergson's lectures, and "introduced aspects of [Bergson's] thought into the British modernist context."²⁷

The other innovative contemporaneous novel was James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which was serialized in the *Egoist* from 1914 to 1915. Moreover, in 1919 Joyce and Richardson would see their writing appear side by side when *Interim*, the fifth volume of *Pilgrimage*, was published serially in the *Little Review* alongside installments of *Ulysses*. Joyce therefore would certainly have been well aware of Richardson by 1919, but he never commented on her fiction. By comparison, when Richardson was asked to review *Finnegans Wake* in 1937, she eagerly agreed.²⁸ To P. Beaumont Wadsworth in 1923, Richardson was, as the title of his review indicates, "A Leader of Modern Realists," and Wadsworth declares that "[p]erhaps the most significant event in modern literature is the coincidental emergence of two writers who, while working independently of each other, were both engaged in breaking new ground in a similar manner, James Joyce and Miss Dorothy Richardson."²⁹

Although Joyce never acknowledged Richardson's fiction, there were other experimental authors who weighed in on her achievement when the first few installments of her roman-fleuve had been published. Richardson was already working on the third chapter-novel, *Honeycomb*,

²⁶ Shiv K. Kumar, *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* (New York: New York University Press, 1962), 36-37.

²⁷ Guerlac, *Thinking in Time*, 11.

²⁸ Kristin Bluemel, *Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism: Dorothy Richardson's "Pilgrimage"* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 23.

²⁹ P. Beaumont Wadsworth, "A Leader of Modern Realists: Dorothy Richardson a Novelist Who Tells her Own Story," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 1923. http://dorothyrichardson.org/bibliography/works_on.htm. See entry 3.2.1 Articles in Books and Periodicals 1915-1945. I have been unable to track down the original.

when *Pointed Roofs* was accepted by Duckworth. With a significant amount of writing already completed when publication began, Richardson was able to bring out the first five chapter-novels in no fewer than five years. Therefore, a substantial amount of her fiction had already gone into circulation before her fellow modernist authors began to take note. Katherine Mansfield, for example, wrote a review for the *Athenæum* in 1919. Mansfield's own development of an innovative style for representing consciousness in her early short stories such as "The Tiredness of Rosabel" (1908) preceded Richardson's first novel. Mansfield was critical of Richardson's rendering of interiority, in particular bringing against her the charge that she treated all the "bits, fragments, flashing glimpses, half scenes and whole scenes" of Miriam's existence as though they were "of equal importance."³⁰

By comparison, Virginia Woolf reviewed Richardson's work twice, in both instances mixing her recognition of Richardson's accomplishments with criticism. When commenting on *The Tunnel* in 1919, she echoed Mansfield's sentiment, writing that the novel fails to achieve "unity, significance, or design."³¹ But when discussing *Revolving Lights* four years later, she made the influential statement that Richardson "has invented, or, if she has not invented, developed and applied to her own uses, a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender."³² Here, Woolf makes the plainest statement of the period about the gendered nature of Richardson's project. Although Woolf states that "[o]ther writers of the opposite sex" have also used such "elastic" sentences, she differentiates Richardson's employment of this sentence because she says that Richardson fashioned it "consciously, in order that it may descend to the depths and investigate the crannies of Miriam Henderson's consciousness." In other words, it is the way in which the form is used by a woman writer to render a woman's consciousness that makes Richardson's project distinctly feminine: the form

³⁰ [Katherine Mansfield,] "Three Women Novelists," *Athenæum* 4640 (April 4, 1919): 141.

³¹ [Virginia Woolf,] "The Tunnel," *Times Literary Supplement* 891 (February 13, 1919): 81.

³² Virginia Woolf, "Romance and the Heart," *Nation and Athenæum*, May 19, 1923, 229.

and the content, in this regard, are perfectly united. More than a decade later, Richardson's own words in the Dent/ Knopf Foreword about creating a feminine realism reinforced the gendered intentionality that Woolf imputed to Richardson.³³

Woman's Narrative and the Elevation of the Everyday

May Sinclair had not yet written her more experimental novels when she published her influential review of Richardson's first three chapter-novels in the *Egoist* in 1918, where she praises Richardson's style as follows: "By imposing very strict limitations on herself she has brought her art, her method, to a high pitch of perfection."³⁴ Sinclair explained the reader's experience of the narrative perspective: "You look at the outer world through Miriam's senses and it is as if you had never seen it so vividly before."³⁵ Sinclair's most memorable statement, however, comes about in her effort to describe *Pilgrimage's* lack of a traditional organizing structure: "In this series there is no drama, no situation, no set scene. Nothing happens. It is just life going on and on. It is Miriam Henderson's stream of consciousness going on and on. And in neither is there any grossly discernible beginning or middle or end."³⁶ Although Sinclair's application of the term stream of consciousness to Richardson's style has made a lasting impact on discussions of general innovations in modernist literature, Richardson, it is worth noting, deplored the phrase, believing that it placed too much emphasis on movement rather than what she regarded as the still fixity of consciousness.³⁷ Richardson preferred the image of a tree, because "its central core, luminous point, (call it what you will, its names are legion) tho [sic]

³³ Richardson, "Foreword," *Pilgrimage*, 1:9.

³⁴ May Sinclair, "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson," *Egoist* (April 1918): 58.

³⁵ Sinclair, "Novels of Dorothy Richardson," 58.

³⁶ Sinclair, "Novels of Dorothy Richardson," 58.

³⁷ Richardson said that "Stream of Consciousness" was a term "isolated by its perfect imbecility." Quoted in Stanley J. Kunitz, *Authors Today and Yesterday: A Companion Volume to Living Authors* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1933), 562.

more or less continuously expanding from birth to maturity, remains stable, one with itself thruout [sic] life.”³⁸

Be that as it may, the significance of Sinclair’s perception is that she shows how Richardson’s techniques not only resist the pervasive marriage plot that remained a staple of English fiction; Sinclair also, perhaps more important, recognizes the non-hierarchical account of Miriam’s daily activities. In this regard, Sinclair sees a virtue in the ways in which Mansfield bewailed Richardson’s treatment of the “fragments” as of “equal importance.” Here, I contend that it is Richardson’s narrative respect for the relevance of even the minutiae of Miriam’s everyday experience that distinguishes her achievement. The category of the everyday has long been associated with women. In the theoretical writings of Henri Lefebvre, for example, women are represented as “the subject of everyday life and its victims or objects.”³⁹ Richardson, however, rewrites this association. As Laurie Langbauer points out: “*Pilgrimage’s* form demystifies the extraordinary into the everyday.”⁴⁰ For by recording a woman’s consciousness of the mundane pieces that make up her daily life with the same amount of attention that is given to her romantic encounters, her professional experiences, and her conversations with stimulating interlocutors, Richardson asserts the value of these otherwise peripheral aspects of a woman’s existence. Miriam’s consciousness transforms these diurnal fragments into epiphanic moments.

In the next section of this chapter, in which I begin by analyzing *Pointed Roofs*, it becomes clear that although each of *Pilgrimage’s* chapter-novels is based in a particular historical moment, Miriam’s epiphanies often form a link between an instance of significance from her past that she has carried into her present, and which will in turn inform a later episode.

³⁸ Richardson quoted in Kunitz, *Authors Today and Yesterday*, 562.

³⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Philip Wander (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1984), 73.

⁴⁰ Laurie Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 165.

Pilgrimage, therefore, demonstrates how narrative consciousness and historical time constantly counterpoint each other. My discussion, then, will to a large extent move through the novels chronologically, but also with an eye to the recurring relevance of certain themes. At the start, I concentrate on *Pointed Roofs* because this chapter-novel introduces several foundational topics that will be featured in subsequent volumes. The themes that are of greatest interest are those that illuminate Miriam's profound engagements with Victorian—and especially fin-de-siècle—art and culture.

“And Yet . . . German Music, a Line of German Poetry, a Sudden Light on Clara’s Face”: Music, Education, Femininity, and the Aesthetics of the German Atmosphere in *Pointed Roofs*

Pointed Roofs takes place primarily in Germany, a foreign location and rival imperial power that brings about many revelations for Miriam in terms of cultural traditions, national identity, and especially attitudes towards women. This first chapter-novel records Miriam's residence at a German school, Waldstrasse, for five months, at the end of which time she returns to England in large part because she cannot afford to remain there uncompensated during the summer holiday. Although Miriam worries about her ability to teach the fundamentals of English in a foreign language (“English grammar . . . in German? Her heart beat in her throat”⁴¹) her knowledge of German indicates the quality of her own learning, while also reminding us that this was one of the two most common languages for girls to learn during the nineteenth century (the other one being French, in which Miriam is also conversant). As we have seen, several reviewers objected to Miriam's enjoyment of German life since Britain was at war with this enemy at the time the novel appeared. However, in the late Victorian period relations between the two countries were very different, and Germany was recognized as a location of great artistic

⁴¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:29.

achievement. Furthermore, German finishing schools, like the one at which Miriam teaches, were considered prestigious. *Pointed Roofs* makes this point when Miriam and her father have made the boat crossing from England, and Miriam realizes when they get on shore that her father is trying to impress a Dutchman by pressing upon him that she is “being taken as a pupil to a finishing school in Germany,” and the Dutchman responds affirmingly: “fine education in German schools.”⁴² Although Miriam in actuality is going to the school as a teacher, this educational setting occasions her own learning in several respects. To begin with, there are many episodes that demonstrate how Miriam’s experiences in Germany are opening her eyes to what it means to be a young woman. She is constantly scrutinizing how girls and women perform their femininity, especially in relation to the ways in which they style their hair. These reflections cause Miriam to evaluate herself in comparison, usually to her disadvantage, but occasionally to her self-aggrandizement when it comes to measuring intelligence. This educational atmosphere also relates to my other primary interests in relation to *Pointed Roofs*: Miriam’s reflections on music, the importance she places on her knowledge of the Aesthetic Movement, and her identification with selected women’s fiction.

Pointed Roofs establishes that Miriam’s employment as a governess not only connects her with earlier generations of Victorian women, but also links her with a literary tradition that originates with Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853). Although there are only two explicit references to *Villette* in *Pointed Roofs*, Brontë’s fiction is crucial to the questions involved in the shaping of a modern professional identity for women, and with what it means to narrate a single woman’s life. Moreover, the enduring relevance of Brontë’s novel to Miriam is underlined when we discover that it is featured again in *The Tunnel*, and somewhat later in *Deadlock*: no other work of fiction that Miriam enjoys is such a frequent touchstone at diverse intervals throughout *Pilgrimage*. A brief overview of *Villette* will make evident the parallel situations that recur at the

⁴² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:27.

beginning of *Pilgrimage*. Brontë's narrative features Lucy Snowe traveling from England to the fictionally named city of Villette, which is based on Brontë's experiences teaching English in Brussels. Lucy, who is very independent, enjoys musing on her surroundings, and her habit is to find situations where "unobserved I could observe."⁴³ She constantly reflects on the forms of femininity by which she is surrounded, expressing antipathy toward women who manipulate men with their feminine charm. She finds herself drawn to Monsieur Paul Emanuel, who teaches literature at the school, and for whom she develops strong feelings that are in conflict with her wish to maintain her autonomy. It would be easy to provide a substantial list of the many specific ways that *Pointed Roofs* parallels *Villette*, a labor which has already been completed by Hilary Newman.⁴⁴ I do not merely wish, however, to demonstrate where Richardson's narrative echoes Brontë's, but draw instead into focus why it is significant that in 1893 Miriam identifies so closely with a novel from four decades earlier.

The first time that Miriam references *Villette* she is still in England, when we do not as yet understand the eventual importance the book will acquire for her once she starts teaching. Miriam is bantering with her sister Harriett, and she lists Brontë's novel among the books on her shelf, which she turns into a chant: "'*The Voyage of the Beeeeeagle*,' she sang 'Scott's Poetical Works. *Villette*—Longfellow—Holy Bible *with* apocrypha—*Egmont*---.'"⁴⁵ Among these works, *Villette* stands out as the only one written by a woman, as well as the only novel. That it is on Miriam's shelf indicates that she is not taking it with her to Hanover, a point that emphasizes that Miriam's recollection when she is abroad is based on her deep familiarity with Brontë's fiction. The next reference makes apparent the specific resonance of *Villette*. In this episode, Miriam has been in Hanover for only a few days, and she finds herself teaching her first English

⁴³ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*, ed. Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 142.

⁴⁴ Hilary Newman, "The Influence of *Villette* on Dorothy Richardson's *Pointed Roofs*," *Brontë Studies* 42, no. 1 (2017): 15-25.

⁴⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:22-23.

lesson, about which she feels that “[t]he moment she had dreaded had come. This was Germany. There was no escape.”⁴⁶ Miriam is concerned about her competence in this foreign school, which is run by Fräulein Pfaff. When Miriam begins teaching her lesson and the German girls praise her clear English and dutifully follow her instruction, she becomes more confident, and she reflects that “[i]t was going—succeeding. This was her class.”⁴⁷ It is here, when Miriam experiences satisfaction in her achievement, that her thoughts lead to Brontë’s novel: “She hoped Fräulein was listening outside. She probably was. Heads of foreign schools did. She remembered Madame Beck in *Villette*.”⁴⁸

The scene that Miriam has in mind is one in which Lucy has just been introduced by the head of the foreign school, Madame Beck, to the English class, and the pupils are keen to test Lucy’s ability to exercise control. Lucy boldly takes on the challenge and succeeds in quieting their commotion: we learn that “the pens travelled peacefully over the pages, and the remainder of the lesson passed in order and industry.”⁴⁹ Afterward, Madame Beck expresses her approval, and Lucy realizes that “[s]he had been listening and peeping through a spy-hole the whole time.”⁵⁰ Madame Beck, as readers will recall, runs the school through forms of surveillance. Lucy understandably dislikes Madame Beck’s style of exercising power, but nonetheless figures out how to maintain her individuality. Although Miriam, when she finds that she is succeeding, wishes her competence to be observed by Fräulein Pfaff, her feelings toward the schoolmistress have a close affinity with Lucy’s for Madame Beck: Miriam frequently has cause to be angered that the Fräulein exercises her power in ways that threaten the autonomy that Miriam wishes to

⁴⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:54.

⁴⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:55.

⁴⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:55.

⁴⁹ Brontë, *Villette*, 81.

⁵⁰ Brontë, *Villette*, 81.

maintain. In this way, the resistance to the authority of an older woman that both Lucy and Miriam express is an aspect of each woman's pursuit of her independence.

But there is an even more fundamental connection between Miriam and Lucy that is embodied in this moment of recollection, which is that these triumphant scenes signify each woman's ability to establish a sustainable autonomy as a teacher. Lucy emphasizes the crucial shift that has occurred in her situation when, at the close of the chapter, she states: "From that day I ceased to be a nursery-governess, and became English teacher."⁵¹ In the opening of the next chapter, we discover why this is so important: "My time was now well and profitably filled up."⁵² Lucy is no longer simply self-sufficient, but she has found a vocation that is satisfying to her. For Miriam as well, her success as a teacher is a sign that her choice of a profession over marriage is a pursuit that she can sustain. On the way to Germany when she was worried about her competence to teach, she imagined that if she failed at the school that she might "find a place somewhere as a servant," and that even this would be preferable to the alternative of going back to England, because she senses that in Germany "there was freedom somewhere at hand."⁵³ To be away from England frees Miriam from all previous obligations on her identity—especially those to her family—and thus she can explore her subjectivity without constraints. After the successful English lesson, she says to herself: "I'm all right, I can do it all right,"⁵⁴ and she realizes that her success has "removed an obstacle to gladness which was waiting to break forth. She was going to stay on. That was the point."⁵⁵ For Miriam, being able to remain in Germany as a teacher makes her feel "strong and independent": she can continue in her solitary pilgrimage.

⁵¹ Brontë, *Villette*, 81.

⁵² Brontë, *Villette*, 82.

⁵³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:30.

⁵⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:55-56.

⁵⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:56.

Besides the fact that there are such clear parallels between Lucy's and Miriam's respective positions as teachers in a foreign girls' school, the most significant legacy that *Villette* has to *Pilgrimage* is connected with the position of narrative observation that we find in the women protagonists' perspectives on their environment. We have already seen that Lucy wishes to observe while being unobserved, and there are distinct similarities in this desire with Miriam's outlook. As readers of *Villette* quickly discern, Lucy is at points an unreliable narrator, largely because she withholds information. The reason for this silence, as Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz points out, is because "silence gives her power": by not sharing certain details with the reader, Lucy reminds us that she is the one who exercises control over her own story.⁵⁶ This silence is continuous with Lucy's treatment of other characters within the novel, toward whom she maintains a distance that allows for her critical observations. In many cases, we see that Lucy particularly dislikes women who wish to make themselves an object of male interest through displays of attention-seeking femininity, such as she finds in her pupil Genevra Fanshawe, whom she thinks of as a "vain coquette" with "fickle tastes."⁵⁷

Even though Richardson's narrative technique is very different, it similarly seeks to prevent Miriam from being objectified by the reader, and it also demonstrates that Miriam wishes to set herself at a remove from the type of insincere girlhood that Lucy deplores. On multiple occasions, Miriam reflects on how much she dislikes women whose behavior is calculated to please the opposite sex. For instance, when she is in Hanover having tea at an inn with her pupils, a group of young men play and sing a waltz. When it is over, Miriam is "disgusted" to "see that all the girls seemed to be sitting up and . . . being bright . . . affected."⁵⁸ The ellipses here reveal Miriam's shocked consternation at how these girls have so thoroughly

⁵⁶ Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, "Faithful Narrator' or 'Partial Eulogist': First-Person Narration in Brontë's *Villette*," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 246.

⁵⁷ Brontë, *Villette*, 87, 86.

⁵⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:155-56.

altered their conduct. But Miriam's hostility goes beyond that of Lucy to expressing a dislike for both men and women. Before Miriam has reached Germany, we are made aware of her general misanthropy. First, remembering a girl named Ellen Sharpe who called her unsociable, she thinks: "all the grand girls were horrid . . . somehow mean and sly."⁵⁹ She then contemplates asking her father a question, but she decides against it: "If only he would answer a question simply, and not with a superior air as if he had invented the thing he was telling about. She felt she had a right to all the knowledge there was, without fuss."⁶⁰ Following these reflections, Miriam recognizes: "I *am* unsociable, I suppose," and she further reflects: "I don't like men and I loathe women. I am a misanthrope."⁶¹ Not coincidentally, this episode marks the earliest time that the third-person narration of Miriam's consciousness seamlessly changes into a first-person voice. Here, we have an "I" erupting into the narrative surface and asserting itself. This shift of narrative voice is one of Richardson's most critical stylistic strategies, allowing the reader to be presented with direct revelations of Miriam's interior thoughts. Richardson experimented with this technique throughout *Pilgrimage*: in the early volumes, Miriam's interior "I" appears infrequently, and its increasing presence in the later installments reflects Miriam's growing confidence in her subjectivity. As we can see in this passage, we are given access to Miriam's thoughts, but we are also given her perspective at the very moment when she makes plain that her disgust with gender performance means that she prefers to remain an outsider.

The stance that Miriam assumes as an observer leads to her reflections on numerous aspects of life in Germany, including, as we discover, that her interest in education is tied up with an investment in beauty and art. Specifically, we begin to see that she is acquainted with the Pre-Raphaelite movement, while at the same time aspects of her musings reveal her alignment with Pater's aesthetic theories. We discover that these artistic ideas inform her

⁵⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:31.

⁶⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:31.

⁶¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:31.

immersion in the aesthetics of the everyday. This body of material becomes important when Miriam's close observations of her situation at Waldstrasse lead to her reflections on the superiority of the education she received in England. When Miriam attempts to identify what set apart her experience, she first pinpoints a difference in the attitude toward girls' education, realizing that in her school "[s]omehow the girls had been made to feel they mattered."⁶² By contrast, the male teachers at Waldstrasse treat the girl pupils "as if they had no minds."⁶³ Miriam further recognizes that the source of this attitude is the expectation that the only destiny for her charges is marriage (Miriam is "astounded" to discover that all but one of the German girls "had already a complete outfit of house-linen"⁶⁴). By contrast, Miriam reflects that "the lessons she had had at school would not have been given more zestfully, more as if it were worth while, had she and her schoolfellows been boys."⁶⁵ Her ruminations further lead her to identify her school's distinction by way of the figures with whom it is associated: "Ruskin and Browning and Holman Hunt."⁶⁶ We learn that among Miriam's instructors were men individually acquainted with these artists, and whose teaching reflected their influence.⁶⁷ It might initially appear that the affirming attitude toward girls' education and these male figures is not related, but in Miriam's conception of her school as "new—modern—Ruskin,"⁶⁸ we find a possible link. Not only was John Ruskin a teacher who extensively developed and published his pedagogical ideas; he was also known for championing robust education for girls. Sara Atwood explains that Ruskin believed "that women should be offered the same educational advantages as men."⁶⁹

⁶² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:80.

⁶³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:81.

⁶⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:82.

⁶⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:79.

⁶⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:80.

⁶⁷ Miriam also had a couple of women teachers at the school. One taught "logic and the beginning of psychology." Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:79.

⁶⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:81.

Perhaps Miriam has in mind Ruskin's well-known "Of Queens' Gardens" (1865), in which he writes that "a girl's education should be nearly, in its course and material of study, the same as a boy's."⁷⁰

What is equally important about the school's association with John Ruskin, William Holman Hunt, and Robert Browning, is that it indicates that Miriam's educational background highly valued the arts. More specifically in regard to pedagogy, another way that these figures may have had such a profound influence on Miriam is that, as with Ruskin's belief in quality education regardless of a person's gender, class, or age, a democratizing principle underlies the artistic beliefs of all three figures. Browning, who had gained great popularity in the 1870s and 1880s, gave voice to a wide range of poetic speakers, including lunatics and slaves, and he introduced new colloquial forms of speech into his dramatic monologues. By comparison, Holman Hunt was one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1849 along with John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.⁷¹ This artistic community proved highly responsive to Ruskin's theories about the need for artists to represent nature as they found it, not attempting to improve upon what they observed. In Ruskin's words, artists should "go to Nature in all singleness of heart [...] rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing,"⁷² which Ian Warrell restates as an injunction to "seek truth uncritically in their

⁶⁹ Sara Atwood, *Ruskin's Educational Ideals* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 35.

⁷⁰ John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens," in *Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1905), 18:128. It must be noted that Ruskin makes one exception to this universal similarity: theology, which he believes women treat too lightly and that they manipulate it to their own advantage. In addition, although Ruskin's ideas were progressive, he also thought that the manner in which girls were instructed should be different than that of boys, and he assuredly believed that men and women had separate roles to fulfill in society. At the same time, we discover his injunction to allow girls to read widely, and he urges: "Let her loose in the library, I say, as you do a fawn in a field," 131.

⁷¹ We discover when Miriam is in Germany and brings to mind the dining-room of her parents' home that "D. G. Rossetti" is on the bookcase. Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:168.

⁷² Ruskin, *Modern Painters I*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, ed. Cook and Wedderburn, 3:624. Ruskin quoted himself when writing his Preface to his essay "Pre-Raphaelitism," in which he declared that this injunction had been "carried out, to the very letter," by the Pre-Raphaelites. "Pre-Raphaelitism," *Works of John Ruskin*, ed. Cook and Wedderburn, 12:341.

depictions of nature.”⁷³ The opposite practice, improving upon a painting’s subject, characterized the work of those artists who were the followers and imitators of Raphael, which explains the origin of the Brotherhood’s name. The Pre-Raphaelite deviation from this tradition provoked harsh criticism. J. B. Bullen explains that the Brotherhood was condemned for their “mimetic accuracy,” an “undiscriminating tendency in their work,” and physiognomy and body language that “were unidealized.”⁷⁴ In a letter to the *Times*, Ruskin defended this approach, and wrote that the Pre-Raphaelites “will draw either what they see, or what they suppose might have been the actual facts of the scene they desire to represent, irrespective of any conventional rules of picture-making.”⁷⁵

A further principle that unites Browning, Holman Hunt, and Ruskin, is the moralizing aspect of their ideas about art, or what Michaela Giebelhausen, referring specifically to the Pre-Raphaelites, calls a quest for “earnestness and sincerity in art.”⁷⁶ All three men believed that art should be instructive and elevate a person’s moral character. In Holman Hunt’s case, he was emphatic that paintings were not for their visual charm alone. He followed Ruskin’s injunction to represent nature as he found it, but at the same time, he integrated symbolism into his paintings, which was consistent with his belief that art should impart a moral message. Carol Jacobi explains that “Hunt’s art is best summarized as addressing extremes: both signification and representation are taken to their absolute limit.”⁷⁷ In Hunt’s painting, one form of symbolism that directly relates to Miriam, is the Pre-Raphaelite fixation with women’s hair. As Galia Ofek notes, “many Pre-Raphaelite depictions of women deployed loose and disheveled

⁷³ Ian Warrell, “Ruskin’s Pre-Raphaelitism,” in Robert Hewison, Ian Warrell and Stephen Wildman, *Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000), 203.

⁷⁴ J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 10-11.

⁷⁵ Ruskin, Letter to the *Times*, May 13, 1851, 8.

⁷⁶ Michaela Giebelhausen, “The Religious and Intellectual Background,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 67.

⁷⁷ Carol Jacobi, “William Holman Hunt,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, 116.

hair to denote and denounce ‘fallen’ sexuality, while neatly arranged hairdos portrayed virtuous women.”⁷⁸ Holman Hunt’s famous paintings of the Lady of Shalott, for example, portray her massive hair billowing above her head, which is frequently read as her surrender to sexual temptation. Miriam’s scrutiny of women’s hair reflects the influence of this symbolism.

Miriam’s obsessive cataloguing of women’s hairstyles may very well have been on reviewers’ minds when they criticized Richardson’s equal treatment of every aspect of Miriam’s day (which also connects Miriam with the Pre-Raphaelite commitment to representing nature without discrimination and attending to “minutely observed details”⁷⁹). In early scenes of *Pointed Roofs*, Miriam notices her sisters’ tresses, and in Germany her observations of women’s hair both in and outside the school are part of her effort to understand different styles of femininity. In an episode in which she takes note of her sister Harriett’s appearance, we recognize that Miriam is envious of a femininity from which she feels excluded. Directly before Miriam begins eyeing Harriett’s head, she “reflected that she need no longer hate [Harriett] for the set of her clothes round her hips.”⁸⁰ This thought reveals that Miriam is jealous of Harriett’s shapely form. Miriam then, “[u]nperceived,” watches Harriett “combing out the tightly-curved fringe standing stubbily out along her forehead and extending like a thickset hedge midway across the crown of her head, where it stopped abruptly against the sleekly-brushed longer strands which strained over her poll and disappeared into the plait.”⁸¹ These details indicate Harriett’s tidiness, and also, since Miriam is covertly examining her sister, there remains an air of the envy she feels for her sister’s shapeliness. We know that Harriett, too, has been observing Miriam’s hair, for she remarks that Miriam “ought to do it in basket plaits like Sarah.”⁸² Miriam

⁷⁸ Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 66.

⁷⁹ Michaela Giebelhausen, “The Religious and Intellectual Background,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, 66.

⁸⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:23

⁸¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:23.

⁸² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:23.

responds that she does not know how, but also that “it’s no good bothering when you’re plain.”⁸³ Miriam’s concern is drawing into focus the work that is required in maintaining and dressing women’s hair, and reveals Miriam’s feeling of incompetence in this realm. The style that Harriett suggests, basket plaits, is not only complicated, but also signifies skill in controlling the hair during a time when women grew their hair long, but did not leave it loose and flowing. Miriam’s protest that she is plain implies that their sister Sarah, by contrast, is lovely, and thus well suited to this more demanding hairstyle. Harriett contradicts Miriam, however, and elaborates about the many people who believe Miriam is attractive. Miriam is amazed to learn that others find her pleasant to look at, and once Harriett has left the room, unable to glance at herself in the mirror in the wake of such a revelation, she says: “I’m pretty.”⁸⁴ Here, we can recognize Miriam’s wish to have others think well of her and be considered attractive, a desire which is in tension with her longing to be unlike other women, and which underlies her statement that she is “unsociable.”

The incompetence that Miriam feels with her sister finds an echo when she is in Hanover in a scene that illuminates her association of Pre-Raphaelite art with hair. At Waldstrasse, Miriam is ordered to join the students in having her hair washed before dinner, which leaves her frustrated because she does not have time for the styling that the wet hair requires: “fancy being landed with hair like that, in the middle of the day! She could not possibly go down. . . . She must.”⁸⁵ Once downstairs, Miriam hopes that “no one would notice how awful she looked,” and we learn that “[s]he could not meet any one’s eye.”⁸⁶ She manages to take note, however, of how the other girls have handled the challenge, starting with the Australian student Gertrude, who “had contrived to look dashing and smart.”⁸⁷ As with the basket plaits, Miriam feels out of her

⁸³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:23.

⁸⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:24.

⁸⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:61.

⁸⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:62.

depth when it comes to this ritual of femininity. We learn that Miriam is not the only one who is contemplating hair fashions, when a German girl nick-named Jimmie declares: “We’ve all got to do our hair in clash . . . clashishsher Knoten,” by which she means a “classic knot.”⁸⁸ This sets all the girls discussing and attempting to describe this style, which causes Miriam also to endeavor to picture it: “Miriam’s mind groped . . . classic—Greece and Rome—Greek knot. . . . Grecian key . . . a Grecian key pattern on the dresses for the sixth form tableau—reading Ruskin . . . the strip of glass all along the window space on the floor in the large room—edged with mosses and grass—the mirror of Venus. . . .”⁸⁹ This thought-stream is interrupted to report the speech of one of the students, but then continues: “. . . Only the eldest pretty girls . . . all on their hands and knees looking into the mirror. . . .”⁹⁰

As Miriam strives to attach meaning to the hairstyle, her thoughts lead through a series of associations between classical Rome and Greece and Ruskin, and then “the mirror of Venus,” which is an allusion to Edward Burne-Jones’s 1877 painting of that name. Burne-Jones was a member of the second phase of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood that formed around Rossetti in 1857. In *The Mirror of Venus*, several women look at their reflections in a pool of water, but none of the women actually has a classic knot. The association nonetheless makes sense because, as one of the Waldstrasse students explains, the hairstyle is “[l]ike a statue,”⁹¹ which connects it not only with statues of antiquity, but also with the posed “tableau” of Burne-Jones’s painting that Miriam is recalling. Through this train of thought, we see that Miriam recognizes that a painting such as Burne-Jones’s is reinforcing a connection between art and women who possess a certain style of statuesque beauty, since it is only the “pretty girls” in her school who

⁸⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:62.

⁸⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:63.

⁸⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:63-64.

⁹⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:64.

⁹¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:64.

have participated in the tableau. As with women whose hair takes on symbolic significance in the paintings of Holman Hunt, women's bodies are similarly on display in the second phase of Pre-Raphaelite art.

At the same time, there is an important difference between these two phases of the Brotherhood, although it is one that is not readily apparent in this scene: the second phase was moving away from the "naturalism that had dominated the early Pre-Raphaelite movement," a shift that was accompanied by no longer ascribing to the idea that art should serve a moral function.⁹² In reactions against this second phase, Burne-Jones's paintings were condemned, as Bullen notes, as "expressive of something unhealthy or unnatural,"⁹³ and Burne-Jones was considered, as one contemporary critic put it, the painter of "the diseased imagination."⁹⁴ The second phase was moving toward what Pater so memorably articulated in his "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* as "art for art's sake."⁹⁵ Pater's concept defined the aestheticism that became popular in the 1870s and 1880s. In some ways, however, this second phase remains the heir of Ruskin's thinking, such as we find in his statement that "the pursuit of beauty, instead of leading us away from truth, increases the desire for it and the necessity of it tenfold."⁹⁶ Here, we can recognize the privileging of beauty that in aestheticism is taken to a greater extreme so that it is no longer beauty for truth's sake, but beauty for beauty's sake. In 1893, the year Miriam moves to Hanover, Pater's *Renaissance* was published in its fourth and final edition. When Miriam proudly claims her school's affiliation with Browning, Holman Hunt, and Ruskin, she also contrasts her institution with a girls' finishing school that was nearby, and muses that "[i]f she had gone to the other school she was sure she would never have heard of the Aesthetic

⁹² Julian Treuherz, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (Stockholm: National Museum, 2009), 212.

⁹³ Bullen, *Pre-Raphaelite Body*, 195.

⁹⁴ "Society of Painters in Water-Colours," *Art Journal* 90 (June 1869): 173.

⁹⁵ Walter Pater, "Conclusion," to *The Renaissance*, ed. Donald L. Hill, 274. This is the original 1873 wording. In the 1893 edition, Pater changed this to "the love of art for its own sake," 190.

⁹⁶ Ruskin, *Modern Painters I*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, ed. Cook and Wedderburn, 3:138.

Movement or felt troubled about the state of Ireland and India.”⁹⁷ Miriam’s concerns about Britain’s empire reveal her sensitivity to pressing political issues, but that these worries are expressed in the same breath as her knowledge of the aesthetic movement makes it plain that she regards her artistic awareness as of at least equal importance to her political knowledge.

There is a remarkable episode in *Pointed Roofs* that embodies the shifts from Holman Hunt’s feminine symbolism to aestheticism’s pleasure for its own sake. In this scene, Miriam is gathered with the rest of the residents of Waldstrasse to listen to the students perform on the piano. In the first section, we observe that Miriam has been influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite interest in “the fashionable pseudo-sciences: craniology, physiology, pathognomy, and phrenology.”⁹⁸ All of these methods of reading the body are related to physiognomy: the popular nineteenth-century belief that a person’s character could be deciphered from their appearance. In this passage, one of the German girls, Clara Bergmann, is taking her turn:

Miriam watched [Clara] as she took her place at the piano—how square and stout she looked and old, careworn, like a woman of forty. She had high square shoulders and high square hips—her brow was low and her face thin broad and flat. Her eyes were like the eyes of a dog and her thin-lipped mouth long and straight until it went steadily down at the corners. She wore a long fringe like Harriett’s—and a thin coil of hair filled the nape of her neck.⁹⁹

Clara is clearly unattractive. She is in her teens, and yet she looks middle-aged. The comparison of her eyes with those of a dog implies that she lacks intelligence. The final attention to Clara’s hair also carries a measure of judgment, for a “coil” indicates that Clara’s hair is controlled, but its “thinness” serves to emphasize its inadequacy (later, Miriam discovers that Clara is in fact

⁹⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:81.

⁹⁸ Bullen, *Pre-Raphaelite Body*, 7.

⁹⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:43.

having her “thin short hair” treated by a “hair-specialist”¹⁰⁰). However, when Clara begins playing, we learn that “[t]he notes rang out in a prelude of unfinished phrases,” and Miriam, who is herself a trained pianist, “felt it was going to be a brilliant piece—fireworks—execution—style—and sat up self-consciously and fixed her eyes on Clara’s hands.”¹⁰¹ This shift in Miriam’s attention reveals that Clara’s performance is completely unexpected, and causes Miriam to relocate her visual evaluation: “[Clara’s] hands dropped with an easy fling and sprang back and dropped again. What loose wrists she must have.”¹⁰²

Miriam’s conclusions about Clara based on her physiognomy are therefore belied as soon as her skill as a pianist is revealed. Clara’s playing is so mesmerizing that Miriam is transported to a long-forgotten childhood impression of a “weed-grown mill-wheel,” which ushers her into a synesthetic experience: “She heard the soft swish and drip of the water,” and “she could feel the cool breeze it made, and sniff the fresh earthy scent of it.”¹⁰³ The result is that “[h]er heart filled. She felt a little tremor in her throat.”¹⁰⁴ There are two crucial things to note at this point. The first is that Clara is the agent of this aesthetic immersion, and Miriam is seeing that although Clara would not make a beautiful object of art, this has nothing to do with her capacity as an artist. The relationship between femininity and art, then, is being turned on its head. The second, is that Miriam’s responsiveness to music aligns her with the kind of transcendent experience that Pater describes in his “Conclusion” when he writes that “the wisest” in this world will spend their time “in art and song” because these two forms yield “passions” and “pulsations” that can give a “quickened sense of life,” and a “multiplied consciousness.”¹⁰⁵ Not

¹⁰⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:94.

¹⁰¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:43.

¹⁰² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:43-44.

¹⁰³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:44.

¹⁰⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:44.

¹⁰⁵ Pater, “Conclusion,” *The Renaissance*, 190.

only are all of Miriam's senses awakened by "song" to the point of altering the physical state of her throat and heart—two areas of the body that are most affected by a change in "pulsation"—but also her consciousness is multiplied when she enters a forgotten experience from her past.

This scene is just one of the many instances where music is central to Richardson's narrative, not only in *Pointed Roofs*, but also throughout *Pilgrimage*.¹⁰⁶ One of the reasons that music has such a profound effect on Miriam is that, in its purest form, music is the least representational of the arts. We can especially understand why this non-imitative aspect of music is significant to Miriam when we observe her captivated responses to the music of Frédéric Chopin. Emma Sutton notes that unlike his contemporaries, Chopin did not "allude to literary, pictorial, or narrative subjects in his compositions; his works are examples of 'absolute' music, making no attempt to represent extra-musical subjects."¹⁰⁷ This "absolute music" is the clearest example of the way in which music, of all the art forms, most closely combines content and form, which is what Pater refers to in his famous statement that "[a]ll art constantly *aspires towards the condition of music*."¹⁰⁸ Since Chopin does not provide specific subjects of meditation, the listener can embrace any association that the music inspires. The value of this freedom becomes especially legible in the way in which it ushers Miriam into transcendent

¹⁰⁶ The significance of music to *Pilgrimage* has been analyzed in a few studies. In 2000, Thomas Fahy argued that classical music has a "thematic and structural importance" throughout *Pilgrimage*, functioning as a means to provide unity. "The Cultivation of Incompatibility: Music as a Leitmotif in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*" *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 29, no.2 (2000): 131. Susan Reid echoed this idea, and also focused on the way that music foregrounds the body, examining the manner in which long modernist novels "use parts of music to provide shape to individual novels as well as to a body of work, and to express experiences of the body that evade verbal expression." "In Parts: Bodies, Feelings, Music in Long Modernist Novels by D. H. Lawrence and Dorothy Richardson," *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* (2015): 15-16. Although Fahy and Reid both focus attention on the role of Wagner's music in *Pilgrimage*, neither scholar connects this experience with aestheticism or decadence. Similarly, Angela Frattarola begins with an analysis of auditory narrative in *Pilgrimage* with reference to Pater's theory of music as the highest art form, but does not examine how this might exemplify Richardson's engagement with Aestheticism. "Auditory Narrative in the Modernist Novel: Prosody, Music, and the Subversion of Vision in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*" *Genre* 44, no.1 (Spring 2011): 5-28.

¹⁰⁷ Emma Sutton, *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169. The way in which Chopin's music presents images and memories to Miriam resonates with Aubrey Beardsley, who produced images of Chopin's work that record the visions that Chopin's music suggested to his own imagination. Beardsley, like Miriam, was inspired by a Chopin Nocturne, and his other drawing refers to Chopin's Ballade No. III. Beardsley completed his illustrations of Chopin's music in 1895: a date that reminds us that Miriam and Beardsley are exposed to the same artistic milieu.

¹⁰⁸ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 106 (italics in original).

experiences. In one scene, we learn that “[t]he single notes of the opening *motif* of Chopin’s Fifteenth Nocturne fell pensively in the waiting room. Miriam, her fatigue forgotten, slid to a featureless freedom. It seemed to her that the light with which the room was filled grew brighter and clearer.”¹⁰⁹ In a later scene, Chopin’s music evokes a specific image: “Minna rippled through a Chopin valse that made Miriam think of an apple orchard in bloom against a blue sky.”¹¹⁰ In each of these experiences, as with Miriam’s response to Clara’s performance, Miriam’s own imagination is stimulated and she becomes a participant in the artwork, rather than remaining a critical observer.

This emphasis on the Polish composer may suggest that Miriam’s location in Germany has little bearing on the nature of her musical experiences in *Pointed Roofs*, but the opposite is true: the advancement of Miriam’s learning in relation to music is tied specifically to what she recognizes as a fundamental difference between the manner in which the German girls play piano, and “nearly all the piano-playing she had [previously] heard.”¹¹¹ Miriam identifies that to play “as the Germans did” means “not to be ashamed of ‘playing with expression.’”¹¹² She notices, by contrast, that when two students from England perform, they “did not think only about the music, they thought about themselves too.”¹¹³ Miriam wishes to renounce this English self-consciousness in her own style, and she resolves that “[s]he would play as she wanted to one day in this German atmosphere.”¹¹⁴ Miriam’s development of her technique on the piano relates to her role as a self-expressive artist, just as her transition to looking at Clara’s hands was the moment of reconceiving of Clara as an agent of artistic experience. Miriam makes her first

¹⁰⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:42-43.

¹¹⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:45.

¹¹¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:35.

¹¹² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:45.

¹¹³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:45.

¹¹⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:45.

attempt to play in the German way following the success of teaching her first English lesson, and she asserts that “[s]he would play, to herself.”¹¹⁵ Debating between a “Grieg lyric” and a “movement from a Beethoven sonata,” she elects to play the latter, because the Norwegian composer was “acquired,” while the German one “had always been real.”¹¹⁶ Miriam’s personal identification with Beethoven is even more pronounced when she chooses to play the opening movement of the *Sonata Pathétique*, and when she sounds the first chord, we learn that “[s]he had confessed herself . . . just that minor chord . . . any one hearing it would know more than she could ever tell them.”¹¹⁷ When Miriam plays, then, she reveals herself to others. And when Miriam listens, as with Clara, the music can reveal her to herself.

Miriam’s musical preferences are mapping a landscape of artistic identification that offers an important counterpart to her aesthetic training that I have been tracking through Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites toward Pater, and which will eventually lead to Oscar Wilde. In music, Miriam enjoys the genre of Romanticism, a style that was inaugurated by Beethoven’s increasing emphasis on expressiveness in his music, and which Chopin further developed in his pieces, which explore exquisitely nuanced emotion. The Romantic compositions of these two composers, as evidenced in their effect on Miriam, inspire interior development and self-reflection, and also give immediacy to Pater’s idea that the most important aspect of an artwork is the subjective experience it provokes. Through nineteenth-century English theories of art, Miriam is moving toward aestheticism. Through foreign musical works of Romanticism, Miriam is moving toward the end-point that this Romanticism found in the decadent music of Richard

¹¹⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:56.

¹¹⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:56.

¹¹⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:57.

Wagner,¹¹⁸ and the immense impact that his work had on fin-de-siècle British art.¹¹⁹ Although we do not witness Miriam responding to performances of Wagner's music until *Interim*, in *Pointed Roofs* Richardson nevertheless hints that Wagner is the direction toward which Miriam's musical tastes are developing, and that the controversial composer is a symbolic—though mostly silent—representative of German culture within the narrative.

The emblematic role that Wagner's music plays in *Pointed Roofs* draws attention to a significant contrast between his compositions and Chopin's pieces, rather than the way in which both composers are indebted to Romanticism. The crucial point of difference is that Chopin's music is impressionistic and has no "extra-musical" content, while Wagner's operas and music dramas are *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the total work of art, which combines many art forms (including representational ones) in order to stimulate a full sensual experience in the audience. *Pointed Roofs* draws attention to this representational dimension since Miriam never actually hears Wagner's music while she is in Germany, but she nonetheless equates his opera *Lohengrin* with German culture, and especially with women's hair. This compression of associations takes place when Miriam is in the "glass-roofed swimming-bath"¹²⁰ at Waldstrasse. Standing near curtained changing rooms, the following image draws her attention: "the light from the glass roof fell upon the top of a head flung back and shaking its mane of hair. The profile was invisible, but the sheeny hair rippled in thick gilded waves almost to the floor. . . . How hateful of her, thought Miriam. . . . How beautiful. I should be just the same if I had hair like that . . . that's Germany. . .

¹¹⁸ Vernon Lee characterized Wagner's music as Romantic art that was in "decay." "Comparative Aesthetics," *Contemporary Review* 38 (August 1880): 317.

¹¹⁹ The eroticism, extravagance, and seductive surfaces of Wagner's music were most closely aligned with fin-de-siècle decadent art in the work of Aubrey Beardsley, who completed the prose narrative *Under the Hill*: a rewriting of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* that first appeared in the *Savoy* (1896). Beardsley was arguably best-known for his distinctive, highly erotic, black-and-white drawings, among which were several inspired by Wagner's music dramas. As Emma Sutton observes: "[Beardsley] gave Wagner a central place within his own corpus of decadent art, promoting Wagnerism as an iconic cultural accessory of contemporary decadents." *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism*, 5. See the second chapter of this dissertation on Syrett's *Nobody's Fault* for a detailed discussion of Wagner's relationship to decadence.

¹²⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:101.

. Lohengrin. . . . She stood adoring.”¹²¹ Miriam’s emotions during this observation are intense and move through quick transitions. Initially, she feels a hatred toward the girl who possesses such beautiful hair, which is also a kind of jealousy, since she imagines what she would be like if her own hair were so lustrous. At the same time, Miriam appreciates the aesthetics of the hair, which provokes her adoration, and just as if she were responding to a work of art, she has an epiphanic moment. At this point, the person who possesses the golden tresses is unknown, and is easily transformed into an “it.” The hair, because of its disembodiment, is able to perform representational work, symbolizing Germany, which is itself then superseded by Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, in which Elsa, the heroine, is traditionally portrayed with long golden hair. Here, we see that the tresses which Miriam has been so closely observing at Waldstrasse have come to stand for Germany; or perhaps more specifically, Miriam’s experience of the everyday in Hanover (including women’s hair) and the way in which she transitions in her observations from critical analysis to aesthetic enjoyment, has come to epitomize what it means for her to experience German culture. Embedded in Miriam’s equation of her impressions of Germany with *Lohengrin* is Miriam’s idea that Wagner’s music articulates human experience, which she will articulate in *Interim* when she thinks: “Wagner writing down the world in sound.”¹²²

The hair in the changing room only inspires associations of this kind, however, so long as it remains disembodied. Once Miriam sees the girl’s hands and hears her voice, her exultation is disrupted:

The billows of gold hair in the gallery were being piled up by two little hands—white and plump like Eve’s, but with quick clever irritating movements, and a thin sweet self-conscious voice began singing “Du, meine *Seele*.” Miriam lost interest in the vision. . . .

¹²¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:102-3.

¹²² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:346.

They were all the same. Men liked creatures like that. She could imagine that girl married.¹²³

As the girl begins to gather up and control her hair, it is returned to the commonplace, and a childish voice places her back into the company of other young women, whose attractiveness for men draws Miriam's scorn. Once Miriam registers that the scene would be appealing to the male gaze, she once again becomes a critical observer, reminding the reader that her critique of gender underlies her evaluations of the everyday, as well as of art. Miriam's persistent consciousness of the ways in which gender is performed and represented in both life and art becomes outstandingly evident in Richardson's next chapter-novel, *Backwater*, which reveals that with Miriam's return to England, new shifts are occurring in her reading and cultural experiences, and especially in relation to the depiction of women in Victorian fiction.

“I Want Bad Things—Strong Bad Things”: Ouida and Aestheticism in *Backwater*

My focus in relation to *Backwater* is on the remarkable role that Miriam's attention to women novelists, and especially Ouida, plays in her daily routine. Once Miriam discovers Ouida, the thrill she experiences transforms the very organization of her existence: “From that moment the red-bound volumes [of Ouida] became the centre of her life.”¹²⁴ These scenes mark the most explicit engagement with the fiction of aestheticism that we find in *Pilgrimage*. In Miriam's enjoyment of Ouida's aesthetic novels, moreover, the significance of women novelists to Richardson's roman-fleuve is entwined with the crucial role of aestheticism. Ouida was a popular bestseller from the 1860s through the 1880s. At the fin de siècle, younger aesthetes such as Oscar Wilde and Max Beerbohm exulted in Ouida's extravagant descriptive prose and magnificently decadent characters. In separate studies, Joseph Bristow and Talia Schaffer have brought to light the influential role that Ouida's novels played to later developments in literary

¹²³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:103.

¹²⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:286.

aestheticism. Bristow “identif[ies] the genesis of aesthetic fiction in Ouida’s ostentatious romances,”¹²⁵ explaining that it was Ouida’s “brazen excessiveness that drew admiration from a generation of fin-de-siècle and early modernist male aesthetes.”¹²⁶ By comparison, Schaffer has demonstrated that younger aesthetes were indebted to Ouida’s “descriptions of beautiful scenery, her use of epigrams, and her sexually explicit, daring plots.”¹²⁷ This admiration for Ouida is evident, for example, in observations made by Wilde, who called Ouida “the high priestess of the impossible,”¹²⁸ and commented that the “Ouida manner” is a style “full of exaggeration and overemphasis but with some remarkable rhetorical qualities and a good deal of colour.”¹²⁹ In 1893, Beerbohm observed that “[n]o writer was ever more finely endowed than Ouida with the love and knowledge of all kinds of beauty in art and nature.”¹³⁰ He further remarked on her “love of luxury for its own sake.”¹³¹ The year of Beerbohm’s remarks also indicates the timeliness of Miriam’s encounter with Ouida in 1894.

The first of Ouida’s novels that Miriam reads is *Under Two Flags* (1867), Ouida’s most enduring work. This full-length fiction features the kinds of unorthodox gender and sexual identities that proliferate in Ouida’s narratives, and which mark their crucial difference from the kinds of women characters who populated the majority of mainstream novels written in this same period. The novel’s protagonist is the androgynous soldier Bertie (also called Beauty), whose temper is characterized as “serene effeminate insouciance.”¹³² In Algiers, he meets

¹²⁵ Joseph Bristow, “The Aesthetic Novel, from Ouida to Firbank,” in *A History of the Modernist Novel*, ed. Gregory Castle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 38.

¹²⁶ Bristow, “The Aesthetic Novel,” 39.

¹²⁷ Talia Schaffer, “The Origins of the Aesthetic Novel: Ouida, Wilde, and the Popular Romance,” in *Wilde Writings: Contextual Conditions*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 226.

¹²⁸ [Oscar Wilde], “Ouida’s New Novel,” *Pall Mall Gazette* 7539 (May 17, 1889): 3.

¹²⁹ [Wilde], “Ouida’s New Novel,” 3.

¹³⁰ Max Beerbohm, “Ouida,” *More* (London: John Lane, 1899), 112. Reprinted from *Saturday Review* 84, no. 2175 (July 3, 1897): 8-9.

¹³¹ Beerbohm, “Ouida,” *More*, 115.

Cigarette, a gamine woman who lives in the soldiers' barracks, and whom Bertie thinks of as a "gallant boy."¹³³ Bertie and Cigarette develop an intimate friendship that becomes passionate when Cigarette declares her love and takes a bullet intended for Bertie. As the unconventional Cigarette makes evident, Ouida's women characters are far from paragons of domestic womanhood, which is also true of the women figures that appear in the two other Ouida novels that Miriam enjoys: *Moths* (1880) and *In Maremma* (1882). *Moths* contrasts the non-maternal, *mondaine* Lady Dolly, "a pretty woman and a wonderful flirt" who "had as many lovers as she had pairs of shoes,"¹³⁴ with her virtuous daughter Vere, whom Dolly forces to marry her own former lover in payment of her numerous debts. *In Maremma* features the orphan Musa, the daughter of an infamous bandit, living on the Tuscan coast in poverty and rejecting many suitors.¹³⁵

The following passage from *In Maremma* describing Musa exemplifies not only Ouida's pulsating prose, but also the style of self-sufficient femininity that Miriam encounters through Ouida: "She was so strong, so fearless, so fierce, so lonely, dwelling there amidst the graves of her perished nation; she was beautiful as a hawk is, poised on a bough of oak and looking with bold and brilliant eye down the shaft of the golden sunbeam. She had that grace, that strength, that untamed dignity and daring, which the green things of forest and crag alone possess."¹³⁶ Here, we witness the lavish way in which Ouida's narrator employs vivid images from nature in

¹³² Ouida, *Under Two Flags*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867; London: Chatto and Windus, 1910), 106. Citations refer to the Chatto and Windus edition.

¹³³ Ouida, *Under Two Flags*, 117.

¹³⁴ Ouida, *Moths* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1880), 6.

¹³⁵ It is important to note that in spite of her sexually daring plots, Ouida was ostensibly anti-feminist. In particular, in 1894 she condemned in fiery terms Sarah Grand's promotion of the New Woman. In spite of Ouida's opposition to this figure, however, it is easy to see the ways in which her transgressive women characters could spark excitement and rebellion in Miriam. See Ouida, "The New Woman," *North American Review* 158 (1894). For an excellent discussion about the debate between Grand and Ouida, see Talia Schaffer, "Nothing but Foolscap and Ink': Inventing the New Woman," in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 39-52.

¹³⁶ Ouida, *In Maremma* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1882), 2:83.

order to convey Musa's unusual, fierce beauty. In the first sentence, the syntax revels in magnifying these qualities through the repeated intensifying phrases. Moreover, the measured use of alliteration invigorates the style with a poetic cadence. Such rich word-pictures and lush language are certainly a source of the thrill that Miriam experiences. The independence of Musa, too, would no doubt appeal to Miriam, along with the other styles of transgressive womanhood that she discovers in *Under Two Flags* and *Moths*.

From these details of plot and style, it may seem that there would be little connection between Ouida's racy romances and Richardson's innovative realism. Undoubtedly, this apparent incongruity is one of the reasons that the scenes which depict Miriam's ecstatic reading are rarely mentioned in scholarly studies, and if so, usually only in passing.¹³⁷ To be sure, Kerstin Fest has advanced the perceptive view that Ouida's presence in *Pilgrimage* is connected with Miriam's refusal to "conform to society's norms of femininity," and that reading Ouida is "an act of self-determination, self-fashioning and subversion."¹³⁸ She does not, however, recognize Ouida's novels as aesthetic fiction, and thus in her analysis Ouida's significance to Miriam ends there. Scott McCracken and Elizabeth Pritchett, by contrast, offer the only sustained discussion of Richardson's relationship to aestheticism, asserting that the "connections between Richardson's experimental form and nineteenth-century aestheticism are undeniable."¹³⁹ The precise nature of these connections, however, go largely unexplored, as the primary concern of the argument is that *Pilgrimage's* "impulses are anti-Platonist and pro-democratic rather than idealist and elitest."¹⁴⁰ In the process of demonstrating this, McCracken and Pritchett contend

¹³⁷ Talia Schaffer, in a study about Ouida, emphasizes that "Ouida influenced some of the most apparently unlikely aesthetic writers well into the twentieth century," and her list includes the scene in which Miriam reads Ouida. Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 155.

¹³⁸ Kerstin Fest, *And All Women Mere Players? Performance and Identity in Dorothy Richardson, Jean Rhys and Radclyffe Hall* (Wien: Braumüller, 2009), 60. Fest is one of the only scholars to focus on the scenes of reading in *Backwater*. She associates Ouida with women's sensationalist literature.

¹³⁹ Scott McCracken and Elizabeth Pritchett, "Plato's Tank: Aestheticism, Dorothy Richardson and the Idea of Democracy," *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 6 (2013-2014): 84.

¹⁴⁰ McCracken and Pritchett, "Plato's Tank," 84.

that Miriam revises art for art's sake into art for life's sake, but we are not made aware of Miriam's responses to aestheticism within *Pilgrimage* itself. In what follows, I show that reading Ouida not only connects Miriam with forms of dissident desire that find affirmation in art for art's sake, but also makes visible the ways in which Richardson's narrative style can be understood in relation to a genealogy of aesthetic fiction.

In *Backwater*, Miriam's established fear that her future prospects hold nothing but "governessing and old age" takes on a more palpable threat. When we join her in this 1916 novel, she is interviewing for her next job as a live-in teacher at Wordsworth House, a girls' boarding school in North London, where she will work with children from six to eight years old during the day, and supervise boarders during the evening. While employed there, Miriam develops a strong antipathy for this neighborhood, which is particularly vivid in one of her reflections when she is away from the school: "North London would always be North London, hard, strong, sneering, money-making, noisy and trummy."¹⁴¹ This description shows Miriam's observation that North London had become a suburb for wealthy professionals. It was also a place where several well-known girls' schools had been established, including the one that Netta Syrett began attending in 1876 at the age of eleven: North London Collegiate School. It makes sense, then, that Miriam's professional aspirations have taken her to this part of England's capital city. Miriam's repulsion toward this wealthy suburb continues to color her associations with North London for the remainder of *Pilgrimage*. Moreover, as the title of Richardson's second chapter-novel makes plain, Miriam experiences this period of employment as a time of stagnation. She is also thoroughly repulsed by the style of womanhood that she associates with this area: "These North London girls would be scornful mocking fiancées. They would be adored by their husbands. Secretly they would forget their husbands in their houses and children and friends."¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:322.

¹⁴² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:344.

Miriam's sustained meditations on femininity in *Backwater* lead to an episode that marks her definitive rejection of traditional womanhood, a severing that is brought about through her extended reading of women novelists. Miriam's protracted period of reading is precipitated by her physical deterioration in North London: when she has been at the school for nine months, she experiences a "half-feverish exhaustion" at the end of each day. When a doctor prescribes "air and movement," she is granted a reprieve from her employment "every day during the hour between afternoon school and tea-time."¹⁴³ Miriam experiences this divergence from her routine as a form of illicit freedom, for when she is outside by herself, she feels that "[e]verything seemed to wonder what she was doing down there instead of being at home in the schoolroom."¹⁴⁴ Initially, she spends her solitary hour in a park, but one rainy afternoon her walk takes her to a railway arch as people are "pouring" out of the station, and she decides, instead of moving with the crowd, to push through it.¹⁴⁵ As she jostles against the people, she encounters an "eye" that magnifies her feeling that she is out of place: "A sudden angry eye above a coarse loudly talking mouth all but made her turn and go with instead of against the tide; but she pushed blindly on and through and presently found herself in a quiet street."¹⁴⁶ On this avenue, Miriam discovers a shop with a circulating library, and her refusal to conform to the tide of bodies is followed by her contemplation—but ultimate deferral—of the additional defiant action of requesting one of Ouida's novels.

In the details that follow, we discover why Miriam regards Ouida's works as transgressive. Observing the bindings, Miriam distinguishes those bearing the name of Ouida from the rest of the books: "an unlimited supply of twopenny volumes, and Ouida. Red-bound volumes of Ouida on the bottom shelf had sent her eyes quickly back to the safety of the upper

¹⁴³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:279, 1:279, 1:278.

¹⁴⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:280.

¹⁴⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:280.

¹⁴⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:280.

rows.”¹⁴⁷ The reason Miriam must return to the “safety” of other shelves is revealed when we learn that once she has returned to the school, “[t]hrough the whole of tea-time she was quietly aware of a discussion going on at the back of her mind as to who it was who had told her that Ouida’s books were bad; evil books.”¹⁴⁸ The weight of Miriam’s eventual decision to read these transgressive volumes is further emphasized by her ensuing inner dialogue, in which she realizes that “there was no one now to prevent her reading them if she chose. She would read them if she chose.”¹⁴⁹ This assertion of her independence is followed by her resolve that she “must leave off being led” by anybody else’s opinions.¹⁵⁰

Before Miriam takes this audacious step, however, her reading of several innocuous fictions provides the occasion for her definitive rejection of the marriage plot. This period of Miriam’s reading occurs in two phases: first, she explores the fictions of Rosa Nouchette Carey (1840-1909), which she then follows with the novels of Margaret Wolfe Hungerford (1855-1897). By beginning with Carey, Miriam is returning to the works of an author with whom she was familiar as a girl. Carey began publishing in the late 1860s, and was still producing new novels during the first decade of the twentieth century. For Miriam, the kind of life that Carey’s novels represent for women can be summed up as “the house and the garden and the man.”¹⁵¹ As Elaine Hartnell emphasizes, Carey’s plots focus attention on “the fictional rewards supplied to those [women] who have done their domestic work well.”¹⁵² Miriam’s own thoughts emphasize this dimension of Carey’s fictions when her reading of one of the author’s volumes is described as

¹⁴⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:281.

¹⁴⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:281.

¹⁴⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:281.

¹⁵⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:281.

¹⁵¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:284.

¹⁵² Elaine Hartnell, *Gender, Religion and Domesticity in the Novels of Rosa Nouchette Carey* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 28.

“haunt[ing] its deeps of domesticity.”¹⁵³ When, as a young girl, Miriam read Carey’s fiction, “it had seemed quite possible that life might suddenly develop into the thing the writer described.”¹⁵⁴ Here, we see that for Miriam reading novels has provided a way to imagine a possible script for her adult existence. After a long description of the domestic destiny found in Carey’s plots, which is typically initiated by the arrival of “an adoring man,” Miriam realizes that this will not be the direction that her life takes: “Now it had all changed.”¹⁵⁵ Miriam concludes: “If Rosa Nouchette Carey knew me, she’d make me one of the bad characters who are turned out of the happy homes.”¹⁵⁶

In Miriam’s next attempt to be satisfied by orthodox women’s fiction, she provides an additional critique of what passes in these novels as happy marriages. In turning to the work of Mrs. Hungerford, Miriam is encountering an extremely prolific and popular Irish writer, publishing around fifty novels between 1877 and 1897. In Hungerford’s plots, Miriam finds a variation on the woman’s destiny: it still culminates in marriage, but this outcome is accompanied by “gay house-parties, people with beautiful wavering complexions and masses of shimmering hair catching the light, [and] fragrant filmy diaphanous dresses.”¹⁵⁷ Hungerford’s novels place great emphasis on the enjoyment of pleasure and beauty. Miriam, however, is equally unable to picture herself attaining this life due to her economic circumstances: “But these things could only happen to people with money. She would never have even the smallest share of that sort of life.”¹⁵⁸ Although reading Hungerford’s novels is a “dreamy sunlit indulgence,” Miriam ultimately grows tired of the “mocking happy books.”¹⁵⁹ Miriam’s

¹⁵³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:284.

¹⁵⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:283-84.

¹⁵⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:284.

¹⁵⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:284.

¹⁵⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:285.

¹⁵⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:285.

“exasperation” leads her to select “*Under Two Flags* with a trembling hand.”¹⁶⁰ “That night,” we learn, “she read until three o’clock and finished the volume the next night at the same hour, sitting upright when the last word was read, refreshed.”¹⁶¹

As she continues to devour Ouida’s novels, we discover unmistakably that these fictions inspire an erotic response. First, we are made aware of the physical intimacy that Miriam experiences with the books: “The strange currents which came whenever she was alone and at ease flowing to the tips of her fingers, seemed to flow into the book as she held it and to be met and satisfied.”¹⁶² Here, the pleasurable contentment that Miriam feels from simply having one of Ouida’s books in her hands makes the novels seem as if they are responsive, animate objects, capable of meeting her physical needs. The erotic attachment Miriam feels is even more evident when we learn about the ritual that she conducts every night: “As soon as the door was shut and the gas alight, she would take the precious, solid trusty volume from her drawer and fling it on her bed, to have it under her eyes while she undressed.”¹⁶³ In these passages, we are made mindful of Miriam’s sexual nature in terms that are unusually explicit within *Pilgrimage*. The scarcity of representations of traditional forms of physical intimacy in Richardson’s novel cycle is so notable that it has been repeatedly lamented by scholars who mourn that although Miriam spends so much time contemplating her gender identity, she does not offer much in the way of sexual detail. In particular, when fresh attention was paid to *Pilgrimage* in the 1970s through the 1990s, the excitement that was generated by Richardson’s sustained narration of a female interiority rebelling against typical restrictions on women’s lives, was countered by disappointment that Miriam—as Lynette Felber and Sydney Janet Kaplan separately

¹⁵⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:285.

¹⁶⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:285.

¹⁶¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:285-86.

¹⁶² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:286.

¹⁶³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:286.

concluded—was “asexual.”¹⁶⁴ In addition, both Felber and Kaplan contend that Miriam’s attitude toward her body and apparent lack of enjoyment of sex demonstrates that, as Felber puts it, Richardson was “late Victorian in her reticence about the body.”¹⁶⁵ At the same time, while scholars such as Lynette Felber and Carol Watts identify a theoretical lesbianism in *Pilgrimage*, they do not discover evidence that Miriam experiences physical desire for other women, again reinforcing the idea that Miriam does not possess bodily yearning.¹⁶⁶

These assessments derive from the comparatively few conventional romantic or sexual encounters of which we are made aware in the pages of *Pilgrimage*, combined with the vague and minimal descriptions of what Miriam is experiencing physically. For example, in *Deadlock*, Miriam is kissed by her lover Michael Shatov, but the only aspect of the sensation reported is its effect on Miriam’s sight:

His solid motionless form, near and equal in the twilight, grew faint, towered above her, immense and invisible in a swift gathering swirling darkness bringing him nearer than sight or touch. The edges of things along the margin of her sight stood for an instant sharply clear and disappeared leaving her faced only with the swirling darkness shot now with darting flame. She ceased to care what thoughts might be occupying him, and exulted in the marvel.¹⁶⁷

As is evident, Miriam’s body remains practically invisible in this passage, although, to be sure, she is enjoying the experience. We only know for certain that Michael has kissed her because

¹⁶⁴ Lynette Felber, *Gender and Genre in Novels without End: The British Roman-Fleuve* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 77. Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 46. The concern with Miriam’s sexual status has been less pronounced in scholarly work of the twenty-first century, although an interest in her erotic relationships with women featured in later volumes of *Pilgrimage* has received some ongoing attention. Joanne Winning’s book-length study of *Pilgrimage* is an attempt to “trace the ‘image’ of lesbian identity through the pages of *Pilgrimage*.” *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 38. See also, Juliet Yates, “Feminine Fluidity: Mind Versus Body in *Pilgrimage*,” *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 2 (2009): 61-75.

¹⁶⁵ Felber, *Gender and Genre*, 79. Kaplan, *Feminine Consciousness*, 19.

¹⁶⁶ Carol Watts writes that in *Pilgrimage* “love between women is sublimated on to another plain.” *Dorothy Richardson* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995), 69. Felber, *Gender and Genre*, 79.

¹⁶⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 3:192.

afterward Miriam reflects: “He had kissed a foreign woman.”¹⁶⁸ It is telling that Miriam is considering the meaning of the experience from Michael’s perspective, rather than her own. As Kristin Bluemel has perceptively pointed out, however, *Pilgrimage* certainly represents female sexuality, but in ways that are unfamiliar to us, in large part because Miriam “hopes to put herself into the active position of the subject who gazes rather than the position of the body that is gazed upon.”¹⁶⁹ In addition to Miriam’s desire to remain as an active subject, her eroticism also seems hidden because it is often in response to stimuli that we do not traditionally label as sexual, such as listening to music. Unlike the threat to her autonomy that she experiences from intimacy with men, Ouida’s novels require no caution or restraint, allowing her to enjoy fully the sensual responsiveness that Ouida’s books provoke.

As the passage about Miriam’s voracious reading of Ouida comes to its culmination, we understand more completely that Miriam’s erotic feelings are directly tied to her subjectivity: “Ouida, Ouida, she would muse with the book at last in her hands. I want bad things—strong bad things. . . . It doesn’t matter, Italy, the sky, bright hot landscapes, things happening. I don’t care what people think or say. I am older than any one here in this house. I am myself.”¹⁷⁰ In these striking lines, we discover that Miriam’s ability to declare her subjectivity is enabled by an expression of desire so irrepressible that the conscious first-person voice disrupts the habitual third-person narrator. These lines, moreover, reveal that in response to Ouida’s aesthetic prose, Miriam now wants things which are defined by their qualification as “bad.” This is why her longings remain so vague, and why she declares “[i]t doesn’t matter”: so long as these are things she is not supposed to want, she wants them. Here, we see that Miriam’s response to Ouida’s novels is not one of identification; instead, they engender insubordinate desires. In Miriam’s

¹⁶⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 3:193. Michael Shatov is a Russian Jew, and Miriam is acutely aware that he is supposed to marry someone of the Jewish faith. For a discussion of the figure of the Jew in *Pilgrimage* see Jacqueline Rose, “Dorothy Richardson and the Jew,” in *Between “Race” and Culture: Representations of “the Jew” in English and American Literature*, ed. Bryan Cheyette (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

¹⁶⁹ Bluemel, *Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism*, 55.

¹⁷⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:286.

longing we can recognize the influence of what Bristow explains is the way in which “aesthetic fiction characteristically embraces styles of dissident desire.”¹⁷¹ Furthermore, as we find in the critical prose of Pater and Wilde, desire is a central tenet of art for art’s sake. For Pater, in his influential “Conclusion,” “success” in life is measured by the intensity of one’s experience, which means one must always be desiring new things: “for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions.”¹⁷² Moreover, Miriam’s wish for ambiguously defined “bad things” resonates with Wilde’s famous essay “The Critic as Artist,” (1890, revised 1891 and 1894) in which he makes the provocative assertion that “Sin” is “an essential element of progress.”¹⁷³ Wilde further explains that sin is an “intensified assertion of individualism,”¹⁷⁴ an idea that Miriam bears out, since her longing for “strong bad things” enables her to make her remarkable, self-assertive statement: “I am myself.”

In many ways, Miriam’s indulgent reading of Ouida sounds as if it were taking place inside an aesthetic novel. However, unlike Ouida’s fictions in which long passages recording a character’s enjoyment of beautiful objects and lush scenery are interspersed with dramatic events, this episode in Richardson’s narrative is just one in an endless chain of situations in which Miriam’s impressions and thoughts are the primary focus. A notice about *Backwater* in the *Saturday Review* includes an amusing summary of the chapter-novel that reminds us that the narrative’s events are minimal: “Miriam loses a lover after treating him in an off-hand way, and teaches in a school of the old fashioned sort run by some old maids, leaving at the end. That is all that happens. Her emotions, her dissatisfaction with life and current religion, and her

¹⁷¹ Bristow, “The Aesthetic Novel,” 39.

¹⁷² Walter Pater, “Conclusion,” *The Renaissance*, 189.

¹⁷³ Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist,” *Intentions and The Soul of Man* (London: Methuen, 1908), 134. First published in 1890 in the *Nineteenth Century* as “The True Function and Value of Criticism: With Some Remarks on the Value of Doing Absolutely Nothing”; it was brought out, in revised versions, in 1891 and 1894 in the collection of essays published under the title *Intentions*.

¹⁷⁴ Wilde, “The Critics as Artist,” 134.

feelings of dark isolation fill up the book.”¹⁷⁵ This summary draws attention to what would normally constitute the primary action of the woman’s plot, but which is glaringly absent from *Backwater* in particular (and *Pilgrimage* in general): namely, romance. Miriam evidently cares so little about this dimension of her life that she treats a lover in an “off-hand way.” Therefore, the novel’s resistance to traditional teleology and action is more closely aligned than we might imagine with an instantiation of the aesthetic novel that followed Ouida’s lush romances such as we find in Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (1885). Pater’s novel revels in lengthy explorations of the protagonist’s mental development and aesthetic impressions, and for the most part dispenses with dramatic turns in the plot.

To a contemporary of Richardson, John Cowper Powys (1872-1963)—the British philosopher, lecturer, novelist, and literary critic—Pater’s rich use of language enjoyed a decisive resonance with Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*. In his laudatory essay from 1931, Powys represents Richardson as carrying on a genealogy of carefully crafted prose: “like Walter Pater and Flaubert Miss Richardson writes slowly, treating every paragraph as if it were as unique and exquisite a problem as a Pindaric Ode.”¹⁷⁶ Here, Powys is acknowledging the challenging aspects of Richardson’s style that, as I have pointed out, several critics found tested their patience. In another passage, Powys almost certainly has in mind Pater’s best-known novel when he makes the point that in contrast with other women modernists, “Richardson is the only one who really continues—in her new feminine way—the great egoist life-quest of Montaigne, Goethe, Wordsworth, Pater and Proust.”¹⁷⁷ Powys’s comparison is about the way in which Richardson’s novel is concerned with the development of an individual human subjectivity.

¹⁷⁵ “Fiction of To-day,” unsigned review of *Backwater*, by Dorothy Richardson, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. 122, no. 3171 (August 5, 1916): 138.

¹⁷⁶ John Cowper Powys, *Dorothy M. Richardson* (London: Joiner and Steele, 1931), 23.

¹⁷⁷ Powys, *Dorothy M. Richardson*, 12.

Powys's comments prompt us to think about further dimensions of Pater's legacy to Richardson, which she herself never makes explicit, but which I contend are to be found in Pater's novel. *Marius* is set at the time in Roman history when Christianity was gaining ascendancy under Marcus Aurelius, and the narrative charts the minute details of the young Marius's intellectual encounters with different forms of religious observance. Early in the novel, we are made aware of his extensive reading, including a detailed account of the books he consumes, and his meditations in response to these literary works. In one chapter, for example, a long description of a "golden"¹⁷⁸ book that he and his friend Flavian are reading—Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*—is followed by the inclusion of Pater's own translation of Apuleius's "The Story of Cupid and Psyche." The following passage narrates Marius's response to the book: it was "a book which awakened the poetic or romantic capacity, as perhaps some other books might have done, but also gave it actually, as another might not have done, a strongly sensuous direction. It made [Marius], in that visionary reception of every-day life, the seer, more especially, of a revelation in colour and form."¹⁷⁹ Here, we not only have vivid prose, but also an advancement of the idea that reading enhances Marius's ability to see what is "poetic" in "every-day life." The intense focus on Marius's mental development suggests that he will experience some kind of religious revelation at the novel's conclusion. It turns out, however, that the "revelation in color and form" that shapes Marius's response to daily impressions is the only epiphany he will receive, for Marius grows sick and dies before he can come to any definite conclusion about religion. Pater thus eschews the teleological plot, suggesting that in fiction, as in life, his famous dictum from the "Conclusion" rings true: "[n]ot the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end."¹⁸⁰ The structure of Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, too, is an ongoing affirmation of this creed. Richardson's brilliance is to make a *woman's* consciousness the subject of the narrative,

¹⁷⁸ Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1885), 1:59.

¹⁷⁹ Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 1:58.

¹⁸⁰ Pater, "Conclusion," *The Renaissance*, 188.

and to so fully renounce the romantic teleology of the woman's plot as to make romance only an occasional presence in the narrative, one that never replaces the primary significance of Miriam's realization of her subjective agency.

In *Backwater*, then, we discover that not only is Miriam's erotic responsiveness tied with Ouida's sexually transgressive narratives, but these scenes of reading themselves encourage us to recognize *Pilgrimage* as a series that extends the aesthetic novel's narrative of subjectivity and interiority into the realm of a woman's forging of her subjectivity. Richardson, as she clearly stated in her "Foreword," did not find the model for her narrative in masculine realism. Through Miriam's reading of Carey and Hungerford we also recognize why a style of feminine realism that emphasizes the teleology of romance is unsatisfactory. Ouida offers a partial solution with her female aestheticism, featuring women pursuing unconventional desires and embodying unorthodox gender identities. But it is perhaps only in Richardson's record of Miriam enjoying Ouida that we get a satisfying answer to the exasperation that the modern independent woman who values beauty encounters in every other form of fiction. By uniting beautiful plotless prose with a realism that dwells relentlessly on a woman's everyday experience, Richardson creates a form capable of representing the woman aesthete who would dare to say: "I am myself."

Transgression in Gender and Sexuality: The New Woman, the Rejection of the Moralizing Author, and Oscar Wilde's Trials in *Honeycomb*

In *Honeycomb*, Miriam's private defiance of feminine propriety that is encapsulated in her insubordinate reading of Ouida's fiction takes on a more public form, particularly by way of her cigarette smoking. This assertion of her individuality is matched by her growing awareness that being a governess places significant limitations on her ability to enact her gender identity in the manner in which she wishes. Moreover, in this third chapter-novel Miriam becomes more keenly aware of contemporary English culture, which I will explore through her reading of W. H. Mallock's 1892 novel *A Human Document*, as well as her vague but nonetheless significant

knowledge of Oscar Wilde's trials for gross indecency, which were the most momentous public scandal of 1895. Miriam's developing responsiveness to shifts in English culture are enabled by her departure from the depressing atmosphere of North London for a new post. She takes up a fresh position as a private teacher to a wealthy family with two children, the Corries, who dwell in Greater London in an area that Richardson names Newlands. These circumstances bring Miriam into close proximity with the kind of luxurious lifestyles about which she had read in Hungerford's and Ouida's respective novels. While at Newlands, she witnesses the fin-de-siècle fad for séances, visits fashionable shops in the West End, and frequently interacts with society people. When Miriam is on her way to the Corries' home, she thinks: "Poverty and discomfort had been shut out of her life when the brougham door closed upon her."¹⁸¹ She further reveals her hopeful anticipation when she muses: "Things that rose warm and laughing and expanding within her now, that had risen to the beauty and music and happiness of Germany, that had dried up and seemed to die in the English boarding school, were going to be met and satisfied."¹⁸² In the Corries' home, Miriam has her own well-furnished upstairs bedroom, which at first she cannot believe: "surely it couldn't be her room."¹⁸³ This comfortable chamber gives Miriam the opportunity she craves for private contemplation.

One of the most significant ways that Miriam starts to express more boldly her rebellion connects with her public enjoyment of cigarette smoking. The cigarette, as we can see from Albert George Morrow's famous poster for Sydney Grundy's play *The New Woman* (1894) (Figure 5), was associated with the insubordinate defiance that characterized modern femininity. The reason smoking was regarded as insolent behavior related to the fact that it had traditionally been a male activity. In *Backwater*, Miriam tries a cigarette for the first time, when

¹⁸¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:351.

¹⁸² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:351. The original Duckworth edition includes an additional clause that is worth noting: "that had risen to the beauty and music and happiness of Germany *and been crushed because she was the despised pupil teacher*, that had dried up and seemed to die in the English boarding school." *Honeycomb* (London: Duckworth, 1917), 6.

¹⁸³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:354.



Figure 5. Albert George Morrow, *The New Woman*. London, 1894. V. & A. Prints, Drawings & Paintings Collection. © The Board of the Trustees of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Color lithograph, 72.4 x 50.8 mm. E. 2682 - 1962.

after having rolled one for her father, she secretly lights it herself; we learn that “[t]he acrid tang in her nostrils intoxicated her.”¹⁸⁴ The scene in *Honeycomb* in which Miriam explicitly asserts her New Woman identity occurs in the Corries’ home when she allies herself with a group of men who are playing billiards, while the rest of the women sit on a couch and observe. Miriam feels that it is “pure joy” to “wander round the table after her ball.”¹⁸⁵ The gendered division of the room, with the exception of Miriam, indicates that men primarily played this game, which in the late nineteenth century had become popular in men’s clubs. A book titled *Billiards*, for instance, was published in 1872 for the purpose of providing a “systematic treatise” on this past time.¹⁸⁶ Notably, this work does not include a single instance of the word “woman.” *Billiards* had gone into its sixth edition in 1894, reflecting its growing popularity: the first professional tournament was held in 1870, and in 1885 the English Billiards Association was created.¹⁸⁷

Miriam’s sense of separation from the women becomes magnified when she introduces the topic of smoking. “[S]tanding about at a loss during a long break,” Miriam states: “It must be jolly to smoke in the in-between times.”¹⁸⁸ Mr. Corrie responds that she “ought to learn to smoke,” and then the division in the room grows more distinct:

[Mr. Corrie’s] quiet smile—the serene offer of companionship, the whole room troubled with the sense of the two parties, the men with whom she was linked in the joyous forward going strife of the game and the women on the sofa, suddenly grown monstrous in their opposition of clothes and kindness and the fuss of distracting personal

¹⁸⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:209.

¹⁸⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:435.

¹⁸⁶ Joseph Bennett, *Billiards*, ed. “Cavendish” (London: Thos de la Rue, 1894), preface page.

¹⁸⁷ In the 1890s, a woman in the United States named Frances Anderson declared herself the “champion woman billiard player.” She was undefeated for twenty-five years, and also beat many of the men who challenged her. In 1928, she took her life, and her secret became known: she was actually a man. See “‘Woman’ Billiard Player a Suicide,” *Lawrence Daily Journal*, March 30, 1928, 2.

¹⁸⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:435.

insincerities of voice and speech, attempting to judge and condemn the roomful of quiet players.¹⁸⁹

Miriam then intensifies her camaraderie with the men when she answers: “I do smoke,” and then “confront[s]” the women on the couch and asks Mrs. Corrie: “Would you mind if I *smoked?*”¹⁹⁰ Mrs. Corrie’s affirmative is followed by Miriam’s bold display of her skills with a cigarette: “[she] discharged a double stream of smoke violently through her nostrils—breaking out at last a public defiance of the freemasonry of women.”¹⁹¹ Here, the double stream of smoke emphasizes Miriam’s competence in performing this male activity. And yet, Miriam’s forceful repudiation of traditional femininity is directly followed by her alliance with a new sorority: “I suppose I’m a new woman—I’ve said I am now, anyhow.”¹⁹² It appears, then, that Miriam sees the New Woman as a sort of third gender identity: women like herself who do not wish to be confined by sexual custom, but who, at least in Miriam’s case, also do not wish to be men. Miriam’s claim upon this gender identity causes her to wonder “how she would reconcile the role with her work as a children’s governess.”

Miriam’s interest in identifying as a New Woman as well as a governess pinpoints a tension that she has felt since the day she arrived. During her first evening with Mrs. Corrie, Miriam attempts to demonstrate her fondness for children when she states: “I think children are so *interesting*.” But then she inwardly reflects: “Perhaps children were interesting. Perhaps she would manage to find the children interesting.”¹⁹³ The repetition here reveals Miriam’s effort to convince herself of the possibility. In reality, Miriam must work hard to perform this maternal

¹⁸⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:435-36.

¹⁹⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:436.

¹⁹¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:436.

¹⁹² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:436.

¹⁹³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:359.

role. To smoke, and play billiards, and say that she is a New Woman, now puts even greater strain on the expectations of her professional identity.

Although Miriam wishes to appropriate male spaces and male confidence for her own use, she is not trying to be masculine, but rather, she is redefining femininity. This redefinition goes hand in hand with her resistance to forms of masculine behavior. We see Miriam's antipathy toward men, for instance, when she is spending an afternoon with Bob Greville, a friend of the Henderson family, with whom she has enjoyed exchanging some letters, but whom she does not admire. At one point, she reflects: "He's . . . blasé, that's it."¹⁹⁴ At the same time, however, Miriam wishes to continue corresponding with him because "she knew she wanted to retain him to decorate her breakfast tray with letters."¹⁹⁵ When the next day Miriam takes a trip to the West End to return some hats for Mrs. Corrie, Bob accompanies her. When he learns that Mrs. Corrie had only just purchased the millinery the day before, he is baffled by this changeable behavior and declares: "The vagaries of the Fair, dear girl."¹⁹⁶ By this, he means the capriciousness of women. Miriam is angered by this clichéd statement, and she concludes that this is "one of his phrases," and that "[b]ehind it he's got some sort of mannish thought," which she pictures as: "a woman never knows her own mind."¹⁹⁷ This false "air of wisdom" that men assume about women enrages Miriam: "How utterly detestable mannishness is; so mighty and strong and comforting when you have been mewed up with women all your life, and then suddenly, in a second, far away, utterly imbecile and aggravating."¹⁹⁸ Miriam, then, acknowledges that there is a strength and confidence in masculinity that is appealing, but she equally recognizes that these traits, when joined with male self-importance, result in the kind of

¹⁹⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:420.

¹⁹⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:420.

¹⁹⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:422.

¹⁹⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:422-23.

¹⁹⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:422-23.

patronizing attitude toward women that is expressed in a phrase such as “the vagaries of the Fair.” Miriam concludes: “Men ought to be horsewhipped, all the grown men, all who have ever had that self-satisfied smile, all, all, horsewhipped until they apologise on their knees.”¹⁹⁹

One way of understanding the transitions Miriam is experiencing is in relation to the material she reads. In *Honeycomb* the focus of her reading begins to shift from women’s writing to men’s fiction, and she engages with a novel by W. H. “William Hurrell” Mallock (1849-1923). We first hear about Mallock’s fiction when we learn that Miriam “closed the book she was reading and laid it on her knee and looked up with sentences from ‘A Human Document’ ringing through her.”²⁰⁰ Mallock published his triple-decker just a few years before Miriam enjoys it. Mallock’s fiction, which is set in Hungary, offers a sympathetic portrayal of adulterous love between Mr. Grenville and the married Mrs. Schilizzi, whose husband has left her and their two children in a local town. When the husband returns and contracts diphtheria, Grenville attempts to save him, resulting in Grenville’s own death from the infection. The greater part of the story is told by an omniscient narrator, but Grenville begins keeping a journal, which is reproduced within the text intermittently. He reflects at times on the value of being completely honest about his shortcomings: “if only a few men would with absolute truth give us some record of the workings of their consciences, what advances in knowledge might be made!”²⁰¹ Such sentiments resound with Richardson’s own unmediated representation of Miriam’s mind in *Pilgrimage*. Once Mrs. Schilizzi enters the narrative, Grenville feels himself drawn to her, and especially admires her self-acquired knowledge, about which the narrator remarks: “what she learnt passed at once into her life, and became part of her being.”²⁰² Sections of her diary appear as well, and she eventually gives it to Grenville, by which he gains access to her private thoughts

¹⁹⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:423.

²⁰⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:381-82.

²⁰¹ W. H. Mallock, *A Human Document* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1892), 245.

²⁰² Mallock, *A Human Document*, 183.

and her singular passion for him, as well as her rebellious opinions against the strictures of an unhappy marriage. In the novel's "Introduction," Mallock uses the device of the "found text," where he claims to have been given the authentic documents in the narrative, ones that a real-life Mrs. Schilizzi was arranging into the form of a novel to be published as if the whole of it were fiction, but which she was unable to complete before her untimely death. Mallock, then, is deeply invested in staging the narrative that follows as a "a piece of life: it is genuinely a human document."²⁰³

Mallock's decision to present much of the story from the perspective of the adulterous woman is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the novel. The reviewer for the *Athenæum* noted: "we have rarely known a book by a man in which the woman's side in an illicit love affair has been treated with more justice and completeness."²⁰⁴ This effort to capture a woman's uncensored, unorthodox thoughts, is no doubt part of the novel's appeal for Miriam, who would have found, for instance, the following statement in Mrs. Schilizzi's journal about a woman who is "married to a man who can never be her companion": "From that moment the highest faculties of her soul are condemned to be never exercised, its deepest needs never to be satisfied. A husband, by a marriage of this kind, becomes his wife's murderer."²⁰⁵ Not all critics, however, were impressed with Mallock's bold portrayal of illicit love. The *Saturday Review* regarded that Mr. Grenville's death amounted to the same thing as a conventional moral. The critic also offered harsh criticism of Mrs. Schilizzi, declaring that "a woman who exacts such a sacrifice [as Mr. Grenville's] and accepts it," will "rarely give anything in return."²⁰⁶ William Sharp, writing

²⁰³ Mallock, "Introduction," *A Human Document*, 11.

²⁰⁴ "Novels of the Week," unsigned review of *A Human Document*, by W. H. Mallock, *Athenæum* 3372 (June 11, 1892): 758.

²⁰⁵ Mallock, *A Human Document*, 187.

²⁰⁶ Unsigned review of *A Human Document*, by W. H. Mallock, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 74, no. 1916 (July 16, 1892): 86.

for the *Academy*, called it the “most unconvincing realism,” although he nevertheless believed it was “worth reading.”²⁰⁷

The mixed reviews of *A Human Document* stand in contrast with the wide praise Mallock had received fifteen years earlier when his career as a novelist began with *The New Republic* (1877), which was a satire of modern thinkers. In addition to Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and John Ruskin, Mallock particularly lampooned modern aestheticism as represented by Walter Pater in the figure of “Mr. Rose,” who is introduced with the description: “his two topics are self-indulgence and art.”²⁰⁸ *The New Republic* came out just a few years following the outrage caused by Pater’s “Conclusion” (1873), which was denounced from the pulpit in Oxford,²⁰⁹ and which Pater retracted from the second edition of *The Renaissance* (1877). Mallock had witnessed the scandal first-hand, having graduated from Oxford in 1874 where he had been a student of Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol College. Mallock, too, is thought to have been connected with the personal matter of Pater’s involvement with an undergraduate named William Money Hardinge, who was a student at Balliol.²¹⁰ It is believed that Mallock brought letters incriminating Hardinge and Pater to Jowett. His depiction of Mr. Rose does not shy away from Pater’s homoeroticism, for he has Mr. Rose compare life to a chamber “which we decorate as we would decorate the chamber of the woman or *the youth* that we love.”²¹¹

²⁰⁷ William Sharp, “New Novels,” review of *A Human Document*, by W. H. Mallock. *Academy* 42, no. 1052 (July 2, 1892): 10.

²⁰⁸ W. H. Mallock, *The New Republic* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1877), 15.

²⁰⁹ In 1875, John Fielder Mackarness, the Bishop of Oxford, gave an address in which he quoted from the “Conclusion,” and denounced its principles. See Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 62.

²¹⁰ See Donoghue, *Walter Pater*, 60-61. Mallock, in later life, may not have been as proud of his harsh satire of Pater and whatever role he might have played in exposing Pater’s involvement with Hardinge, for in his *Memoirs of Life and Literature* (1920) Mallock neglects to record anything about his social knowledge of Pater, with the singular instance of his name appearing in the following sentence: “Mr. Rose was Pater,” *Memoirs of Life and Literature* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1920), 88.

²¹¹ Mallock, *New Republic*, 27 (emphasis mine). In a later section, Mr. Rose takes from his pocket a sonnet written by a boy of eighteen (271-72), which is a thinly veiled reference to Pater’s exchange of letters with the Oxford undergraduate, William Money Hardinge, who was “known to have written several indecent sonnets.” Donoghue, *Lover of Strange Souls*, 59.

Although Mallock's keen portraiture of these various Victorian thinkers had been hailed as a brilliant start to a promising career as a satirist, in his subsequent writing Mallock expanded his focus to religious, social, and economic issues, as well as political commentary, where he expressed his opposition to democratic politics. In this realm, even though he never again achieved the attention won by his first novel, as P. M. Yarker notes, he was "always given serious consideration."²¹² The strength of Mallock's political writing was later acknowledged by Raymond Williams, who noted that Mallock was "perhaps the most able conservative thinker of the last eighty years."²¹³

A Human Document is a critically neglected book, although Tom Phillips's treated text, *A Humument* (publication began in 1970), is an important art piece, about which far more has been written than the work of fiction that it treats. What Phillips's text occludes, however, is the novel's remarkable account of a woman's adulterous behavior, which puts *A Human Document* in company with a host of fictions about sexual transgression written in the nineteenth century, all of which touch on controversies about separation and infidelity, including Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856), George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), and Theodore Fontane's *Effi Briest* (published serially 1894-95). Tony Tanner has observed that the adulteress is so dangerous because she "offers an attack on" society's rules, "revealing them to be arbitrary rather than absolute."²¹⁴ Tanner further argues that we can view adultery as "the gap, or silence, in the bourgeois novel that finally leads to [the novel's] dissolution and displacement" in twentieth-century works such as D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928).²¹⁵ This

²¹² P. M. Yarker, "W. H. Mallock's Other Novels," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 14, no. 3 (December 1959): 189.

²¹³ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 163. Williams particularly has in mind Mallock's *Limits of Pure Democracy* (1917).

²¹⁴ Tony Tanner, *Adultery and the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 13.

²¹⁵ Tanner, *Adultery and the Novel*, 14.

comment may relate to why Miriam feels that this novel has a great immediacy in 1892, even though its formal elements, such as the incorporation of journal entries, is rather conventional.

Miriam's reading of *A Human Document* has received virtually no scholarly attention, a neglect that seems primarily attributable to the modest amount of scholarship that addresses Mallock's work in general, and even less about his 1892 novel.²¹⁶ As Yarker writes, Mallock's first book "created such a stir that it completely eclipsed his later work, and remains the only book readily associated with his name."²¹⁷ And yet, as we will see, Miriam's engagement with *A Human Document* brings about multiple revelations about her preference for certain authors, and her repudiation of morally didactic art. *A Human Document's* relationship to aestheticism, moreover, warrants. Although Mallock had satirized Pater fifteen years before in his 1892 novel his interest in representing transgressive sexuality causes him to enter into a debate about what constitutes appropriate subject matter for fiction. In his "Introduction," Mallock upholds his sympathetic portrayal of adultery by defending art that accurately represents life. He argues that if his novel portrays situations considered immoral, the reader cannot be upset because "life is immoral in precisely the same sense."²¹⁸ Furthermore, he refuses to comply with the notion that a narrative should punish the transgressing characters, since life itself does not do so. In this way, he shows a desire to revise moral judgments about fiction, a project that we also discover in aestheticism. Mallock, however, launches his defense on the grounds of literary mimesis, in direct contrast with aestheticism's rejection of mimetic art.

Mallock attracted the admiration of Ouida, who, like him, was a politically conservative thinker, while also writing erotically insubordinate novels. Ouida met Mallock in London in 1887, when she was briefly away from her home in Italy, and Mallock hosted a luncheon in her

²¹⁶ Mhairi Pooler, in an exploration of Richardson's style in relation to Henry James, mentions that in *Honeycomb* Miriam discovers that she reads fiction for the author, but the text that allows her to develop this insight is not even mentioned. *Writing Life*, 172.

²¹⁷ Yarker, "Mallock's Other Novels," 189.

²¹⁸ Mallock, "Introduction," *A Human Document*, 13.

honor. When Ouida published her collection of essays titled *Views and Opinions* in 1895 (which reprinted her notorious essay denouncing the New Woman), she memorialized her respect for Mallock by dedicating the book to him “[a]s a slight token of personal regard and intellectual admiration.”²¹⁹ Mallock’s tone toward Ouida is one that mixes his admiration with a degree of condescension.²²⁰ In his *Memoirs of Life and Literature* (1920), Mallock called Ouida a “genius,”²²¹ but he also paid her something of a back-handed compliment when he remarked that “apart from her affectations, [she] was a very remarkable woman.”²²² The connection between these two authors also relates to Miriam’s interest in Mallock, since just as Miriam relishes Ouida’s lush romances, her approach to reading *A Human Document* demonstrates that her enjoyment of Mallock has substantially to do with her appreciation of style.

In some ways, Miriam’s musings about Mallock’s novel are an extension of the literary theories that she was developing in *Backwater*. In particular, Miriam’s rejection of the marriage plot has encouraged her to read passages from *A Human Document* “here and there,” rather than from start to finish.²²³ Miriam further reflects that “she could look at the end,” because if “it spoilt a book” to look at the end, then “there was something wrong about the book. If it was finished and the interest gone when you know who married who, what was the good of reading at all?”²²⁴ Miriam, then, has bypassed the issue of mimesis, since to read out of order is clearly to reject narrative teleology. Her personal approach reflects her aestheticism, since she is asserting that the style of the writing, not its linear structure, is the highest measure of a book’s quality.

²¹⁹ Ouida, “Dedication,” *Views and Opinions* (London: Methuen, 1895), dedication page.

²²⁰ Carl R. Woodring believes that in *The New Republic* Mallock was satirizing Ouida in the form of a housekeeper’s daughter who describes the inhabitants of a villa in a manner that satirizes Ouida’s style. Woodring believes Mallock wished to set his own novel apart from the “fashionable novels” written by people “less qualified to portray English aristocracy, since Mallock wished to “defend the aristocracy against portrayal at once envious and subversive.” “Notes and Queries: Notes on Mallock’s *The New Republic*,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 6, no. 1 (June 1951): 74.

²²¹ Mallock, *Memoirs of Life and Literature*, 125.

²²² Mallock, *Memoirs of Life and Literature*, 256.

²²³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:383.

²²⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:384.

This may be why Miriam's assessment of *A Human Document* differs greatly from that of the many reviewers who felt that one of the ways in which it fell short was, as Yarker puts it, the "crudity of th[e] plot."²²⁵ Reading Mallock's novel in this non-sequential manner satisfies Miriam because his prose captivates her: "Why did this strange book come so near, nearer than any others, so that you *felt* the writing, felt the sentences as if you were writing them yourself? [...] it was somehow the writing, the clearness. That was the thing."²²⁶ Here, we see that there is such clarity in Mallock's writing that Miriam feels as if his words—and the thoughts and emotions that those words express—were her own.

But she also comes to a further recognition that such lucidity allows her to understand something intimate about the author behind the work. She processes the question of what she most enjoys about a book by reflecting upon the novels that she had read in *Backwater*:

There was something more in books than [the end] . . . even Rosa Nouchette Carey and Mrs. Hungerford, something that came to you out of the book, any bit of it, a page, even a sentence—and the "stronger" the author was, the more came. That was why Ouida put those others in the shade, not, not, *not*, because her books were improper. It was her, herself somehow. Then you read books to find the author!²²⁷

Miriam's musing about what unites Mallock with Carey, Hungerford, and especially Ouida, leads her to recognize that what she cares for most is not specific characters or plots, but rather an author's skill in using language, which can be enjoyed in even just "a sentence." Miriam's discovery that she reads books "as a psychological study of the author"²²⁸ helps her to identify what makes morally didactic fiction so detestable: "then that was why the people who wrote

²²⁵ Yarker, "Mallock's Other Novels," 197.

²²⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:384-85.

²²⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:384.

²²⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:384.

moral stories were so awful. They were standing behind the pages preaching at you with smarmy voices. [...] A moral writer only sees the mote in his brother's eye. And you see him seeing it."²²⁹ Miriam's resistance to didacticism in fiction has ties with her increasing resistance against stifling social structures of gender and class as we have seen, for example, in her cigarette smoking. These issues are further connected to an episode later in the novel that foregrounds the question of censoring sexual deviation in life rather than in art, a topic that enters Richardson's narrative by way of Oscar Wilde. Although in many ways Mallock and Wilde would appear to be antithetical figures—especially since Mallock's attack on Pater's homosexuality would no doubt have extended to Wilde—both of them share an interest in satire and in exploring different forms of sexual non-conformity in ways that provide Miriam with materials that bolsters her developing critique of moral self-righteousness within 1890s culture.

Wilde's transgressive behavior enters the narrative through the events around his trials for "gross indecency" that began in April 1895 after Wilde's libel suit against the Marquess of Queensberry, the father of his lover Lord Alfred ("Bosie") Douglas, failed earlier that month. The two subsequent trials (the jury for the first trial could not agree) led to Wilde's sentencing to two years in solitary confinement with hard labour. Miriam, who is unaware of Wilde's existence until the year of the trials, first hears about him in relation to his plays when she accompanies Mrs. Corrie into London for some West End shopping and to pay a visit to her friend Mrs. Kronen. When Miriam and Mrs. Corrie arrive at the friend's home, we are told that they "found Mrs. Kronen in a mauve and white drawing-room, reclining on a mauve and white striped settee in a pale mauve tea-gown. On a large low table, a frail mauve tea service stood ready, and Mrs. Kronen rose tall to welcome them, dropping on to the mauve carpet a little volume bound in pale green velvet."²³⁰ Mrs. Kronen's richly furnished room, her relaxed posture on her settee, and her casual indulgence in an aesthetic book, all point to the wealth and pleasure that

²²⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:385.

²³⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:412.

structure this woman's life. These luxurious details, too, sound as if they could have been taken from one of Wilde's society comedies, which Miriam almost seems aware of when she reflects: "Then this was 'Society.' To come so easily up from the Corries' beautiful home, via the West End hat shop, to this wonderful West End flat and eat strawberries in April."²³¹ When Mrs. Kronen "trail[s] about the mauve floor reciting her impressions of the weather," she sounds a bit like a Wildean character, and the humorous repetition of mauve from the tea-gown to the floor, clearly accentuates the faddishness of this color among aesthetes and decadents in the 1890s, and especially brings to mind Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* in which Lord Henry Wotton tells Dorian: "Never trust a woman who wears mauve," which he calls a "sentimental color."²³² Although the pale green color of Mrs. Kronen's book does not feature as largely, it is also a revealing detail about the chromatics associated with aestheticism in this period of time. Wilde's "Pen, Pencil, and Poison," after all, was subtitled: "A Study in Green."²³³ With this introduction, then, it almost seems less unexpected when Mrs. Kronen returns to the settee and makes an unpreluded statement about Wilde: "'That play of *Wilde's* . . .' she said. Miriam shook at the name. 'You ought not to miss it. He—has—such—*genius.*' *Wilde . . . Wilde . . .* a play in the spring—someone named Wilde. Wild spring. That was genius. There was something in the name. . . . [...] *Wilde . . . Spring . . . Genius.*"²³⁴

In early April 1895, at the time of Wilde's libel trial, two of Wilde's plays were running concurrently in London: *An Ideal Husband* at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, and *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the St. James's Theatre. It is unclear which one Mrs. Kronen is

²³¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:41.

²³² Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88.

²³³ Charlotte Ribeyrol also points to the relevance of this color at the fin de siècle in relation to the "aniline revolution that transformed the very materiality of colour": "aesthetes and Decadents emulated the lexical inventiveness triggered by these inventions and sometimes embraced the artifice of chemical synthesis—best symbolized by the aniline-dyed green carnation of Oscar Wilde." "From Via Magenta to Via Solferino: A Chromatic Itinerary through John Singer Sargent's and Vernon Lee's Early Aesthetic Works," *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism* 3 (Autumn 2018): 60.

²³⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:413-14.

referring to, but the most significant aspect of her statement is the impression that it makes on Miriam, who shakes, and then delights in the sound of Wilde's name, its homophone, and the connotations that reverberate for her when she associates it with brilliance and regeneration. Miriam seems somehow to instinctively know that Wilde is associated with beautiful and evocative language. Then, in the next moment, it is as if Miriam is channeling Wilde's resonant idea that he articulates in "The Decay of Lying," that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life."²³⁵ For when she observes Mrs. Kronen enjoying a cigarette, she thinks that the woman's posture and expression make her look "like some martyr . . . that picture by Rossetti, Beata Beatrix."²³⁶ The details of Mrs. Kronen's drawing-room place Miriam in the kind of society scenes that Wilde enjoyed depicting and often satirizing in his plays and fiction. Miriam's enjoyment of words, and her recognition of life imitating art, suggests a self-consciousness on Richardson's part in subtly aligning Miriam with Wilde's aestheticism. Miriam's unconscious resonance with Wilde's understanding of art later expands to a more conscious sympathy with Wilde's life.

Part of the basis of that sympathy emerges in the narrative after the scene in Mrs. Kronen's drawing room, but before Miriam learns about the Wilde trials. At this point we are still unaware that there will be an eventual connection between the two. The chapter opens by emphasizing that the narrative has moved forward into May, for we are told: "When May came, life lay round Miriam without a flaw."²³⁷ At Newlands, she feels released from a burden that she has been carrying for a long time: the scandal that had surrounded her family because of her father's financial failure. Miriam thinks of it as "the general shadow that lay over the family life," but which had "shrunk" to "a small black cloud of disgrace hanging over her father."²³⁸ Initially,

²³⁵ Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" (first published 1889), *Intentions and The Soul of Man* (London: Methuen, 1908), 56.

²³⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:414.

²³⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:424.

²³⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:424.

Miriam had ambitiously imagined one day paying off her father's creditors: "she had sunk for a while under the conviction that the rest of her life must be spent in a vain attempt to pay off his debts."²³⁹ Once again, we learn that "[d]isgrace had closed round her, stifling."²⁴⁰ The passage that follows returns to the events occurring in April, drawing attention once more to Richardson's desire to relate these events out of chronological order. I contend that Richardson's integration of Miriam's meditations about her family's humiliation at this precise point has a strategic purpose: to make the reader fully aware of the magnitude of degradation that Miriam and her family experienced directly before the Wilde scandal is introduced into the novel.

It is crucial to bear in mind, then, the precise sequence of these episodes from the moment Wilde the playwright is introduced, to the moment when the scandal of the trials becomes visible. The order is as follows: Miriam has her excursion with Mrs. Corrie to the West End, and on the next day Mrs. Corrie announces her intention to have Miriam and the family take painting lessons. This prospect had "excited Miriam deeply, putting everything else out of her mind,"²⁴¹ because Miriam has longed to take art lessons ever since her schooldays when she could not join the girls who had extra classes on Fridays. We next encounter the passages in which Miriam meditates about the cloud that had hung over her family, but which she feels has finally dispersed. The next episode, which introduces Wilde's ordeal at the Old Bailey, returns to recording events that began on the day following Mrs. Corrie's announcement about painting lessons, where we learn that the "idea had died in Mrs. Corrie's mind," and instead a "strange interest, something dreadful that was happening in London had taken its place. It seemed to absorb her completely and to spread a strange curious excitement throughout the house."²⁴² The

²³⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:424.

²⁴⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:424.

²⁴¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:420.

²⁴² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:427.

indirect appearance of Wilde's trials comes through a subtle statement about artistic beauty, one represented by the proposed lessons in painting, which are quickly occluded by discussion of the sordid side of life. We learn that Mrs. Corrie "sent a servant every afternoon up to the station for an evening newspaper. The pink papers disappeared, but she was perpetually making allusions to their strange secret in a way that told Miriam she wanted to impart it, and that irritated without really arousing her interest."²⁴³ Miriam's limited understanding of what is taking place in London reflects the way in which a young, unmarried woman in this period was kept ignorant of high-profile controversy. Monica Stirling records that when Wilde's trials were being reported on, "in many homes gentlemen concealed newspapers lest ladies, particularly unmarried ladies, read [the] disgraceful dialogue" that took place in court.²⁴⁴ In *Honeycomb*, it is Mrs. Corrie who is removing the section of the paper that reported such news. In some ways, this censorship relates to Mallock's argument that life does not follow the moral restraints that some people attempt to place on fiction, but in this case, an effort is also being made to censor the details of life that are made available in print media.

Miriam's irritation with Mrs. Corrie's secretive behavior is clear when the narrator records that "[Miriam] felt that anything that was being fussed over in pink evening papers was probably really nothing at all. She could not believe that anything that had such a strange effect on Mrs Corrie could really interest her. But she longed to know what the mysterious thing was."²⁴⁵ Here, Miriam is demonstrating that she is not tantalized by sensational court cases, and we can infer that she thinks Mrs. Corrie, by contrast, is easily scandalized. The way in which Mrs. Corrie insists on keeping the affair a mystery, however, arouses Miriam's interest as to what could provoke in her such a strange response. Miriam rules out the possibility of divorce and murder cases, because she knows that those are topics that would be discussed, and she

²⁴³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:427.

²⁴⁴ Monica Stirling, *The Fine and the Wicked: The Life and Times of Ouida* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1957), 189.

²⁴⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:427.

therefore concludes: “It must be something worse than a murder or a divorce.”²⁴⁶ In response to Miriam’s eventual questioning about the secret, Mrs. Corrie cries: “I couldn’t tell you!,” and when Miriam responds, “[w]hy *not?*,” Mrs. Corrie states: “[i]t’s too awful,” and then declares: “It’s the most awful thing there is. It’s in the Bible.”²⁴⁷

That Miriam understands this coded statement is clear when the next section of text opens: “Little cities burning and flaring in a great plain until everything was consumed.”²⁴⁸ This image is unmistakably of Sodom and Gomorrah recorded in Genesis 18 and 19, when the Old Testament God sets the cities on fire for a sin that over time had come to be closely associated with male homosexuality, hence the term “sodomy.” The term was at the heart of Wilde’s scandal, since Wilde brought his case for criminal libeling in response to Queensberry’s calling card, which read: “For Oscar Wilde posing as sodomite [*sic*].” Miriam’s thoughts that follow this mental picture of “little cities burning” show that her initial reaction is one of revulsion: “Humanity was as bad now as in Bible days. It made one feel cold and sick. In the midst of the beauty and happiness of England—awful things, the worst things there were. What awful faces those people must have. It would be dreadful to see them.”²⁴⁹ Miriam does not yet know that Wilde is associated with the case. That weekend, however, when the house is “full of little groups of conspirators,” Miriam overhears people talking:

Names were mentioned—the name of the man who wrote the plays, Mrs. Kronen’s “genius.” Miriam could only recall when she was alone that it was a woodland springtime name. It comforted her to think that this name was concerned in the horrible mystery.

²⁴⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:427.

²⁴⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:428. Richardson revised this statement for the Knopf edition. In the Duckworth volume Mrs. Corrie said: “It’s the most awful thing there. It’s like the Bible.” *Honeycomb* (London: Duckworth, 1917), 148.

²⁴⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:428.

²⁴⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:428.

Her sympathies veered vaguely out towards the patch of disgrace in London and her interest died down.²⁵⁰

Miriam's discovery that Wilde is part of the secret instead of changing her view of the playwright transforms her perception of the scandal. It is as if her initial conviction that something Mrs. Corrie was so obsessed with could not merit much interest, has now been confirmed. Moreover, the "patch of disgrace" unmistakably echoes the "small black cloud of disgrace" that only pages before had described the effect of her father's bankruptcy on the Henderson family. This detail reveals that Miriam has recognized some affinity between, on the one hand, her family's trouble, and on the other hand, the man with the "woodland springtime name," and so her sympathies have been turned toward Wilde.

The revelation of Wilde's connection with this scandal releases Miriam from her distraction, and it also separates her from the rest of the family for whom it still holds intrigue: "[t]he general preoccupation and excitement seemed to destroy her link with the household."²⁵¹ Furthermore, the protracted visit of a woman named Miss Tower completely occupies Mrs. Corrie, and Miriam finds that "she felt herself free."²⁵² With this feeling of liberation, Miriam chooses to pursue on her own the promise of artistic advancement that seemed to be destroyed when the trial was first introduced into the narrative. We learn that Miriam "had bought a block and brushes, a small box of paints and a book on painting in water colours. For days she painted."²⁵³ Miriam fills "sheet after sheet with swift efforts," and "[e]ach day what she had done the day before thrilled her afresh and drove her on, and the time she spent in contemplation and hope became the heart of the days as April wore on."²⁵⁴ Having replaced her judgment with

²⁵⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:428-29.

²⁵¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:429.

²⁵² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:429.

²⁵³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:429.

²⁵⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:430.

sympathy, Miriam is released to develop her artistry while Wilde's trials continue to unfold in London.

The final time that Wilde's scandal is referenced in *Honeycomb* is in the same scene in which Miriam is playing billiards and defiantly smokes a cigarette. Directly following her concern about reconciling her identity as a governess with that of a cigarette-smoking New Woman, she refuses to be troubled: "I'm not in their crowd, anyhow; I despise their silly secret," she pursued, feeling out ahead towards some lonely solution of her difficulty that seemed to come shapelessly towards her."²⁵⁵ Here, we see that Miriam's scorn of the manner in which these society people treat Wilde's scandal signifies to her that she does not identify with their group. Even without directly acknowledging it, Miriam has joined Wilde in critiquing their self-righteous moralizing. Miriam's "difficulty," as we have seen, involves integrating her roles as New Woman and governess. This might also be described as a struggle between her masculine and feminine sides. But it is less clear what the narrator means by the "lonely solution." Scott McCracken suggests that it is a "not-yet articulated" "third space" outside the gender binary that "emerges through the unspeakable crime behind the Wilde trial."²⁵⁶ This interpretation would account for why the "solution" would be lonely, since it would solidify Miriam's position as one placed outside the sexual norms of society. The language in Richardson's passage also sounds similar to the earlier moment when Miriam's sympathies "veered vaguely out towards the patch of disgrace in London." Now something is coming "shapelessly toward her," which is connected with the secret in London. It may be, then, that Miriam is associating deviance with the metropolis, and vaguely recognizing the possibility of fashioning a transgressive form of subjectivity in the space of the city. Even if this is not the case, we discover when we look to the next volume that Miriam is indeed beginning to find a "solution," and that this assuredly

²⁵⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:436.

²⁵⁶ Scott McCracken, *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction and the Urban Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 66.

involves leaving behind her role as a governess, moving to London to work as a secretary, and more completely embodying her New Woman identity.

Everyday Life Transformed in London: Aestheticism, Gender, and Reading *Villette* in *The Tunnel*

When *The Tunnel* opens, we begin to decipher that Miriam is moving into a bedroom in a boarding house in London that she had previously come to look at once before. The whole first chapter is a lengthy exposition of Miriam thoroughly acquainting herself with every detail of her new dwelling. It is especially in an episode such as this one, that the sense of time passing feels paced with the reader's own experience of clock time. At intervals, Miriam notices the changing light in the room from bright sun to twilight, and during this transition we have remained with Miriam while she does nothing more than observe her surroundings, open a window, attempt to let down a blind, wash her hands, and pause to read a few pages of a book. In this way, the rhythm of the narrative bears out Langbauer's point that "*Pilgrimage* means for the everyday to be a property of form."²⁵⁷ That we choose to continue to read page after page, I contend, is because Miriam's perspective transforms this otherwise unexceptional dailiness into an aesthetic experience. Moreover, Miriam's notation of the minutiae of her environment is interspersed with her experience of several revelations about her subjectivity. I want to follow the thread of these observation-epiphanies in order to demonstrate that Miriam's aestheticization of the everyday is intimately bound up with her experience of her selfhood.

We follow Miriam as she makes her way through the house and up the stairs toward her new room, taking note of such details as a skylight in the hallway that is "blue and gold with light, its cracks threads of bright gold," and we learn that the doorknob to her bedroom is a "little brass knob [that] rattled loosely in her hand."²⁵⁸ Then Miriam looks inside and discovers

²⁵⁷ Langbauer, *Novels of Everyday Life*, 165.

²⁵⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:12.

that “[t]he room was half dark shadow and half brilliant light.”²⁵⁹ As Miriam gazes around her, she muses that she is “surprised now at her familiarity with the detail of the room . . . that idea of visiting places in dreams.”²⁶⁰ That the room’s features have remained with her so vividly leads Miriam to a revelation: “I am back now where I was before I began trying to do things like other people. I left home to get here. None of those things can touch me here.”²⁶¹ For Miriam, then, this room symbolizes the full assertion of her autonomy in contrast with an attempt she had made to be more conventional in her former situations. Here, we are only on the third page of the Duckworth edition, but Miriam’s “I” is already asserting its presence for the first time. The intensity of Miriam’s impressions in the passages that follow are heightened by the frequent and extended use of the first-person voice, which demonstrates that this room is already enabling Miriam’s assured control over her subjectivity.

Miriam’s delight in her room is substantially informed by her constant awareness that she is in London: a mindfulness that is enabled by the room’s single window. Miriam takes note of everything she can see, including the gutter: “Outside she saw grey tiles sloping steeply from the window to a cemented gutter beyond which was a little stone parapet about two feet high. A soft wash of madder lay along the grey tiles.”²⁶² There is nothing remarkable about these architectural features in and of themselves, and yet Miriam’s impressions make them of interest. Once she has observed additional details such as the window’s framework, and the “bare trees,” she further notes the satisfaction she derives from her geographical location: “the distant view of the courtyard of Euston Station. . . . In between that and the square of trees ran the Euston Road, by day and by night, her unsleeping guardian, the rim of the world beyond which lay the northern suburbs, banished.”²⁶³ Significantly, then, Miriam has expelled the London

²⁵⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:13.

²⁶⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:13.

²⁶¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:13.

²⁶² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:14.

neighborhood she found so enervating in *Backwater*, establishing herself instead in the Bloomsbury neighborhood that would in the early twentieth century become so significant in relation to those more well-known authors such as Virginia Woolf. When Miriam returns her attention to the room's interior, she has another epiphany: "Twenty-one and only one room to hold the richly renewed consciousness, and a living to earn, but the self that was with her in the room was the untouched tireless self of her seventeenth year and all the earlier time."²⁶⁴ Here, Miriam recognizes the confident expansiveness of her subjectivity. She especially realizes that the challenges she has faced since first leaving for Germany, then enduring the drudgery of North London, and most recently facing her mother's suicide (the final event of *Honeycomb*), have not obliterated the hopeful, "tireless self" that envisioned her future independence, the achievement of which the room now symbolizes.

These opening pages, moreover, bear the evidence of Miriam's "richly renewed consciousness," for even though this is a dusty room containing a window with a "discoloured roll of window blind"²⁶⁵ and "[s]hort skimpy faded Madras muslin curtains,"²⁶⁶ her refreshed perspective transforms it: "The gas flared out into a wide bright flame. The dingy ceiling and counterpane turned white. The room was a square of bright light and had a rich brown glow, shut brightly in by the straight square of level white ceiling and thrown up by the oblong that sloped down, white, at the side of the big bed almost to the floor."²⁶⁷ In this vivid passage, we see that Miriam is registering the details of the space as if she were looking at a painting, and these observations about light and color are followed by Miriam's recognition that "[e]very evening here would have a glory."²⁶⁸ When she awakens the next morning, this episode comes to an

²⁶³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:15.

²⁶⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:16.

²⁶⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:14.

²⁶⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:16.

²⁶⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:16-17.

exultant climax. Miriam eats her breakfast and hears the bells of the nearby St. Pancras church, leading to the full blossoming of her joy: “Happiness streamed along her arms and from her head,” and then, as the bells play a new tune, they become an embodiment of Miriam’s mood: “They clamoured recklessly mingling with Miriam’s shout of joy as they banged against the wooden walls of the window space.”²⁶⁹

In this space of personal independence, then, it is perhaps no accident that we discover a critical moment when *Villette* once again plays a central role to the narrative. Whereas in *Pointed Roofs* Miriam’s identification is with Lucy Snowe’s position as a governess in a foreign school, in *The Tunnel* the relevance of Brontë’s fiction to Miriam is not circumscribed by situational similarities. Instead, Miriam’s increased autonomy has brought about a fresh engagement with the novel. In addition, in the same episode we discover that *Villette* now facilitates a connection between Miriam and another woman, which is one of the scenes that marks *The Tunnel* as the first volume in which Miriam has women friends who are not her sisters. In this incident, Miriam is paying a visit to a woman named Miss Dear, a nurse who had first been acquainted with Miriam’s sister Eve. When Miss Dear seeks Miriam out for companionship, she initially feels annoyance toward this older woman, but chooses to treat her with kindness. At Miss Dear’s insistence, Miriam comes to her flat, and her arrival is followed by the other woman’s inquiry: “What is your book dear?” Miriam’s response, “Oh—*Villette*,” causes Miss Dear to question: “Is it a pretty book?”²⁷⁰ At this point, we learn the history of Miriam’s familiarity with the novel: “I bought it when I was fifteen [...] and a Byron—with some money I had; seven and six. [...] I didn’t care for the Byron.”²⁷¹ These initial details establish a contrast

²⁶⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:17.

²⁶⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:23.

²⁷⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:259.

²⁷¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:259.

between Byron and Brontë, informing the reader of Miriam's early dislike of this male poet whose brooding masculinity possessed a celebrity status of its own.

It is worth dwelling a moment on Byron because this is not the first time that his name has been mentioned in *The Tunnel*. In a much earlier scene, Miriam associates Byron with a certain way of male thinking that she despises. In this instance, Miriam is at the home of her married sister Harriett. A man named Mr. Tremayne drops in for a visit, and Miriam listens to him tell stories in a tone that "made him appear to be saying one thing over and over again in innuendo."²⁷² She realizes from his endless anecdotes that "[h]e wanted a home, something away from business life and away from social life."²⁷³ When she recognizes this wish, she realizes the way in which he views her, which she associates with a form of empty aphoristic speech:

He saw her as a woman in a home, nicely dressed in a quiet drawing room, lit by softly screened clear fresh garden daylight. . . . "Business is business." . . . "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart—'tis woman's whole existence."²⁷⁴ Byron did not know what he was saying when he wrote it in his calm patronizing way. Mr. Tremayne would admire it as a "great truth"—thinking it like a man in the way Byron thought it. What a hopeless thing a man's consciousness was. How awful to have nothing but a man's consciousness.²⁷⁵

Miriam here establishes an association between this well-known line about femininity from Byron's *Don Juan*, and a patronizing male way of thinking, which draws her scorn.

²⁷² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:26.

²⁷³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:27.

²⁷⁴ Lord George Gordon Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto 1, stanza 194. "Man's love is of man's life a thing apart, / 'Tis woman's whole existence." *Don Juan* (London: Thomas Davison, 1819), 100.

²⁷⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:27. It is worth noting that in the Duckworth edition, Miriam attributes this quotation to Tennyson rather than to Byron. Richardson silently corrected it in the Dent/ Knopf revision. The incorrect attribution to Tennyson would seem to reveal that Miriam sees certain male poets as sharing this quality of making generalizing statements about women. The corrected attribution to Byron, however, also creates an illuminating perspective for the later scene when Miriam expresses her dislike for him.

Now returning to the scene with Miss Dear, we can further understand that Byron's smug statement about love dominating women's lives is contradicted by the sentiment that is found in the volume that Miriam purchased at the same time: Lucy Snowe records that the "three happiest years of my life" were those in which the man she loved, M. Emanuel, "was away."²⁷⁶ Having made clear her dislike for Byron, Miriam, who like Lucy has been relishing her singleness, reveals her devotion to *Villette*: "I've been reading this thing [*Villette*] ever since I came back from my holidays."²⁷⁷ Miss Dear is aware that Miriam returned to London a while ago, so she protests that "[i]t doesn't look very big," but Miriam explains: "I don't mean that. When I've finished it I begin again."²⁷⁸ This detail makes plain that Miriam is engaging in a cyclical pattern of enjoying Brontë's novel, revealing an almost compulsive repetition that signals the relevance *Villette* holds for her in this phase of her life. This also stands in contrast with the episodic approach that Miriam used when reading *A Human Document*, although it similarly resists narrative closure, reflecting *Villette*'s own refusal to acquiesce not only to the demand that the woman protagonist's plot end in marriage but also that the conclusion must not remain open-ended. As readers of Brontë's narrative will recall, in the final chapter Lucy refrains from informing the reader whether M. Emanuel survives a terrible storm, and therefore we do not discover whether he is reunited with her. For Richardson to bring Brontë's novel back into *Pilgrimage* at this point, too, performs its own repetition, embodying the way in which Miriam's narrative is about the formation of the inner self, a formation that eschews traditional teleology.

When Miriam reads *Villette* aloud to Miss Dear, its full significance to *The Tunnel* is revealed: "The book was cold and unreal compared to what it was when she read it alone. But

²⁷⁶ Brontë, *Villette*, 493.

²⁷⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:259.

²⁷⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:259. In 1943, Richardson wrote in a letter to a friend: "Villette I am always reading, for I know it almost by heart." Dorothy Richardson to Bernice Elliott, 11 March 1943, in *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson*, ed. Gloria G. Fromm (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 459.

something was happening. Something was passing to and fro between them, behind the text; a conversation between them that the text, the calm quiet grey that was the outer layer of the tumult, brought into being. If they should read on, the conversation would deepen. A glow ran through her at the thought.”²⁷⁹ Brontë’s novel, then, has become the vehicle for an intimate form of female communication that unites the women. What is more, Miriam is enjoying this sororal connection. Her ensuing reflections draw into clearer focus the gendered dimensions of this experience, especially in relation to reading aloud:

She felt that in some way she was like a man reading to a woman, but the reading did not separate them like a man’s reading did. She paused for a moment on the thought. A man’s reading was not reading: not a looking and a listening so that things came into the room. It was always an assertion of himself. Men read in loud harsh unnatural voices, in sentences, or with voices that were a commentary on the text, as if they were telling you what to think . . .²⁸⁰

Initially, Miriam associates her role with a masculine subject position, but quickly distinguishes her difference from the male one. As a result, her style of reading aloud corresponds with her refashioned gender identity: she possesses an assertiveness that she associates with masculinity, but unlike a man, she does not allow her confident subjectivity to obstruct the voice of Brontë’s narrator. Through this process, something sacred in Miriam’s private life is brought into her social life, and in both realms Miriam finds affirmation and fulfillment through *Villette*. This productive intersection further reveals the way in which her inner convictions and public performance of her subjectivity are becoming more closely aligned.

Although Miriam’s bicycle riding, eating in London cafés, and solitary walks around the city in many ways advance her New Woman role, she continues to search for a further identity category that bypasses the binary of masculinity and femininity. If Miriam’s reading to her

²⁷⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:260-61.

²⁸⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:261.

female companion in some ways made her feel like a man, then in a later episode when she nurses the sick Miss Dear and waits at her bedside all night, Miriam is strongly aware of fulfilling the role of a woman. On the night that she cares for her friend, as morning dawns she reflects on what it means to live in London: “that feeling when you live right *in* London, of being a Londoner, the thing that made it *enough* to be a Londoner, getting up, in London; the thing that made real Londoners different to everyone else, going about with a sense that made them *alive*.”²⁸¹ Intrinsic to this metropolitan identity is Miriam’s feeling that one is “undisturbed by the necessity of being anything,” including being “a woman.”²⁸² Miriam wishes to cut through the burden of gender designations and simply acknowledge her autonomy, and as she looks forward to the return of her regular routine, she reflects: “She would be again soon . . . not a woman . . . a Londoner.”²⁸³

In *The Tunnel*, then, we see the way in which Miriam is continuing to develop her independent identity, and we observe that part of this process involves her persistent engagement with forms of culture that have been meaningful to her in the past, such as *Villette*. Although, as McCracken notes, the chapter-novels set in London in the 1890s “read like a deliberate performance of the public image of the New Woman,”²⁸⁴ Miriam’s enactment remains informed by earlier literary forms of Victorian womanhood. These stages of female subjectivity, too, become woven into the reader’s mindfulness of a modernity that is already present in Richardson’s formal innovations, and which Miriam is herself moving toward in her effort to break even more completely with any form of identity that is socially defined, even if that identity is transgressive. In this way, Deborah Parsons’ observation about Richardson herself also holds true for Miriam: “she refused commitment to any of the organized socialist,

²⁸¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:265-66.

²⁸² Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:266.

²⁸³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:266.

²⁸⁴ McCracken, *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction*, 25.

spiritualist or suffragette groups with whose theories she dallied, always remaining staunchly faithful to [her] social and emotional individualism.”²⁸⁵ Over the course of the remaining volumes, Miriam’s significant revelations about her subjectivity continue to come about through her engagements with 1890s and early 1900s culture, a culture that forms the stimulating landscape of her daily life.²⁸⁶

Conclusion: The Representation of Women in Henry James, Richard Wagner, and Dorothy Richardson

Having observed the way in which Brontë’s 1853 fiction remains relevant to a later installment of Richardson’s roman-fleuve, it bears also pointing out that Miriam’s implicit engagement with the legacy of the aesthetic novel, and with forms of art for art’s sake more broadly, continues to inform her development in the remaining chapter-novels, which conclude with Miriam’s experiences in 1912. One of the overall ambitions of *Pilgrimage* is to find alternatives to the experimental forms of fiction with which Richardson’s fresh style might seem to be more readily associated. It is more than evident, for instance, that Richardson’s narrative technique has an affinity with the advances that Henry James made in his late phase, especially in novels such as *The Ambassadors* (1903). Miriam, indeed, reads James’s novel in *Pilgrimage*’s eighth installment *The Trap* (1925), and she is enthralled with his narrative innovations, memorably reflecting that he has “achieved the first completely satisfying way of writing a novel.”²⁸⁷ This “way,” as Miriam articulates it, is that James “convey[s] information without coming forward to announce it,”²⁸⁸ a description that could be easily applied to Richardson’s own methods.

²⁸⁵ Deborah Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf* (London: Routledge, 2007), 8.

²⁸⁶ For the most part, these volumes are set in London, with the exception of *Oberland* (1927), in which Miriam travels to Switzerland for a two-week holiday, and the final two volumes, *Dimple Hill* (1938) and *March Moonlight* (1967), which largely take place in a Quaker society to which Miriam moves in order to free herself from all forms of obligation.

²⁸⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 3:410.

Miriam's delight, however, cannot be sustained when she focuses on James's representation of a woman character, Maria Gostrey. Miriam's disappointment is so poignant that when she comes back to the novel after having read the opening pages a few days earlier, she remembers that "she had already read on into the next chapter, that something had happened, so bitter as to have been pushed from her mind. [...] It had happened with the coming of Maria Gostrey."²⁸⁹ The arrival of this character is so painful because James's representation of womanhood causes Miriam reluctantly to recognize that "in every word he came forward with his views, which were the most hopelessly complacent masculine ignorance."²⁹⁰ His unenlightened depiction of femininity makes Miriam realize how the experience of reading *The Ambassadors* would be different, and dangerous, for a man: "She now for the first time imagined men reading the magic pages, suffering unconsciously their insidious corruption."²⁹¹

In contrast with the disappointment that Miriam experiences with James's fiction, there is her great satisfaction in the decadent music of Wagner. In *Interim*, which takes place from 1896 to 1897, Miriam expresses her love for the *Tannhäuser* overture, which is Wagner's music-drama that became "the very emblem of decadent sexuality."²⁹² Having enjoyed once before the piano version of the overture performed by a man named Mr. Bowdoin, when Miriam next has the opportunity to hear him play she intends to ask him for a repeat performance. We discover, however, that her missed chance to talk with him means that she is "left with her prepared remark about the piano and her plea for a performance of the *Tannhäuser* overture."²⁹³

²⁸⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 3:409.

²⁸⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 3:409.

²⁹⁰ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 3:409.

²⁹¹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 3:409.

²⁹² Erwin Koppen, "Wagnerism as Concept and Phenomenon," trans. Erika Swales and Martin Swales, *Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski, trans. and ed. John Deathridge (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 349.

Nonetheless, when Mr. Bowdoin performs the piece of his own accord, Miriam is very annoyed because the presence of unfamiliar people in the intimate room means that “[s]he was unable to lose herself in the Wagner overture.”²⁹⁴ Miriam’s powerful feelings about Wagner’s overture make plain the enjoyment that she derives from his notoriously sensual music.

Miriam’s engagement with Wagner has its full blossoming in *Pilgrimage’s* tenth installment, *Dawn’s Left Hand* (1931), set in 1906. Here, Miriam sees a performance of *The Flying Dutchman*, and we can observe that her ideas about representational art receive a full articulation with reference to Wagner’s music. Having recently returned to London from a restorative holiday in Switzerland, Miriam reflects that the concert is to be “the first event of the new life begun amongst the sunlit mountains.”²⁹⁵ Miriam is seated with friends in an opera box, and in a remarkable passage she proposes that she will sit with her back to the stage:

“There is no possible representation that can compete with the vast scenes his music brings to your mind. I shall see, with the lit stage behind me instead of the Queen’s Hall orchestra in front, much bigger scenes than the stage could hold. No one can see and hear to perfection at the same moment. And the wonder of Wagner is that through your ears he makes you see so hugely. All humanity pouring itself into space.”²⁹⁶

For Miriam, then, Wagner’s music is so powerful and provocative that it requires no visual embodiment. She wants to treat it as she did the music of Chopin that in Hanover had transported her into epiphanic moments. But Miriam complies with her friend’s wish that she face the stage, and as she observes the performance she notes that “[e]very sound in the world, every protest and cry of agony, every relieving shriek of hysteria, is tribute to the sure knowledge of life’s perfection.”²⁹⁷ And then we learn that “Senta’s little spinning-song, heard in its setting,

²⁹³ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:371.

²⁹⁴ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 2:372.

²⁹⁵ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 4:168.

²⁹⁶ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 4:170.

flowed forth from this knowledge. It prevailed against the earlier roaring of sea-music and would prevail against the din and fury of life in which she was to be caught. Singing to herself over her wheel, she was truth.”²⁹⁸ In Wagner’s representation of this character partaking in the mundane woman’s activity of spinning, Miriam finds the power of the joyful everyday. It is a “little” song, but one which Miriam believes remains steadfast against the far more dramatic music and events preceding and following this scene. For Miriam, the music has succeeded in capturing the “truth” of this woman’s life, and she further reflects that Senta is “[s]inging her sunlight and her being and her happiness.”²⁹⁹ Miriam so thoroughly enjoys this song because she takes the same delight in her own daily routine. In Miriam’s estimation, Wagner has recognized the truth of woman’s existence in a manner that James utterly failed to achieve.

Miriam’s response to Wagner’s music-drama reinforces that her ideas about art and life are developing in crucial ways in relation to a composer whose music was so central to fin-de-siècle British decadence. In the same way, I have tried to demonstrate that Richardson’s decision to devise completely innovative techniques to talk about Miriam’s experiences at the turn of the century involved paying close attention to her protagonist’s engagements with Victorian forms of culture, and especially the theories and artworks associated with the aesthetic movement.

Richardson published the twelfth volume of *Pilgrimage, Dimple Hill*, in 1938, which was long after many modernist writers had established the notion of a break between their experimental literary forms and those associated with the period of Queen Victoria’s reign. Richardson’s chapter-novels, however, had continued to silently challenge this paradigm of rupture through their continued investment in Miriam’s advancement in relation to fin-de-siècle culture. After *Dimple Hill*, it would be almost another thirty years before the thirteenth and final

²⁹⁷ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 4:172.

²⁹⁸ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 4:172.

²⁹⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 4:173.

installment of Richardson's series, *March Moonlight*, was published in 1967, exactly ten years after her death. As far as her readers were aware during her lifetime, then, Richardson's career as an author of fiction concluded directly before the second world war broke out in 1939. And even though Richardson became a published author during the Great War, Miriam's existence is only recorded through 1912, bringing her to the year in which Richardson began writing her roman-fleuve. Richardson's protagonist, then, belongs wholly to the world of the turn of the century. Unlike Malet and Syrett who explored in some of their fictions the changes that took place in women's lives because of the war (Malet registering a curtailing of women's opportunities, and Syrett acknowledging a returned emphasis on motherhood and increased pressure to marry), Richardson's protagonist goes on her pilgrimage in a period in which her personal longings to refashion her identity can find forms of expression in the shifting world around her: from smoking cigarettes, to eating alongside businessmen in cafés, making a living in a profession outside governessing, enjoying her own private room, occupying the metropolitan streets, and belonging to a London women's club. It is unclear whether Richardson herself intended for *March Moonlight*—which was uncompleted at her death—to be the final volume, and George Thomson has made a convincing argument based on Richardson's letters that she envisioned more installments that would possibly chronicle Miriam's life through 1915.³⁰⁰ It feels fitting, however, that Richardson's plotless series remains without an intended conclusion, even if that conclusion would, in terms of form, have resisted any type of teleological closure.

³⁰⁰ See George Thomson, *A Reader's Guide to Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage* (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1996), 53-56.

Coda

Although this study has made it clear that Lucas Malet, Netta Syrett, and Dorothy Richardson write in styles that are very distinct from one another, there is a strikingly similar aspect of literary form that is found in their oeuvres. Repeatedly, critics note that in the authors' various novels, there is a dearth of traditional plot development and action. In some cases, these commentators explicitly associate this lack of drama with the absence of an orthodox heterosexual romance. For instance, we have witnessed this style of critique in relation to Richardson's *Backwater*, in which a reviewer fixates on Miriam "los[ing] a lover after treating him in an off-hand way," and regards the rest of the narrative details that focus on Miriam's interiority as amounting to very little: "That is all that happens."¹ What this critic fails to recognize is that far more critical than Miriam's loss of a suitor is the non-traditional type of eroticism that Miriam experiences from reading Ouida's novels, a type of eroticism that brings about her increasing ability to assert her autonomy.

This particular review of *Backwater* draws attention to one of the most significant legacies of Malet's, Syrett's, and Richardson's respective corpuses: for all three of these authors, reimagining womanhood meant remapping the woman's body and sexuality, a remapping that in turn restructures the woman's plot. It is fair to say that in traditional English novels the representation of women's eroticism is largely limited to their reproductive capabilities, and on the level of narrative structure, the romance plot clothes the reproductive possibilities of sexuality in the trappings of heterosexual romance that progresses toward marriage. In the novels that I have discussed, there is a repeated pattern that rejects this customary teleology of female sexuality. As a consequence, the thirteen novels that I have studied deny ready-made resolutions that culminate in wedded union. Instead, Malet, Syrett, and Richardson consistently

¹ "Fiction of To-day," unsigned review of *Backwater*, by Dorothy Richardson, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 122, no. 3171 (August 5, 1916): 138.

represent women's desire as autotelic or self-generating, whether this desire includes a man as the object of passion or not. These writers' unconventional position on women's eroticism produces narratives that draw attention to aspects of their women protagonists' emotional and physical experience that do not customarily receive pronounced attention in the English novel.

For instance, of the five works by Syrett that I explore in Chapter 2, *Anne Page* portrays arguably the most explicitly transgressive approach to challenging the marriage plot. As we have seen, Anne chooses to have a lengthy affair rather than to accept a proposal, and when she is purposefully single, she contentedly tends her garden and reads the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that *Anne Page* garnered noticeably mixed responses, as the title of one review indicates: "*Anne Page* Not a Tale for the Impatient or the Lover of Sensation." In the notice, the critic comments that the narrative is a bit too "pensive in [its] retrospection."² At the same time, this reviewer recognizes that, although not all readers will appreciate this meditative narrative technique, Syrett is nonetheless an accomplished stylist: "[t]he book will be left for lovers of delicately shaded action, who are even willing to be dull for a page or two, in quiet enjoyment of felicitous prose and everyday situations."³ These comments clarify that Syrett was shifting fiction toward the contemplation of otherwise insignificant details that affect women's experience of the everyday modern world.

By comparison, when reviewing Malet's *Deadham Hard* critics were conscious of the novel as one in which very little plot-based action takes place, an impression that was no doubt compounded by Malet's ability to fill no fewer than five hundred pages with painstaking details of a young woman's diurnal life. It seems no accident that the full-length fiction that attracted this critical response is one of Malet's only novels in which the leading woman character emerges as the singular focus of the narrative. Unlike *Sir Richard Calmady* and *Adrian Savage*

² "*Anne Page* Not a Tale for the Impatient or the Lover of Sensation: Netta Syrett's Latest Romance is an Old World Story Facing Boldly a Condition of Life," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 16, 1909, 8.

³ "*Anne Page* not a tale for the impatient," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8.

(whose titles accentuate the centrality of the male characters), and different from *The Far Horizon* (in which Poppy and Dominic's narratives are equally central), once *Deadham Hard* turns its attention to Damaris her experiences and reflections remain the unchallenged focal point of Malet's prose. Although not all contemporary readers enjoyed the detailed concentration on a character who does little more than read books, go on long walks, and reflect on her emotions, one critic nevertheless enjoyed this unusual approach to a woman's life: "[t]he plot of 'Deadham Hard' is slight, negligible almost, and its interest lies in the ripened and masterly style with which all of its trivialities are clothed, making it so beautiful that one reads on for the sheer pleasure of it."⁴ Here, we find a rare example of a sympathetic reader who recognizes that the absence of plot and concentration instead on "trivialities" enables an experience of reading that is simply for art's sake: an experience that evokes the female aestheticism that Malet sought to celebrate.

Richardson's novels, as we have seen in Chapter 3, were repeatedly characterized as ones in which "[t]here is no plot."⁵ One reviewer in 1920 contended: "Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* books are pernicious. They make you morbidly self-conscious."⁶ Still, the same critic reluctantly admitted to enjoying Richardson's volumes: "The trouble is that the books are interesting. There is a terrible fascination about their incisive minutenesses. Nothing happens, but you keep on reading. They are very skillfully done."⁷ Again, there is an awareness that, even against one's will, an aesthetically-crafted novel can compel the reader's continued engagement.

By taking these reviews together, we can grasp the ways in which the works of these three writers are united through prioritizing women's lives in relation to themselves, rather than

⁴ "Deadham Hard is sequel to *Damaris*: Lucas Malet Continues the Story of Her Strange Romance of the East," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 18, 1920, E2.

⁵ "An Original Book," unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* 120, no. 3129 (October 17, 1915): vi.

⁶ "A Self-Conscious Pilgrimage," *Independent* 103, no. 3732 (August 14, 1920): 186.

⁷ "A Self-Conscious Pilgrimage," *Independent*, 186.

in relation to men. The novels of Malet, Syrett, and Richardson are focused on “everyday situations,” “trivialities,” and “minutenesses.” In other words, they are about the tissue of women’s lives, in ways that show that women’s thoughts, private activities, and daily routines are of greater significance than the romance plot. Further, each writer identifies a special value in these minutiae, which implicitly contrast with the heroism that is supposed to elevate the male protagonist. These reimaginings of overlooked female experiences, as we can see, consistently involve a rethinking of women’s eroticism. Anne Page chooses sexual satisfaction and independence over the socially sanctioned option of marriage. Damaris spurns the potential of the cousinship plot as well as the courtship plot, thus prolonging her libidinal plenitude while she determines the precise direction in which she wants to channel her professional and sexual desires. Miriam resists any kind of threat to her autonomy, but especially the potential breach posed by romance, finding far greater enjoyment in communing with herself than encouraging male attention. Once the woman character is treated as complete in herself, the development of her independent subjectivity emerges as the most significant focus of the narration.

As a result, Malet, Syrett, and Richardson represent women delighting in pleasure for pleasure’s sake. Such pleasure facilitates a powerful resistance to the traditional emphasis on the marriageable young woman’s destiny as one of biological reproductivity. Instead, she is in control of her own sensual satisfaction. This is abundantly evident in the scene in *Backwater* in which Miriam smokes a cigarette that possesses a phallic significance—“the cigarette felt pleasantly plump and firm”—and which she wields for her “intoxicated” enjoyment.⁸ This solitary pleasure is one that “brought her a sense of power,” a sense which leads her to assert inwardly that “[s]he would choose her fate.”⁹ As we have noticed, another crucial, and related, aspect of women’s experience has to do with their engagements with art. When these encounters are with aesthetic or decadent artworks they are especially significant because these more

⁸ Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* (New York: Knopf, 1938), 1:208, 1:209.

⁹ Richardson, *Pilgrimage*, 1:209, 1:210.

dissident artistic modes are facilitating women's exposure to not only beauty but also aspects of existence that were supposed to be outside their awareness, such as transgressive forms of desire. This point becomes evident, for example, when Syrett's Rose Cottingham first looks at Aubrey Beardsley's artwork: "for half an hour Rose was fascinated, bewildered, and engrossed. She had an odd sensation of having always known these strange, secret women."¹⁰ As a result, Rose wishes that she were like one of the "evil type[s]" of Beardsley's female figures, since they were "very horrid, of course, but—exciting. With a face bearing some resemblance to theirs, one might do and feel all sorts of things, and she was not altogether averse from[,] at any rate[,] *feeling* 'all sorts of things.'"¹¹ As we can see from Syrett's example, the authors that I have looked at in this dissertation recognize that heightened artistic experience inspires the recognition that a woman can feel as she wants to feel, and to label those sensations as both valid and valuable, is to claim an authority over one's independent subjectivity. To take another example, in *Deadham Hard* once Damaris has relished her private reading in the library and is inspired to defy convention, she experiences an intense awareness of her consciousness: "she could yield herself to an ecstasy of contemplation, active rather than passive, [because] imagination, breaking the bounds of personality, made her strangely one with all she looked on. Consciousness of self was merged in pure delight."¹²

At the fin de siècle, it remained the case that the dominant attitude toward women was that their experience was somehow inferior to a man's impressions. But as we can see from the respective fictions of Malet, Syrett, and Richardson, the 1890s also marked a period when there were extraordinary possibilities for women to gain a measure of liberation from the marriage market, or, if they chose, to enter it on their own terms. The ways in which these authors represent this decade are very different from the conventional manner in which it was often

¹⁰ Netta Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1916), 54.

¹¹ Syrett, *Rose Cottingham Married*, 55 (italics in original).

¹² Lucas Malet, *Deadham Hard* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1919), 109.

thought of as a period of empire, culminating in the horrific second Anglo-Boer War. (1899-1902). Malet's *Far Horizon*, as we saw, is set against this backdrop of England's faltering imperial power, while foregrounding the personal success of the decadent actress Poppy, who, once she frees herself from her husband, looks at London and declares: "Ah! how I love [London], how I love it . . . For it belongs to me and I belong to it. In the name of my art I must try conclusions with it. I must play to it, and conquer it, and enchant, and possess it, since I am free at last—I am free."¹³ Malet, Syrett, and Richardson offer a recalibration of what matters in a woman's life: to seek heightened forms of artistic experience, but to also immerse oneself in the beauty of everyday experience that had typically been discounted. This emphasis on women's ordinary experiences, whether psychological, sensual, or just experiential, constitutes the innovative manner in which Malet, Syrett, and Richardson asserted the right of women to full autonomy, rather than through more traditionally polemic strategies of argumentation and advocacy.

By examining the way in which women's sexuality fashions the feminist narratives of these three writers, my dissertation is part of a broader history of the period that looks at the advances that women novelists were making in rethinking female eroticism. Recent scholarly interventions continue to expand our understanding of the remarkable manner in which women at the fin de siècle and early twentieth century were boldly reconceiving female desire. Tina O'Toole has strengthened our awareness of female modernity in the Irish tradition. Her discussion of George Egerton focuses on this Irish author's subversive representation of the maternal body, declaring that Egerton "wrote too explicitly, by contemporary standards, about the erotic and corporeal aspects of motherhood."¹⁴ By comparison, Emma Liggins has focused attention on what she classifies as the "'misfit' lesbian heroine of inter-war fiction."¹⁵ She

¹³ Lucas Malet, *The Far Horizon* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1907), 362.

¹⁴ Tina O'Toole, *The Irish New Woman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 13.

emphasizes that it was not only lesbian authors who were interested in queer women characters, arguing that Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women* (1917) and Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer* (1927) present "the disruptive possibilities of lesbian plotting, and representations of all-female educational environments, [which] sanction revisions of heteronormative assumptions about sexuality."¹⁶ Emma Heaney, too, has recently brought to light the cultural forms through which transgender feminine identities were explored and articulated, especially in medical, psychoanalytic, and literary works of the early twentieth century. Further, Heaney charts the development of the "literary Modernist trans feminine" in avant-garde modernist fictions by authors such as Mina Loy, Mae West, and Djuna Barnes.¹⁷

Even though within Malet's, Syrett's, and Richardson's respective novels the object of the woman protagonist's desire is most often male, their women characters' desires frequently stand outside the conventions of heteronormative reproduction. At the same time, we have also seen that these authors are at times invested in female homoeroticism, such as in Malet's *Sir Richard Calmady* which depicts Honoria's passion for Katherine, or in Syrett's *The Victorians*, which represents Rose's erotic awakening as brought through her infatuation for her friend Helen. In the case of Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, too, Miriam experiences sexual attraction for other women. However, other than glimpses of this same-sex desire in the early volumes of this roman-fleuve, her homoeroticism does not become fully legible until the tenth installment, *Dawn's Left Hand* (1931), when she develops a sensual friendship with a woman named Amabel. One of the legacies of Malet's, Syrett's, and Richardson's respective novels, then, is the figure of the independent woman whose sexuality transgresses traditional boundaries, whether in the form of unwedded sexual passion for men, or longing for other women. Moreover, in the instances of

¹⁵ Emma Liggins, *Odd Women? Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women's Fiction, 1850s-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 163.

¹⁶ Liggins, *Odd Women?*, 163.

¹⁷ Emma Heaney, *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 9.

Malet's Honoria, Syrett's Rose in *The Victorians* along with its sequel *Rose Cottingham Married*, or Miriam's multiple affairs (whether chaste or not) with men and women, these characters also experience attraction toward both sexes. These novelists, then, belong to the emergence of more openly lesbian and bisexual forms of writing in the early twentieth century. Authors who wrote more openly queer fiction include Radclyffe Hall, who had close ties with the aesthetic movement, and who explored openly lesbian relationships in such distinguished works as *The Unlit Lamp* (1924)—which it is worth noting is primarily set in the 1890s and explores a romantic female friendship—and her best-known novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Virginia Woolf ingeniously broke down gender and sexual binaries in her imaginative transhistorical novel *Orlando* (1928). Similarly, Lehmann was interested in bisexual experiences, and in *Dusty Answer* she represented the female protagonist's sexual attraction to both women and men.

Malet, Syrett, and Richardson, then, are writers whose novels constitute bold innovations for women, for aestheticism, and for the English novel. They forge these innovations in divergent prose styles, but ones which nevertheless share a commitment to beauty, and which through this commitment succeeded in repeatedly attracting readers' engagements with their subversive rewritings of women's plots. In this regard, the substantial body of fiction I have analyzed had, in its own time, the potential to bring about for their readers the same kinds of aesthetic and erotic transformations that they record their women protagonists experiencing, transformations that might in turn inspire the attentive reader's own assertion of a sexuality, artistically, and (on occasion) professionally independent selfhood.

Bibliography

- Academy*. Unsigned review of *Anne Page*, by Netta Syrett. 1879 (May 9, 1908): 767.
- Academy*. Unsigned review of *The Child of Promise*, by Netta Syrett. 1827 (May 11, 1907): 465.
- Adams, Kimberly VanEsveld. *Our Lady of Victorian Feminism: The Madonna in the Work of Anna Jameson, Margaret Fuller, and George Eliot*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001.
- Alden, William L. Review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet. *New York Times Saturday Review of Books*. October 5, 1901.
- A. L. H. "Literary Entertainments." Review of *Eminent Victorians*, by Lytton Strachey. *Athenæum* 4668 (October 17, 1919): 1031.
- Arata, Stephen. Introduction to *News From Nowhere*, by William Morris, 11-44. Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003.
- Ardis, Ann L. *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Ardis, Ann L. "Netta Syrett's Aestheticization of Everyday Life: Countering the Counterdiscourse of Aestheticism." In *Women and British Aestheticism*, edited by Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer, 233-50. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
- Arnold, Matthew. "Shelley." In *The Last Word*, edited by R. H. Super. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977.
- Art Journal*. "Society of Painters in Water-Colours." 90 (June 1869): 173-74.
- Athenæum*. "Books Published This Week." 4588 (October 2, 1915): 228-31.
- Athenæum*. "For Girls." Unsigned review of *The Victorians*, by Netta Syrett. 4596 (November 27, 1915): 402.
- Athenæum*. "Novels of the Week." Unsigned review of *A Human Document*, by W. H. Mallock. 3372 (June 11, 1892): 758-59.

Athenæum. Unsigned review of *The Far Horizon*, by Lucas Malet. 4128 (December 8, 1906): 729-30.

Athenæum. Unsigned review of "Poems and Ballads," by Algernon Charles Swinburne. 2023 (August 4, 1866): 137-38.

Atwood, Sara. *Ruskin's Educational Ideals*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011.

Barry, William. "Lucas Malet's Saint and Sinner." *Bookman* 31, no. 183 (December 1906): 143-44.

Baudelaire, Charles. *Baudelaire: Prose and Poetry*, translated by Arthur Symons. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1926.

Baudelaire, Charles. "The Painter of Modern Life." In *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne, 1-40. London: Phaidon, 1964.

Baudelaire, Charles. *Intimate Journals*. Translated by Christopher Isherwood. London: Black Spring Press, 1989.

Baudelaire, Charles. "Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris." In *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne, 111-46. London: Phaidon, 1964.

Bennett, Joseph. *Billiards*. Edited by "Cavendish." London: Thos de la Rue, 1894.

Beerbohm, Max. "A Defence of Cosmetics." *Yellow Book* 1 (April 1894): 65-82.

Beerbohm, Max. "Ouida." In *More*, 101-16. London: John Lane, 1899. Reprinted from *Saturday Review* 84, no. 2175 (July 3, 1897): 8-9. Page references are to the 1899 edition.

Bluemel, Kristin. *Experimenting on the Borders of Modernism: Dorothy Richardson's "Pilgrimage"*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997.

Bookman. Unsigned review of *The Victorians*, by Netta Syrett. 49, no. 290 (November 1915): 60.

Bristow, Joseph. "The Aesthetic Novel, from Ouida to Firbank." In *A History of the Modernist Novel*, edited by Gregory Castle, 37-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

- Bristow, Joseph. "Female Decadence." In *The History of British Women's Writing, 1880-1920*, edited by Holly A. Laird, 84-96. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Bristow, Joseph. "Why Victorian? A Period and its Problems." *Literature Compass* 1 (2004): 1-16.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Edited by Michael Mason. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette*. Edited by Margaret Smith and Herbert Rosengarten. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Brophy, Brigid. *Black and White: A Portrait of Aubrey Beardsley*. New York: Stein and Day, 1969.
- Bullen, J. B. *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Burdett, Osbert. *The Beardsley Period: An Essay in Perspective*. London: John Lane, 1925.
- Byron, Lord George Gordon. *Don Juan*. London: Thomas Davison, 1819.
- Calder, Robert. *Willie: The Life of W. Somerset Maugham*. London: Heinemann, 1989.
- Cevasco, G. A. *The Breviary of the Decadence: J.-K. Huysmans's "À Rebours" and English Literature*. New York: AMS Press, 2001.
- Chicago Daily Tribune*. "Anne Page Not a Tale for the Impatient or the Lover of Sensation: Netta Syrett's Latest Romance is an Old World Story Facing Boldly a Condition of Life." October 16, 1909.
- Chitty, Susan. *The Beast and the Monk: A Life of Charles Kingsley*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974.
- Clements, Patricia. *Baudelaire and the English Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Cooper, Edith. Edith Cooper to Katharine Bradley, [September 11, 1882]. In *The Fowl and the Pussycat: Love Letters of Michael Field, 1876-1909*, edited by Sharon Bickle. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008.

- Courtney, Janet. "A Novelist of the Nineties." *Fortnightly Review* 131 (February 1932): 230-41.
- Courtney, W. L. *The Feminine Note in Fiction*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1904.
- Cregan-Reid, Vybarr. Introduction to *Nobody's Fault*, by Netta Syrett, ix-xxi. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010.
- Cruse, Amy. *The Victorians and Their Books*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935.
- Davis, Tracy. *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Delyfer, Catherine. *Art and Womanhood in Fin-de-Siècle Writing: The Fiction of Lucas Malet, 1880-1931*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011.
- Delyfer, Catherine. "Cosmopolitan Romance and Feminist Aestheticism in *Adrian Savage*." In *Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays*, edited by Jane Ford and Alexandra Gray, 109-26. New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Dial*. Unsigned review of *Deadham Hard*, by Lucas Malet. 67, no. 801 (October 18, 1919): 350.
- Doan, Laura. Introduction to *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel*, edited by Laura Doan, 1-16. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Donoghue, Denis. *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls*. New York: Knopf, 1995.
- Dowling, Linda. "The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1979): 434-53.
- Dowling, Linda. *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Dowling, Linda. *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Evangelista, Stefano. *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile*. New York: Palgrave, 2009.
- Evans, C. S. "Three War Novels." *Bookman* 52, no.307 (April 1917): 24-25.

- Fahy, Thomas. "The Cultivation of Incompatibility: Music as a Leitmotif in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*." *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 29, no.2 (2000): 131-47.
- Felber, Lynette. *Gender and Genre in Novels Without End: The British Roman-Fleuve*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995.
- Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Fest, Kerstin. *And All Women Mere Players? Performance and Identity in Dorothy Richardson, Jean Rhys and Radclyffe Hall*. Wien: Braumüller, 2009.
- Fish, Arthur. "Oscar Wilde as Editor." *Harper's Weekly* 58 (1913): 18-20.
- Frattarola, Angela. "Auditory Narrative in the Modernist Novel: Prosody, Music, and the Subversion of Vision in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*." *Genre* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 5-28.
- Fromm, Gloria G. *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
- Furness, Raymond. *Wagner and Literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982.
- Gagnier, Regenia. *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.
- Gagnier, Regenia. "Productive Bodies, Pleasured Bodies: On Victorian Aesthetics." In *Women and British Aestheticism*, edited by Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer, 270-89. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography." In *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, edited by Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson. New York: MLA, 2002.
- Gautier, Théophile. *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. Translated by Helen Constantine. London: Penguin, 2005.

- Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Giebelhausen, Michaela. "The Religious and Intellectual Background." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, edited by Elizabeth Prettejohn, 62-75. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Gill, Clare. "Olive Schreiner, T. Fisher Unwin and the Rise of the Short Fiction Collection in Britain." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 55, no. 3 (2012): 315-38.
- Gillies, Mary Ann. *Henri Bergson and British Modernism*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996.
- Guerlac, Suzanne. *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.
- Gwynn, Stephen. Review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, *New Liberal Review* 2, no. 10 (November 1901): 480-88.
- Hanson, Ellis. *Decadence and Catholicism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Hartnell, Elaine. *Gender, Religion and Domesticity in the Novels of Rosa Nouchette Carey*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000.
- Heaney, Emma. *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017.
- Heilmann, Ann. *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- [Henley, W. E.]. Editorial. *National Observer*, April 6, 1895.
- Hicks-Bartlett, Alani. "'Vanity of Vanities': The *Bildungsroman*, Corporeal Fragility, and the Aesthetic Ideal in *The Far Horizon*." In *Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays*, edited by Jane Ford and Alexandra Gray, 69-85. New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Hughes, Linda K. "A Female Aesthete at the Helm: *Sylvia's Journal* and 'Graham R. Tomson,' 1893-1894." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 29 (1996): 173-92.

- Hughes, Linda K. "Feminizing Decadence." In *Women and British Aestheticism*, edited by Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer, 119-38. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
- Huysmans, Joris-Karl. *À Rebours*. Translated by Robert Baldick. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Independent*. "A Self-Conscious Pilgrimage." 103, no. 3732 (August 14, 1920): 186.
- Jackson, Holbrook. *The Eighteen-Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*. London: Grant Richards, 1913.
- Jacobi, Carol. "William Holman Hunt." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, edited by Elizabeth Prettejohn, 116-32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Jeffreys, Sheila. *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930*. London: Pandora, 1985.
- J. M. C. Review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet. *New York Times Saturday Review of Books*, June 21, 1902.
- Jones, Jill Tedford. "Netta Syrett." In *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 197, edited by George M. Johnson, 275-84. Detroit: Gale Research, 1999.
- Kaplan, Sydney Janet. *Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975.
- King, Richard. "Novelty." Review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson. *Tatler* 744 (September 29, 1915): 414.
- Koppen, Erwin. "Wagnerism as Concept and Phenomenon." Translated by Erika Swales and Martin Swales. In *Wagner Handbook*, edited by Ulrich Müller and Peter Wapnewski. Translation edited by John Deathridge, 343-53. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Kumar, Shiv K. *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel*. New York: New York University Press, 1962.

- Kunitz, Stanley J. *Authors Today and Yesterday: A Companion Volume to Living Authors*. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1933.
- Kurnick, David. "An Erotics of Detachment: *Middlemarch* and Novel-Reading as Critical Practice." *ELH* 74, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 583-608.
- Laird, Holly A. "Against the English Nation: The Ideological Proto-Modernism of *The Far Horizon*." In *Lucas Malet, Dissident Pilgrim: Critical Essays*, edited by Jane Ford and Alexandra Gray, 185-203. New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Langbauer, Laurie. *Novels of Everyday Life: The Series in English Fiction, 1850-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Ledger, Sally. *Henrik Ibsen*. 2nd ed. Plymouth: Northcote House, 2008.
- Ledger, Sally. *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.
- Lee, Vernon. "Beauty and Sanity." *Fortnightly Review* 58 (1895): 252-68.
- Lee, Vernon. "Comparative Aesthetics." *Contemporary Review* 38 (August 1880): 300-26.
- Lee, Vernon. *Miss Brown*. 3 vols. Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1884.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. Translated by Philip Wander. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1984.
- Le Gallienne, Richard. *The Romantic '90s*. New York: Doubleday, 1925.
- Lewis, Wyndham. "Manifesto." In *Blast*. London: John Lane, 1914.
- Liggins, Emma. *Odd Women? Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women's Fiction, 1850s-1930s*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.
- Livesey, Ruth. *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science*. "Mr. Swinburne's Poems and Ballads." 13, no. 318 (August 4, 1866): 130-31.

- Lundberg, Patricia Lorimer. *An Inward Necessity: The Writer's Life of Lucas Malet*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.
- Macarthur, James. Review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet. *Harper's Weekly* 46 (April 12, 1902): 474
- Macdonald, Kate. "Edwardian Transitions in the Fiction of Una L. Silberrad." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 54, no. 2 (2011): 212-33.
- MacLeod, Kirsten. *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin de Siècle*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Mahoney, Kristin. *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Malet, Lucas. *Adrian Savage*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911.
- Malet, Lucas. *Deadham Hard: A Romance*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1919.
- Malet, Lucas. *The Far Horizon*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1907.
- Malet, Lucas. *The History of Sir Richard Calmady: A Romance*. London: Methuen, 1901.
- Malet, Lucas. "The Progress of Woman: In Literature." *Universal Review* 2, no. 7 (November 1888): 295-301.
- Malet, Lucas. "The Threatened Re-subjection of Woman." *Fortnightly Review* 77, no. 461 (May 1905): 815.
- Malet, Lucas. Review of *The Feminine Note in Fiction*, by W. L. Courtney. *Bookman* 27, no. 159 (December 1904): 116-18.
- Mallock, W. H. *A Human Document*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1892.
- Mallock, W. H. *Memoirs of Life and Literature*. London: Harper and Brothers, 1920.
- Mallock, W. H. *The New Republic*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1877.
- [Mansfield, Katherine]. "Three Women Novelists." *Athenæum* 4640 (April 4, 1919): 140-41.
- Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

- Maxwell, Catherine and Patricia Pulham. Introduction to *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, edited by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham, 1-20. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- McCracken, Scott. *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction, and the Urban Public Sphere*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- McCracken, Scott, and Elizabeth Pritchett. "Plato's Tank: Aestheticism, Dorothy Richardson and the Idea of Democracy." *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 6 (2013-2014): 84-106.
- McDiarmid, Lucy. in "Oscar Wilde's Speech from the Dock." *The Wilde Legacy*, edited by Eiléan ní Chuilleanáin. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003.
- McGann, Jerome. "Wagner, Baudelaire, Swinburne: Poetry in the Condition of Music." *Victorian Poetry* 47 (2009): 619-32.
- Montgomery, Florence. *A Very Simple Story*. London: W. Kent, 1870.
- Morning Post*. "Richter Concerts." June 14, 1881.
- Morris, William. *News From Nowhere*. Edited by Stephen Arata. Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2003.
- Murry, John Middleton. "A Feminine Novel." *Daily News and Leader*, September 22, 1915.
- National Review*. "Roman Catholic Encroachments" 37, no. 217 (March 1901): 9.
- Newman, Hilary. "The Influence of *Villette* on Dorothy Richardson's *Pointed Roofs*." *Brontë Studies* 42, no. 1 (2017): 15-25.
- Newman, John Henry. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: The Two Versions of 1864 and 1865*. Edited by Wilfrid Ward. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931.
- Newman, John Henry. "The Glories of Mary for the Sake of Her Son." In *Newman Reader*, 342-59. National Institute for Newman Studies, 2007. Newmanreader.org.
- Newman, John Henry. "Our Lady in the Gospel." In *Catholic Sermons of Cardinal Newman*, 92-104. London: Burns and Oates, 1957.

New York Times. "A New Trilogy of English Life: Miss Richardson's First Novel of a Governess's Adventures." Unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson. December 31, 1916.

New York Times. "Lucas Malet and Her Work." October 12, 1901.

New York Times. Unsigned review of *The Survivors*, by Lucas Malet. June 18, 1923.

New York Times Book Review. "Life Seen Through the Lens of Humor: George A. Birmingham in *Gossamer* and Other Writers of Current Fiction Portray Human Weaknesses and Shortcomings with a Kindly Touch." Unsigned review of *Rose Cottingham*, by Netta Syrett. February 13, 1916.

Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. Translated from 2nd ed. London: Heinemann, 1898.

Observer. "A Fine New Novel." Unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson. October 3, 1915.

[Oliphant, Margaret]. "Pater's History of the Renaissance." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 114 (November 1873): 604-609.

Ofek, Galia. *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2009.

Oram, Alison. "Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Interwar Discourses." *Women's History Review* 1, no. 3 (1992): 413-33.

Oram, Alison. *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900-1939*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.

O'Toole, Tina. *The Irish New Woman*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Ouida. *In Maremma*. 3 vols. London: Chatto and Windus, 1882.

Ouida. *Moths*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1880.

Ouida. *Othmar*. 3 vols. London: Chatto and Windus, 1885.

Ouida. "The New Woman." *North American Review* 158 (1894): 610-19.

- Ouida. *Under Two Flags*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1910. First published 1867 by Chapman and Hall (London).
- Ouida. Dedication to *Views and Opinions*. London: Methuen, 1895.
- Oulton, Carolyn W. de la L. *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.
- Parsons, Deborah L. *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Parsons, Deborah L. *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Pater, Walter. *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1885.
- Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, The 1893 Text*. Edited by Donald L. Hill. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980.
- Pendennis [pseud.]. "New Novels." Review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson. *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 28, 1915.
- Pollard, Alfred W. "The Governess and Her Grievances." *Murray's Magazine* 5, no. 28 (April 1889): 505-15.
- Pooler, Mhairi. *Writing Life: Early Twentieth-Century Autobiographies of the Artist-Hero*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015.
- Potolsky, Matthew. *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics, and Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Powys, John Cowper. *Dorothy M. Richardson*. London: Joiner and Steele, 1931.
- Priebe, Anna Catherine. "'May I Disturb You?': British Women Writers, Imperial Identities, and the Late Imperial Period, 1880-1940." PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2003.

- Psomiades, Kathy Alexis. *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Psomiades, Kathy Alexis, and Talia Schaffer. Introduction to *Women and British Aestheticism*, edited by Kathy Alexis Psomiades and Talia Schaffer, 1-22. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
- Publishers Weekly*. Unsigned review of *The Far Horizon*, by Lucas Malet. 70 (December 22, 1906): 1827.
- Rabinowitz, Nancy Sorkin. "'Faithful Narrator' or 'Partial Eulogist': First-Person Narration in Bronte's *Villette*." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 15, no. 3 (Fall 1985): 245-55.
- Radford, Jean. "Coming to Terms: Dorothy Richardson, Modernism, and Women." *News from Nowhere* 7 (1989): 25-36.
- Rasula, Jed. "Make It New." *Modernism/ Modernity* 17, no. 4 (November 2010): 713-33.
- Reid, Susan. "In Parts: Bodies, Feelings, Music in Long Modernist Novels by D. H. Lawrence and Dorothy Richardson." *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* (2015): 7-29.
- Review of Reviews*. "The Book of the Month." July 10, 1894.
- Ribeyrol, Charlotte. "From Via Magenta to Via Solferino: A Chromatic Itinerary through John Singer Sargent's and Vernon Lee's Early Aesthetic Works." *Studies in Walter Pater and Aestheticism* 3 (Autumn 2018): 59-75.
- Richardson, Dorothy. "Beginnings." In *Journey to Paradise: Short Stories and Autobiographical Sketches*, edited by Trudi Tate, 111-13. London: Virago, 1989.
- Richardson, Dorothy. Dorothy Richardson to Bernice Elliott, March 11, 1943. In *Windows on Modernism: Selected Letters of Dorothy Richardson*, edited by Gloria G. Fromm, 459. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995.
- Richardson, Dorothy. *Honeycomb*. London: Duckworth, 1917.
- Richardson, Dorothy. Foreword to *Pilgrimage*. Vol. 1. New York: Knopf, 1938.

- Richardson, Dorothy. *Pilgrimage*. 4 vols. New York: Knopf, 1938.
- Rose, Jacqueline. "Dorothy Richardson and the Jew." In *Between "Race" and Culture: Representations of "the Jew" in English and American Literature*, edited by Bryan Cheyette, 114-28. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Rossetti, Christina. "In an Artist's Studio." In *The Complete Poems of Christina Rossetti*. Vol. 3, edited by R. W. Crump, 3:264. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979.
- Rowbotham, Sheila and Jeffrey Weeks. *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis*. London: Pluto, 1977.
- Ruskin, John. Letter to the *Times*, May 13, 1851.
- Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters I*. Vol. 3. In *The Works of John Ruskin*, edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. London: George Allen, 1905.
- Ruskin, John. "Of Queen's Gardens." Vol. 18. In *The Works of John Ruskin*, edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 109-44. London: George Allen, 1905.
- Ruskin, John. "Pre-Raphaelitism." Vol. 12. In *The Works of John Ruskin*, edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 339-93. London: George Allen, 1905.
- San Francisco Chronicle*. "Deadham Hard is sequel to Damaris: Lucas Malet Continues the Story of Her Strange Romance of the East." January 18, 1920, E2.
- Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. "Fiction of To-day." Unsigned review of *Backwater*, by Dorothy Richardson. 122, no. 3171 (August 5, 1916): 138-39.
- Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. Unsigned review of *A Human Document*, by W. H. Mallock. 74, no. 1916 (July 16, 1892): 86.
- Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. "An Original Book." Unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson. 120, no. 3129 (October 17, 1915): vi, viii.
- Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. Unsigned review of *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet. 92, no. 2399 (October 19, 1901): 501.

- Schaffer, Talia. "Connoisseurship and Concealment in *Sir Richard Calmady*." In *Women and British Aestheticism*, edited by Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, 44-61. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999.
- Schaffer, Talia. *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000.
- Schaffer, Talia. Introduction to *The History of Sir Richard Calmady*, by Lucas Malet, ix-xxxii. Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003.
- Schaffer, Talia. "‘Nothing but Foolscap and Ink’: Inventing the New Woman." In *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, edited by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, 39-52. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Schaffer, Talia. "A Novelist of Character: Becoming Lucas Malet." In *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves and Self-Fashioning, 1880-1930*, edited by Marysa Demoor, 73-95. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Schaffer, Talia. "The Origins of the Aesthetic Novel: Ouida, Wilde, and the Popular Romance." In *Wilde Writings: Contextual Conditions*, edited by Joseph Bristow, 212-29. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.
- Schreiner, Olive. *Woman and Labour*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911.
- [Scott, Clement]. Review of *A Doll's House*, by Henrik Ibsen. *Daily Telegraph*, June 8, 1889.
- Sessa, Anne Dzamba. "At Wagner's Shrine: British and American Wagnerians." In *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, edited by David C. Large and William Weber, 246-77. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Sharp, William. "New Novels." Review of *A Human Document*, by W. H. Mallock. *Academy* 42, no. 1052 (July 2, 1892): 9-10.
- Sherry, Vincent. "T. S. Eliot, Late Empire, and Decadence." In *Modernism and Colonialism: British and Irish Literature, 1899-1939*, edited by Richard Begam and Michael Valdez Moses, 111-35. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

- Sinclair, May. "The Novels of Dorothy Richardson." *Egoist* (April 1918): 57-59.
- Skidelsky, Robert. *English Progressive Schools*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969.
- Solano, E. John. "An Appreciation of *The Far Horizon*." *Monthly Review* 26, no. 77 (February 1907): 143-48.
- Srebrnik, Patricia. "The Re-Subjection of 'Lucas Malet': Charles Kingsley's Daughter and the Response to Muscular Christianity." In *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, edited by Donald E. Hall, 194-214. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Stenson, Martin. *The Life and Work of Alan Odle*. Stroud: Books and Things, 2012.
- Stirling, Monica. *The Fine and the Wicked: The Life and Times of Ouida*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1957.
- St. James's Gazette*. "Music." Unsigned review of Herr Richter's Wagner Concerts in London. May 14, 1888.
- Stokes, John. *In the Nineties*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.
- Storr, Merl. "Transformations: Subjects, Categories and Cures in Krafft-Ebing's Sexology." In *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, edited by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, 11-26. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.
- Sturgis, Matthew. *Oscar: A Life*. London: Head of Zeus, 2018.
- Stutfield, Hugh E. M. "Tommyrotics." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 157 (1895): 833-45.
- Sutherland, John. Introduction to *Eminent Victorians* by Lytton Strachey, vii-xviii. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Sutton, Emma. *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism in the 1890s*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *Major Poems and Selected Prose*, edited by Jerome McGann and Charles L. Sligh. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Symons, Arthur. "The Decadent Movement in Literature." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 87 (1893): 858-67.

- Syrett, Netta. *Anne Page*. New York: John Lane, 1909.
- Syrett, Netta. *Child of Promise*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1907.
- Syrett, Netta. *Day's Journey*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1906.
- Syrett, Netta. "The Finding of Nancy." In *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Performance*, edited by Tracy Davis, 643-84. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2012.
- Syrett, Netta. *Nobody's Fault*. London: John Lane, 1896.
- Syrett, Netta. *Rose Cottingham*. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1915.
- Syrett, Netta. *Rose Cottingham Married*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1916.
- Syrett, Netta. *Portrait of a Rebel*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1930.
- Syrett, Netta. *The Sheltering Tree*. London: Bles, 1939.
- Tanner, Tony. *Adultery and the Novel: Contract and Transgression*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979.
- Thomson, George. *A Reader's Guide to Dorothy Richardson's "Pilgrimage"*. Greensboro: ELT Press, 1996.
- Todd, Dennis. *Imagining Monsters: Miscreations of the Self in Eighteenth-Century England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Tompkins, Jane P. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Treuherz, Julian. *The Pre-Raphaelites*. Stockholm: National Museum, 2009.
- Vicinus, Martha. *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Wadsworth, P. Beaumont. "A Leader of Modern Realists: Dorothy Richardson a Novelist Who Tells her Own Story." *Boston Evening Transcript*, 1923. <http://dorothyrichardson.org/bibliography/works on.htm>.
- Wahl, Kimberly. *Dressed as in a Painting: Women and British Aestheticism in an Age of Reform*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013.

- Warrell, Ian, and Robert Hewison. "Ruskin's Pre-Raphaelitism." In Robert Hewison, Ian Warrell and Stephen Wildman. *Ruskin, Turner and the Pre-Raphaelites*, 203-30. London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2000.
- Watts, Carol. *Dorothy Richardson*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1995.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1984.
- Westminster Gazette*. "New Novels." Unsigned review of *Pointed Roofs*, by Dorothy Richardson. October 30, 1915.
- White, Gleeson. "Artistic Book Covers." *Studio* 3 (1893): 15-23.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Winning, Joanne. *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.
- Wilde, Oscar. "The Critic as Artist." In *Intentions and The Soul of Man*. London: Methuen, 1908.
- Wilde, Oscar. "The Decay of Lying." In *Intentions and The Soul of Man*. London: Methuen, 1908.
- Wilde, Oscar. *An Ideal Husband*. London: L. Smithers, 1899.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest*. London: L. Smithers, 1899.
- Wilde, Oscar. "Mr. Pater's Last Volume." *Speaker*, March 22, 1890, 319-20.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Edited by Joseph Bristow. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- [Wilde, Oscar]. "Ouida's New Novel." *Pall Mall Gazette* 7539 (May 17, 1889): 3.
- Willcocks, M. P. "A New Tale of Two Cities." Review of *Adrian Savage*, by Lucas Malet. *Bookman* 41, no. 242 (November 1911): 107-108.

- Williams, Harold. *Modern English Writers: Being a Study of Imaginative Literature, 1890-1914*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1925.
- “‘Woman’ Billiard Player a Suicide.” *Lawrence Daily Journal*, March 30, 1928.
- Woodring, Carl R. “Notes and Queries: Notes on Mallock’s *The New Republic*.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 6, no. 1 (June 1951): 71-74.
- Woolf, Virginia. “Middlebrow.” In *The Death of the Moth*, 113-19. London: Hogarth Press, 1947.
- Woolf, Virginia. “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown.” In *The Hogarth Essays*, 3-29. New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.
- Woolf, Virginia. “Romance and the Heart.” *Nation and Athenæum*, May 19, 1923.
- [Woolf, Virginia]. Review of *The Tunnel*, by Dorothy Richardson. *Times Literary Supplement* 891 (February 13, 1919): 81.
- Yarker, P. M. “W. H. Mallock’s Other Novels.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 14, no. 3 (December 1959): 189-205.
- Yates, Juliet. “Feminine Fluidity: Mind Versus Body in *Pilgrimage*.” *Pilgrimages: A Journal of Dorothy Richardson Studies* 2 (2009): 61-75.
- Yeats, W. B. *The Trembling of the Veil*. London: T. Werner Laurie, 1922.
- Zatlin, Linda Gertner. *Aubrey Beardsley: A Catalogue Raisonné*. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.