

**LAW, THE DOMESTIC
AND SOVEREIGNTY
IN INTERWAR WOMEN'S WRITING**

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ABSTRACT

My Ph.D. examines women's writing in the interwar period through a questioning of the boundaries between the public and private sphere as traditional masculine forms of power based on a system of sovereignty and law enter the domestic realm. I also consider how power might be reimagined abroad. I juxtapose works of popular fiction from E.M. Hull, Agatha Christie and Marie Belloc Lowndes with the modernist writers Sylvia Townsend Warner, Katherine Mansfield and Rebecca West. Like much popular fiction of the early twentieth century, the bestsellers I explore exist in a complex relationship with that of their "other" - modernism. Section One looks at the modernist short story writer Mansfield alongside Christie, the Queen of Crime. The conception of home, for both Christie and Mansfield, is always somewhat uncanny. My readings of sovereignty in Mansfield and Christie are very much underpinned by a notion of the domestic space which becomes permeable to the political sphere at certain times of crisis. By using Giorgio Agamben's theory of bare life within the state of exception, I unpack the notion of how the public and private become conflated. In the uncanny domesticity which haunts the pages of both Mansfield and Christie, the category of *femina sacra* offers a more gender specific reading than that of *homo sacer* or bare life within which I examine the paradoxical notion of legalised murder. The two chapters of Section Two juxtapose Warner's modernist fantasy novels with the popular desert romance novel of Hull. This section examines ways in which colonialism and imagined representations of colonial lands and the colonial "other" impacts on understanding of sovereignty and representations of power. Though apparently from two dissimilar literary worlds, Hull and Warner share a surprising affinity: I look at Warner's imagined representations of colonial lands and the colonial other in terms of how these may impact on understandings of sovereignty and representations of power. I consider how the imagined space of her early novels is broadened to include the historical spaces of her later fictions. In the chapter on Hull I argue that representations of androgynous and cross-dressing women, a theme also apparent in Warner's novels, allow for her heroines to inhabit positions of relative power in relation to their male counterparts. Section Three contrasts the modernist West with popular romance/psychological thriller writer Lowndes. Both writers also have a deep-seated concern with the domestic and its complex relationship with power and rule. Though neither of these authors are consciously writing within the Gothic tradition I draw on notions of this genre to explore the uncanny in relation to images of domesticity that find themselves tainted by the threat of murder. In this section I draw on Freudian psychoanalytic notions, both of the death drive and of *das unheimliche*, to unravel parallels between the works of these two authors specifically examining how representations of death and the recurrent notions of the opposing life and death drives can be read as enactments of the grand-narrative of sovereignty. Although my thesis is concerned with authors who were writing in and around the literary innovations characterised by the modernist movement, this is not a project about modernism in a straightforward sense; rather, I read somewhat marginal modernist figures alongside popular fiction writers who seem to function as auxiliary modernists. Whilst I am comparing the low-brow with the modernist I do not seek to place any value laden judgements on the relative literary merits of these works; though, on the whole, the popular fiction I examine takes a more conservative approach than that of its more innovative modernist counterparts, it still, at moments, disrupts expectations with its critical stance towards conceptions of sovereignty and law.

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¹ Kate Saunders, 'Introduction', in E.M. Hull, *The Sheik* (London: Virago, 1996), pp.v-xi (pp.x-xi).

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines women's writing in the interwar period through a questioning of the boundaries between the public and private spheres as traditional masculine forms of power, based on a system of sovereignty and law, enter the domestic realm. I also consider how power might be reimagined abroad. I juxtapose works of popular fiction by Agatha Christie (1890-1976), E.M. Hull (1880-1947) and Marie Belloc Lowndes (1868-1947) with the modernist writers Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978) and Rebecca West (1892-1983). Whilst Andrew John Miller has recently undertaken a study into sovereignty in the works of interwar modernists W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, my argument is concerned with writers from the margins.¹ Like much popular fiction of the early twentieth century, the bestsellers I explore exist in a complex relationship with that of their 'other', modernism. Modernist writing and the popular fiction contemporary to it have been mutually influential; elements of the popular fiction I have looked at can be seen to embody modernist elements, whilst my readings of modernist fiction are not reliant on a simple understanding of their reactionary qualities to the popular, but engage with them in a more complex correlation. This is the primary motivation behind the chapter pairings. Whilst my thesis is concerned with authors who were writing in and around the literary innovations characterised by the modernist movement, this is not a project about modernism in a straightforward sense; rather, I read somewhat marginal modernist figures alongside writers of popular fiction who seem to function as auxiliary modernists.

The six writers who are considered in the three constituent sections of this project were all born between the years of 1868 and 1892. Though the dates and spans of their literary outputs vary considerably, all were producing fiction during the years in which modernism

¹ Andrew John Miller, *Modernism and the Crisis of Sovereignty* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Maud

was at its height. The works I look at fall roughly (though not exactly) within the period between the two World Wars.² The period between the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945) was characterised by significant changes in societal expectations of women, not least the 1928 granting of the right to vote for women over 21. Fears surrounding the breakdown of conventional gender roles started to manifest themselves in interwar culture. Angela Kershaw and Angela Kimyongür explore this in their discussion of women in Europe during this period:

The desire to ensure that women's dedication to their traditional domestic destinies did not waver manifested itself in a public preoccupation with the public and private conduct of women, with their appearance, with their clothes and hair, with their adoption of such unfeminine habits as drinking and smoking.³

Potentially unfounded fears that the First World War had irrevocably changed women's roles in society since the absence of men, who were away fighting on the battlefield, meant that women were liberated (or forced out) from the restrictions and imprisonment (or potential safety) of the domestic realm dominate literary representations of power in the examples I use in this thesis. Billie Melman notes, however, that the material changes for women following the First World War were, at least in some part, illusory. Following Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L. R. Higonnet, who ask 'when is change not change?',

² I also look at fiction pre-First World War and post-Second World War as a means by which to understand the significance of these two events.

³ Angela Kershaw and Angela Kimyongür, 'Women in Europe Between the Wars: A Culture of Contradiction', in *Women in Europe Between the Wars: Politics, Culture and Society*, ed. by Angela Kershaw, Angela Kimyongür (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp.1-24 (p.5).

she argues that it is difficult to establish exactly how much did actually change for women as perceptions and actuality do not always equate.⁴ She asks: 'Did the war materially change the status of women? Did it enhance change in gender relations, or merely precipitate and accelerate trends already on the move in society, social production, and culture?'⁵ Whether or not these perceptions translated into reality, the fiction I look at here reflects the notion that the interwar period was a time of great change for gendered power dynamics.

Debra Rae Cohen argues that, during The First World War, '[e]ven women's work in munitions factories was often in the press configured in domestic imagery; stoking the fires in a factory could be seen as just another version of keeping the home-fires burning'.⁶ Cohen suggests that this was, in large part, due to the conception of England as an island separate from the rest of Europe which maintained an almost mythical aura of safety and domesticity. This mythical safety is constantly alluded to in all of the authors I examine in this project. Whilst some (Hull and Lowndes in particular), seek to uphold this notion of

⁴ Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.R. Higonnet, 'The Double Helix', in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet et al (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp.31-47 (p.31). They go on to explain that '[t]he social and economic roles of many women undergo rapid and radical transformation both at the onset of war and, in a symmetrically opposed direction, at its conclusion. [...] The radical changes for women precipitated by war are understood to be mere interruptions of "normal" gender relations. The nation calls upon women to change their roles only for the duration' (p.31).

⁵ Billie Melman, 'Introduction', in *Borderlines: Gender and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930*, ed. by Billie Melman (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 1-26 (p.5).

⁶ Debra Rae Cohen, *Remapping the Home Front: Locating Citizenship in British Women's Great War Fiction* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), p.4.

safety and others (Christie, Mansfield, West and Warner), aim to challenge the myth, all find themselves bound by the complex and at times contradictory nature of the home. Jane Garrity comments on a similar correlation between gender, domesticity and nation. Garrity cites a Marie Belloc Lowndes article which appeared in *The Englishwoman* in 1919. Here Lowndes writes that '[d]omestic order....is a necessary part of civilisation...Upon the foundation of the well-ordered home is built the health, the happiness, the prosperity, and the very life of our race'.⁷

Garrity asserts that this extract, 'like so much British feminist propaganda of the interwar period, envision[ed] the privatized feminine sphere of the domestic as central to national culture'. She goes on to write that 'within this pervasive paradigm women are upheld as national saviors, their ameliorative influence portrayed as central to the preservation of the imperial body politic'.⁸ The view that Lowndes puts forth here, and to which Garrity calls attention, is the perception that a strict divide between the public and the private spheres should be maintained. I read notions of domesticity as intrinsically linked to conceptions of law and sovereignty as well as nationhood. As Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes in *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), '[t]he time when all men were enemies, when out-of-doors was one promiscuous battlefield, when home, well fortified, was the only place on earth where man could rest in peace, is past, long past'. Despite this, she claims that 'the *feeling*

⁷ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *The Englishwoman*, March 1919. Cited in Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England: British Modernists and the National Imaginary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.43.

⁸ Garrity, p.43.

that home is more secure and protective than anywhere else is not outgrown'.⁹ These thoughts from turn-of-the-century America can be seen to persist throughout the following decades in post-war Britain. Though the domestic can be read, as Cohen suggests, as a realm of comparative safety, it can simultaneously and paradoxically be read as a site of danger. The boundaries between the domestic and the public spheres are not as distinct as they might seem, and in the fiction I examine there are multiple instances of the conflation of these two spheres. As external danger creeps inside the home so too does the law, which is designed to keep these forces in check.

The disintegration of gender distinctions is, like the collapse of the domestic and public spheres, intimately connected to issues of power. Susan Kingsley Kent writes that '[t]he perceived blurring of gender lines occasioned by the upheaval of war and the social and economic disorder that followed led many in Britain to see in a re-establishment of sexual difference the means to recreate a semblance of order'.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Kent reads the First World War as a period in which feminists began to adjust their conceptions of the masculine and the feminine and, rather than insisting 'upon equality with men [...] gradually gave way to an ideology which emphasized women's special sphere – a separate sphere, in fact'.¹¹ She goes on to write that '[c]onservative and reactionary images of masculinity and femininity emerged as British society sought in the establishment of

⁹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002), pp.37-38. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.287.

¹¹ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.6.

harmonious martial relationships a resolution to the anxieties and political turmoil caused by the Great War'.¹² Despite this, Kent notes that the fashions of the 1920s were dominated by that which challenged this; by effeminate men and boyish women. This was not however an entirely new phenomenon.¹³ Karl Miller notes that in the 1880s and 1890s, 'a hunger for pseudonyms, masks, new identities, new conceptions of human nature declared itself'. As he continues, '[m]en became women. Women became men. Gender and country were put into doubt'.¹⁴ The 'girls who play at being boys, and boys who look like girls' in the likes of Hull's fiction reflect the movement of this notion from the margins into popular culture.¹⁵

This conflation of gender roles becomes particularly apparent in my discussion of Warner and Hull in Section Two but gender confusion is apparent in a number of the other texts I

¹² Kent, *Making Peace*, p.140.

¹³ As Lyn Pickett writes, 'the turn-of-the-century period was one of gender crisis. [...] The *fin de siècle* gender crisis, or, more accurately, the series of crises around the issue of gender, manifested itself most obviously and clamourously in the ongoing debates about women and the feminine'. *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel In the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Arnold, 1995), pp.14-15. Pickett puts these changes down not only to the controversies surrounding 'Votes for Women' campaigns, but also to the emergence of discourses such as anthropology and psychoanalysis, with which new representations of women were introduced.

¹⁴ Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.209.

¹⁵ E.M. Hull, *The Captive of Sahara* (London: Methuen, 1945), p.5. Scott McCracken too recognises this as a time of rethinking in terms of gender. He writes that '[i]n the period in which modernist fiction emerged, new masculinities and femininities, and new subjectivities not previously recognisable as either, were produced at the interstices of between private and public spheres'. *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction and the Urban Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.3.

study here. Poirot, the effeminate detective in Christie's murder mysteries, Harriet Hume, who defies the conventions of the single female in West's novel and Katherine Mansfield's masculine outback women from the early New Zealand stories provide just a few examples of inconsistent gender roles. Whilst this project does not provide an exhaustive account of this gender question, it does rest on the premise of such issues being prominent in interwar fiction. This gender conflation, the blurring of the boundaries of the masculine and the feminine, also becomes significant in my discussion of *femina sacra* which I use as the predominant theoretical framework for this project. Here, as I go on to discuss, the merging of masculine and feminine is met with the mingling of the public and the private spheres.

Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault and Sovereignty Discourse

There is a school of myths connected with the home, more tenacious in their hold on the popular mind than even religious beliefs. Of all current superstitions none are more deeply rooted, none so sensitive to the touch, so acutely painful in removal. We have lived to see nations outgrow some of their early beliefs, but others are still left us to study, in their long slow process of decay. Belief in "the divine right of kings," for instance is practically outgrown in America; and yet, given a king, — or even a king's brother, — and we show how much of the feeling remains in our minds, disclaim as we may the idea. Habits of thought persist through the centuries; and while a healthy brain may reject the doctrine it no longer believes, it will continue to feel the same sentiments formerly associated with that doctrine.¹⁶

The domestic setting is central to the works that I examine in this project. Mansfield Christie, West and Lowndes are concerned with the illusion of safety in the home. Rather differently, but with equivalent emphasis, Warner and Hull depict the home as that which can be transported abroad to provide a conflicting source of safety/oppression abroad. Gilman writes that the perpetuation of the myth of the home as a site of safety from the perilous external world is embedded within the general consciousness, meaning that, although it may bear no resemblance to reality, it continues to hold sway over the popular imagination. She draws an analogy here between the continuation of this particular illusion and the persistence of notions of outmoded conceptions of sovereignty. The juxtaposition of these two myths by Gilman serves as an apt springboard for a discussion of the representation of sovereignty as that which could potentially be regarded as an obsolete form of power in relation to its assimilation with a feminised domestic sphere. These observations display a marked similarity with Michel Foucault's reflection that '[w]here relations between right and power are concerned, [...] one fact must never be forgotten: In

¹⁶ Gilman, p.36.

Western societies, the elaboration of juridical thought has essentially centred around royal power ever since the Middle Ages'.¹⁷ As Mitchell Dean affirms, contemporary ideas of power are 'largely derived from ideas clustered around the ubiquitous but difficult and somewhat obscure concept of "the state"'.¹⁸ While Foucault might claim that '[i]n political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king', the inevitable outcome of this is the issue of how we are to replace the notion of sovereignty with an alternative form of power when all our thinking and discursive systems rely on this concept.¹⁹ The alternative to sovereignty that Foucault proposes is governmentality, which sees power dispersed throughout assorted societal institutions. Ellmann describes Foucault's approach to the disintegration of sovereignty as 'a preposterous fetish left over from a former age'. As Ellmann continues, 'power no longer descends from such a lofty center of authority, but branches out in every direction into the rhizomatic networks of modernity'.²⁰ The collapse of sovereignty is inextricably coupled with the experience of modernity.

According to Foucault, governmentality prescribes 'that the practices of government are, on the one hand, multifarious and concern many kinds of people', and that these practices are also 'internal to the state or society'.²¹ Rather than functioning through repressive laws,

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. by David Macey (London: Penguin, 2003), p.25.

¹⁸ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: SAGE, 1999), p.9.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge, The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1988), pp.88-89.

²⁰ Ellmann, p.40.

²¹ Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. by Graham Burchell *et al.* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp.87-104 (p.91).

power operates here through the construction of societal norms. Nevertheless, for Foucault, thinking about power is necessarily bound up with conceptions of sovereignty. This project is premised on the idea that a kind of sovereignty discourse was in circulation in the interwar period of which I am writing. By sovereignty discourse I mean a vocabulary of power which cannot be separated from a language of sovereignty. As Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Faulk argue, 'sovereignty is not just an idea. It is a way of speaking about the world, a way of acting in the world. It is central to the language of politics but also to the politics of language'. They state that, in talking of power 'we experience what amounts to a *sovereignty discourse*'.²² This discourse of sovereignty becomes particularly apparent in Section Three, in which I read the fiction of West and Lowndes as necessarily embedded within (and alternately struggling against and upholding) this discursive system. I use Freudian psychoanalysis as an example of a concept that is subsumed under this overarching discourse of sovereignty. By psychoanalysis I refer to a theory centred on the notion that the unconscious is governed by hidden laws, which is phallogentric in its focus on the concept of the 'law of the father'.

I recognise all of the authors that I discuss over the course of this project, by necessity, to be writing from within the discursive sphere of sovereignty. To talk of a sovereignty discourse means to speak with a tradition of sovereignty which emerged with an attempt to legitimise monarchical rule. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* defines sovereignty as 'the claim to the ultimate political authority, subject to no higher power as regards the

²² Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Faulk, *The End of Sovereignty? The Politics of a Shrinking World* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1992), p.11; p.2. Emphasis in original.

making and enforcing of political decision'.²³ Likewise, Robert H. Jackson states that '[s]overeignty presupposes that there are no limits of the authorized exercise of state power at any point within a sovereign's jurisdiction'.²⁴ Though the concept of sovereignty has its origins in the Roman Empire, it emerged in something more akin to its modern form in the sixteenth century. Jean Bodin, for instance, argued for a theory of sovereignty based on the divine right of kings. As Bodin writes in *The Six Books of the Commonwealth* (1576), '[t]he person of the sovereign, according to the law, is always excepted no matter how much power and authority he grants to someone else; and he never gives so much that he does not hold back even more'.²⁵ Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762) further developed the concept of sovereignty based on the notion that individuals tacitly agree to be governed under a sovereign power because only by following laws which are made and enforced by this power can individuals be protected from violence against one another. Without this sovereign control, the 'state of nature', in which anarchy is the defining characteristic, will prevail. Rousseau writes that '[t]he Sovereign, having no other force than the legislative power, acts only by means of the laws, and the laws being nothing but authentic acts of the general will'.²⁶ In Rousseau's formulation, the sovereign represents the general will. Our current conception of

²³ Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.498.

²⁴ Robert H. Jackson, *Sovereignty: The Evolution of an Idea* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.17.

²⁵ Jean Bodin, *On Sovereignty: Four Chapters From the Six Books of the Commonwealth*, ed. by Julian H. Franklin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.2.

²⁶ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.110.

sovereignty has emerged from these key thinkers, but sovereignty is now a term which is very much under debate.

If the notion of sovereignty very briefly outlined above represents an outmoded system of rule, it is reasonable to question how power functions. Jean Luc Nancy asks this question when he writes, '[h]ow to think, how to act, how to do without a model? This is the question that is avoided, and yet posed, by the entire tradition of sovereignty'.²⁷ The same question is put forward by Andrew W. Neal: 'We are faced with the problem of how to justify alternative forms of political authority. [...] If we "cut off the king's head," perhaps another, possibly even nastier, head will sprout elsewhere'.²⁸ This project is concerned with the conflicting impulses of fiction to represent power as both that which is tied inextricably to conventional traditions like sovereignty (a system which historically puts power in the hands of the patriarchy), and, concurrently, to attempt to reimagine alternative forms of power out of the fragments left over from the disintegration of a sovereignty discourse. Whilst the more conservative fiction I look at here, particularly that of Hull and Lowndes, tends towards a reaffirmation of traditional masculine forms of rule, the more radical fiction of their modernist contemporaries grapples with competing alternatives.

Though still inextricably caught in the grasp of a sovereignty discourse, the more radical fiction I explore wrestles with competing impulses to develop new ways of thinking of power. Rebecca West's attitude towards the rule of law perhaps best exemplifies this

²⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.141.

²⁸ Andrew W. Neal, 'Cutting off the King's Head', *Alternatives*, 29 (2004), 373-398 (p.381).

paradoxical position. Although the 1920s novels that I examine in Chapter Five hint at her later intellectual development, elements in West's later writings (both fictional and non-fictional) demonstrate her commitment to the rule of law, which she sees as an essential condition of an orderly and harmonious society. Writing on West's nonfictional *The Meaning of Treason* (1949), Glendinning claims that 'Rebecca West's horror for the crime of treason grew out of her respect for the rule of law'.²⁹ Likewise, Nattie Golubov expresses West's ambivalent relationship with the concept of law when she writes that, for West, 'law – experienced as painful because it restricts liberty – is necessary, since it is essential to establish social order and achieve the wellbeing of a community'.³⁰ Whilst West might be the most explicit in her feelings towards law, the other authors I discuss here hold similarly ambiguous views which emerge implicitly throughout their fiction.

Not only are Giorgio Agamben's theories surrounding sovereign power and the state of exception timely in today's political climate but, if we look to the origins of his thought, it becomes apparent that they bear a particular relevance to the political situation in early- to mid-twentieth-century Europe. Indeed, the paradigm that Agamben sets out for modern governance is the Nazi concentration camp of the Second World War. He writes that 'the birth of the camp in our time appears as an event that decisively signals the political space of modernity itself'.³¹ Furthermore, Agamben sees the origins of the universalised state of

²⁹ Glendinning, *Rebecca West: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p.185.

³⁰ Nattie Golubov, 'Rebecca West's "Strange Necessity": Literature, Love and the Good', in *Rebecca West Today*, ed. by Bernard Schweizer (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), pp.206-222 (p.210).

³¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.174.

exception in the emergency measures employed by states in the First World War. The historical period surrounding the two world wars seems to be fertile ground for the application of Agamben's theories of sovereignty in light of the fact that these global conflicts represent the emergence of, in Agamben's view, a new order of rule. Agamben's work, specifically *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (published in its original language in 1995 and published in a translated edition in 1998) and *State of Exception* (published in 2003 and translated into English in 2005), draw heavily on the work of the pro-Nazi German political thinker Carl Schmitt, who originally defined the conception of the 'state of exception'. Though Agamben's work is founded in the political philosophy of the past from the ancients onwards, his philosophy is additionally rooted in more contemporary poststructuralist political theory.

According to Agamben, sovereignty is defined by the capacity to decide on the exception when what the exception amounts to is the suspension of law; in Agamben's terms 'a suspension of the juridical order itself'.³² Agamben's theory rests on the claim made by Schmitt that the '[s]overeign is he who decides on the exception'.³³ This right to decide on the exception necessarily demands that the sovereign inhabit a realm that is not bound by law, since in order to make law the sovereign must be outside that law; in other words, a sovereign must pre-exist law. However, simultaneously, the sovereign decision must be granted legitimacy and so must, in a sense, be inscribed within law. As Agamben writes,

³² Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans by Kevin Attell, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.4.

³³ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. by George Schwab (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p.5.

'[t]he paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact that the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside of the juridical order'. The sovereign's relation to law is conceived as a 'relation of exclusion', which refers to what Agamben describes as 'the extreme form of relation by which something is included through its exclusion'.³⁴ This simultaneous immanence and transcendence of the sovereign figure is a feature that Agamben reiterates continually and, like the sovereign who inhabits this liminal sphere, the state of exception which stems from this figure is placed in this threshold realm:

In truth, the state of exception is neither external nor internal to the juridical order, and the problem of defining it concerns precisely a threshold, or a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other.³⁵

Agamben's notoriously difficult and convoluted conceptions of the sovereign and the state of exception are typified by the paradox that seeks to inscribe that which is outside of law within law. As Andrew Norris describes it, '[t]he sovereign is the unlimited power that makes limits – or, in other words, the ungrounded ground of law'.³⁶

This paradox establishes the foundation for my readings of the fiction of Mansfield and Christie. My subsequent readings in later chapters rely implicitly on the work I undertake in Section One. Representations of violence here are read through the framework of the state

³⁴ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.15; p.18.

³⁵ Agamben, *State of Exception*, p.23.

³⁶ Andrew Norris, 'The Exemplary Exception: Philosophical Decisions in Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*', in *Politics, Metaphysics and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer* ed. by Andrew Norris (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp.262-297 (p.268).

of exception. Reading Mansfield and Christie through Agamben's framework is particularly interesting in light of the fact that their writing careers span the years immediately surrounding the World Wars (the First World War in Mansfield's case and the Second World War in Christie's). The First World War functions as a pivotal event for both Katherine Mansfield, who saw its devastating effects first-hand, and Agamben, for whom it serves as a crucial event in developing the foundations for a permanent state of exception. More generally though, the period surrounding the two World Wars is particularly significant in charting the breakdown of sovereignty. Miller argues that '[t]here is abundant evidence that, among many of those writing in the period between the wars, there was indeed a sense that the First World War had never fully ended: that war had become a perpetual condition'.³⁷ Similarly, Christopher J. Bickerton writes that the Second World War 'saw virtually all the historic nation-states of Europe overrun or overthrown in conquest. Though the sovereign state was restored after the war, it never fully recovered'.³⁸ Though ostensibly peacetime was resumed, the spectre of war still haunted issues of power and sovereignty.

War and sovereign power are closely related, and this is most definitely the case in terms of sovereignty as the enactment of the state of exception. Jean-Luc Nancy affirms this, writing that '[t]he right to wage war excepts itself from law at a point replete with

³⁷ Miller, p.16.

³⁸ Christopher J. Bickerton *et al.*, 'Introduction: The Unholy Alliance Against Sovereignty', in *Politics Without Sovereignty: A Critique of Contemporary International Relations*, ed. by Christopher J. Bickerton *et al.* (London: UCL Press, 2007), pp.1-19 (pp.7-8).

sovereign brilliance'.³⁹ Though pre-twentieth-century warfare may have seen the enactment of the state of exception as a temporary measure that was revoked once peace was resumed, Agamben sees the First World War as initiating the state of exception as an enduring and irreversible paradigm of rule. What led to the foundations of this universalised state of exception were the emergency powers implemented during the First World War, which were never to be fully and finally revoked as they subsumed not only the political world in its traditional sense, but also managed to infiltrate what could be termed the private domestic realm as new orders of power sought to dissolve the distinction between the two.

The blurring of the public/private divide which characterises the state of exception in Agamben's claim that '[b]are life is no longer confined to a particular place or a definite category' and 'now dwells in the biological body of every living being' has specific implications for readings from a feminine perspective.⁴⁰ As the 'masculine' public realm and the 'feminine' private realm become one and the same, the gendered binaries are, to an extent, dissolved. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben charts this disintegration of binaries:

Every attempt to rethink the political space of the West must begin with the clear awareness that we no longer know anything of the classical distinction between *zoē* and *bios*, between private life and political existence, between man as a simple living being at home in the house and man's political existence in the city.⁴¹

³⁹ Nancy, p.107.

⁴⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.140.

⁴¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.187.

The dissolution of these categories converts all life into bare life. Akin to Nancy's statement that '[t]here is no longer any polis since the oikos is everywhere: the housekeeping of the world as a single household, with "humanity" for a mother, "law" for a father', the exclusion from political protection and punishment, once characteristic of the domestic sphere, becomes applicable to the whole of life.⁴² From a feminist perspective, we witness here a more level playing field in which 'masculine' and 'feminine' spaces are no longer separated in terms of politics.

The theoretical framework on which all the readings in this project are based is inspired by a specifically feminine reworking of Agamben's notion of bare life. According to Agamben, historically the domestic sphere belonged to the category of *zoē*; as that which remained distinct from the body politic. In consensus with this concept, the woman in the home was not afforded full political status and, in her exclusion from the political realm, inhabited this liminal sphere of bare life. However, despite the apparent link between bare life and the feminine Agamben never fully established this connection. As Ronit Lentin posits, '[s]urprisingly, and despite the clear link between "nation" and "birth," Agamben dwells only momentarily on the gendered meanings of *homo sacer*'.⁴³ Christina Masters explains this in her discussion of Agamben's *zoē* and *bios*:

[T]he distinction between politically qualified life and bare life, citizens and bodies, politics and nature – has historically been constituted through gendered

⁴² Nancy, p.135.

Ronit Lentin, 'Reflections on Feminist Researchers Constructing Racialised Others: Palestinian Women from *Femina Sacra* to Active Agents of Resistance', in *World Wide women: Globalizzazione, Generi, Linguaggi: Vol, 2* ed. by Franca Balsamo (Torino: Università degli Studi di Torino), pp.39-52 (p.44).

representations central to the very formation and intelligibility of the state, wherein women have been vital to the making of distinctions between what is political and, significantly, what is apolitical.⁴⁴

Drawing on the work of Lentin, who theorises a female equivalent of the category of bare life, Masters claims that 'one could even go so far as to argue that women in the sovereign state have historically already been cast as lives devoid of politics: in other words, bare life'.⁴⁵ This project has been written with this historical condition in mind, whilst also considering how the universalisation of such a condition might impact upon how the texts in question are understood.

Lentin explores whether bare life should be theorised differently in the case of women. Here she questions 'whether the category homo sacer has any gendered implications. Is there a female equivalent of bare life? Is there a *femina sacra*?'.⁴⁶ Masters considers Lentin's theorisation of a female form of bare life as a framework for considering how the case of women might be configured differently:

Femina sacra [...] helps us to think through the specificity of how war operates on women's bodies, without reducing women to dominant representations or massifying them as one among many. This is not to argue that women's lives are necessarily more bare than men's, but rather to critically think through how

⁴⁴ Cristina Masters, 'Femina sacra: The "War on/of Terror", Women and the Feminine', *Security Dialogue*, 40.1 (2009), 29-49 (p.33).

⁴⁵ Masters, p.34.

⁴⁶ Ronit Lentin, 'Femina sacra: Gendered memory and political violence', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29 (2006), 463-473 (p.465).

they are rendered bare in particular ways – ways worth paying special attention to.⁴⁷

For both Masters and Lentin, the female body is distinct from that of the male because of its reproductive function: '[t]he body of woman creates and contains birth-nations and demarcates territories, and is therefore the basis of nation-states'.⁴⁸ Kristen Phillips also recognises the necessity of developing a theoretical framework of the concept of bare life which brings into play the female: 'In using the notion of bare life or homo sacer to describe the life that is without the protection of citizenship in modernity, we need to consider the ways in which female life continues to be positioned precariously in relation to citizenship, and thus is marked as already "bare life"'.⁴⁹ From a historical perspective, if women have in the past been associated with a domestic sphere which remains outside their political reach, then they have already inhabited a position of bare life.⁵⁰ This notion of *femina sacra* can be felt as a lingering resonance in the works of Christie and Mansfield most overtly and is implicit also in my readings of the other four authors in this project.

Domestic spaces in Mansfield, Christie, West and Lowndes are liminal spaces which belong neither wholly to the private nor wholly to the political. In Christie, those who commit

⁴⁷ Masters, p.32.

⁴⁸ Lentin, p.465.

⁴⁹ Kristen Phillips, 'Interventions, interceptions, separations: Australia's biopolitical war at the borders and the gendering of bare life', *Social Identities*, 15.1 (2009), 131-147 (p.134).

⁵⁰ It is worthy of note that Mansfield died before universal suffrage was introduced in the United Kingdom (although in her birth country of New Zealand women were granted the franchise in 1893) and Christie saw in the extension of the franchise to women over 30 in 1918 and then universal suffrage in 1928. Mansfield and Christie were both writing at a time of change for women's political status in society.

crimes sacrifice their right to life and are cast aside as bare life. Bare life becomes more closely related to *femina sacra* than to *homo sacer* by virtue of the domestic settings of the crimes in question. The novel with which I set up my discussion of *femina sacra* in Christie's detective fiction, *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (1975), typifies the feminisation of those placed in the realm of bare life. Returning to the isolated Essex country manor of Christie's first published novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the guests at Style Court are once again swathed in the very domestic setting which proves no protection against murder. In Mansfield the home once again becomes the site for the production of bare life. Mansfield's 1922 story, 'At the Bay' typifies this representing the domestic realm as the space in which the threat of violence is immanent and ever present; and because it is contained within the domestic, this violence is legitimised. Mansfield exemplifies this sense of legitimated domestic violence through representing the apparently promiscuous Mrs Harry Kember as, in the eyes of the others at the bay, deserving of punishment as a consequence of her social and sexual deviancy.

In the final two chapters of this project (those on West and Lowndes), I recognise *femina sacra* as that which enters the home as a consequence of the varying permeability of the walls of the domestic sphere. For instance, Harriet Hume seemingly complacently gives up her life to the power hungry Arnold Condorex as he brings into her Kensington Apartment the political world from outside. In the case of Lowndes, and exemplified in the very last novel that I discuss in this project, *Lizzie Borden: A Study in Conjecture* (1939), the permeability (or otherwise) of the domestic sphere to the political world outside is inextricably linked to the concept of *femina sacra*. Though the patriarch (Mr Borden), attempts to shore his house up against the intrusion of the outside world and therefore rule

over his own domestic affairs with sovereign power, the law still seeps in (although this intrusion of law is not enough to save him). In fact, it is Lizzie Borden's father, in attempting to create this "safe" sphere, who ultimately invites violence and murder into his home. Perhaps this is *femina sacra* at work in its most exaggerated sense; by attempting to deny entry to the law that might protect his family, Mr Borden seeks a vacuum from safety. Perhaps in a sort of poetic justice, it is the patriarch who is cast as bare life also. In the case of Warner and Hull, in which I am dealing with the notion of the domestic recreated outside of its traditional arena, *femina sacra* still makes its presence felt in their articulation of a domesticity which seems to follow them across the globe. Even in their attempted flight from the confines of the home, the women here always seem to find *femina sacra* in pursuit of them. If the state of exception has become the paradigm for rule, then the political is defined solely in terms of what is excluded from the legal protection it affords. The permeability between *zoē* and *bios* becomes easier to understand, and in a sense inevitable, if it is possible to recognise all of society as subsumed under this state of exclusion.

Modernisms, the Popular and the In-between

*Yet it is often the oddest exhibit which tells us most about the museum, its classifications and its process of selection.[...] If women's writing is a house of many mansions, could it be that we have been reluctant to investigate its darkest corners, to move from its well-lit rooms down into the shadowy cellars?*⁵¹

Modernism is slippery to define. It is not limited to highbrow literary forms. In fact, it is not only middlebrow literature which can plausibly be read in terms of its relation to modernism, but also the lowbrow, the supposedly uncultured and 'trashy' bestsellers of the day. Like many works of popular fiction of the early twentieth century, the bestsellers I explore over the course of this project exist in a complex relationship with the 'other', modernism. In beginning to theorise this relationship, Andreas Huyssen writes in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (1986), '[m]ass culture has always been the hidden subtext of the modernist project'.⁵² Whilst modernism can be viewed in an oppositional relationship with popular fiction, it is sometimes more productive to view the correlation between the two not in terms of competing binaries, but rather as different (and distinctive) sides of the same coin. Huyssen states that '[h]igh-low should here be seen as shorthand for a much more complex set of relations involving palimpsests of times and spaces that are anything but binary'. Huyssen is not attempting to argue that the high/low distinction should be dissolved but rather that they cannot be read in binary terms. As he writes, '[t]he cultural space that modernism inhabited was divided into high and low, into

⁵¹ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.22.

⁵² Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p.47.

elite culture and an increasingly commercialized mass culture'.⁵³ For Huysen, '[c]omplexity does not reside only on one side of the old binary'.⁵⁴ The relationship between modernist and popular texts is symbiotic; they feed off one another.

Modernism and popular fiction are interrelated. David Earl, for instance, reads in the mid-twentieth-century pulp magazine and mass-produced paperback a breed of modernism that does not self-consciously pit itself against mass culture but rather incorporates it:

'Pulp Modernism', a seeming oxymoron, obviously conflicts with many of the traditional definitions of modernism—modernism's inscrutability, stylistic experimentation, resistance to or disavowal of the marketplace—and purposefully so, for where and when modernism and popular culture do overlap, it illustrates the shortcomings of the traditional definition of modernism.⁵⁵

Likewise, Nicholas Daly argues for a breed of popular modernism (which seems equivalent in certain respects with the notion of the middlebrow) in the romance novel from the decades leading up to the First World War.⁵⁶ In his work, Daly argues for a definition of 'the

⁵³ Andreas Huysen, 'Geographies of Modernism' *New German Critique*, 34. 1 (2007), 189-207 (p.197).

⁵⁴ Andreas Huysen, 'High/Low in an Expanded Field', *Modernism/Modernity*, 9.3 (2002), 363-374 (p.370).

⁵⁵ David M. Earle, *Re-covering Modernism; Pulp, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), p.13.

⁵⁶ In this project, I use the term 'romance' to refer to a genre of popular fiction in the twentieth century. Whilst it has sometimes been used as a pejorative term, this project seeks to distance itself from this type of value laden interpretation. I use Pamela Regis's definition of the romance novel as 'a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines'. Regis goes on to define eight characteristics that must occur in the romance novel: 'a definition of society, always corrupt, that the

romance rival as a sibling of modernism rather than as its unusually decrepit uncle'.⁵⁷ The popular modernism that Daly discusses however is not that of the lowbrow; it is still classed under the genre of modernism despite the fact that it is not at the elitist end of the modernist scale. Similarly, Earl's 'pulp modernism' focuses on a breed of modernism that embraced rather than eschewed commercialism. What these studies have in common is that they discuss the high and the low within the category of modernism. Where this project differs is in its juxtaposition of a kind of middlebrow modernism with the lowbrow popular bestseller; I am not comparing modernisms but rather reading modernism against and alongside its so-called other. Fredric Jameson, arguing that 'both modernism and mass culture entertain relations of repression with the fundamental social anxieties and concerns, hopes and blind spots, ideological antinomies and fantasies of disaster, which are their raw materials', highlights the conception that both the high and the low emerge from the same cultural, social and political reality.⁵⁸ Though I use the terms high and low to indicate the kinds of fiction I am looking at, I use these labels not because I see one as being of any more value than another but rather because these are the categories which reflect a

romance novel will reform; the meeting between the heroine and hero; an account of their attraction for each other; the barrier between them; the point of ritual death; the recognition that fells the barrier; the declaration of the heroine and hero that they love each other; and their betrothal'. Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p.14. Although I do not systematically breakdown all the novels that I here classify as 'romance' according to these criteria, I do use these as a loose basic guide.

⁵⁷ Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siecle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.10.

⁵⁸ Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', *Social Text* 1 (1979), 130-148 (p.141).

common understanding of meaning; this is not to suggest that they are unproblematic in themselves.

In this project I have consciously chosen to avoid the high-modernists of the interwar period. In looking at interwar women's writing in the context of modernism, the absence of Virginia Woolf seems like a glaring omission, but in examining Katherine Mansfield, Rebecca West and Sylvia Townsend Warner I have chosen authors who are, in some respects, borderline modernists. The field of modernist studies has undergone something of a revolution in the last two decades, and with it the old and hoary definitions have become increasingly obsolete. Anne Charles, in a review article entitled 'A Broader View of Modernism', cites the 'inaugural conference of the Modernist Studies Association, an organization designed to bring together scholars working in what had become the disparate and amorphous field known as modernist studies', as a pivotal event in the redefining of modernism.⁵⁹ As Charles goes on to write:

According to the theoretical assumptions and critical practice endorsed by the 'New Modernisms', no longer was the work of art to be considered in isolation from the biographical, cultural, and ideological circumstances that impacted its production and reception. And no longer was modernist studies the exclusive province of white male academics examining the work of their artistic, racial, gender-inscribed, and ethnic counterparts in England and, sometimes, the United States.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Anne Charles, 'A Broader View of Modernism', *NWSA Journal*, 15.3 (2003), 179-188 (p.180).

⁶⁰ Charles, pp.179-180.

Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid's edited collection *High and Low Moderns: Literature and Culture, 1889-1939* is typical of works which seek to broaden the field of modernist studies.⁶¹ Bonnie Kime Scott has argued persuasively in her two-volume work *Refiguring Modernism* that Rebecca West, alongside her female contemporaries Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes, was a central figure in the modernist movement. As she writes, '[r]efiguring occurred as Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, and Djuna Barnes were selected as central representatives of modernist writing, where typically a cluster of male figures have stood'.⁶² This project engages with modernism in this broader and more inclusive sense.

Alongside the modernists, this project examines the work of popular genre fiction writers Agatha Christie, Marie Belloc Lowndes and E.M. Hull. As with modernism, it is problematical to attempt to categorise these writers under a homogenous label, so, for the purposes of this study, they are all united by their status as authors of bestselling fiction. On being asked for her views on what makes a great bestseller, Lowndes commented that:

I think what you call 'a great best-seller' must have in it what might be called the human note which carries it along. I think it is a cruel thing to bracket *John Halifax, Gentleman* and *Comin' thro' the Rye* with *The Sheik*. *The Sheik* is utter rubbish, and in quite another class to the other two books. The large sale of *The Sheik* type of best-seller is undoubtedly owing to an unscrupulous use of the

⁶¹ Maria DiBattista, 'Introduction', *High and Low Moderns: Literature and Culture, 1889-1939*, ed. by Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.3-19.

⁶² Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism, Volume 1: The Women of 1928* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp.xv-xvi.

lascivious note. [...] Best-sellers of the bad type have a brief period of popularity because they have no appeal apart from that to the reader's sensuality.⁶³

This derogatory remark on the work of her contemporary shows that Lowndes recognised her own brand of fiction as a step above that of the likes of Hull. The tendency to rank works on the high/low scale in modernism is equally apparent in the perceived hierarchies of popular fiction. In a similar spirit to Alison Light's *Forever England: Femininity, Literature, and Conservatism Between the Wars* (1991) where, '[r]ather than setting "highbrow" against "low-brow", the serious against the merely escapist or trashy, [she is] drawn to look for what is shared and common across these forms in the interwar years, and to see them all as historically meaningful', this project does not seek to evaluate the relative literary merit of any of the works that it considers.⁶⁴ However, Lowndes' comment does serve to indicate that the term 'bestseller' is an imprecise and expansive term. According to Clive Bloom, defining the bestseller should in theory be a straightforward task; the bestseller is 'the work of fiction sold in most units (books in a given price range) to the most people over a set period of time'.⁶⁵ Bloom highlights, however, the fact that '[i]n practice the answer is extremely complex, running into difficulties as to the definition of units (hardback; paperback; serialisation) and the period of time (month of publication; a year; the twentieth century), the importance of the price at which it is sold (significance of cost of hardback or paperback) and the definition of fiction itself (whether the work is literary, popular, pulp)'. Furthermore, defining the bestseller in the first half of the twentieth century is complicated

⁶³ Marie Belloc Lowndes, 'Answers to Questions', Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lowndes, M.A.B. Box 1, Works Unidentified-B.

⁶⁴ Light, p.x.

⁶⁵ Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.6.

by the issue that there are no accessible and reliable sources of information of sales figures as there are today; '[u]ntil very recently (the last twenty years of the twentieth century) little could be proved with certainty about what sold best, which authors were most popular or who read or why'.⁶⁶ Despite this uncertainty, the term 'bestseller' is inextricably linked with commercialisation.

As Scott McCracken writes, 'the bestseller belongs to the industrial age. The book trade shares its basic features with other forms of enterprise in the modern capitalist economy: it relies for much of its income on mass production, distribution and consumption'.⁶⁷ Though I do not focus on this aspect specifically, it certainly becomes apparent in my readings of the three popular fiction writers, and this is especially the case with Hull and Lowndes, whose legacy is in large part the result of successful film adaptations which have overshadowed their fame as authors. Even within the sphere of popular fiction there is a vast degree of divergence in the reputation of the authors I am exploring. As Bloom writes:

Popular genres do not, however, have equal status. Some are considered more serious than others (which often means less 'female' or less 'juvenile'). This becomes obvious when one compares the two leading genres that account for

⁶⁶ Bloom, p.6; p.7.

⁶⁷ Scott McCracken, *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.22. Bloom reaffirms this when he writes that '[p]opular fiction is the expression of mass, industrial and consumer society. It is organised into aesthetic categories that often correspond to sociological, political and economic categories, cross-divided themselves by gender considerations. Popular fiction is always commercially orientated and its production and marketing is essentially corporate and industrial, aimed at maximum distribution and sale of units (books) and the capitalisation on past successes for potential future sales' (p.17).

almost all the annual fictional output: detective fiction and women's romance.

Detective fiction always had *cachet*.⁶⁸

If I were to place the popular authors of this study on this purely imaginary scale of perceived degrees of mediocrity then Christie would be at the more 'respectable' end, with Lowndes somewhere in the middle and Hull at the bottom. The highbrow end of the scale (in both modernism and popular fiction) has a tendency to be equated with more radical approaches and the lower with more conservative ones. This project seeks to chart how sovereignty is represented in light of these perceived divisions.

Thesis Overview

Section One of this thesis looks at the modernist short story writer Mansfield alongside Christie, the 'Queen of Crime'. Born within two years of each other, Mansfield in New Zealand and Christie in England, they share a complex, and at times contradictory, concern with underlying violence in the domestic sphere and a fascination with the notion of Englishness. The notion of home, for both Christie and Mansfield, is always somewhat uncanny; it is a conception that is constantly described with a sense of detachment. As well as providing readings of the texts which offer an understanding of the state of exception in Mansfield and Christie, signalled by the paradoxical notion of legalised murder, I ask whether the inscription of this code takes on a specifically female character. I use Ronit Lentin's reformulation of *homo sacer* as *femina sacra* to illustrate how the body, in relation domestic sphere, is typified by its exclusion from the political realm and, consequently, can

⁶⁸ Bloom, p.15. Emphasis in original.

be killed with impunity.⁶⁹ The body in this realm is always vulnerable to the threat of violence.

In Chapter One I explore Mansfield's pre- and post-First World War New Zealand stories. In the pre-war stories I recognise legalised violence as an external threat that poses a risk to the domestic realm through the domestic's inability to deny entry to this violence. Just as colonial New Zealand is recognised as a lawless land in which violence is perpetrated in accordance with the state of nature, so the home is represented as an unprotected sphere. In the post-war stories I read the implicit violence that finds itself at the heart of the domestic sphere as a consequence of the universalised state of exception that prevailed in the wake of the war.

I continue this theme in my discussion of Christie in Chapter Two, in which I explore the role of detective Hercule Poirot as arbitrator of the law. Poirot stands in a position of liminality, being simultaneously inside and outside the legal sphere. He embodies the sovereign exception in his determination of which perpetrators should be punished for their crimes. In Christie, as in Mansfield, we witness the dehumanisation of certain individuals (usually those who have transgressed the law), who are then placed in a realm not dissimilar from that of the state of nature where they can be killed with impunity. As a consequence of their previous actions, they are inscribed as the alive but already dead. Though I draw parallels between Christie and Mansfield, Christie would never have aligned herself with the

⁶⁹ Ronit Lentin, 'Femina sacra: Gendered memory and political violence', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29 (2006), 463–473.

literary elite.⁷⁰ By reading Christie alongside Mansfield I am engaging in a field of scholarship characterised by the work of Gill Plain and Alison Light, which seeks to align middlebrow detective fiction with its modernist contemporaries.⁷¹ My readings here are innovative not in terms of the juxtaposition of these two authors but rather in the theoretical framework of *femina sacra* by which this chapter is underpinned. However, reading Mansfield and Christie comparatively provides the first step through a logical progression to Sections Two and Three, which seek to address, on equal terms, low-brow authors in relation to modernism.

The curious and detached island life that Christie takes as the setting for her novel *And Then There Were None* (1939) sets the scene for my discussion of Warner and Hull in Section Two. Christie's narrator claims that '[t]here was something magical about an island – the mere word suggested fantasy. You lost touch with the world – an island was a world of its own. A world, perhaps, from which you might never return'.⁷² The two chapters of which Section Two is comprised juxtapose Warner's modernist fantasy novels with the popular desert romance novels of Hull. This section examines the ways in which colonialism and the

⁷⁰ Christie reveals her sardonic sentiment towards literary modernism when she has Vicar Leonard Clement in *Murder at the Vicarage* (1930) comment on Miss Marple's novelist nephew: 'He is, I know, supposed to be a brilliant novelist and has made quite a name as a poet. His poems have no capital letters in them, which is, I believe, the essence of modernity. His books are about unpleasant people leading lives of surpassing dullness' (Agatha Christie, *Murder at the Vicarage* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p.247).

⁷¹ See Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), and Light, *Forever England*.

⁷² Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p.29.

imagined representations of colonial lands and the colonial 'other' impact on an understanding of sovereignty and representations of power. Though apparently from two dissimilar, and perhaps even oppositional, literary worlds, Hull and Warner share a surprising affinity as we recognise the proximity of the desert romance and the modernist fantasy genre.

Chapter Three looks at Warner in relation to the modernist fantasy novel. It examines how a sovereignty discourse is variously critiqued and begins to examine how this fantasy realm might be able to provide a narrative space in which to imagine alternative forms of power. From a gendered perspective, it asks how women (or effeminate men) might appropriate or reformulate sovereignty to suit their own purposes. I look here at how the imagined space of Warner's early novels is broadened to include the historical spaces of her later fictions. Chapter Four explores Hull's desert romance novels and asks whether the space of the desert, often read as a space of sexual emancipation for women, can also offer up a potential space for reworking conventional models of sovereignty. More specifically, it deals with women who take on male positions of power and questions whether this amounts to a radical reworking of power or merely reinforces pre-existing notions of sovereignty. In both cases the authors here exhibit an exaggerated concern with home and Britishness in the sometimes exotic settings of their novels; geographical distance is always told through the lens of home and domestic details seem to gain added significance by virtue of their detachment from their conventional settings.

Having moved away (in certain respects) from the very domestic focus of Section One, my last section comes full-circle in its move back to looking at the peculiar movement of law

into the bounds of the home. Section Three contrasts the modernist West with popular romance/psychological thriller writer Lowndes. In Chapter Five I consider psychoanalysis and its relationship with the grand narrative of sovereignty in the fiction of West. Here I ask whether Freudian psychoanalysis is embedded within the same meta-discourse and question the impact that this has on a reading of West's overtly psychoanalytic novels. In West, the domestic sphere functions as the site in which the boundaries between various binaries (life/death, private/political, male/female) are transgressed. I draw on parallels with the Gothic to understand the conflation of these opposites and question whether, in this confusion, West is able to deconstruct the conventional binaries which govern the functioning of a patriarchal system of sovereignty. I explore West's complex feelings towards sovereignty through her association with law and the masculine death drive. In Chapter Six I read Lowndes' 'real crime' fiction as representing the domestic sphere as a place of almost supernatural uncanniness. The walls of the house here do not operate as armour against the outside world but instead are permeable and seem to encourage border crossings. Focusing primarily on Lowndes' novels about murderesses, I read law in these novels as aligned with the masculine and as that which functions to reprimand feminine excesses of 'dangerous' sexuality. Law becomes not just the enforcement of legality, but the enactment of a sovereign power which exerts control over all areas of life as it is seen also to police morality. In both West and Lowndes, the figure of the policeman, who serves as the embodiment of the law and the representative of a system of sovereignty, steps over the threshold of the home. As is the case with West, in Lowndes' psychological murder thrillers the boundaries of the domestic provide scant protection against the threat of law which seeps into the house uninvited.

The two world wars heralded, in Melman's view, a new era in the perception of state power. When Melman writes that 'during World War I, the state, everywhere, made inroads into areas considered as domestic and "private,"' she refers to a movement of the political into the sphere of the domestic that was, in part, irrevocable in terms of perceptions and representations of that power.⁷³ What my explorations of these six authors intend to answer is how this shift has been variously represented and dealt with by this diverse range of fiction. I read Christie as a representative of a kind of popular modernism and, whilst I see Hull and Warner as potentially more conservative in relation to Christie, I ask whether they function in a similar respect. Hull's potentially radical stance on women in the public sphere and Lowndes' affinity with some of modernism's central figures makes this a valid question. I ask how current critical trends on the issue of sovereignty can assist in such an understanding of interwar representations of power and whether the perceived radicalism of the modernist authors here extends to an ability to appropriate or reconstitute conceptions of sovereignty. Matters of gender are at the forefront of all the fiction I survey here, and my opening section uses the framework of *femina sacra* to foreground the focus on the female. Section Two takes gender issues as central in its discussion of the imaginary realm and how this might offer up alternatives to sovereignty by looking at the effect of conflating or inverting the masculine and the feminine. Section Three continues this strand of thought in questioning how West and Lowndes set up law and sovereignty in relation to gender. Implicitly, since this is a project that juxtaposes the high and the low, I aim to challenge preconceptions that the low is inherently conservative and the high inherently radical.

⁷³ Melman, pp.12-13.

SECTION ONE

The Modernist Short Story versus the Detective Novel

In this section of the thesis I discuss the depiction of the paradoxical concept of legalised murder in Christie's and Mansfield's fictions. Though they appear to belong to two divergent genres, Christie to the popular Golden Age detective novel and Mansfield to the nuanced modernist short story, I argue that striking thematic similarities underscore the work of these writers. My readings of sovereignty in Mansfield and Christie are very much underpinned by the notion of a fragile domestic space, which becomes permeable to the political sphere at certain times of crisis. Using Giorgio Agamben's theory of bare life, which occurs within the state of exception, I am able to unpack the notion of the conflation of private and public spheres. This section draws comparisons between the work of these two authors specifically by looking at how the body becomes the site for the most extreme conflation of the public and the private. In the writings of Mansfield and Christie, the domestic is manifested as a sphere which is devoid of legal protection and obligation; in other words, though from opposing ends of the highbrow/lowbrow spectrum, the home functions as a vacuum from the law in the work of both Mansfield and Christie.

In order to situate Christie more clearly within my project it is necessary to trace recent efforts to align her fiction with modernism. This is part of a broader move in detective fiction studies to rethink how the genre is understood in terms of its relation to highbrow literature. For instance, Jon Thompson describes crime fiction as 'the "illegitimate progeny" of high modernism: born out of the same experience of urban modernity that gave its impetus to the great modernist fictions of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Franz Kafka,

Thomas Mann'.⁷⁴ Though Christie's fiction is predominantly rural rather than urban, Thompson's discussion is still highly relevant because of the shared preoccupation of the solving of a mystery. Thompson reads detective fiction and modernist literature as stemming from analogous epistemological positions: 'both are structured around the assumption that appearances disguise a deeper truth; both are organized around the attempt to decode and solve the mystery of existence'.⁷⁵ Thompson draws on the idea of the psychoanalytic text as a blueprint for both forms of writing, specifically drawing on Sigmund Freud's 'Dora' as an exemplar of this form.⁷⁶ What is significant about the case of 'Dora', is that, in his account, Freud recognises the fragmentary nature of the process of psychoanalysis and the role of the psychoanalyst as the figure who fits together the pieces of evidence in order to tell a coherent tale. Drawing on another concern of psychoanalysis, that of memory, Stacy Gillis argues for the relationship between detective fiction and modernist literature, writing that '[u]nderstanding the detective novel as a witness to World War I acknowledges the fragility of memory and the powerful nature of a collective

⁷⁴ Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernism and Postmodernism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.5.

⁷⁵ Thompson, p.112.

⁷⁶ Freud wrote about 'Dora' in his case-study, 'Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (1905). Toril Moi writes that, in this case study, 'Freud himself figures as an archaeologist, digging the relics out from the earth'. Moi continues: 'We must assume that it is Freud himself who has imposed a fictional coherence on Dora's story, in order to render the narrative readable'. 'Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's "Dora"', *Feminist Review*, 9 (1981), 60-74 (p.64). Freud regarded his treatment of Dora as ultimately a failure as she withdrew from treatment before she was 'cured'.

response to death – both concerns of the modernist project'.⁷⁷ So modernism and detective fiction are aligned in terms of both content and form; not only do they take the appearance of a reconstruction of a fragmentary existence, the detective genre is also responding to the same traumas out of which modernist writing emerged.

Christie's fiction, in particular, seems to be situated in unusually close proximity to modernism. Alison Light's *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (1991) marks the emergence of a body of criticism which recognises Christie as embodying 'a modernist spirit'.⁷⁸ Gill Plain's work on Christie and the body is very much indebted to Light's reclassification of Christie, which shifts away from the notion of her as a popular, lightweight author, a category to which she had previously tended to be assigned.⁷⁹ Pierre Bayard's work, *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd: The Mystery Behind the Agatha Christie Mystery* (2000), has also been central to the re-evaluation of Christie's work in terms of narrative form. For Bayard, Christie's fiction is not the straightforward story as which it masquerades, but rather a kind of dialogic narrative which is comprised of multiple

⁷⁷ Stacy Gillis, 'Consoling Fictions: Mourning, World War One, and Dorothy L. Sayers', in *Modernism and Mourning*, ed. by Patricia Rae (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp.185-197 (p.194). Maria DiBattista also deals with the borders of high and low fiction in relation of the detective genre in 'The Lowly Art of Murder: Modernism and the Case of the Free Woman', in *High and Low Moderns: Literature and Culture, 1889-1939*, ed. by Maria DiBattista and Lucy McDiarmid (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.176-193.

⁷⁸ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.61.

⁷⁹ Plain provides reading of crime fiction texts that focus on 'the deployment of gendered and sexualised bodies both living and dead, that at the same time reflect the adaptability of form that has made detective fiction one of the century's most influential modes of popular fiction (pp.5-6).

voices. According to Bayard, Christie uses a 'double-edged discourse – statements that offer two possible but completely contrary, or at least distinctly different, readings'.⁸⁰ By laying emphasis on Christie's elaborate narrative techniques, Bayard problematizes oversimplistic readings of Christie. As Lee Horsley writes, '[w]hat Bayard does is to counter the conception of Christie's novels as the very embodiment of "readerly" texts, instead encouraging the sense that her readers *are* involved as active participants in the production of meaning'.⁸¹ As in both Thompson and Gillis's reformulation of the detective novel, the role of the reader as a key figure in the invention of narrative signification aligns the genre again with modernism's enterprise. Christie's detective fiction deserves the same serious contemplation given to her modernist contemporaries, as the distinction between the two forms is shown to be ever narrowing in the current critical debate, which is increasingly taking genre fiction seriously.

Mansfield, though most definitely a modernist, did not produce exclusively highbrow works. In an analogous way to Christie's connection with modernism, Mansfield holds an interesting affiliation with the popular. As Jenny McDonnell writes, 'Mansfield's writing, shaped as it is by a combination of commercial and aesthetic ambitions, enacts a challenge to the categories of "high" and "popular" culture through her exploitation of different

⁸⁰ Pierre Bayard, *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?: The Mystery Behind the Agatha Christie Mystery* (New York: The New York Press, 2000), p.34.

⁸¹ Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2005), p.44. Emphasis in original.

modes of publication of her work'.⁸² McDonnell goes on to claim that the form of the short story too represented tensions between high and popular cultures. According to McDonnell, Mansfield was able to 'establish a brand of literary modernism that was also both formally experimental and commercially viable; it was here that she found the space in which to articulate "a new word"'.⁸³ To recognise the cross-over between the popular and the modernist is to recognise the space in which these authors can be read simultaneously against a similar theoretical framework. I argue that Christie and Mansfield share a strong preoccupation with the idea of the home. Both write with a sense of detachment from the domestic spaces they depict, which is perhaps related to the actual geographical remoteness of the authors to the settings of their fiction. Christie's travel meant a considerable amount of time spent abroad and afforded her a distant perspective of her home country, whilst Mansfield's most famous portrayals of her native country were written from her new permanent home in Europe. Both authors are often removed and somewhat isolated from the scenes of their fiction; both can be seen in a position of transcendence from their fictional worlds, in which they do not participate, but rather stand outside, or watch over from above.

Raymond Chandler criticises Golden Age detective novels by authors such as Christie and, explicitly in this case, Sayers, writing that '[i]t was second-grade literature because it was not about the things that could make first-grade literature'. He is particularly scathing of

⁸²Jenny McDonnell, "'Wanted, a New Word': Katherine Mansfield and the Athenaeum', *Modernism/Modernity*, 16. 4 (2009), 727-742 (pp.727-728).

⁸³ McDonnell, p.739.

the genre's tendency to create cardboard cut-out characters.⁸⁴ He writes of Sayers' characters that even if at one point her characterisations might have been realistic,

they must very soon do unreal things in order to form the artificial pattern required by the plot. When they did unreal things, they ceased to be real themselves. They became puppets and cardboard lovers and papier-mâché villains and detectives of exquisite and impossible gentility.⁸⁵

Christie's fictional world, like that of Sayers, rests on this notion of outward superficiality: a seemingly calm sea which screens the darker currents underneath. Similarly, Mansfield's short stories are typically set in a tranquil domesticity which belies the dangerous tide that is never fully articulated or understood by the characters themselves. Saikat Majumdar explains this:

From underneath this sanitized, quiet, and uneventful surface, the feminized upper-middle-class domesticity in Mansfield's stories forms a quiet dialectic with possibilities of trauma and violence lurking within her consciousness of colonial and indigenous landscapes. Such violence is literalized only occasionally, but even when it is not brought to the surface it forms a silent undertow in the texture of her fiction.⁸⁶

Both Christie and Mansfield point towards a concealed reality on which the apparent safety of the domestic realm precariously rests. In this section I trace a parallel strand which infiltrates the fiction of both Christie and Mansfield: the notion of legalised violence and

⁸⁴ Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Vintage, 1988), p.12.

⁸⁵ Chandler, p.12.

⁸⁶ Saikat Majumdar, 'Katherine Mansfield and the Fragility of Pākehā Boredom', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 55.1 (2009), 119-141 (p.123).

murder, which I recognise manifests itself as a reaction to the actuality and the imminent threat of war. Horsley writes that the society that Christie portrays is one of strangers interacting theatrically, implying a deliberate revelation of narrative artificiality which secludes characters from communion with the 'real world'. Horsley suggests that, '[i]n this reading, "containment" of crime is double-edged: it allows reassuring closure but also implies that the class represented is preying on itself, and that it contains the seeds of its own destruction'.⁸⁷ This argument could similarly be made about many of Mansfield's short stories, in which the threat of violence in the domestic setting is immanent and yet somehow, in most instances, kept at bay. Though the majority of Mansfield's fiction and almost all of Christie's is physically distanced from the violence of the battlefield, it is embedded within society as a psychic wound, which was inflicted and kept raw by the ever-present threat of death and the changing perception of the value of the body and of human life.

Both chapters in this section read violence and death in the state of exception within the theoretical framework of *femina sacra*. In the uncanny domesticity which haunts the pages of both Mansfield and Christie, the category of *femina sacra* offers a more specific reading than that of *homo sacer*, or bare life. In articulating this gendered version of bare life in both Christie and Mansfield I come back, in both cases, to the representation of the body; specifically I examine how, in bare life, the categories of the living and the dead become conflated. Far removed from the battlefield victims to whom Christie and Mansfield seem to respond, the bodies we see here are usually in the midst of the domestic scene. The figure of the living but already dead, the biologically alive but somehow excluded from the

⁸⁷ Horsley, p.40.

political realm by virtue of being stripped of the right to life, features repeatedly in the works of both of these authors. Whilst this enactment of bare life is sometimes brought about through the characters' own transgressions, whereby they sacrifice their political existence (for instance by breaking the law or taking the life of another), bare life also comes to play on life inside the home irrespective of individual deeds or circumstances. Bare life reveals itself as a feature of both domestic life and of life more generally when it takes on its feminine version, *femina sacra*.

Whilst a specifically gendered approach to using Agambenian theory in reading the detective novel has yet to be undertaken, a small amount of criticism surrounding fiction and the enactment of the state of exception has been produced. In terms of existing scholarly work on literature and the state of exception, work on detective fiction is further advanced than that on modernism, although there is little existing critical work on either and certainly no extended exposition. Lee Spinks uses Agamben's formulation of the state of exception as 'the most productive theoretical context within which to understand the development of a particular literary genre: the American roman noir'.⁸⁸ He writes of this genre:

The detective outsider is always excepted in noir fiction – his position as private detective simultaneously denotes an insufficiency within the established juridical order and his exclusion from the structure of institutional policing. At the same time, he paradoxically comes to guarantee the ethical potential of a society in which the relation between law and ethics has become obscure. Roman noir

⁸⁸ Lee Spinks, 'Except for Law: Raymond Chandler, James Ellroy, and the Politics of Exception', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107.1 (2008), 121-143 (p.125).

continually poses the question of the relation of society's outside to its inside and insists that what is excluded from the juridico-political order also represents the hidden foundation to that order.⁸⁹

Whilst Spinks looks specifically at the detective novels of Chandler and James Ellroy, many of his observations in relation to the detective inhabiting the state of exception are equally applicable to Christie's fiction. More importantly, Spinks' argument provides the precedent for using Agamben's theory of the state of exception as a useful framework in which to read detective fiction. The hard-boiled detective fiction genre about which Spinks writes is far removed from that of the Golden Age British detective novel, but the positioning of the detective as the outsider who operates beyond the purely legal realm is a comparison which can be maintained. Whilst these two figures of the detective are clearly very distinct, this similarity holds. In Christie, the feminised detective figure (in sharp contrast to the ultra-masculine detective of the hard-boiled genre) stands outside the political order and effects a kind of sovereign control which is based very much on this gendered positioning.

The domestic and the female are two aspects which significantly impact upon my readings of the state of exception in Christie's fiction. My readings of the state of exception in Mansfield follow very similar lines, seeing the domestic sphere of which she writes as an exemplar for the enactment of *femina sacra*. In Mansfield, bare life is most evident in the early New Zealand stories, in which women tend to be depicted as exempt from the punishment and protection of law. Whilst these stories are primarily concerned with the domestic sphere, they do not enact *femina sacra* in its truest sense as they symbolize the passage of the state of exception from the outside in. In their precariously defined

⁸⁹ Spinks, p.127.

domestic sphere they embody an absence of political recognition which functions as a microcosm for New Zealand society as a whole. In the later New Zealand stories the gendered designation of the absence of law moves toward a dissolution which sees male and female lives designated equally as bare life. Though bare life is represented in both male and female bodies, paradoxically, in these later stories it becomes more consistent with the notion of *femina sacra*. In these stories bare life is entrenched right at the very heart of domestic life and even the male figures here are somewhat feminised.

Agamben's work clearly resonates with (perhaps unconscious) aspects of the fiction of Mansfield and Christie. However my readings go further than the recognition of the enactment of the sovereign exception. As Judith Butler asks in *Precarious Life*, 'Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?'.⁹⁰ I examine the ways in which Christie and Mansfield engage with this issue. Their historical proximity to the events that Agamben claims to have been the origin of the state of exception, and their extraordinary interpretations of violence and murder within a sphere which can be read as so closely analogous to Agamben's account, is quite unexpected but equally exciting.⁹¹ Both Christie and Mansfield represent in their fiction '[v]iolence against those who are already not quite living, that is living in a state of suspension, between life and death, [that] leaves a mark

⁹⁰ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), p.20.

⁹¹ The state of bare life as it has been variously interpreted, in the current political climate in which certain human beings are denied basic human rights (the treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and unacknowledged civilian casualties of wars waged by the West in the name of democracy perhaps provide the most pertinent illustrations), is equally apparent, albeit in a more subtle and instinctive form, in the authors I am examining here.

that is no mark'.⁹² The fear that both these authors express with surprising unanimity is the notion that the state of exception, in which anyone maybe stripped of their right to life by being designated bare life, has become a universal paradigm.

⁹² Butler, p.36.

CHAPTER ONE

Killing with Impunity in Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand Narratives

*Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man.*⁹³

While the Christie novels I examine in Chapter Two hint at the steady development and progression of aspects of bare life and the state of exception, Mansfield's short stories are distinct in that they reveal something of a paradigm shift, which occurs somewhere between the pre- and post-First World War stories. I have divided the present chapter into two sections in recognition of this partition. Though with Christie I have chosen to look at fiction from the 1930s and 1940s, with Mansfield I look to the preceding decades in order to chart a chronological progression. An apparent consequence of their domestic setting, scenes of violence and death in Mansfield's fiction can be most straightforwardly interpreted as remaining within the confines of the private realm. It would be an oversight to regard Mansfield's stories in isolation from the external political scenes that serve as their backdrop. Prior to her move to Europe, which brought her closer to the events of 1914-1918, Mansfield witnessed the political tension between white colonial settlers/invaders and the indigenous Maori from the relatively safe distance of her middle-class Wellington home. Mansfield was born almost fifty years after the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) was signed, making New Zealand a colony of the British Empire. Following the

⁹³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p.76.

signing of the treaty, New Zealand witnessed over two decades of land wars. As Madjumdar writes:

Within the troubled colonial history of turn-of-the-century New Zealand, the separation of such a private sphere from the traumatized public history is always more apparent than real. Consequently, this threat of violence and drama, forever lurking in the background, symbolically punctures the staid and quotidian texture of the stories, either directly or figuratively.⁹⁴

The conflation of the public and private spheres is a consistent feature of Mansfield's fiction. As in Christie's work, the domestic is never impermeable to the influence of the public sphere. However, this influence is not one-directional; on a more complex level it is also possible to suggest that political existence comes to resemble that of the domestic in a more symbiotic relationship. In this chapter I chart the movement of the dead body from the margins of the page to centre stage, a passage which reflects the universalisation of the state of exception. I also show something of the development of the notion of *homo sacer*, which sees bare life move from a more general condition of existence in the early New Zealand narratives to a more specifically feminine condition, suggested by Lentin's term *femina sacra*, in some of Mansfield's later stories. Whilst one element of my argument is that the effects of the First World War fundamentally changed the way in which Mansfield was able to inscribe death within the confines of her fiction, I also claim that this movement is inextricably linked to the shift toward a more developed notion of the domestic in her work.

⁹⁴ Madjumdar, p.124.

The First World War serves as the pivotal event around which Mansfield's representations can be variously charted. As Patrick Morrow writes, 'Like other British Empire writers of her generation, Katherine Mansfield's most traumatic and meaningful experience with public world events was the First World War. In the case of Mansfield, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of this massively tragic event'.⁹⁵ Mansfield was affected personally by the tragedies of war when her brother was killed in service in 1915. Mansfield's representations of death seem to undergo a paradigmatic shift in the years following the war, at the heart of which is the movement of previously marginalised deaths to the centre of the narrative. In contrast to the early New Zealand stories, 'The Woman at the Store' (1911), 'Ole Underwood' (1912), and 'Millie' (1913), which sought to depict and transcribe murder as that which remained, in effect, in a sphere external to both law and text, the representation of death, as it moves towards a literal inscription on the page, becomes analogous with the process by which nations sought to inscribe within the law the paradoxical notion of legalised murder. I end the first section of this chapter with a discussion of 'How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped' (1912), an example of the potential emancipatory facet to this apparent legal void. Whilst *femina sacra* seems to define much of existence in the detective fiction of Christie, Mansfield's work bears a more complex relationship with the term in that it is sometimes hard to distinguish where the public ends and the private begins. I read, in Mansfield, the First World War as a crucial point in the merging of the domestic and the political which sees not only a slippage between the two categories but also a concentration of the political at the heart of the home.

⁹⁵ Patrick Morrow, 'Katherine Mansfield and World War I', in *Literature and War*, ed. by David Bevan (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1990), pp.39-44 (p.39).

As Evelyn Cobley writes, 'the First World War brought home that war is indeed highly contradictory in that it encourages soldiers to kill each other so as to preserve the kind of civilised society that was intended precisely to prevent such murder'.⁹⁶ Acutely aware of such a paradox, Mansfield's post-war stories, 'At the Bay' (1922), 'The Garden Party' (1922), and 'The Voyage' (1922), caution against the kind of state monopoly on violence to which Freud alerts his reader in his criticism of the First World War: '[t]he individual citizen can with horror convince himself in this war of what would occasionally cross his mind in peacetime – that the state has forbidden to the individual the practice of wrong-doing, not because it desires to abolish it, but because it desires to monopolize it, like salt and tobacco'.⁹⁷ Like these various theorisations of the inscription of the illegal within the law, Mansfield's New Zealand stories are repeatedly forced to deal with the contradictory relationship between violence and law. The post-war stories often reiterate on a wider scale the manner in which law retracts itself from instances of violence in the early 'savage' tales. Following Agamben's claim that 'World War One (and the years following it) appear as a laboratory for testing and honing the functional mechanisms and apparatuses of the state of exception', my readings of Mansfield's New Zealand stories demonstrate that the state of exception, which can be read in certain occasions of violence in the early stories,

⁹⁶ Evelyn Cobley, 'Violence and Sacrifice in Modern War Narratives', *Substance*, 23.3 (1994), 75-90 (p.75).

⁹⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts on War and Death', in *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and other works*, ed. by Albert Dickson, trans. by James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1991), pp.61-89 (p.66).

becomes the organising pattern according to which Mansfield's later representations are structured.⁹⁸

I read the early New Zealand stories as exhibiting a kind of violence which is excluded from a pre-existing order of law. The three stories mentioned above are often read as analogous. For example, Andrew Bennett and Pamela Dunbar have both noted that these particular stories rest on conceptions of violence and lawlessness.⁹⁹ As Bennett contends:

In 'The Woman at the Store', 'Ole Underwood', and 'Millie', [...] Mansfield seems to suggest that New Zealand society is constituted precisely in its absence, an absence of cultural and social conventions that allows undistinguished physical violence – usually unpunished or at the very least not punished by official legal process and in that sense too outside the law – to predominate.¹⁰⁰

Violence here is reminiscent of a Hobbesian state of nature whereby, in the absence of law, any act becomes permissible in a war of all against all. However violence in these stories does not function in a total absence of legality.¹⁰¹ In Hobbesian philosophy, the state of

⁹⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. by Kevin Attell, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.7.

⁹⁹ Andrew Bennett, *Katherine Mansfield* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2004); Pamela Dunbar, *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

¹⁰⁰ Bennett, p.38.

¹⁰¹ Hobbes writes that: 'The RIGHT OF NATURE, which Writers commonly call Jus Naturale, is the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own Life, and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own judgement, and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto' (p.79).

nature necessarily predates law; violence in Mansfield's stories operates rather in terms of its exception from a legal system. Violence in these early New Zealand stories straddles a liminal sphere which is neither immanent nor transcendent to law; the victims here are human beings yet their lives are excluded, to a certain extent, from the protection offered by the political realm. I argue that this sense of liminality is reflected in narrative terms as death occupies a central space in these stories and yet remains largely unwritten; that is, death in these early stories occurs, as Anthony Alpers has noted, 'outside the actual narrative'.¹⁰² By bringing death onto the page in the post-war stories, Mansfield attempts to place it within the rules and boundaries of the narrative. Echoing, to a certain degree, the state sanctioned murder that arose from the suspension of normal peacetime laws, Mansfield's stories can be read as a reflection of the process whereby states sought, effectively, to place killing within the limits of the law. Whilst bare life is a feature of domestic existence, it does not seem to be exclusive to this realm, and as such, categorising it as *femina sacra* seems more problematic than a similar move in Christie. Nevertheless, Mansfield's clear emphasis on the domestic makes it highly useful to attach it to such a theoretical framework.

The State of Nature in the Colonial Narrative

Mansfield's early New Zealand stories, written in the years immediately prior to the First World War, are largely centred on representations of murder which I and others argue can be understood as the manifestation of struggles in an emerging nation whose recent past was characterised by the violence of colonisation. New Zealand's history of European colonisation was marred by the bloodshed and disorder that is inevitable when tribal lands

¹⁰² Anthony Alpers, *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1954), p.192.

are unfairly appropriated and two incompatible systems of life, both in terms of the social and the political, are forced to assimilate. The European history of New Zealand is saturated with episodic aggression and brutality from the introduction by Europeans of guns to the Maori tribes which caused, according to Keith Sinclair, 'murder [to] spread out like waves from a stone dropped in the pool of tribal society', to the New Zealand Wars which spanned the central years of the nineteenth century.¹⁰³ My readings of these stories examine the way in which Mansfield's fiction addresses the idea of murder which stems from knowledge of violence in her native New Zealand; a violence, in the localised sense, impervious to the more global trauma that was later to be inflicted by the First World War.

The setting for 'The Woman at the Store' typifies the anomic space in which justice is carried out in accordance with supposedly natural laws. 'The Woman at the Store' details the story of three riders who chance upon a vaguely recollected store which was once managed by a beautiful blonde woman. On arrival the riders find the store in a state of deterioration and the no-longer beautiful woman mirrors its dishevelled nature. After reluctantly allowing the three characters to stay the night, it is determined that the absence of the woman's husband can be attributed to the fact that she has murdered him. The solitary settlement in the New Zealand backblocks where the travellers seek shelter is characterised by a sense of hostility which is embodied by the store's inhabitants. 'Too much alone', the woman at the store is depicted by the narrator in almost animalistic terms as a madwoman; like a beast her 'nostrils expand [...] as she breathe[s]'. A child is described in similar terms as '[a] mean, undersized brat', 'a lunatic with a lunatic's cleverness'.¹⁰⁴ Here,

¹⁰³ Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand* (Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin, 2000), p.41.

¹⁰⁴ Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Stories* (London: Penguin, 2007), p.553; p.556; p.559.

as Claire Tomalin suggests, Mansfield reveals her 'first deliberate portrayal of her native country, a vivid and almost sinister evocation of the atmosphere of the sparsely inhabited wilderness, [...] the "savage spirit" of the place'.¹⁰⁵ The woman at the store is described by the travellers as 'a figure of fun'. She is the image of decay: 'Looking at her, you felt there was nothing but sticks and wires under that pinafore front teeth were knocked out, she had red pulpy hands'.¹⁰⁶ She is evocative of this sense of vulgarity and coarseness. This 'savage spirit' too infects 'Ole Underwood'. Like the wife who takes the (natural) law into her own hands, Ole Underwood murders his wife in a fit of personal vengeance and, like the woman and her child, he is described in similar non-human terms as a clawed 'ole swine' who 'scuttled like a rat' and 'sneaked [...] like a cat'.¹⁰⁷ By depriving her characters of the higher human attributes and assigning to them only visceral traits, Mansfield places them in a realm which excludes them from a political existence and denies them the essential protection such an existence offers.

Haunting both these stories is the absent figure of the spouse. In 'The Woman at the Store', it is revealed through the child's drawing of 'the woman shooting at a man with a rook rifle and then digging a hole to bury him in' that the figure of the husband has been killed by his wife. In this lawless land the woman has had to seek justice without recourse to the state judicial system. The absence of the husband or father is symbolic of the absence of the sovereign. The fact that, as the woman reveals, she would have had her husband 'lynched for child murder', had they have been living in a populated coastal region, suggests a

¹⁰⁵ Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life* (London: Viking, 1987), pp.95-6.

¹⁰⁶ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.564.

¹⁰⁷ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.553.

general lawlessness rife in New Zealand life which is only amplified in the desolation which serves as the setting for the store.¹⁰⁸ According to Masters, *femina sacra* implies 'the naturalization of women's sexualized reproductive labour [and] [...]the domination and subjugation of women by men, wherein their bodies could be controlled, used and violated with impunity'.¹⁰⁹ Unable to utilize the law in order to reprimand her husband for the sexual violation of her body, the woman in Mansfield's story murders her husband in what she imagines as an act of justice to avenge him for her four miscarriages. The murder here operates as a form of resistance to the exclusion from the political realm to which individuals subsumed under the category of bare life are subjected.

Although the colonial settings of the stories I look at here seem far removed from the civilised domesticity of the later stories, they do represent a variety of *femina sacra* which moves across into the apparently more domestic stories. The early stories denote bare life in its more primitive form. The characters in these stories are placed in a precariously walled domestic sphere but it is always one contaminated with savagery. Though the characters in these stories are described in animalistic terms, their classification as such is neither unexpected nor the result of individual misdeeds or character traits. Rather they are positioned in the category of bare life by virtue of their proximity to the state of nature. Bare life becomes *femina sacra* as it crosses into the boundaries of the home; whilst it apparently exists within the domestic sphere, it does not appear as the product or defining feature of the domestic as it is more inclined to do so in both Christie's work and in the later Mansfield stories. Bare life in these early stories does not emanate from the domestic but

¹⁰⁸ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.561; p.558.

¹⁰⁹ Masters, p.33.

rather infiltrates its boundaries from outside. The walls of the makeshift wooden shacks that the characters inhabit may keep the weather out but they provide scant shelter from the society outside.

Mansfield's story 'Millie' evokes most clearly the complex position that the crime of murder occupies in New Zealand society, which is apparently torn between the two orders of the state of nature and the rule of law. Like 'The Woman at the Store' and 'Ole Underwood', 'Millie' centres on a murder that has taken place off the page prior to the story and, similarly, it is concerned with attaining justice which, as in 'The Woman at the Store', is granted outside the law. The story focuses on the fugitive, Harrison, who is supposed to have murdered Mr Williamson in a bloody attack. Much indebted to Henry Lawson's short story, 'The Drover's Wife' (1892), the story's protagonist, Millie, is left alone in her sweltering house as the men ride off on horseback to track down the absconder.¹¹⁰

Millie finds Harrison behind a woodpile at the back of her house. Providing food for the murderer, who she finds sheltering on her property, Millie says, 'They won't ketch him. Not if I can 'elp it. Men is all beasts. I don't care wot 'e's done, or wot 'e 'asn't done'. Though Millie claims not to 'care anythink about justice', the twist at the end sees Millie savagely

¹¹⁰ The house in 'The Drover's Wife' is described as being isolated in the bush: 'Bush all around - bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilisation - a shanty on the main road'. Henry Lawson, 'The Drover's Wife', in *While the Billy Boils* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981), pp.155-165 (p.165).

rooting for Harrison's capture: 'And at the sight of Harrison in the distance, and the three men hot after, a strange mad joy smothered everything else. [...]. "A-ah! Arter 'im, Sid! A-a-a-h! Ketch him, Willie. Go it! Go it! A-ah, Sid! Shoot 'im down. Shoot 'im!'"¹¹¹ Millie seeks not justice but a kind of wild and savage revenge. Here, where the law holds little sway, violence takes place as a kind of game; Millie feeds Harrison and allows him to rest before the game may continue. Millie's treatment of Harrison mirrors Walter Benjamin's reflection of the frequency with which 'the figure of the "great" criminal, however repellent his ends may have been, has aroused the secret admiration of the public'.¹¹² Violence, as it exists outside the bounds of law, is threatening to that law, but it also provokes a sort of savage excitement. In 'Millie' justice is sought, not in law, but through the natural order.¹¹³

In 'Millie' we witness the permeation of the state of nature into the domestic sphere. As Majumdar articulates, 'the feminine private sphere is abruptly punctured by violence enacted in a masculine public domain'. Majumdar goes on to enunciate the significance of this by stating that '[t]his reveals a troubling of the domestic sphere of settler colonial life that had been so jealously guarded from the trauma-ridden public spaces of colonial history'. For Majumdar, the attempt by white settlers in New Zealand to impose a safe domestic space amongst the violence of colonisation was little more than a smoke screen

¹¹¹ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, pp.576-577.

¹¹² Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorism, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken, 2007), pp.277-300 (p.281).

¹¹³ Though, as Dunbar argues, '[n]owhere of course does the story confirm the fugitive's guilt in the murder that his pursuers – self-appointed agents of summary justice – accuse him of: he has been convicted only by their settler animosity' (p.57). This kind of rule without recourse to the juridical system brings the risk of injustice also.

to conceal the inevitable: 'Whilst the public space of colonial history in a place like New Zealand is inevitably ridden with the continuity of conflict, violence and trauma, the white settler society tries its utmost to ensure the construction of a feminized domestic space that is seemingly sheltered and distanced from such conflicts'.¹¹⁴ In such a reading the very notion of 'domestic space' itself becomes problematic; in 'Millie' we might question whether the home is little more than a façade with paper thin walls through which the enactment of bare life can pass through effortlessly.

Just as the public and the domestic are conflated in 'Millie', so too are the boundaries of law and outlawry. However much it is possible to read the settings of these early stories as inhabiting a sphere of lawlessness, Mansfield deliberately problematises such simplistic interpretations. Though the murders apparently occur both off the page and outside the law, they nevertheless retain a certain connection with both law and narrative which cannot be severed. As Bennett has recognised, '[w]hile New Zealand is presented as a place of lawlessness and outlawry, a place of the outsider, the stories complicate this sense of a New Zealand 'identity' by suggesting its involvement in a context of British imperialism'. As he goes on to argue, 'in "The Woman at the Store", "Ole Underwood" and "Millie", the imperial power is represented as an uncanny presence within the otherness of New Zealand settler culture'.¹¹⁵ Though, as Bennett rightly notes, these stories are characterised according to their 'absence' of law, they cannot be said to inhabit a state of nature in an authentic sense. It is not as if Mansfield's characters inhabit an entirely lawless domain in

¹¹⁴ Majumdar, pp.130-131.

¹¹⁵ Bennett, p.40.

which absolute anarchy reigns; rather, their exclusion from law takes on a greater significance.

'The Woman at the Store' provides a particularly pertinent illustration of this idea. In contrast to the travellers, the woman and her daughter remain nameless throughout; they are, in a sense, denied the same status as human beings afforded to the other characters as they apparently inhabit a world quite separate from that of their visitors. To use Agamben's terms, they are not afforded life in its political sense but rather are subsumed under the category of 'bare life'; as such they are excluded from the political order. Agamben, in scrutinising life as it is excluded from political existence, writes that 'the life of *homo sacer*, or of the bandit' is characterised by the conception that 'his entire existence is reduced to a bare life, stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide'.¹¹⁶ These individuals, stripped of their categorisation as humans, can be treated like animals and apparently killed without this act being defined as murder. As Robert Buch argues in his reading of Agamben, 'it would be a misunderstanding to regard bare life as something that precedes the political order'. Rather, '[i]t is the outcome of a peculiar operation, in which sovereign power retracts itself'.¹¹⁷ What both Agamben and Buch claim is that the state of nature cannot coexist with a legal system. Rather, we can infer that what might initially appear to be enactments of violence in the state of nature feasibly represent violence in a more intricate and complex relationship with law and order.

¹¹⁶ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.183.

¹¹⁷ Robert Buch, 'Seeing the Impossibility of Seeing or the Visibility of the Undead: Giorgio Agamben's Gorgon', *The Germanic Review*, 8.2 (2007), 179-196 (p.190).

The closing sentence of 'The Woman at the Store', as the travellers depart, is filled with loss and absence: 'A bend in the road, and the whole place disappeared'.¹¹⁸ This emphasises the ease with which crimes in these rural New Zealand outposts can be purposefully forgotten whilst others are purposefully remembered. Benjamin asserts that 'violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law'.¹¹⁹ Reading Benjamin, Agamben affirms that '[w]hat the law can never tolerate – what it feels as a threat with which it is impossible to come to terms is the existence of a violence outside the law'.¹²⁰ What 'The Woman at the Store' exposes is the extent to which violence is excluded from law in an attempt to uphold that very law. By setting up an opposing paradigm which paradoxically seeks to inscribe this 'outside of law' within law by setting up what Carl Schmitt, and subsequently Agamben, defines as the 'state of exception', the murders that take place here are neutralised in terms of the threat that they pose to law and society. Some part of the state system is making the decision over who deserves political significance and of when the law should be applied. As long as the violence occurs in a zone that has been, paradoxically, legally inscribed as outside the law, its law-threatening content is neutralised.

'The Woman at the Store' is very much a story which resonates with the political reality which Mansfield recognised. As Majumdar acknowledges:

Mansfield's recollection of the 'most horrible massacre' of Opipi is made in the same notebook entry that contains the source material for the store in 'The

¹¹⁸ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.562.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin, p.281.

¹²⁰ Agamben, *State of Exception*, p.53.

Woman at the Store' (*Urewera* 86). The two entries are in fact just a few lines apart from each other. Her awareness of a traumatic colonial history rooted in the same landscape that served as the setting of the story, it is possible to suggest, influenced her depiction of what is one of the bleakest, bitterest, and darkest ambiances in her work.¹²¹

Ian Gordon asserts that 'Millie' 'is a reworking of the violence of "The Woman at the Store"', and indeed both stories are derived from the *The Urewera Notebook*, Mansfield's 1907 travel diary.¹²² As a nineteen-year-old, Mansfield embarked on a camping trip in New Zealand's North Island. According to Anne Maxwell, '[t]his tour was the New Zealand equivalent of the European Grand tour in that it functioned as a rite of passage into the independence of adulthood'. Maxwell goes on to write, '[t]he route taken by the small group was through an extremely remote and hilly part of the North Island known as the Ureweras—a region inhabited by the Tuhoe people'.¹²³ *The Urewera Notebook*, which was not intended by Mansfield for publication, details her recollections of this trip. As Gordon writes of 'The Woman at the Store', '[s]o close is the dependence of the one text on the other, she must have had the Urewera notebook open before her as she was writing [...]. All the elements of the story and much of the language is derived directly from the Urewera notebook'.¹²⁴ In a diary entry dated Wednesday 11 December, 1907, Mansfield writes of the store they break

¹²¹ Majumdar, p.137.

¹²² Ian A. Gordon, 'Introduction' to Katherine Mansfield, *The Urewera Notebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp.11-30 (p.29).

¹²³ Anne Maxwell, 'Encountering the Cultural Other: Virginia Woolf in Constantinople and Katherine Mansfield in the Ureweras', *Ariel*, 38.2-3 (2007), 19-40 (p.19).

¹²⁴ Gordon, p.27.

their journey at: it 'is so ugly – they do not seem glad or surprised to see us – give us fresh bread – all surly and familiar – and they seem troubled'.¹²⁵ The similarities between the real and the fictional stories are remarkable and by reading the two alongside there is a sense of the conflation of the fictional and the non-fictional as Mansfield draws on first-hand experience of the settings in which she is writing. In writing this colonial history as a semi-domestic scene, Mansfield initiates the process of political slippage into the home.¹²⁶

To a certain degree the killings represented in these stories remain unpunishable. Though the relics of imperialism, present in both 'The Woman at the Store', in which the walls of the whare are 'plastered with old pages of English periodicals', and 'Millie', with the 'coloured print' of 'Garden Party at Windsor', attest to the notion that law does indeed exist, it is a law that is so distant from the backblocks that it becomes almost negligible.¹²⁷ As Patricia Chu expounds in relation to 'The Woman at the Store', '[t]he Queen's oversight seems to emphasize rather than relieve the isolation of the store and its desolate surroundings'.¹²⁸ It is the fact of the deliberate exclusion from the political realm that, in a

¹²⁵ Katherine Mansfield, *The Urewera Notebook* (see Gordon, above), p.86.

¹²⁶ Patricia E. Chu has argued that '[i]n "The Woman at the Store" Mansfield makes (white, British) female bodies the sites where authority and national identity are constructed and destroyed'. *Race, Nationalism and the State in British and American Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.61. She goes on to assert that '[t]he failure to maintain a properly regulated private life is femininity's as well as whiteness' failure' (p.67). If we are to understand the absence of effective law in these stories as the failure of femininity to somehow tame the supposedly masculine nature of the bush then bare life here is clearly not the product of the feminine domestic but rather it could be read as its opposite.

¹²⁷ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.553; p.572.

¹²⁸ Chu, p.64.

sense, strengthens the sovereignty of the colonial centre; the sovereign figurehead is both there and not there; she looks on but, in the face of violence, chooses to avert her gaze. As Agamben writes, '[h]e who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it'.¹²⁹ In theory, a legal order exists but, in practice, their antipodal distance means they are effectively abandoned by the laws that might otherwise protect them. In the later stories, set in a more 'civilised' New Zealand, the distance from the colonial homeland is diminished as British cultural influences seem to be superimposed on the whole of cultural life. Simultaneously, the violence that remains on the periphery of the early 'savage' New Zealand is transferred so that it also subsumes this civilised world.

Mansfield's early stories do not always follow the formula, which suggests the absence of law as a danger; in certain instances it is represented as emancipating. In 'How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped' (1912), two Maori women invite the child Pearl to accompany them as she is playing outside her house whilst her mother remains unaware, engaged in housework. Although, as the story's title attests, 'How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped' represents a transgression of law, it does not depict a crime which is aggressive or violent. On the contrary, the 'crime', at least through the eyes of the child, takes her away from her repressive white colonial existence. As Pearl asks the women in shock: 'Haven't you got any Houses of Boxes? [...] Don't you all live in a row? Don't the men go to offices? Aren't there any nasty things?'.¹³⁰ The 'nasty things' from which Pearl has been taken away are all part of the supposedly civilised world which are represented by the '[!]ittle men in blue coats'.

¹²⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.28.

¹³⁰ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.522.

These 'little blue men came running, running towards her with shouts and whistlings—a crowd of little blue men to carry her back to the House of Boxes'.¹³¹ According to Richard Brock, this story explores 'the world *outside* the domestic boundary [...] whilst the space inside the garden gate is referred to only implicitly'.¹³² Brock argues that the world that Pearl inhabits is a liminal space: '[t]he story begins with Pearl already on the boundary of her domestic space, swinging on her garden gate'.¹³³ Mansfield opens the story with the following sentence: 'Pearl Button swung on the little gate in front of the House of Boxes'. The image here is repeated in the third sentence also as we witness Pearl swinging 'on the little gate, all alone', as she sings to herself, only to be interrupted by the approach of the women who 'kidnap' her; 'Pearl stopped swinging, and when they saw her they stopped walking'.¹³⁴ Pearl, who is perched in this marginal space which is neither inside nor out, embodies the conflation of the domestic and the external world, but rather than representing this as a dangerous meeting, in this instance Mansfield points towards a potential deliverance from repressive state institutions. Though Mansfield's representation of the absence of law in both domestic and public spheres is generally negative, the story of Pearl Button complicates such a simplistic interpretation.

¹³¹ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.523.

¹³² Richard Brock, 'Disapprobation, Disobedience and the Nation in Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand Stories', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 24.1 (2006), 58-74 (p.69). Emphasis in original.

¹³³ Brock, p.69.

¹³⁴ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.522.

Mansfield and *Femina sacra* in the Post-War Domestic Story

Brock's discussion of the shoring up of the domestic sphere in Mansfield's later stories seems an expedient place to begin an analysis of her post-war stories. According to Brock, the periphery between the domestic and the outside world is clearly underscored:

Beyond the house, the family's domestic space is clearly demarcated by the cultivated garden, with its deliberate arrangement of familiar British plants emphasising the total dependence of the family's economic and social status, as well as its value system, on the colonial centre. The domesticated space of the garden exists in sharp contrast to the recently settled land beyond it, which is glimpsed only rarely [...]. The garden gate becomes the boundary between two seemingly irreconcilable worlds, a boundary whose crossing becomes a highly significant and often transgressive event.¹³⁵

The conflation between the public and the private which characterises the early New Zealand stories is ostensibly disentangled in these later works and this impacts on the way in which the framework of the state of exception can be employed in these cases. In the early stories the state of exception is equally present both inside and outside the house because there is little to separate the two. In the later stories the state of exception and bare life which accompanies it is right at the heart of the domestic sphere, which is clearly distinguished from the outside world. Despite the clearer division between the two, the state of exception is still present in both spheres; this is significant as it shows not just a slippage of bare life from one sphere to the other but also the naturalisation of it within the home, which serves as the very heart of the nation.

¹³⁵ Brock, pp.58-59.

Far removed from the rural backblocks, Mansfield's mature stories focus on the more 'civilised' colonial New Zealand of her childhood. This New Zealand, which appears in 'At the Bay' (1922), 'The Garden Party' (1922), and 'The Voyage' (1922), amongst others, is deeply inculcated with the classist pretensions of the colonial centre to which Mansfield emigrated to in 1908. When Bennett writes of Mansfield's later work that 'violence is often qualified by (if not constituted as) the decorum of English and European society', he reaches the crux of the matter: violence here becomes that which law seeks to make immanent to itself, so that it may not present a threat.¹³⁶ Mansfield's post-war New Zealand stories offer a neutralised representation of death. They do not show any of the reality of battlefield deaths and mutilated bodies that Trudi Tate identifies when she writes of the '[t]wo sights [that] are figured repeatedly in the soldiers' narratives of the First World War: corpses and bodies in pieces'.¹³⁷ Far removed from the front-line narratives that sought to present the horrific realities of war, in Mansfield the bodies of the dead are formulated very differently in an attempt to replicate the kind of death which can be more easily owned by a system of law. In order to constitute a conception of death that will not be immediately rejected by society, a part of death must remain untold. It is within this sphere that Mansfield constructs her accounts of death; for her, death always remains in a liminal place. Going back to Brock's claim concerning the more clearly distinguished boundaries between the domestic and the public, violence here is not transmitted smoothly through the flimsy walls of the house but finds itself already embedded at the heart of the

¹³⁶ Bennett, p.38.

¹³⁷ Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.64.

home. The violence here remains hidden and inconspicuous, whereas that which occurs in the early stories, though off the page, is unambiguous.

'The Garden-Party' offers the most significant illustration of the theme and serves as a crucial signifier of the change that takes place between the pre- and post-war representations. Here Mansfield licenses the entry of death onto the page; the pivotal event in 'The Garden-Party', Laura's visit to the home of Scott, the carter, whose death threatens to disturb the party taking place nearby, attests to this. Whereas the bodies of the dead were absent from the pages of the early stories, here the image of the corpse is clearly privileged. Though he is the victim of 'a beastly accident', 'a horrible affair', Scott's body bears no witness to a violent death.¹³⁸ As Christine Darrohn articulates, '[i]n "The Garden-Party", Mansfield creates a story that depends on a man's violent death even as it erases traces of injury from his body'.¹³⁹ She goes on to claim that the 'terrifying image is transformed into a picture of beautiful, peaceful, still wholeness, an image to assuage anxieties that the war raises – not merely for Mansfield, but for an entire society – about the vulnerability of the male body to violence'.¹⁴⁰ I argue that in transforming the unbearable into the bearable, Mansfield responds to a general process by which violence is misrepresented in a misguided attempt to justify its existence in order to validate war. By sanitising death and placing it right at the core of the home, the bodies here are somewhat feminised; *femina sacra* operates in its truest sense when it is thus centred.

¹³⁸ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.257.

¹³⁹ Christine Darrohn, "Blown to Bits!": Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden-Party" and the First World War', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 44.5 (1998), 513-539 (p.514).

¹⁴⁰ Darrohn, p.520.

Atkinson speaks to this when he writes that 'Laura's aestheticization of the corpse' functions as a method 'whereby she neutralises its danger by refusing to see the body for what it is'.¹⁴¹ Instead of being the 'awful' experience that her brother imagines it to be, Laura describes her viewing of the body in the house as 'simply marvellous'; the acerbic tone with which Mansfield presents Laura's assessment evokes the veneer of cheerfulness and false optimism with which the state and its population regarded the war from the home-front.¹⁴² Death here no longer represents a chaotic, almost anarchic scene in which bodies are desecrated, but rather that which can be ordered and justified; a war in which the bodies of men who die as heroes fighting for a better civilisation have a sense of righteousness and dignity inscribed on their bodies. It is only because death has here been effectively deactivated and deprived of its law-threatening content that it has been allowed onto the page.

The death which takes centre stage in 'The Garden-Party', like the deaths that occur in many other of Mansfield's post-war stories, is blameless; there is no perpetrator, unlike in the early New Zealand stories. Her representations of death can, on the one hand, be seen as capable of offering up a consoling picture on which to ground the post-war process of mourning. They can also be read as a sardonic reaction to the First World War's monopoly on murder, which sought to transform all death into the neutralised conception which is apparent in 'The Garden-Party'. It is a conception that we see variously repeated in

¹⁴¹ William Atkinson, 'Mrs Sheridan's Masterstroke: Liminality in Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party"', *English Studies*, 87.1 (2006), 53-61 (p.59).

¹⁴² Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.261.

Mansfield's post-war stories; for instance in 'The Daughters of the Late Colonel' (1922), in which the Colonel has died in a domestic setting far removed from the horror of the battlefield, and 'The Stranger' (1922), in which a passenger on a ship, a young man like the carter in 'The Garden-Party', dies peacefully in Janey's arms. Exemplified in 'At the Bay' when the Grandmother tells Kezia that death is a fact of life – that '[i]t happens to all of us sooner or later' – is this naturalised and neutralised conception of death, with which the First World War nations sought to legalise murder and falsely reconstitute it as inevitable and necessary.¹⁴³ Though death features as the pivotal event in the aforementioned stories, the process of dying is notably absent. As Françoise Defromont writes of 'The Garden Party', Laura is undoubtedly changed by her encounter with death, 'but she misses her last step in her experience and fails to understand what death actually means'.¹⁴⁴ Death in 'The Garden-Party' denotes a fundamental omission in the representation of war which creates only blameless victims without perpetrators. 'The Garden-Party' rests on the idea that the neutralised representation of death that it portrays corresponds to an attempt to universalise the conception of state-sanctioned murder. The ability to kill with impunity is no longer the preserve of the colonial backwaters but rather has become the norm for the entire civilized world.

The liminality of the death in 'The Garden-Party' seeks to inscribe death within the page whilst omitting the process of dying. This can be read, in Agamben's terms, as a reflection of the enactment of the state of exception in which state-sanctioned violence, though in a

¹⁴³ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.226.

¹⁴⁴ Françoise Defromont, 'Impossible Mourning', in *The Fine Instrument: Essays on Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Paulette Michel and Michel Dupuis (Sydney: Dangoroo Press, 1989), pp.157-165 (p.163).

sense legitimised through a suspension of the laws that prohibit such violence, necessarily inhabits a space that is neither immanent nor transcendent to law; neither entirely on nor entirely off the page. This theme in the post-war stories can be differentiated from its pre-war counterpart in the degree to which it can be read as a universalised paradigm within the post-war society. In inscribing death within this liminal space Mansfield challenges the received opinion that justifies the violence and murder within war as legitimate, and instead places it on the indistinct ground which sees the suspension of all law. In such a state, all violence apparently becomes fair game. As Benjamin Morgan has pointed out, '[w]hat is peculiar – and dangerous – about the state of exception is that the suspension of legal norms allows *any* action to potentially acquire legal force'.¹⁴⁵ Knowledge of the brutalities that took place on the battlefields of the First World War instigated fears that perhaps this violence might contaminate society at large in the aftermath of the war.¹⁴⁶ Jon Lawrence affirms that 'Britain after the First World War was haunted by the fear that violence had slipped its chains – by the fear that ex-servicemen, the general public, the state, or perhaps all three, had been irrevocably 'brutalized' by the mass carnage of four and a half years of war'.¹⁴⁷ Mansfield's post-war stories can be read as a reaction to this conception as we see the brutality which existed in the pages of her early 'savage' New Zealand tales become subtly etched into the very fabric of life for the inhabitants of her supposedly more civilised New Zealand.

¹⁴⁵ Benjamin Morgan, 'Undoing Legal Violence: Walter Benjamin's and Giorgio Agamben's Aesthetics of Pure Means', *Journal of Law and Society*, 34.1 (2007), 46-64 (p.60). Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁶ See Clive Emsley (2008), Susan Kingsley Kent (1993) and Joanna Bourke (1999) amongst others.

¹⁴⁷ Jon Lawrence, 'Forging a Peaceable Kingdom: War, Violence, and Fear of Brutalization in Post-First World War Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 75 (2003), 557-589 (p.557).

Significantly, Mansfield's representations of violence in her later New Zealand stories can be read as an attempt to place the characters in the same depoliticized realm that denies the right to life in various instances already discussed in the early stories. 'At the Bay', the story that precedes 'The Garden-Party' in the collection, is an attempt to reinscribe the violence that is absent in 'The Garden-Party'. More akin to the early New Zealand stories, 'At the Bay' sees violence enter the very core of the story. In contrast to these early stories violence enters a sphere in which it is ordinarily absent; that is, the supposedly civilised domestic realm of middle-class New Zealand life. For instance, Jonathan, after his early morning swim, emerges from the water 'blue with cold. He ached all over; it was as though someone was wringing the blood out of him'.¹⁴⁸ In light of the palpable anger that Stanley directs toward him in his resentment at being denied the solitude of the water, this 'wringing the blood out of him' functions, in part, as a metaphor for this underlying familial violence that we find reiterated throughout. Likewise, imagined violence is also figured against the transgressive Mrs Harry Kember, whose murder by her husband, we are told, is privately imagined by the other women who envisage her 'stretched as she lay on the beach; but cold, bloody, and still with a cigarette stuck in the corner of her mouth'.¹⁴⁹ As Angela Smith notes, 'the women at the bay expect Mrs Kember to be murdered by her husband'.¹⁵⁰ Dunbar too reaffirms Harry's fate: 'Harry Kember is rumoured to sleep with other women, and there is a popular belief that he will one day commit a murder – with his

¹⁴⁸ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.209.

¹⁴⁹ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.219.

¹⁵⁰ Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p.169-170.

wife as victim. The fantasy seems to stem in part from the feeling that violent death would be an appropriate fate for the flashy Mrs Kember'.¹⁵¹ Mrs Kember embodies the notion of *femina sacra*; the imagined murder of this woman who is described in the story in terms of the already dead (she is '[p]arched, withered, cold' as she lies 'stretched on the stones like a piece of tossed-up driftwood'), has, in a sense, already been granted impunity by the society at the bay, who see her as a threat.¹⁵²

The bodies of the dead are everywhere; even the living are represented, to an extent, as the living dead. Mrs Kember, for instance, is placed in this liminal realm that traverses death. Tate's assessment of the proximity between the living and the dead in the trench narratives of the First World War expresses the extent to which this idea permeated the consciousness of the men on the frontline. Tate claims that '[b]eing rejected as a form of rubbish is precisely how soldiers see themselves at certain moments in the war narratives, especially in Barbusse's novel [*Under Fire* (1917)]; it is particularly disturbing to find the living being cast as abjected, like the dead'.¹⁵³ To be cast aside as waste is to be placed outside of the political. Margaret Higonnet *also* expresses this idea when she writes that '[i]n some sense to be at the front is to be in a suspended state of not yet but already dead'.¹⁵⁴ Just as the lives of the soldiers who were sent to the frontlines were regarded as the living dead – that

¹⁵¹ Dunbar, p.161.

¹⁵² Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.218.

¹⁵³ Tate, p.68.

¹⁵⁴ Margaret R. Higonnet, 'Women in the Forbidden Zone: War, Women, and Death', in *Death and Representation*, ed. by Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp.192-209 (p.202).

is, their deployment to the frontlines was tantamount to a death sentence – Mansfield represents even those who are distant from the frontline (and New Zealand was about as far away as it was possible to get), inside this realm.

Death in Mansfield's work becomes that which is paradoxically immanent in all existence as state protection of life is withdrawn. It is an idea that we find reiterated again and again throughout her mature New Zealand stories. For instance, in 'Prelude' (1920), Beryl suggests this idea when she utters that '[o]ne may as well rot here as anywhere else', and later, in a letter in which she writes of her dissatisfaction at moving away from the town: 'buried, my dear. Buried isn't the word'.¹⁵⁵ There appears to be an intimate connection with life in private as opposed to the public realm and the lives of the front line soldier. Writing on 'At the Bay', Smith insightfully claims:

Even the most homely scenes in the story are imbued with a hint of danger, and superficially of domestic violence; the threat is not that one member of the family *will* hurt another, but that some are licensed by their society to inflict habitual pain on others, and it is deeply resented. [...] the compulsion to become involved in sexual relationships, and so to conform to gender roles, is imagined as oppression justifying murder, which suggests the violence of resentment about it.¹⁵⁶

What we witness here is the relocation of the theme of sanctioned violence within the law from the political to the domestic sphere in the kind of dissolution that Agamben talks of when he writes that in the state of exception is 'a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in

¹⁵⁵ Mansfield, *The Collected Stories*, p.31; p.55.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, p.169. Emphasis in original.

which all legal determinations – and above all the very distinction between public and private – are deactivated'.¹⁵⁷ These later stories are symbolic of the process by which murder was written into law in the war years, to the extent that it served as a catalyst for the movement of this paradigm into the private familial realm. Entering into the domestic bare life seems to take on the specifically female form of *femina sacra*. What a comparison between Mansfield's representations of violence and death in the pre- and post-war New Zealand stories demonstrates is the extent to which state-legitimated violence, which is initiated by the enactment of the paradoxical state of exception, might contaminate all spheres of society. In the later stories the universalised 'state of exception' becomes 'not the exception', as it occurs in the early savage tales, 'but the rule'.¹⁵⁸ Despite their apparent disparities, Mansfield's two New Zealands are more alike than we might first want to admit. The woman from the store and her cohorts, who inhabit the 'savage' stories, are no longer singled out in their exclusion from the protection and punishment offered by the political realm, as the state of exception threatens too the middle-class world of the Sheridan and Burnell families of Mansfield's post-war narratives.

¹⁵⁷ Agamben, *State of Exception*, p.50.

¹⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999) pp.245-255 (p.248).

CHAPTER TWO

Agatha Christie and Justice Outside Law: Legalised Murder and the Second World War

*Eh bien, I have no more now to say. I do not know, Hastings, if what I have done is justified or not justified. No – I do not know. I do not believe that a man should take the law into his own hands...[...] But on the other hand, I am the law! As a young man in the Belgian police force I shot down a desperate criminal who sat on the roof and fired at people below. In a state of emergency martial law is proclaimed.*¹⁵⁹

During the Second World War, Christie wrote the manuscript for *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (1975). Safely stored in the a bank vault, the novel, in which Christie pens the demise of her most famous detective, Hercule Poirot, was not published until the year prior to her own death in 1976.¹⁶⁰ Throughout the Second World War, Christie was determined to be outwardly resilient to the threats posed by air raids, but she was not unaware of her own mortality, and this novel serves as a tidying up of affairs for her fictional detective. The epigraph is from the postscript to *Curtain*, in which Poirot has left a manuscript detailing the particulars of his last mystery to be read by his sidekick Captain Hastings four months after his own death. In the postscript Poirot reveals that he took the life of the murderer Norton since the crimes of the latter were being committed beyond the reach of legal punishment. Thus the detective himself becomes a murderer when he takes life and law

¹⁵⁹ Agatha Christie, *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (London: Fontana, 1989), p.218.

¹⁶⁰ According to Marty S. Knepper, Christie 'had locked in a vault two complete typescripts, one novel featuring Hercule Poirot and another with Miss Marple, both composed during World War II but with almost no references to that era'. 'The Curtain Falls: Agatha Christie's Last Novels', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 23.4 (2005), 69-84 (p.69).

into his own hands; in his own eyes he *becomes* the law. Significantly Poirot invokes the idea of 'martial law' to justify his actions. In the context in which it was written I argue that the link between Poirot's 'state of emergency' and the much more far-reaching and deadly state of emergency which was the Second World War are inextricably linked. In this chapter I look at Christie's depictions of legalised murder both as they are represented in her fiction of the 1930s, the years leading to the Second World War, and those novels published in the early 1940s, during the war itself. *Curtain* represents the most extreme expression of a principle which finds itself more subtly incorporated into much of Christie's fiction; the tenet that in order to effectively police a society the governing body must exist as part of the system but simultaneously must be exempt from its punishment.

This chapter focuses on *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), *Appointment with Death* (1938), *And Then There Were None* (1939), *Evil Under the Sun* (1941), *The Hollow* (1946) and *Curtain* (1975); all novels, with the exception of *And Then There Were None*, which feature Christie's Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. Just as I used the First World War as the pivotal event around which to organise Mansfield's stories, the Second World War provides an analogous function in my consideration of Christie. However, whilst the First World War serves as an epistemic break in Mansfield, the influence of war on Christie's fiction is more nuanced. Christie's work is deeply entrenched in an epoch very much defined by the events of two world wars. Christie was prolific and her body of detective fiction is enormously rich. The focus of this chapter on the Poirot novels to the exclusion of other important novels, such as those in the Miss Marple series, is because Poirot offers such an excellent analogy for the embodiment of the sovereign in the state of exception. Whilst a similar Agambenian framework might very well be applied to Christie's broader range of fiction, for the

purposes of this project I have had to be more selective in order to provide an appropriately thorough reading.

In *Policing Narratives and the State of Terror*, Robin Truth Goodman explores how detective narratives offer a liminal space between the domestic and the political. Examining the 'crisis of the modern nation-state by studying the way popular stories of policing pose limits to the public sphere of law enforcement through the increasing privatization of detection',¹⁶¹ Goodman observes that the Golden Age detective novel played a decisive role in charting this process:

Narratives of the police provide exemplars of changing liberal ideas about privacy, because, like women under contemporary capitalism, the police have a privileged relation to privacy. In the evolving traditions of detective fictions, police investigations involve digging into the private lives of suspects and victims in order to piece together secret identities, interior spaces, and personal histories that, in response to a crime, come into first contact with state authority.¹⁶²

Goodman goes on to refer more specifically of the Golden Age detective novel, writing that women in these texts, because of their intimacy with the domestic, are well placed as detective agents. Goodman argues that because of their economic marginality and their separation from the public sphere these women retain a certain sense of distance from the law. Goodman contends that detectives such as 'Lord Peter Wimsey because of his

¹⁶¹ Robin Truth Goodman, *Policing Narratives and the State of Terror* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), p2.

¹⁶² Goodman, p.29.

independent status as an aristocrat [...] outside the wage system' and 'Sherlock Holmes because of his *pro bono* causes and outside benefactors' inhabit a similar position to their female counterparts in terms of their distinctive economic positioning. Goodman maintains that, despite this, 'they always help to secure the State by instituting and practicing the order of law'.¹⁶³ Though these detectives apparently operate outside the law they are complicit in its interests.

Poirot corresponds with this model of the detective with his independent status and his effeminate characterisation. Philippa Gates describes Poirot as an example of 'cultured and androgynous masculinity', while, for Sally Munt, Poirot 'is a feminine hero'.¹⁶⁴ Poirot, she writes, 'is a parody of the male myth; his name implies his satirical status: he is a shortened Hercules, and a *poirot* – a clown'. She elucidates this further, noting that '[h]e is narcissistic, emotive, feline, apparently irrational, eccentric, quixotic, obsessed with the domestic, and socially 'other' in that he is a Belgian'.¹⁶⁵ Poirot's character then is associated with the feminine and the crimes he detects are primarily those that take place within the feminine domestic realm. Through his alliance with the domestic Poirot necessarily inhabits a sphere that is perceived to be beyond the scope of the masculine-dominated state juridical system; he polices yet he is not the 'Police'. A reading of Christie's novels through a gendered variant on Agamben's *homo sacer* is appropriate due to the centring of the domestic.

¹⁶³ Goodman, p.33.

¹⁶⁴ Philippa Gates, *Detecting Men: Masculinity and the Hollywood Detective Film* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006), p.31.; Sally Munt, *Murder By the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.8.

¹⁶⁵ Munt, p.8.

Poirot's liminal position is one that places him both in the same sphere as that of the crimes he investigates (the domestic) and in a position of transcendence which enables him to administer justice without necessarily using the legal apparatus of the state.

Curtain exemplifies Poirot as the sovereign exception. The novel is unique in the lengths to which it goes to break with readerly expectations, severing itself also from the conventions of the genre by employing the detective simultaneously as the murderer. Poirot disrupts expectations not only in the very serious matter of life and death but also in surprising but trivial ways. Following Poirot's death in *Curtain*, Hastings learns initially from George, Poirot's former valet, and then posthumously from Poirot himself, that he wore a wig and touched up his moustache; appearances, as far as Poirot is concerned, are evidently deceptive.¹⁶⁶ Though seemingly inconsequential, these small details only add to an unsettling rupture of expectations. In *Curtain* the reader is duped in much the same way that Hastings, though he has his suspicions, fails to comprehend the true Poirot. As Bayard notes: 'the book rests on the classic narrative play of every detective novel: The most unlikely suspect is the killer. As the mythic figure of the investigator, Poirot is the most unlikely suspect among all the characters, since he is proscribed from killing by his

¹⁶⁶ When Hastings suggests to George that Poirot must have dyed his hair George refutes this. Hastings replies: 'Nonsense. [...] It was as black as a raven – looked quite like a wig it was so unnatural'. George responds to this saying apologetically: 'Excuse me, sir, it was a wig. M. Poirot's hair came out a good deal lately, so he took to a wig' (*Curtain*, p.194). Poirot later restates this in his final letter to Hastings: 'You may not have realized it, but I wear a wig, Hastings. You will realize even less that I wear a false moustache. (Even George does not know that)' (p.214).

function'.¹⁶⁷ What Bayard is pointing to is a kind of breached sovereign transcendence on the part of the detective. Ordinarily it is the detective who forms the organising principle of the detective novel. Like Agamben's sovereign, the detective occupies a liminal sphere neither entirely within, nor entirely without, the narrative and the law. As Knepper argues, '[w]hen [Poirot] feels he must, as in *Curtain*, he takes the law into his own hands to protect the innocent and stop a murderer the law cannot touch'.¹⁶⁸ In the exceptional circumstances evinced by the murders that take place in *Curtain*, Poirot is compelled to invoke his position of exception, becoming the embodiment of the law himself. As Poirot states in *Dumb Witness* (1937), 'in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred cases, shall we say, I am on the side of the law. The hundredth – well, the hundredth is different'.¹⁶⁹ In this 'hundredth' case Poirot operates in a realm which transcends legal boundaries.

In order to prevent further murder, Poirot must operate within this extra-legal sphere since the method employed by the man he eventually eliminates is itself beyond the reach of law; '[m]ake no mistake', states Poirot, 'X [the seemingly benign Norton] could not be touched by the law. He was safe'.¹⁷⁰ As Poirot writes in his posthumous manuscript:

And I saw that I had come across at last, at the end of my career, the perfect criminal, the criminal who had invented such a technique that *he could never be convicted of crime*. [...] The deaths of Desdemona, of Cassio – indeed of Othello himself – are all Iago's crimes, planned by him, carried out by him. And *he*

¹⁶⁷ Bayard, p.115.

¹⁶⁸ Knepper, pp.69-84.

¹⁶⁹ Christie, *Dumb Witness* (London: Fontana, 1989),p.110.

¹⁷⁰ Christie, *Curtain*, p.200.

remains outside the circle, untouched by suspicion – or could have done so. [...]
Now you must realize this, Hastings. Everyone is a potential murderer. In everyone there arises from time to time the *wish* to kill – though not the *will* to kill.¹⁷¹

Shakespeare's *Othello* becomes crucial in the unveiling of the mystery in *Curtain*. Hastings realises, '*Othello!* It was *Othello* I had taken from the bookcase that night when Mrs Franklin had died. Was that the clue?'.¹⁷² Harold Bloom asserts that 'Iago has been a fecund ancestor in high literature. His progeny include Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Claggart in Melville's *Billy Budd*, and Judge Holden in Cormac MacCarthy's *Blood Meridian*'.¹⁷³ Though from popular fiction rather than 'high literature', Christie's Norton can be added to this list of descendants.¹⁷⁴ Nick de Somogyi further develops the *Othello/Curtain* connection, writing that, '[a] "small cheap edition" of *Othello* furnished Agatha Christie with one of her final clues. *Curtain* (1975) is, as its subtitle promises, *Poirot's Last Case*'.¹⁷⁵ According to De Somogyi, who uses Christie's novel as a means with which to introduce Shakespeare's play, '*Othello* was a particularly appropriate play to feature in this "curtain-call". [...] [B]oth

¹⁷¹ Christie, *Curtain*, p.198. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷² Christie, *Curtain*, p.191.

¹⁷³ Harold Bloom, 'Introduction' to *William Shakespeare's Othello*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2010), pp.1-4 (p.1).

¹⁷⁴ Iago is not the only literary character with whom Norton is equated. As we learn, 'the same technique is seen in the brilliant third act of *John Ferguson*, where the "half-witted" Clutie John induces others to kill the man that he himself hates. It is a wonderful piece of psychological suggestion' (Christie, *Curtain*, p.82). *John Ferguson: A Play in Four Acts* (1915) was written by Saint John Greer Ervine.

¹⁷⁵ Nick de Somogyi, *Othello: The Shakespeare Folios*, ed. by Nick de Somogyi (London: Nick Hearn Books, 2002), p.xxvii.

Christie's novel and Shakespeare's play resemble Poirot's "sealed packet": their contents were not published until long after they were written'.¹⁷⁶ Both production and content link these two works. Poirot's actions in *Curtain* are exceptional as he is dealing with a criminal who, like Iago, is in a position of transcendence from the usual functioning of law.

Like Iago, all the players in *Curtain* exist on a liminal plane—'a collection of twilight people. *Grey heads, grey hearts, grey dreams*' in which morality and mortality are no longer products of stable black and white binaries but rather blur into grey uncertainties. '[G]uilt and innocence, good and evil' have become relative.¹⁷⁷ Throughout the novel Christie's characters engage themselves in discussions of the morality of taking a life. For instance Hastings' daughter, Judith, seems to have a preoccupation with an almost eugenic belief in the sacrifice of certain 'worthless' lives over stronger and more 'worthwhile' individuals. Early in the novel Hastings is disturbed to hear his daughter speak of defensible murder. When he indicates this to Judith, saying, 'and I don't like to hear you talking of murder as justified in certain cases', she responds by saying '[y]ou know, Father, some people really *ask* to be murdered'. The party similarly fall into a discussion of euthanasia. Whilst there is a general consensus of sympathy for the cause, it is Boyd Carrington who voices the moral objection: 'It wouldn't do, you know. You can't have people here, there, and everywhere,

¹⁷⁶ De Somogyi, p.xxvii. Earl F. Bargainnier also asserts the importance of *Othello* in *Curtain*, writing that '[t]he character of Iago fascinated Christie. The many references to him culminate in *Curtain*, where the villain and his method are specifically equated with Shakespeare's schemer and his'. Earl F. Bargainnier, *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), p.168.

¹⁷⁷ Christie, *Curtain*, p.82 ; p.58. Emphasis in original.

taking the law into their own hands, deciding matters of life and death'.¹⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that it is Carrington who proclaims this opinion. Although he does not represent the legal institution, Carrington seems part of the political world in a way that the other inhabitants at Styles are not. As Miss Cole articulates, 'Sir William is different. He doesn't belong here like the rest of us do. He's from the outside world – the world of success and independence'.¹⁷⁹ In representing the external world he signifies a conservative, unambiguous and overly simplified conception of the morality of murder; it is a conception which the conclusion to *Curtain* completely overturns. As well as murdering Norton, Poirot also commits an act of euthanasia when he removes vital emergency heart medication from the reach of his own bedside table. It also transpires that Hastings has unwittingly murdered Mrs Franklin in the unconscious act of switching poisoned coffee cups by revolving a bookcase. If Hastings too is a murderer, then truly everybody is a potential suspect.

Poirot divulges a disquieting theory when he relates to Hastings that '[e]veryone is a potential murderer'. Having earlier been almost driven to, and only narrowly prevented from, the murder of the unscrupulous man who he believed to be the seducer of his daughter, Hastings' actions at Styles appear to justify this hypothesis. As Poirot states of himself, 'I, who do not approve of murder – I, who value human life – have ended my career by committing murder'.¹⁸⁰ As Nancy Wingate argues, 'no matter how convincingly Poirot argues that he saw no other course, no matter how persuasively he argues his side of the

¹⁷⁸ Christie, *Curtain*, p.38; p.113.

¹⁷⁹ Christie, *Curtain*, p.83.

¹⁸⁰ Christie, *Curtain*, p.198 ; p.200.

moral question, we are profoundly shocked that he has become a murderer'.¹⁸¹ Poirot takes it into his own hands to act as judge, jury and executioner in the name of the greater good. He does not make the decision lightly and is well-aware of the implications of his choice. As he writes to his friend, '[f]or the worst part of murder, Hastings, is its effect on the murderer. I, Hercule Poirot, might come to believe myself divinely appointed to deal out death to all and sundry'.¹⁸² Poirot is conscious of the necessity of his position of transcendence as well as its dangers. But, echoing the situation brought about by the events of the Second World War, exceptional times call for exceptional measures.

'The hundredth – well, the hundredth is different': Extralegal Justice in Christie

In 'Getting Away with Murder', Wingate observes the pattern that in a number of detective novels the murderer may get away with his crime but is then later punished through 'poetic justice'. Wingate posits that in these instances, though a murderer may not be punished for his original crime, he is later punished for a further murder which he did not even commit. Wingate writes that such a conclusion is 'deliciously satisfying' since it fulfils a certain ideological function. Accordingly, '[t]hese books reassure us that even though a murderer may be untouchable by human courts and detectives, fate will ensure that the guilty will eventually get his just deserts'.¹⁸³ Justice which takes place beyond law is a subject that holds a surprisingly prominent place in much of Christie's 1930s and early 1940s fiction: *Murder on the Orient Express* (1935) provides a particularly good illustration of this theme of

¹⁸¹ Nancy Wingate, 'Getting Away With Murder: An Analysis', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 12.4 (1979), 581-603 (p.592).

¹⁸² Christie, *Curtain*, p.209.

¹⁸³ Wingate, p.582.

exacting punishment of a wrong-doer outside of the usual legal processes. In this novel, the victim, who is found dead in his train compartment, stabbed twelve times, is revealed to be a child kidnapper and murderer whose crime, unpunished by law, has had far-reaching effects on a number of people who are intent on administering their own justice. The twelve stab wounds correspond to the twelve people who jointly commit murder to rid the world of this lowly specimen of humanity. As Matthew Beaumont argues, the twelve murderers 'act as an unofficial jury executing rough justice on an individual whom the law has failed to contain'. Beaumont goes on to say that, 'although Poirot duly accuses the passengers of the crime, he does not ultimately impugn them, both because he is sympathetic to their motives and because he himself is profoundly socially conservative'.¹⁸⁴ As the reader of the Poirot series goes on to learn, Poirot, as I have discussed, goes on to commit a comparable murder at the end of his career and life. Though not the murderer on the Orient Express, Poirot finds himself in a position of exception to the law which prefigures his later definitive act of exception as, here, it is he who characteristically takes the law into his own hands by making the decision not to punish the perpetrators.

The murder in Christie's novel is not dissimilar to that in Dorothy L. Sayers' *The Nine Tailors* (1934) published the previous year. As Gillis has argued, Sayer's detective Wimsey

re-enacts his wartime experiences with the group killing of Deacon by all those responsible for ringing the changes on New Year's Eve. That no one individual can be held responsible for his death indicates the source of trauma – the war – for which the murder solution provides a consoling fiction. It also cathartically

¹⁸⁴ Matthew Beaumont, 'Cutting Up the Corpse: Agatha Christie, Max Ernst, and Neo-Victorianism in the 1930s', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 20.1 (2009), 12-26 (p.17).

repeats this trauma. With all those in the belfry responsible for causing Deacon's death, blame cannot be easily ascribed to any one individual, pointing up the absurdity of taking responsibility for any one death on the battlefields of World War I.¹⁸⁵

As in much of Christie's fiction, the murderers are absolved from guilt not only because they were unaware that they were the perpetrators of the crime, but also because Deacon is a criminal who has wrecked lives and therefore is apparently deserving of his death sentence. Before solving the case and recognising his own role in Deacon's death, Wimsey states of Deacon that '[i]f the law had found him the law would have hanged him, with loud applause from all good citizens'. As he continues: 'Why should we hang a perfectly decent chap for anticipating the law and doing our dirty work for us? [...] Curse the man! He's a perfect nuisance, dead or alive, and whoever killed him was a public benefactor. I wish I'd killed him myself'.¹⁸⁶ As is so often the case in Christie's fiction, the victim seemingly deserved his fate and apparently justice is eventually served, albeit in an extra-legal sphere.

Where Christie's story differs from that of Sayers, however, is in the intent of the murderers, who clearly mean to kill the criminal, Cassetti. However, even once intention is established, they are still granted impunity. Christie's novels represent a more telling analogy to battlefield deaths than *The Nine Tailors*. To make a rather oversimplified statement, but one which nevertheless contains an element of truth, men entered the war knowing that they risked their lives and were prepared to kill in what they believed was their duty to their nation (whether or not they saw it as a worthy cause), just as the 'jury' in

¹⁸⁵ Gillis, p.192.

¹⁸⁶ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Nine Tailors* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), p.256.

Murder on the Orient Express justify their crime. On the battlefield men have, in a sense, already entered a no man's land, a liminal sphere between life and death in which their peacetime right to life is removed. The battlefield here resembles something akin to a Hobbesian state of nature in which life becomes a matter of self-preservation and a kind of justice is served out by all. As one member of the party articulates, '[s]ociety had condemned [Cassetti]; we were only carrying out the sentence'.¹⁸⁷ The passengers on the Orient Express make up a microcosmic society of their own which administers justice on what might potentially be viewed as a more authentic kind of direct democracy. The setting for the murder in Christie's novel does bear a resemblance to both a state of nature and the no man's land of the battlefield. Phyllis Lassner argues that, '[i]n its insulated and plush interior, the Express is transformed into a self-contained corner of Europe'.¹⁸⁸ On a stationary snowbound train in Yugoslavia, the characters of *Murder on the Orient Express* are entirely isolated from the civilisation to which they usually belong.

The law is literally absent from the train. As we are told, '[p]assing through most countries we have the police of that country on the train. But in Yugoslavia – no. You comprehend?'. The only law that exists is the law that Poirot and the other passengers see fit to execute. Ultimately though, as in *Curtain*, Poirot makes the final decision. On being mistaken for a Yugoslavian detective, Poirot replies, 'I am not a Yugo-Slavian detective, Madame. I am an international detective. [...] I belong to the world, Madame'. Poirot, never modest,

¹⁸⁷ Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, (London: Harper, 2007), p. 346.

¹⁸⁸ Phyllis Lassner, 'The Mysterious New Empire: Agatha Christie's Colonial Murders', in *At home and Abroad in the Empire: British Women Write the 1930s*, ed. by Robin Hackett, Freda Hauser and Gay Wachman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), pp.31-50 (p.39).

identifies himself with what could be called a universal law. The community on the train 'are cut off from all the normal routes of procedure'. In this sense, the train becomes a state of exception. In these exceptional states constructed by Christie, the murder becomes almost validated as the guilty victim has already been psychically placed in a realm that positions him as, in a sense, subhuman; as alive but almost deserving of death. As Poirot states, '[t]here was no question as to his guilt. I visualized a self-appointed jury of twelve people who condemned him to death and were forced by exigencies of the case to be their own executioners'.¹⁸⁹ The train carriage in *Murder on the Orient Express* serves as a kind of vacuum from law; a space in which justice is carried out in accordance with the state of nature.

Cassetti's crime has stripped him of his right to life; he is represented as a living animal. Beaumont's reading of *Murder on the Orient Express* as 'in one sense, a reinscription of Émile Zola's naturalist masterpiece *La Bête Humaine* (1890)', is significant in its stress on Cassetti's representation in animal terms. He writes, '[i]t transpires, of course, that this man, who cannot quite conceal the appearance, according to Poirot of a human beast, is not the respectable man he claims to be – he is, after all, a human beast'.¹⁹⁰ From the first, Poirot identifies the animal in Cassetti, who initially goes by the name Rachett. As Poirot declares: 'When he passed me in the restaurant [...] I had a curious impression. It was as though a wild animal – an animal savage, but savage! you understand – had passed me by. [...] The body – the cage – is everything of the most respectable – but through the bars, the wild animal looks out'. Poirot's sentiments resonate with those of the other passengers. For

¹⁸⁹ Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, p.62; p.124; p.258; p.338.

¹⁹⁰ Beaumont, p.15; p.16.

instance Bouc, one of the avengers, proclaims 'Ah! *quel animal!*[...] I cannot regret that he is dead – not at all!'. Likewise Colonel Arbuthnot describes Cassetti as a 'swine' who 'deserved what he got'.¹⁹¹ As an animal the 'jury' see fit to punish to Cassetti as such. As Princess Dragomiroff makes apparent, this man is undeserving of justice by the usual legal means: 'Flog this man to death and fling him out on the rubbish heap', she declares. To use Zygmunt Bauman's term, Cassetti becomes 'human waste'.¹⁹²

The idea of the victim as a savage and primitive human animal, fit to be punished in the state of nature, is one that pervades many of Christie's novels. For example, Mrs Boynton, the victim in *Appointment with Death* (1938), 'ought to die – yes...'.¹⁹³ Carol and Raymond, Mrs Boynton's step-children, justify this by saying 'think it's just like killing a mad dog – something that's doing harm in the world and must be stopped. This is the only way of stopping it'. Dr Gerard too reads Mrs Boynton in non-human terms: "'What a horror of a woman!" Old, swollen, bloated, sitting there immovable in the midst of them – a distorted old Buddha – a gross spider in the centre of a web!'. Mrs Boynton has a 'slow reptilian smile', and her glare had 'a resemblance to the effect produced by a cobra'. As Sarah King ponders: 'Why was it that something about that woman seemed hardly human?'. Sarah thinks '[c]ivilisation *is* all wrong – *all* wrong! But for civilisation there wouldn't be a Mrs Boynton! In savage tribes they'd probably have killed and eaten her years ago!'.¹⁹⁴ Like the murderers in *Murder on the Orient Express*, Sarah King perceives civilisation as inhibiting the

¹⁹¹ Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, p.29; p.97; p.175.

¹⁹² Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2004), p.33.

¹⁹³ Agatha Christie, *Appointment with Death* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p.9.

¹⁹⁴ Christie, *Appointment with Death*, p.9; p.14; p.28; p.26; p.77. Emphasis in original.

true justice which would be carried out as a matter of course in the state of nature. In *Forever England*, Alison Light reads *Appointment with Death* in terms of its representation of the unconscious as 'seen in a almost Darwinian light as the repository for purely anti-social desires of an unambiguously destructive kind, which represent traces of "savagery" in the individual, a racial and social past which must be overcome and survived'.¹⁹⁵ The notion of '[m]an as an animal very delicately balanced' between competing unconscious impulses invokes an image of a darker side of society which functions not according to the rules and laws of civilisation, but harks back to a much earlier state of nature.¹⁹⁶ It is this more primitive extra-legal state in which the human animal desires to kill in order to achieve natural justice. As Susan Rowland asserts, *Appointment with Death* 'exhibits acute metaphysical tension between Christie's very rare *Orient Express* model, in which divine justice is finally assigned to the ostensible killers, and the more typical identifying of cosmic justice with the human law'.¹⁹⁷ What much of the representation of this kind of extralegal justice achieves is to emphasise the paradox which sees the practice of law on the one hand as a flawed system which at times fails to deliver its promise, and on the other as a deep and abiding sense of the idea of law as the highest and most esteemed of principles.

¹⁹⁵ Light, p.104.

¹⁹⁶ Christie, *Appointment with Death*, p.41.

¹⁹⁷ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British Women Writers in Detective and Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.144.

Alive but Already Dead: The Fate of the Perpetrator

Taking the notion of murder within the state of nature to its limits, Christie went on to write *And Then There Were None* (1939), which was published four years after *Murder on the Orient Express*.¹⁹⁸ *And Then There Were None* is the story of ten people who are lured by various and devious means (for most the promise of a free holiday), to a large house on Nigger Island, a remote and otherwise uninhabited island, only accessible by small boat, off the south coast of England. As Christie's narrator states, '[t]here was something magical about an island – the mere word suggested fantasy. You lost touch with the world – an island was a world of its own. A world, perhaps, from which you might never return'.¹⁹⁹ It is revealed to the party, by a voice on a gramophone, that all ten of them are guilty of murders which have, up to now, gone unpunished. Like Norton in *Curtain*, the murderers here have committed crimes which are, for the most part, beyond the reach the law. And like the train carriage in *Murder on the Orient Express*, 'Nigger Island' exists in a vacuum from the normal processes of law; here only the laws of nature apply. As Light writes:

[W]e cannot see it as merely arbitrary that Christie's setting, however unconsciously chosen, is 'Nigger Island', a place 'just off the coast' of England, belonging to it and yet wildly different from it. For her readers such a name could be relied upon automatically to conjure up a thrilling 'otherness', a place where revelations about the 'dark side' of the English would be appropriate.²⁰⁰

And Then There Were None, published just before the Second World War, voices a cautionary tale on the consequences of the breakdown of law.

¹⁹⁸ This novel was originally published under the title of *Ten Little Niggers*.

¹⁹⁹ Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p.29.

²⁰⁰ Light, pp.98-99.

Like Cassetti, the temporary inhabitants of Nigger Island are all perpetrators of crimes for which justice has never been dealt: 'crimes that cannot be brought home to their perpetrators' by the usual legal means.²⁰¹ Dr Armstrong, intoxicated, killed a patient on the operating table; Anthony Marston killed two people through careless driving; General MacArthur purposelessly sent a man to certain death on the frontlines of World War One; retired police inspector William Blore ensured the conviction of an innocent man who was later to die in prison. All the 'murderers' believe they have escaped punishment: '*Murder in Hospital. Murder on the Operating Table. Safe – yes, safe as houses!*' thinks Dr Armstrong.²⁰² In the epilogue to the story, the man behind the plot to bring justice to the murderers, Wargrave, the murderer, explains the supposed justification for his actions in a manuscript which he has sent out to sea as a message in a bottle. In it he writes that he was gripped by an ever increasing desire to kill:

The innocent must not suffer. And then, quite suddenly, the idea came to me – started by a chance remark uttered during casual conversation. It was a doctor to whom I was talking – some ordinary undistinguished G.P. He mentioned casually how often murder must be committed which the law was unable to touch. [...] He added that there were many cases of a similar nature going on all the time – cases of deliberate murder – and all quite untouchable by the law.²⁰³

On the extralegal sphere of the island, the ten inhabitants are apparently inevitable victims. The island resembles, in Agamben's terms, a Hobbesian state of nature which is 'not so

²⁰¹ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, p.86.

²⁰² Christie, *And Then There Were None*, p.87. Emphasis in original.

²⁰³ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, pp.212-213.

much a war of all against all [...] [but] more precisely, a condition in which everyone is bare life and a *homo sacer* for everyone else'.²⁰⁴ Like Cassetti, by virtue of their past actions, the inhabitants have seemingly forfeited the right to life and these inhuman qualities are manifested in their increasingly bestial representation. The exception to this is Marston who, as the one whose crime has been deemed by Wargrave the least serious (he ran over two children in a motoring accident), is the first victim on the Island. In fact, as he motors up to the coast to join the boat to the island, Marston is described in rather opposite terms: 'In the blaze of the evening light he looked, not a man, but a young god, a hero out of some Northern Saga. [...] Anthony Marston seemed to be something more than mortal'.²⁰⁵ As Christie's narrator reveals, after his death, 'Anthony Marston in the height of his youth and manhood had seemed like a being who was immortal. And now, crumpled and broken, he lay on the floor'.²⁰⁶ Though Marston might not have been portrayed as subhuman, there is definitely sometime inhuman in his previous appearance of immortality.

As the murders on the island progress with a seeming relentlessness, the last traces of civilisation and order start to disintegrate.²⁰⁷ With this disintegration, the characters increasingly revert to animal type. Philip Lombard, who is 'guilty of the death of twenty-one men, members of an East African tribe', is perhaps most strongly represented within

²⁰⁴ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.106.

²⁰⁵ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, pp.22-23.

²⁰⁶ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, p.60.

²⁰⁷ This breaking-down of everyday civilities is most evident at meal times. Whilst the first meal on the island is an elaborate affair soon they are reduced to eating out of tins 'standing round the kitchen table'. Christie, *And Then There Were None*, p. 158.

these terms and it is significant that Wargrave has planned it that he be amongst the last of the party to die, suggesting the seriousness of his offences. As the gong sounds for the first meal on the island Christie describes how, as he leaves his room, Lombard 'moved like a panther, smoothly and noiselessly. There was something of the panther about him altogether. A beast of prey – pleasant to the eye'. Later Lombard is described as having a 'curious wolf-like smile'.²⁰⁸ This animalistic rendering associated with Lombard is extended to encompass the party in their entirety:

They were five enemies linked together by a mutual instinct of self-preservation. [...] And all of them, suddenly, looked less like human beings. They were reverting more to bestial types. Like a wary old tortoise, Mr Justice Wargrave sat hunched up, his body motionless, his eyes keen and alert. Ex-Inspector Blore looked coarser and clumsier in build. His walk was that of a slow padding animal. His eyes were bloodshot. There was a look of mingled ferocity and stupidity about him. He was like a beast at bay ready to charge its pursuers. Philip Lombard's senses seemed heightened, rather than diminished. His ears reacted to the slightest sound. His step was lighter and quicker, his body was lithe and graceful. And he smiled often, his lips curling back from his long white teeth.²⁰⁹

In extending the animal metaphor Christie is articulating a kind of bare life that strips the human of its political capacity since animals differ from human beings in their lack of political recognition as beings with rights and obligations. Vera is also described in comparable terms: 'She was like a bird that dashed its head against glass and that has been

²⁰⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, p.32; p.135.

²⁰⁹ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, pp.157-158.

picked up by a human hand. It crouches there, terrified, unable to move, hoping to save itself by its immobility'. As Vera articulates: 'Don't you see? *We're the zoo...*Last night, we were hardly human any more. *We're the zoo...*'.²¹⁰ Murderer and victims alike are all subsumed under similar terms.²¹¹ There is in their bestiality something which makes them fit for death; alive but almost already dead. Emily Brent's reference to the *Book of Common Prayer* when she quotes, '[i]n the midst of life we are in death', suggests something of the growing sense of the blurred boundaries between the borders of life and death that the first murder, that of Marston, initially denies.²¹² So vitally alive before, Marston's crumpled and unambiguously dead body serves as an illustration of the clear cut boundaries between life and death that, from here on in, begins to disintegrate.

Plain has argued that the body in Christie's fiction foregrounds 'the uncertain division between law and disorder, desire and repulsion, attraction and aggression'.²¹³ Plain uses Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject to discuss the body and the idea of death infecting life, which has deep resonances with Agamben's theory of bare life. Plain goes on: 'There is even comfort in the certainty of death offered by detective fictions. This is a world in which no one is maimed, blinded or left hovering in the limbo of intensive care. The value of the

²¹⁰ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, pp.157-158; p.185. Emphasis in original.

²¹¹ In *Dumb Witness*, the animal is described in terms of the human. Bob, the terrier who is supposed to have left a ball at the top of the stairs for his owner to slip on, is repeatedly referred to in these terms: 'He's almost human, Bob is'. Christie, *Dumb Witness* (p.58). Though the inversion is here represented from the opposite side it nevertheless demonstrates a tendency to conflate the human and the animal.

²¹² Christie, *And Then There Were None* (p.59).

²¹³ Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p.26.

sacrificial body lies also in its clear-cut avoidance of the unstable boundary between life and death'.²¹⁴ Plain quotes Kristeva's assertion that '[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life'.²¹⁵ In much of Christie's fiction, those who remain alive exist in a liminal sphere between life and death. The connection with Agamben's theory of bare life is here obvious: life, seen through its proximity to death, becomes a kind of death in life. Where death surrounds life, all life becomes bare life. Furthermore the representation of bare life and the rendering of the human as animal seem to be inextricably linked.

Mr Justice Wargrave, the criminal mastermind of the island killings, perhaps best exemplifies this dissolution. Wargrave fakes his own death before 'coming back to life' to complete his murderous intents. To convince the others of his death all he has to do is lie there and look dead; as he reveals in his message in the bottle: 'I calculated that they would search the house again, but I did not think they would look closely at any of the corpses, a mere twitch of the sheet to satisfy themselves that it was not Armstrong masquerading as a body. This is exactly what occurred'. He is alive and yet, to fleeting appearances, he is dead. It is by deliberately placing himself within this liminal realm, this exceptional position, that Wargrave is able to conduct the others, as his puppets, to their deaths. From the first, Wargrave's identity as judge on the island is made apparent: 'Mr Justice Wargrave took charge of the proceedings. The room became an impromptu court of law'.²¹⁶ For Lombard

²¹⁴ Plain, p.34.

²¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.4.

²¹⁶ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, p.219; p.43.

it is this very identity which makes Wargrave the chief suspect. Asked why he suspects Wargrave he replies:

Hard to say exactly. But to begin with, he's an old man and he's been presiding over courts of law for years. That is to say, he's played God Almighty for a good many months every year. That must go to a man's head eventually. He gets to see himself as all-powerful, as holding the power of life and death – and it's possible that his brain might snap and he might want to go one step further and be Executioner and Judge Extraordinary.²¹⁷

On the island, Wargrave's position is one of partial transcendence; he is one of the party and yet he is separate from it. U.N. Owen, the islanders' host/murderer, is on one hand immanent to the group. As Lombard says 'U.N. Owen is one of us. No exceptions allowed. We all qualify'.²¹⁸ On the one hand Lombard is right that Wargrave is amongst the group, but Wargrave is, by his own design, the exception.

There is something very suggestive in Wargrave's name and there is an undeniable connection between Wargrave's perceived warranted killings and legalised battlefield murders. The retired judge ostensibly stands for justice, but as we have seen, his sense of justice can never be fully realised within the legal framework. The name Wargrave implies something quite different. Published twenty years after the end of the First World War and just before of the Second World War, the evocative image of the war grave that the judge's name invokes becomes significant if we consider his role in punishing perpetrators for what are effectively legalised murders. *And Then There Were None's* correlation with the

²¹⁷ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, p.127.

²¹⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None*, p.116.

battlefield killings of the First World War is two-fold. The victims on the island are simply analogous to the soldiers (of all countries) on the frontlines who have forfeited their right to life and may therefore be killed with impunity. However, by virtue of their past wrongdoings the island's inhabitants can be more closely aligned with the enemy combatants; Wargrave, who places himself in the position of the sovereign exception, believes he is killing for the greater good. The message of the novel serves as a stark warning for the circularity that legalised wartime killing constructs; in taking a life, even in the name of a higher cause, a new breed of murder is created. Wargrave represents a second degree of killer—the murderer of the murderer—as he becomes representative of a nation's sense of duty and subsequent culpability.

Maintaining the battlefield analogy, in Christie's novel *Evil Under the Sun* (1941), published during the Second World War, this undertone of the alive but almost already dead comes to the fore. *Evil Under the Sun* also functions as the place in which it is possible to apply a gendered reading of the body and bare life, as it is the specifically female form that can be read into Christie's writing.. As Plain writes, '[b]y the time the war begins, the living have begun to assume a number of symbolic functions previously contained by the corpse'.²¹⁹ *Evil Under the Sun* epitomises the move whereby it is not merely the criminals who are subsumed under the category of bare life, but the whole of humanity. In *Evil Under the Sun* Poirot is holidaying on 'Smuggler's Island' which, at high tide, is only accessible by boat, though at other times can be reached by causeway. Set once again just off the south coast of England, Smuggler's Island, with all its exotic intrigue, like Nigger Island, becomes an unstable place in which the boundaries between life and death are breached. In *Evil Under*

²¹⁹ Plain, p.43.

the Sun it is the figure of the sunbather who comes to represent this infringement of the usual binaries. Prior to the murder on the island, Poirot is sensitive to this notion. When someone says there are no bodies on the island he declares, 'Ah! but that is not strictly true' and directing attention to the sunbathers on the beach says: 'Regard them there, lying out in rows. What are they? They are not men and women. There is nothing personal about them. They are just – bodies!'. For Poirot, the rows of 'recumbent figures', 'reminds [him] very much of the Morgue in Paris'. They are '[b]odies – arranged on slabs – like butcher's meat!'.²²⁰ Whilst Poirot here talks of both 'men and women' the bodies here are distinctly feminised. The sunbathers provide a sinister spectacle for Poirot and the reader alike as they become indicative of the events that are to follow.

As Kasia Boddy writes of Christie's novel, '[b]y making individuality impossible, the model beach not only resembled the morgue, it actively facilitated the journey from beach towel to marble slab'.²²¹ These people have crossed a moral boundary by bearing their flesh in full public view and they closely resemble the figures of the war dead lying sprawled on the battlefield. However, the sunbathers in *Evil Under the Sun*, though they might look from a distance like inanimate bodies, differ crucially from the mutilated and disfigured bodies that result from the war. The sunbathers' bodies are slim, young, oiled and deeply tanned: in other words they are perfect (eugenic?) specimens. Poirot reflects on the lack of distinctive features on these sunbathing bodies. As he says, '[i]f one looked closely and appraisingly – yes – but to the casual glance? One moderately well-made young woman is very like another. Two brown legs, two brown arms, a little piece of bathing suit in between

²²⁰ Christie, *Evil Under the Sun* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), pp.11-12.

²²¹ Kasia Boddy, 'The Modern Beach', *Critical Quarterly*, 49.1 (2007), 21-39 (p.25).

– just a body lying out in the sun'.²²² Like the war dead who, maimed and broken, become indistinguishable from one another, the women on the beach become interchangeable by virtue of their standardised perfection. This observation resonates with Plain's argument that '[c]ontrary to appearances, then, detective fiction is an arena that displays the body made safe. The dismembered bodies of the battlefield become the tidily reassembled corpses of Christie's fiction'.²²³ It is clear that these bodies have transgressed the life/death binary; in this conflated realm all are already potential victims.

In a shift to the personal which denotes a further movement of the idea of bare life or *femina sacra* into the domestic sphere, *Evil Under the Sun* focuses its attention on the female body.²²⁴ As Catherine Horwood explains, '[b]efore the 1920s, exposure of the skin to

²²² Christie, *Evil Under the Sun*, p.203.

²²³ Plain, p.33.

²²⁴ Whilst *Evil Under the Sun* certainly exacts revenge upon the Arlena, the symbol of decadence and dishonesty, it is unclear how far we can align these attributions of culpability with Christie's own views. Whilst the novel could be said to legitimately reflect fears surrounding the kind of society which led its nation in to two world wars, it might not be so easy to align these views with their author. The very suggestive image of the sunbathing body is one that is imbued with ambivalence. In Christie's *Autobiography* she writes that '[b]athing was one of the joys of [her] life' (London: Fontana, 1977), pp.145-146. Christie says that '[a] great social change came when I was about thirteen', in which bathing was no longer 'strictly segregated'. She writes that in her youth at the beginning of the twentieth century '[t]here was of course no such thing as sunbathing on the beach' (Christie, *An Autobiography*, pp.145-146). Christie devotes several pages of her autobiography to an account of social changes in bathing that occurred during her early life. She goes on to write: 'Bathing-dresses continued to be very pure practically up to the time when I was first married. Though mixed bathing was accepted by then, it was still regarded as dubious by older ladies and more conservative families. But progress was too strong, even for my mother. We often took to the sea on such beaches as were given

the sun's rays had been a mark of working-class roughness, especially in women. Now tanned skin became a "sign of affluence, suggesting sunbathing in the Riviera rather than potato picking in Essex'."²²⁵ The bronzed figure becomes the embodiment of such modernity. The exposure that sunbathing necessitates reveals the body as ultimately vulnerable; as Butler writes, '[t]he body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of these as well'.²²⁶ If part of the essence of modernity is expressed by the revealing of the body then this very modernity is placing itself in a realm of vulnerability to violence, but also might become a potential breeding ground for violence itself.

over the mingling of the sexes' (Christie, *An Autobiography*, p.147). Whilst she is writing on the activity of *bathing* rather than the related *sunbathing* it is apparent that Christie welcomed the freedom of offered by such a pastime and was unperturbed by the 'mingling of the sexes'. Nonetheless, as Horwood claims, 'the activity of swimming was far more than merely a leisure activity and the places where it was performed became testing grounds for issues of dress, sexuality, gender and emancipation'. Catherine Horwood, "'Girls Who Arouse Dangerous Passions': Women and Bathing, 1900-1939', *Women's History Review*, 9.4 (2000), 653-673 (p.655). Horwood further expounds on the issues faced by women bathing in the early part of the twentieth century. As she writes: 'The problem for female bathers was that swimming inevitably stirred up the murky waters of sexuality, both in terms of arousal and contact – or lack of it – with the opposite sex. [...]There is no activity where the body is so overtly exposed than when bathing in public' (p.655). The idea of the exposure of the body is, for Horwood, central.

²²⁵ Horwood, 'Girls Who Arouse Dangerous Passions', p.658, quoting Angela Holdsworth (1988) *Out of the Doll's House* (London: BBC), p. 166.

²²⁶ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p.26.

The mystery in *Evil Under the Sun* is predicated on the notion of the anonymous dead/alive sunbathing body. The body of the character who we suppose is the dead woman—'Arlena Marshall was lying face downwards on the shingle, her arms outstretched'²²⁷—is exposed ultimately not to be as it appears:

Body – the word stirred something in my mind – bodies lying on the beach – all alike, Patrick Redfern and Emily Brewster had got to the Cove and seen a body lying there. A body – suppose it was not Arlena's body but somebody else's? The face was hidden by the great Chinese hat. [...] But there *was* only one dead body – Arlena's. Then, could it be – a *live* body – someone pretending to be dead?²²⁸

As Poirot reveals, it is '[a] body – yes. But not a *dead* body. The *live* body of the woman that helped you, her arms and legs stained with tan, her face was hidden by a green cardboard hat'. Arlena Marshall is to Poirot 'first, last and all the time, [...] an eternal and predestined *victim*'.²²⁹ As a morally corrupt adulterer, the sunbathing figure of Arlena Marshall is perhaps representative of a whole society which has become morally reprehensible; an entire body of humanity which has surrendered its higher political existence in favour of universal bare life. It is not only criminal acts which reduce a person to this most basic condition of existence and place life in a most precarious position, but acts which betray a sense of common decency.

²²⁷ Christie, *Evil Under the Sun*, p.63.

²²⁸ Christie, *Evil Under the Sun*, p.212. Emphasis in original.

²²⁹ Christie, *Evil Under the Sun*, p.202; p.204. Emphasis in original.

The conflation of the living and the dead that occurs in *Evil Under the Sun* recurs in Christie's *The Hollow* (1946), in which the body of murdered doctor John Christow is found beside a swimming pool. The poolside setting for this murder is indeed reminiscent of the beach in *Evil Under the Sun* where the corpse is mistaken for a live body. The body is described as 'artistically arranged with an outflung arm and even some red paint dripping gently over the edge of the concrete into the pool'.²³⁰ On witnessing the scene Poirot initially believes it to be the site of some hoax, and the body in question that of an actor playing the part. However, the body is indeed a corpse:

And suddenly, with a terrific shock, with that feeling as of blurring on a cinematograph screen before the picture comes into focus, Hercule Poirot realised that this artificially set scene had a point of reality. [...] For what he was looking down at was, if not a dead man, at least a dying man. [...] It was not red paint dripping off the edge of the concrete, it was blood.²³¹

However, even dead, John Christow is emphatically described as more alive than his literally alive companions: 'Poirot's eyes rested once more on the dead man. He still had the curious impression that the dead man was more alive than the living'. Whilst Christow is dead, departing in a flourish of colour and intrigue, the others continue their grey existence. As Edward says to Henrietta: 'I can't help resenting that John, who was so alive, is dead. [...] And that I who am half-dead, am alive'.²³² Published in the year following the end of the Second World War, the notion of the living as almost already dead, as living life in an almost

²³⁰ Christie, *The Hollow*, (London: Fontana, 1979), p.70.

²³¹ Christie, *The Hollow*, p.71.

²³² Christie, *The Hollow*, p.74; p.88.

translucent shade of grey, is not merely a side issue but a central theme that pervades the novel.

During the course of this chapter I have moved from the notion of the detective as the sovereign exception, as exemplified most obviously in *Curtain* and *Murder on the Orient Express*, to the notion of the bare life that constitutes life outside of the political realm. The sovereign exception and the concept of bare life are inextricably linked as the sovereign is he who sets decides on who is granted life in the political sense and who may, on the other hand, be killed with impunity. In Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1935), the state of exception – the realm in which the state of nature rules – is very definitely confined. The train carriage which provides the exclusive setting for the novel is safely contained from the outside world in which legal rules still prevail, secure from the contamination of zones of exception. In the pre-war *Appointment with Death*, the scene of the murder, though not so contained, has limited force of contagion since it takes place in the remote Middle East. However, within the relatively confined space of the novel, the animalistic savagery that can be equated with Agamben's definition of bare life becomes all pervasive. As is the case in virtually all of Christie's detective novels, everyone is a potential murderer and as such, since committing murder automatically condemns the perpetrator to the realm of bare life, all are just one small step away from relinquishing their right to life. *And Then There Were None*, published in the same year as the outbreak of the Second World War, though still contained on an island, witnesses the proliferation of bare life to encompass every single inhabitant. Concurrent with this spread of bare life to the entire population of the island is the conflation of the life and death binary: the two are inexorably bound because in bare life the living, in their vulnerability to death, can be categorised as the almost already dead.

The publication of *Evil Under the Sun* two years later, when the war was well-established as a war to equal and perhaps exceed the bloodshed and violence of the First World War (in 1940 Britain's major cities were being bombed by German forces and rationing was underway), sees this theme of the living dead become omnipresent as inevitably bare life becomes universalised. As Butler writes in *Precarious Life*, '[i]f bare life, life conceived as biological minimum, becomes a condition to which we are all reducible, then we might find a certain universality in this condition'.²³³ *Evil Under the Sun* portrays life in this light. The universalised state of exception that characterises life in Mansfield's later New Zealand stories, becomes equally apparent in Christie's fiction.

²³³ Butler, *Precarious Life*, p.67.

The Dead, the Alive and the Domestic

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Hannah Arendt writes that 'a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a man'.²³⁴ In both Christie and Mansfield we see examples of this formulation, which is essentially a more rudimentary precursor to Agamben's theory of bare life. Arendt goes on to write in *The Human Condition* about the ancient world in which '[a] man who lived only a private life, who like the slave was not permitted to enter the public realm, or like the barbarian had chosen not to establish such a realm, was not fully human'.²³⁵ The domestic sphere devoid of politics in which bare life proliferates, becomes, when we are talking of the domestic sphere, *femina sacra*. It is this notion of *femina sacra* which finds expression in the work of Christie and Mansfield as they grapple to represent a world in which order and sovereignty was dominated by the threat of war.

In Christie we see examples of the enactment of a kind of justice based loosely on the conception of justice in the state of nature. Andrew Norris writing on John Locke's *Two Treatise of Government* claims that:

Locke's reasoning is as follows: if someone tries to take away my freedom, he has as good as tried to kill me. Being guilty of (attempted) murder, he forfeits his life; that is, he enters a zone in which he has no power over his own life and is

²³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt, 1973), p.300

²³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p.38.

in fact *already dead*. As the living dead he loses the rights and powers of the living and may be treated as a slave.²³⁶

To read Christie in light of this seems particularly apt. The perpetrator of the crime forfeits his right to life and can then be killed with impunity; the domestic sphere in which Christie's novels are set acts as a state of exception devoid of politics, in which seemingly natural laws must play out. In Mansfield the relation is rather more complicated, not least because the representation of *femina sacra* is inconsistent across her stories. In the early New Zealand stories the state of exception which is represented in the recently colonised country enters the home as a consequence of the porous boundary between the public and the domestic space. Unlike Christie's fiction, in which the domestic setting is a secluded realm (even if it is also a microcosm for society as a whole), Mansfield's early stories present the domestic and the public as two conflated spheres. Mansfield's representations of *femina sacra* are revised in her later post-war stories. Whereas in Christie, *femina sacra* is apparently a *product* of the domestic, in Mansfield's early stories *femina sacra* exists in the domestic but is very much represented as a result of external forces; in the post-war stories the conditions of existence become much more closely aligned with those that are represented in the Christie novels which I have explored. Both enact *femina sacra* since the idea of 'death in life' is placed at the very heart of the domestic.

Bringing back my readings of Mansfield and Christie to the representation of conceptions of sovereignty, it is the task of this concluding paragraph to reflect on how these

²³⁶ Andrew Norris, 'The Exemplary Exception: Philosophical Decisions in Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*', in *Politics, Metaphysics, and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer*, ed by Andrew Norris (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp.262-297 (p.273). Emphasis in original.

representatives of the popular and the modernist might be juxtaposed in a relation of both resemblance and divergence. As might seem to be the case with the majority of readings that make up this thesis, the application of theoretical frameworks is in some sense always artificial. Neither Christie nor Mansfield wrote with these theories in mind; their work is pre-theoretical in this sense. Nevertheless using a theory like Lentin's conception of *femina sacra* allows for comparisons to be made between seemingly disparate texts. Both Mansfield and Christie are ideal starting points for applying a gendered version of Agamben's theories of bare life and the state of exception to literary works.

SECTION TWO

The Modernist Novel versus the Desert Romance

In 1919 the now largely forgotten popular novelist E.M. Hull sparked a decade of infatuation with the 'desert romance' on the publication of her first novel *The Sheik*. The 1920s also saw the rise of the modernist fantasy genre, under which much of Sylvia Townsend Warner's fiction in this decade can be classified. Though apparently from two dissimilar literary worlds, Hull and Warner share a surprising affinity. As a representative of the genre, I look at Warner's imagined representations of colonial lands and the colonial other in terms of how these may impact on understandings of sovereignty and representations of power. The large gulf between the literary worlds of Hull and Warner (not least since Hull maintained a strict anonymity and tended to avoid socialising in literary circles) meant that the two authors had no known connection with one another, and are unlikely to have shared a mutual readership. Nevertheless, their constructions of fantasy realms in which they depict the workings or reworkings of sovereignty, and their implication of gender in these representations, allow for profitable parallel readings. Whilst I do not use the concept of *femina sacra* so explicitly in my readings of Warner and Hull, the schema that I set up in the first section of this project with Mansfield and Christie is played out on a more universal scale. By this I mean that *femina sacra* has moved beyond the site of the material space of home; the conditions that determine life within the home are here replicated abroad.

Warner's novels emerge from the same innovative tangential channel of modernism which influenced works such as West's *Harriet Hume* (1929) and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928). Her contribution to this genre was exceptionally varied and, as with West, it is Warner's

diversity and longevity that has jeopardised her classification as a modernist.²³⁷ Jane Garrity notes that Warner is notably excluded from the modernist canon, attributing this largely to her reliance on conventional narrative form:

Warner never 'broke the sentence' in any discernibly Woolfian sense: she never attempted to rupture or reconfigure prevailing linguistic structures. Instead her desire [...] was to deconstruct 'fundamental belief systems' through her use of elegant and witty, if seemingly conventional, English prose.²³⁸

Gay Wachman similarly affirms that, 'because her writing is not "difficult," she has not been admitted to the mainstream modernist canon'.²³⁹ Warner may have evaded the linguistic deconstruction and formal experimentation that characterised much of the work of her modernist contemporaries, but, like West, she was at heart a modernist in her ardent desire to rework existing patriarchal systems of thought. Arguing that Warner's 'writing is the antithesis of everything held dear in the metropolitan literary and social circles from which

²³⁷ Gillian Beer speaks to Warner's diversity: 'If *After the Death of Don Juan* had been published, not in 1936 but fifty years later, it would have been greeted as magic-realist fiction; if *Mr Fortune's Maggot* had been published not in 1928 but, likewise, fifty years later, it would be read as a post-colonial text; while *Summer Will Show* would be seen as part of the current vogue for novels that rewrite the nineteenth century, and the medieval *The Corner that Held Them* as a follower of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. But Warner in fact wrote each of these very diverse novels long before those critical templates were in place'. ' Sylvia Townsend Warner: "The Centrifugal Kick"', in *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender Politics and History*, ed. by Maroula Joannou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.76-86 (p.82).

²³⁸ Jane Garrity, 'Encoding bi-location: Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Primitive Erotics of Sapphic Dissimulation', in *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*, ed. by Jane Garrity (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.140-187 (p.148).

²³⁹ Gay Wachman, *Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p.3.

she judiciously removed herself in the early 1930s', Maroula Joannou claims that she 'identified the sclerotic, parsimonious and patriarchal arrangement of the British social order with rapier-like precision'.²⁴⁰ Joannou's claims point to the radical and unconventional nature of much of Warner's fiction, which has made her work difficult to define and slippery to grasp. Warner's fiction may be essentially indefinable, but this refusal to be categorised offers up more breathing room for the assembly of new models of power. The tendency of Warner's writing to evade attempts to label it is sometimes disconcerting. David Malcolm affirms this, noting that 'Warner's work has often produced an unease among critics; she seems difficult to categorize and place. Highly regarded by many commentators, she misses becoming canonical'.²⁴¹ Indeed, existing as she does on the periphery of the modernist canon, Warner may have more in common with the popular novelist than her literary innovations might at first suggest.

As a romance novelist, Hull had no literary pretensions. Her work was unashamedly written for popular consumption and, whereas Warner attempts to remodel the prevailing

²⁴⁰ Maroula Joannou, 'Preface', in *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978*, ed. by Gill Davies, David Malcolm and John Simons (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), pp.i-vi (p.i).

²⁴¹ David Malcolm, 'The Flint Anchor and the Conventions of Historical Fiction', in *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner*, ed. by Davies et al., pp.145-162 (p.145). Eleanor Perényi also recognises the difficulties of classifying Warner's fiction: 'Was she a historical novelist? Since all seven of her novels are set more or less remotely in time and space, she could be called that—except that they have none of the self-conscious, reconstructed air usually associated with the genre. *Déjà vu* would be more like it, as though she were recollecting a former life—or having a particularly vivid hallucination'. 'The Good Witch of the West', *New York Review of Books*, 32, 18 July 1985, pp.27-30.

oppressive power networks, Hull's novels serve to reaffirm such conventional notions of sovereignty. Both in terms of form (making use of straightforward linear narrative and descriptive realist prose) and in terms of content, Hull's novels can be said to represent the antithesis of the modernist work. However, as Laura Frost has argued, though Hull was not a modernist, her work bears an 'auxiliary' relationship to modernism: '*The Sheik* has a surprisingly prominent place in some of the most significant formulations of British modernism by key critics, for whom Hull was not just a bad writer and *The Sheik* not merely a bad novel but a chief representative of cultural degeneracy'.²⁴² The entry on Hull in an encyclopaedia of 'pulp fiction' claims that 'not since Elinor Glyn's *Three Weeks* [1907], which featured a seductress on a tiger skin rug, had a female author shocked the English-speaking world as did E.M. Hull with the scandalous success' of her first novel.²⁴³ The entry also notes the dubious accolade of Barbara Cartland's 'tribute to the long-forgotten E.M. Hull by making *The Sheik* the premiere volume in Cartland's "Library of Love," a line of reissues of classic romance novels'.²⁴⁴ Hull's romances become significant in formulating conceptions of modernism in terms of their binary opposition to their highbrow counterparts; just as the colonial lands that constitute their settings are considered the 'other' against which the West is defined, the desert romance represents modernism's 'other'.

²⁴² Laura Frost, 'The Romance Cliché: E.M. Hull, D.H. Lawrence, and Interwar Erotic Fiction', in *Bad Modernisms*, ed. by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp.94-118 (p.96).

²⁴³ Lee Server, *Encyclopedia of Pulp Fiction Writers* (New York: Facts on File, 2002), p.149.

²⁴⁴ Server, p.149.

There are, however, subtler links between the two genres. Though Warner's lack of linguistic experimentation, in part, denied her a place at the centre of the modernist canon, the accessibility and marginality of her work immediately makes comparisons with popular fiction more attainable. Speaking of a later collection of short stories which were first published in the *New Yorker* between 1936 and 1973, Kristianne Kalata argues that Warner 'engages with modernist techniques and uses them to create a distinctly hybridized autobiographic form'. Kalata endeavours to 'locate Warner more firmly within feminist, modernist literary tradition and to show how her work in *Scenes of Childhood* exemplifies the dialogue in high modernism between the "popular" and the "literary"'.²⁴⁵ Gill Davies further stresses the liminal nature of Warner's writing, stating that '[h]er spatial subject matter is most frequently concerned with margins and borders, with the periphery rather than the centre'.²⁴⁶ It is at this intersection – this borderland space – in which I explore the construction of narrative spaces used to represent or reimagine gender, power and sovereignty. In consensus with Andreas Huyssen's claim that '[m]ass culture has always been the hidden subtext of the modernist project', I read Warner and Hull as part of mutually dependent and symbiotic genres.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Kristianne Kalata, "'There was a World of Things...and a World of Words": Narration of Self through Object in Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Scenes of Childhood"', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 24.2 (2005), 319-339 (p.320).

²⁴⁶ Gill Davies, 'The Corners that Held Her: The Importance of Place in Sylvia Townsend Warner's Writing', in *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner*, ed. by Davies et al., pp.1-10 (p.1).

²⁴⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p.47.

Both Hull and Warner were writing under the remit of fantasy. Terry Castle suggests of Warner's writing career that, taken as one, it 'suggests a progressive shifting away from realism toward the explicitly antimimetic modes of allegory and fable'. Castle goes on to write that 'in her last published stories, collected in *Kingdoms of Elfin*, she dispensed with human subjects entirely, choosing to commemorate instead the delicate passions of a race of elves'.²⁴⁸ Hull's novels, though written in a more realist mode, were unambiguously pure fantasy. The desert romance genre within which Hull was writing is, according to Anne Kaler, '[a]s ageless as the desert sands and as slick as the latest cover, conventions of the adult fairy tales which hint at a deeper sexual fantasy make captivity romance novels ever old/ever new'.²⁴⁹ Hull's desert romances, like Warner's novels, sought to construct alternative narrative spaces by making use of the freedom from conventions offered by the exotic. One of the key features that links Hull and Warner's fiction is a preoccupation with the inversion of gender roles and both male-to-female and female-to-male cross-dressing. As I demonstrate in the two chapters in this section, notions of gender and notions of sovereignty are intimately connected. Though they draw on similar ideas about the freedom that such narrative spaces offers, along with the role of gender and its deconstruction within these spaces, not surprisingly, the representations of these two disparate authors vary widely and have very different effects. I argue that, whereas

²⁴⁸ Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p.89.

²⁴⁹ Anne K. Kaler, 'Conventions of Captivity in Romance Novels', in *Romantic Conventions*, ed. by Anne K. Kaler and Rosemary E. Johnson-Kurek (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), pp.86-99 (p.86).

Warner's novels seek to disrupt and reimagine a sovereign system of control, Hull's novels serve, ultimately, to maintain them.

My chapter on Hull sees her fiction not just as representative of female sexual liberation in the 1920s, but also as a space which is aligned with the entry of women into the public and political spheres. My focuses in this chapter are on how Hull's cross-dressing heroines manage to transcend the private sphere, and in male costume are granted privileges of masculine power. Always in Hull's fiction, gender binaries, though inverted, are maintained; power and sovereignty are always on the side of the masculine; and it is the sovereign who can decide on the state of exception and consequently on who can be cast outside of legal protection. In essence, *femina sacra* still characterises the feminine side of existence which is always under threat from its exclusion from the political sphere. In *The Sheik* for instance, Diana is raped by her captor but then absolves him when she falls in love with him; the reader too of this type of captivity fantasy is also supposed to pardon him.

By contrast, my chapter on Warner sees this strict organisation of the masculine as the active sovereign and the feminine as the passive subject disintegrate. The chapter on Warner focuses predominantly on her three 1920s novels but sees a particular parallel with the desert romance in *Mr Fortune's Maggot* (1927) in its exotic setting and focus on issues of gender, power and colonialism. I read Warner as far more radical than Hull in her representations of sovereignty, which envisage the possibility of a power outside pre-existing binaries. In constructing these fictions of potentially emancipatory spaces, both Warner and Hull have a tendency rewrite the domestic sphere, which becomes symbolic of the imperial British centre. In the case of Warner this rewriting of the home abroad is

largely satirical, whilst in Hull, it makes safe and naturalises the latent danger in the otherness of the colonial space.

CHAPTER THREE

The Modernist Fantasy Novel and Sovereignty Reimagined in Sylvia Townsend Warner

*Wonderful or supernatural events are not so uncommon, rather they are irregular in their incidence. Thus there may be one marvel to speak of in a century, and then often enough comes a plentiful crop of them; monsters of all sorts swarm suddenly upon the earth, comets blaze in the sky, eclipses frighten nature, meteors fall in rain, while mermaids and sirens beguile, and sea-serpents engulf every passing ship, and terrible cataclysms beset humanity.*²⁵⁰

Parallel to the desert romance, the modernist fantasy novel endeavours to construct an alternative narrative space. However, where the desert romance reinforces the potential disintegration of sovereignty, the modernist novel looks to the future to reimagine a system of rule that it sees as too closely aligned to this outmoded system in an inversion of the ideals espoused by Hull's novels. Jane Marcus argues that, '[i]n modern British fantasy novels, an imaginary mythological wild space is sought by women as a source of creativity and selfhood in response to the phallogentric city'.²⁵¹ She goes on to claim that '[t]he feminist fantasy novel of the twenties is a response to realism's failure to make permanent female space in the citadels of male power'.²⁵² All three of Warner's 1920s novels – *Lolly*

²⁵⁰ David Garnett, 'Lady Into Fox', in *Lady Into Fox and A Man in the Zoo* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929), pp.1-91 (p.1).

²⁵¹ Jane Marcus, 'A Wilderness of One's Own: Feminist Fantasy Novels of the Twenties: Rebecca West and Sylvia Townsend Warner', in *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by S.M. Squier (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), pp. 134-160 (p.136).

²⁵² Marcus, p.141.

Willowes or the Loving Huntsman (1926), *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* (1927) and *The True Heart* (1929) – can be classified under the genre of modernist fantasy and all exhibit this fervour towards reconstructing power structures in the name of egalitarianism. It is *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, in its not quite colonial setting, which provides the most pertinent contrast to Hull's Sheik romances. Emily Hinnov argues that 'Warner's decision to set the novel in a place yet untainted with colonialism demonstrates her desire to tell a different, perhaps anti-colonial, story'.²⁵³ Further, Young-Hee Kwon argues that *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* bears a close tie to the imperial romance novel in the inversion of its formulations of power:

Insofar as the adventure genre is engraved in fashioning and consolidating imperial subjectivity, its signifying structure is inevitably contingent on the interlocking power relations of race and gender. [...] *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* challenges the masculinist gender politics of the Victorian imperial romance.²⁵⁴

Gender and race, then, are key concerns in unravelling Warner's response to sovereignty. Before exploring these themes in more depth it is helpful to set out the framework of power that Warner evaluates. I discuss Warner's later novel *True Heart* in advance of my discussion of her earlier two novels because it most explicitly sets out the power networks based on a system of monarchical sovereignty that I build on in my discussion of later works by other authors.

²⁵³ Emily M. Hinnov, 'A Counter-Reading to Conquest: "Primitivism" and Utopian Longing in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Mr. Maggot's Fortune*', in *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner*, ed. by Davies et al., pp.83-102 (p.87).

²⁵⁴ Young-Hee Kwon, 'Mr. Fortune's Maggot and the De-Masculinization of the Victorian Imperial Romance', *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 18 (2007), 303-323 (p.305).

Like the majority of Warner's fiction, the nature of *The True Heart* is hard to articulate. As a *Times Literary Supplement* review put it:

To express its quality one would have to compare this story to an illumination, to some old Italian series-picture of the life of Griselda, or to the figures on a Flemish tapestry. Though the author does not shrink from the ugly and the violent [...], this charming tale does not belong to the actual world at all, but to the ever imagined youth of the world when a true and innocent heart could go unscathed through every danger, unspoiled by any contact, to find love at the last.²⁵⁵

In this novel, Warner lays out perhaps most decisively and satirically the manifestations of imperialism which she had previously critiqued in *Lolly Willowes* and *Mr Fortune's Maggot*. *The True Heart* therefore serves as an apt starting point from which to embark on an analysis of Warner's attitude towards conventional systems of power and rule. Set in 1870s Victorian Essex, Warner's third novel tells the story of Sukey Bond and her quest to visit the Queen in a bizarre belief that she can win over her potential mother-in-law and marry her beautiful, harmless 'idiot' lover Eric. Eric, described as 'not in his right mind, never has been, never will be', and the orphan Sukey represent Cupid and Psyche in Warner's retelling of the myth, and conquer all to marry and eventually bear a child together.²⁵⁶

According to Warner's 1978 preface to the novel, Queen Victoria represents Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld, and holds, in Sukey's eyes, the key to her happiness. Sukey's mission is inspired by an engraving of Queen Victoria:

²⁵⁵ 'Review of *The True Heart*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 February 1929, p.160.

²⁵⁶ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The True Heart* (London: Virago, 1978), p.76.

The title was: *The True Secret of England's Greatness*. The story was simple, but at the same time magnificent. Queen Victoria stood on the steps of her throne, as upright as a pillar-box. Round her, at a lower level and in a suitable shading of perspective, were grouped statesmen, courtiers, field-marsals, bishops, pages, ladies-in-waiting. At the foot of the throne knelt a negro, a heathen, for with her gloved hand she was extending to him the gift of a Bible. Sukey would stand in front of the picture and sigh. She wanted to marry Eric beyond all things, but she also had a natural wish to go to court.²⁵⁷

Much like Garrity, who reads slave narratives into *Lolly Willowes*, Gay Wachman recognises in the above scene that Sukey places herself in the perspective of the negro at Victoria's feet. As she writes, '[i]n her vision of disempowered empowerment, Sukey is delighted to imagine herself as literally interchangeable with the "negro". Class, gender, and racial oppression have become identical in the fantasy world of this novel'.²⁵⁸ In the engraving 'The True Secret of England's Greatness', Sukey imagines that '[t]he Bible was still in the royal hand. Only the negro was not there; in his place, kneeling at the foot of the throne, was Sukey Bond. She had always wanted to go to court. Now she was going'.²⁵⁹ Wachman describes the fantasy realm of *The True Heart* as 'a guide to the interlocking, destructive, ideological absurdities of empire – a guide book cross-dressed as a classical fable'.²⁶⁰ *The True Heart* functions as a kind of cipher for translating the preposterous symbolics of sovereignty and empire into this satirical fantasy.

²⁵⁷ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.185.

²⁵⁸ Garrity, p.53.

²⁵⁹ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.200.

²⁶⁰ Wachman, p.46.

The colonial rhetoric that I go on to discuss in relation to *Lolly Willowes* is equally apparent in *The True Heart*, in which Zeph, like the character of Titus in *Lolly Willowes*, speaks 'with the animation of a conqueror'.²⁶¹ Furthermore, the foregrounding of the figure of Victoria, who reigned over the British Empire at the height of its power, grounds the novel within the context of political sovereignty. The monarch in *The True Heart* is represented almost as a mythical figurehead from a bygone era, and Warner's representation of the Queen is similar to the recurrence of the image of the monarch as derided figurehead that appears throughout the novels of her modernist contemporary, Virginia Woolf. In Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915), Richard Dalloway has a 'vision of English history, King following King, Prime Minister Prime Minister, and Law Law'.²⁶² Through Dalloway, Woolf subtly undermines the symbolics of sovereignty. From the severed '[r]oyal hand attached to an invisible body' in *Jacob's Room*, to the 'little figure' with a golden teapot on his head' who represents the monarch in *The Waves*, Woolf ridicules such traditions.²⁶³ As she suggests in *The Waves*, '[t]o put Kings on their thrones, one following another, with crowns on their heads' represents an arbitrary and absurd democratic tradition.²⁶⁴ Much like Woolf's representation of Queen Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen who 'when she mounted the soap box in the centre, representing perhaps a rock in the ocean, her size made her appear

²⁶¹ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.21.

²⁶² Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: Vintage, 2004), p.46.

²⁶³ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (London: Hogarth, 1945), p.66; Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.194.

²⁶⁴ Woolf, *The Waves*, p.194.

gigantic', Warner's representation of Queen Victoria presents the monarch with satirically inflated purpose.²⁶⁵ As Warner's narrator states:

She is England's Queen, she is something very fine indeed. Perhaps we shall never know how fine. We are too much accustomed to her, we see her too close. England's Queen isn't meant to be looked at close. But one day, later on, some time in the twentieth century, people will look back. And there she'll be, sitting up against the horizon like St. Paul's, blue and majestic and dumpy; but superbly dumpy, sitting there bolt upright with her crown on, dwarfing and mothering everything. And we, we who live in her reign, we shall all be under the dome.²⁶⁶

The 'dome' under which all Victoria's subjects will reside is the empire and her enormity represents a reign supreme.

However, this sovereign belongs, in Warner's world, to something of a fantasy realm. Being given directions to Buckingham Palace where she is to encounter the Queen, Sukey finds that '[t]he words seemed to sweep her forward, to leave her standing alone before a reality. This Buckingham Place, then, to her a word and a dream, existed, and was close at hand; and others knew it and took it for granted as a thing seen day by day'.²⁶⁷ There is here a sense of conflation between the world of dreams and the world of reality in which the Queen resides, and this is brought to the fore on the morning that Sukey is to complete her quest and stand before the Queen: 'It was so real, this May morning, that it was almost

²⁶⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (London: Vintage, 2005), pp.51-52.

²⁶⁶ Warner, *The True Heart*, pp.245-246.

²⁶⁷ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.241.

unreal. [...] This was more dreamlike than any dream'.²⁶⁸ The conflation between dream and reality is noted in the *Times Literary Supplement* review, which writes that '[t]hough Sukey is too good to be true, there is nothing grotesque about her; for Miss Warner is a poet at heart who draws no hard line between the imagined and the real, and can therefore blend both with perfect grace'.²⁶⁹ The extent of the fantasy is emphasised by the surreal, almost carnivalesque scene that takes place shortly before at Covent Garden Market, in which Sukey sees 'a blue dog' and imagines that '[a] gentleman rich enough to own a blue dog might impart some valuable advice on how to behave with royalty'.²⁷⁰ Indeed, the man who emerges from this improbable scene does provide Sukey with the introduction to the Queen.

Warner's further historical novels of the 1930s and beyond adhere very much to the formula she sets out in *The True Heart*, in that she uses the past to reimagine the present. While the 1920s novels look at a fantasy realm located in the present or recent past, the later novels stretch over a broad span of history in search of a space to reinvent contemporary models of power. Thomas Foster, discussing *Summer Will Show*, Warner's 1936 novel set in 1848 revolutionary Paris, claims that 'Warner's awareness of the politics of representation should also be understood in terms of the novel's "incredulity toward metanarratives"'.²⁷¹ As Foster argues, 'no one story is allowed to achieve either completion or complete authority; no

²⁶⁸ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.256.

²⁶⁹ 'Review of *The True Heart*', p.160.

²⁷⁰ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.237; p.239.

²⁷¹ Thomas Foster, *Transformations of Domesticity in Modern Women's Writing: Homelessness at Home* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.117.

narrative perspective is privileged over all others. These disruptions of narrative sequence mark the convergence of distinct structures of domination and resistances to them'.²⁷² In invoking Lyotard's theory of the postmodern, Foster's argument links neatly with my own, in that I suggest that sovereignty functions as one of the grand narratives that Lyotard attempts to discredit. Warner looks to the past and highlights the existence of these systems of thought and, in doing so, questions the existence and production of contemporary metanarratives. In *Summer Will Show*, Sophia's belief in her absolute control over her household – 'I rule and order it alone' – results in her belief that '[n]o cloistered fool of a nun could live freer from the onslaught of love than I, and no queen could have a more absolute sway'.²⁷³ Here Sophia becomes the manifestation of sovereign power as '[s]he lived singularly uncriticised by her household, so calmly enforcing her will upon them that they felt themselves supported by it'.²⁷⁴ Like Laura in *Lolly Willowes* and Fortune in *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, Sophia's sovereignty is tied to the domestic realm.

However, Sophia comes to realise that her sovereignty does not extend beyond the home:

It was boring to be a woman, nothing one did had any meat in it. And her peculiar freedom, well-incomed, dis-husbanded, seemed now only to increase the impotence of her life. Free as she might be to do as she pleased, all her doings were barred. [...] Should she enforce her will over convention, go out into the woods and cut down another tree, the deed would only be granted to her on terms that it was a woman's whim, a nonsense to be tidied up as soon as

²⁷² Foster, pp.129-130.

²⁷³ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Summer Will Show* (London: Virago, 1987), p.22.

²⁷⁴ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p.24.

possible by the responsible part of the world. [...] She could do nothing out of doors, a woman's sphere was the home.²⁷⁵

That this breed of monarchical sovereignty represents an unsatisfactory situation, both for Sophia as an individual and for broader European society, is a theme that manifests itself very clearly in the novel's historical backdrop: the 1848 French revolution resulted in the end of King Louis-Philippe's reign to be replaced by a republican government. When Sophia arrives in Paris she sees a caricature of the King as a pear: '[f]or now the outlined pears had been filled with features, and the features were unmistakably of the cast of the Royal Family – a big Louis Philippe pear in the centre of the tree, with all his lesser pears around him'. This image alludes to Charles Philipon's 1831 ink drawing entitled *The Metamorphosis of King Louis-Philippe into a Pear*, in which the figural disintegration of the monarchy is represented. Much like the sovereign in *The True Heart*, the French King is represented with equally satirical tone. The narrator goes on: '[o]n the twenty-fourth of February Louis Philippe abdicated, hastening through the gardens of Tuileries on foot and under an umbrella, for it was raining pretty smartly'.²⁷⁶ The image of the King scurrying away in the rain is pertinent in its levelling effect; the once great monarchy is now reduced to fairly dismal terms. In *Summer Will Show*, perhaps more than in any other of Warner's novels, the issue of monarchical sovereignty and its demise is made very overtly apparent.

The satirical portrayal of the monarchy penetrates deeply into Warner's novel *The True Heart*. Early in the novel Sukey is introduced to her employer's Godmother: 'P'raps I'd better introduce you. Miss Sukey Bond, the Duchess of Kent. Duchess of Kent, Miss Sukey

²⁷⁵ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p.53.

²⁷⁶ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p.106; p.172.

Bond'. As it turns out, Mrs Disbrowe, the Godmother, is the landlady of 'a public called the Duke of Kent'.²⁷⁷ Sukey, however, imagines her appearance at the farm to be an act of providence:

The Duke of Kent. The Duchess of Kent. Queen Victoria was their child, rather surprisingly, since how should a duchess, wearing only feathers, bring forth a crowned Queen? Sukey glanced towards The True Secret of England's Greatness, and then towards Mrs Disbrowe, and then back to The True Secret Again. The True Secret had come to Halfacres from Godmother. Perhaps all publics called the Duke of Kent were obliged by the law of England loyally to possess a picture of his illustrious child.²⁷⁸

'The True Secret', which represents the manifestation of the sovereign as she appears to her subjects, could be said to represent the reality of the Queen more closely than the woman herself, because this is form in which she makes her appearance in households across her entirety of Great Britain and her colonies. This illusory manifestation becomes the socially constructed reality for her subjects and would explain the conflation of fantasy and reality in the depiction of the Queen.

In *The True Heart* the fact that, to an extent, the Queen remains a carefully constructed image allows both Warner and her protagonist, Sukey, to manipulate her according to their own means; Sukey is able '[t]o bend the Queen into her own stratagem, to use the Queen of England for her own purposes'.²⁷⁹ Sukey lies to the Queen about the purpose of her visit:

²⁷⁷ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.217.

²⁷⁸ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.217.

²⁷⁹ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.260.

'she had deceived the Queen, behaving in a most underhand and disloyal fashion to a Sovereign who was so gracious, to an old lady who was so sorrowful'.²⁸⁰ Sukey's exploitation of the Queen becomes analogous with Warner's greater project, which transcends the bounds of this one novel, of twisting the ideologies of empire to reconstruct sovereignty. Though *The True Heart* is a historical novel it is also very much a product of contemporary discursive systems. Wachman argues that 'the ideological requirements of empire had hardly changed between 1873 and 1929'.²⁸¹ By setting *The True Heart* in a past that so closely resembles her present, Warner is able to critique the grand narrative of sovereignty from a position that takes the past and superimposes it onto the present. The absurdity of the monarchical system is only escalated by this transition, which aims to show how such a system, incongruous during the Victorian age, becomes increasingly inappropriate in the 1920s. *Lolly Willowes* and *Mr Fortune's Maggot* both explore the alternative spaces in which it becomes possible to reformulate the kind of conventional power dynamics which are laid out in this later novel.

The Slave Narrative in *Lolly Willowes*

David Matless argues that, in the 1920s and 30s, '[t]he open air could be presented as a space of equality and freedom for women and men, offering a democratic direct contact with the landscape which did not respect conservative conventions of gender'. He goes on:

Conversely, others could connect a surveying mentality to a particular masculinity seeking to order the landscape and erase other knowledges. Such a reading is central to Sylvia Townsend Warner's 1926 novel *Lolly Willowes*, the

²⁸⁰ Warner, *The True Heart*, p.266.

²⁸¹ Wachman, p.49.

story of a single woman making her way in the country, socially and spiritually. Lolly Willowes moves to the Chilterns from London via a map and guidebook knowledge, but her move towards an intimate local knowledge, and towards witchcraft, is symbolized by a rejection of formal geography.²⁸²

From the start of her career as a novelist, Warner found herself engaged in the process of imagining narrative spaces in which to create an alternative to the prevailing systems of thought, which were inevitably embedded in patriarchy. In her first novel, *Lolly Willowes*, this imaginary realm is the village of Great Mop in which Laura goes to live, unbeknownst to her at first, in a community of witches.²⁸³ Great Mop is a village which itself straddles borders. For Peter Swaab, '[g]eographically Great Mop is cut off from the world: it stands at the head of a valley, not on the way anywhere, five miles from the nearest village. But it is not entirely cut off, as it is also easily reachable from London and a railway line runs nearby'.²⁸⁴ Swaab argues that Great Mop's situation is reflected in the novel's relation to narrative mode. As he claims, '[i]ts location in respect of realism is similarly remote but not decisively separate'.²⁸⁵ Reflecting Warner's own liminal status as novelist, Great Mop is close at hand and yet somehow just out of reach; it is so near and yet so far.

²⁸² David Matless, 'Moral Geographies of English Landscape', *Landscape Research*, 22.2 (1997), 141-155 (p.147).

²⁸³ 'Lolly' is the name that Laura rejects because of its association with her former repressed existence.

²⁸⁴ Peter Swaab, 'The Queerness of *Lolly Willowes*', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* (2010), 29-52 (p.43).

²⁸⁵ Swaab, p.43.

Strangely drawn to the village by what appear to be subtly supernatural forces, Laura eventually meets with the benign devil (the loving huntsman of the title) and releases that she herself is a witch:

Warner [...] has Lolly reject the whole value system of the patriarchal society and decide that if God is on the side of female servility and propriety, male pomposity and tradition, and the institutionalism that is civilization, then her calling is to be a servant of the devil, a witch.²⁸⁶

The novel gradually morphs from realism to fantasy as Laura comes to realise her true identity and to reject a society based on traditional and oppressive values. As a 1926 review asserts, '[n]obody would suspect the emergence of a cloven hoof from this quiet realism'.²⁸⁷ Perényi too charts *Lolly Willowes'* slide into the realm of fantasy, noting that the novel 'begins with reality—the condition of an upper-class young woman doomed by her aversion to men to the horrors of Edwardian spinsterhood—and ends in the supernatural, when she falls into the hands of Satan'.²⁸⁸ According to Perényi, it is the second half of the novel that is the most compelling and persuasive, 'perhaps because in Warner herself there was more than a touch of the witch'.²⁸⁹ Warner's introduction of the supernatural or fantasy holds greater sway over the mind of the reader because it dares to imagine an alternative to Laura's previously subjugated existence.

²⁸⁶ Barbara Brothers, 'Flying the Nets at Forty: *Lolly Willowes* as Female Bildungsroman', in *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel*, ed. by Laura Doan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp.195-212 (p.200).

²⁸⁷ 'Review of *Lolly Willowes*', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4 February 1926, p.78.

²⁸⁸ Perényi, 'The Good Witch of the West', p.127.

²⁸⁹ Perényi, p.127.

The destructive forces in the world that Laura leaves behind, represented by the predominantly phallogocentric institutions of 'Society, the Law, the Church, the History of Europe, the Old testament, great-great-aunt Salome and her prayer book, the Bank of England, Prostitution, the Architect of Apsley Terrace, and half a dozen other useful props of civilisation', reflect the inexorable mesh of civilization which constitute Warner's understanding of patriarchal society.²⁹⁰ These institutions are part of a tightly woven web of societal conventions, and Warner's inclusion of these contributes to a broader recognition of similar networks of repressive systems of thought that are present in modernist women's writing.

In *Lolly Willowes* Laura finds the street lamps of London leading her on through the workings of society: 'Each in turn would hand her on, her and her shadow, as she walked the unfathomed streets and squares'. She imagines these hands guiding her on to be 'complying with the sealed orders of the future'.²⁹¹ As Woolf suggests in *Jacob's Room* (1922), '[i]t is thus that we live, they say, driven by an unseizable force'. She suggests this again in *The Waves* (1931), writing that 'we spin round us infinitely fine filaments and construct a system', we are governed in our everyday life by this unseen power.²⁹² If she remains in London, Laura envisions herself trapped indefinitely within this web: '[s]he would become an inmate of the tall house in Apsley Terrace'. Warner's narrator writes that, at Apsley Terrace, Laura 'actually had a sensation that she was stitching herself into a piece

²⁹⁰ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes or the Loving Huntsman* (London: Virago, 2000), p.150.

²⁹¹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, p.4.

²⁹² Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, p.155; Woolf, *The Waves*, p.153.

of embroidery with a good deal of background'. Indeed, for much of Part 1 of the novel Laura is presented through the consciousness of her step-sister Caroline in a kind of free indirect discourse that mimics omniscience. Here Laura is described as 'a gentle creature' who would 'have to make haste if she were going to find a husband before she was thirty'. Formally as well as thematically, in this introductory section of the novel, Laura's identity is only accessible through the dubious and biased perspectives of those who represent the society she is attempting to escape. Here, in London, where 'the preparation and demolition of every day went on, like the inward persistent workings of heart and entrails', Laura finds herself seamlessly stitched into a society she loathes.²⁹³ She realises that her only chance of escape is to unpick the stitches of her old life and detach herself completely from the society she knows. However, having made the move to Great Mop, aspects of her old life continue to plague her. For instance, her nephew Titus takes a fancy to the quaint peaceful village and attempts to invade Laura's sanctuary: 'He left his pipe and tobacco pouch on the mantelpiece. They lay there like the orb and sceptre of an usurping monarch'.²⁹⁴ As the embodiment of the patriarchy that Laura thought she had left behind, Titus is representative of one of the most malign components of the system, which is that of a state sovereignty derived from a monarchical system. Titus, through his belongings, is represented according to the symbolics of such an order. In the shadow of the system of sovereignty, Laura once again becomes the oppressed in a system designed to privilege men.

²⁹³ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, p.3; p.2, p.46; p.47.

²⁹⁴ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, p.158. To further the connection between Warner and Woolf, Jane Marcus notes that 'Warner's portrait of Titus is much like Woolf's portrait of Jacob Flanders. We see him through objects and the eyes of others' (Marcus, p.155).

Just as Caroline attempts to shape Laura to fit her own mould, Laura finds herself fighting against even weightier narrative oppression. Even the seemingly omniscient third-person narrator of the opening section of *Lolly Willowes* attempts to bind Laura to her apparently inexorable fate. As the narrator predicts, when Laura's niece, Fancy Willowes, 'had grown up, and married, and lost her husband in the war, and driven a lorry for the Government, and married again from patriotic motives' Fancy declares to her second husband:

How unenterprising women were in the old days! Look at Aunt Lolly. Grandfather left her five hundred a year, and she was nearly thirty when he died, and yet she could find nothing better to do than settle down with Mum and Dad, and stay there ever since.²⁹⁵

Though we have no reason to mistrust our narrator in the first pages of the novel, as we see later, this prediction turns out to be inaccurate in the extreme. Laura is not only fighting against conventional societal moulds, but just also fighting to break free of the plot that the narrator has set out for her. Not only is Laura described a piece of furniture at Apsley Terrace but her destiny appears to be mapped out with a complete lack of regard for her own self-determination.

Reading *Lolly Willowes*, Garrity compellingly argues that the novel is bound within 'colonial rhetoric': 'the novel's invocation of feminist reform at times colludes with Anglo-centric conceptions of womanhood as a subject race: as Lolly critiques empire, she simultaneously appropriates the role of colonised Other'. She goes on to argue that *Lolly Willowes*, like the later *The True Heart*, 'demonstrate[s] how the Englishwoman understands her cultural

²⁹⁵ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, p.6.

disempowerment as equivalent to that of other colonized peoples everywhere'.²⁹⁶ This is corroborated by Wachman, who sees the use of this discourse as troubling: 'Warner can lapse, however, into a problematic appropriation of the oppression of racial Others'.²⁹⁷ Alarmed at the prospect of being captured again by the life she thought she had managed to escape, Lolly imagines the illusory figures of her old life that Titus has inevitably brought with him to Great Mop:

She stood at bay, trembling before them, shaking and sick with the grinding anger of the slave. They were come out to recapture her, they had tracked her down and closed her in. They had let her run a little way – that was all – for they knew they could get her back when they chose. Her delusion of freedom had amused them.²⁹⁸

The only way Lolly can envisage escaping the society in which her role is equated with that of the slave is to assert, in defiance, her own individual sovereignty.

Appropriating for herself the colonial rhetoric which characterised her own oppression, Lolly constructs her own sovereign territory:

Room, house, village encircled her like the rings of fortification. This was her domain, and it was to keep this inviolate that she had made her compact with the devil [...]. They could not drive her out, or enslave her spirit any more, nor shake her possession of the place she had chosen.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Garrity, pp.154-155.

²⁹⁷ Wachman, p.80.

²⁹⁸ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, p.163.

²⁹⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, p.174.

Reading this, Garrity compares her to 'an imperial queen presiding over her spoils [as] Lolly expresses her lesbian-witch identity through the trope of conquest and acquisition'.³⁰⁰ Garrity's persuasive argument is backed up by many further examples from the text. For instance, she describes the scene in which Lolly bakes dough in the form of the people from the village of Great Mop. She writes that 'Warner here situates Lolly in a very different relation to the empire from that of the compliant Salome, repositioning her not as loyal subject but, in effect, as a subversive queen, re-creating and transforming the body politic as it pleases her'.³⁰¹ Rather than creating an alternative to the system of sovereignty, Laura attempts to adopt the concept to work to her own advantage. Whilst Sukey uses the Queen for her own purposes in *The True Heart*, she remains always her subject. In *Lolly Willowes*, however, Laura escapes, in some senses, this subject/ruler binary by becoming sovereign herself. Nevertheless, Laura is still bound by the limits posed by a sovereignty discourse. Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt articulates that '[e]scape is impossible, but negotiation is possible, as Laura discovers. Thus, as the plot of *Lolly Willowes* progresses, England's spaces are also replotted in response to Laura's broadening political perspective'.³⁰² In order to overthrow conventional systems of power, Lolly has enthroned herself. To expand on Garrity's argument, though Warner in *Lolly Willowes* shrewdly fashions the discourse of colonialism and sovereignty to the advantage of her protagonist she nevertheless remains tied within the grasp of such rhetoric, which is inextricably bound within a delimiting grand narrative.

³⁰⁰ Garrity, p.171.

³⁰¹ Garrity, p.165.

³⁰² Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt, 'Footsteps of Red Ink: Body and Landscape in *Lolly Willowes*', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 49.4 (2003), 449-471 (p.451).

Though the imaginary village of Great Mop offers Warner a certain amount of potential as a narrative space in which to dramatise this restructuring of patriarchal power networks, it remains firmly rooted within the heart of Great Britain, the seat of the British Empire. Swaab points out that 'Great Mop has a village shop, a pub, a church and a population of 227'. As he continues, however, '[i]t is not a merely fantastical utopia – the details of village life are too lively and specific for that – but nor is it explored in relation to modernity and the conditions of labour. It is hardly a site for revolutionary change'.³⁰³ The setting of *Lolly Willowes* is characterised by its peculiar sense of the quotidian and the domestic, though Laura's domestic existence in Great Mop is far removed from that by which she was imprisoned in London. Gina Wisker writes that *Lolly Willowes* symbolises 'a genuine alternative to the constraints of domesticity, dependency and a secondary role'.³⁰⁴ *Lolly Willowes* still represents domesticity—after all, it is Laura's home that is her fortress—but it is a radically revised notion of domesticity. With her home as her citadel, Laura usurps the role of the sovereign and makes it an inextricable part of the domestic. Whilst Warner might not be imagining alternative systems of rule here, she is being radical in that she is appropriating conventional formulations of power for her own purposes. In making the site for this appropriation the domestic, Warner constitutes the private as an inherently political space.

The Imagined Orient in *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*

³⁰³ Swaab, p.43.

³⁰⁴ Gina Wisker, 'Demisting the Mirror: Contemporary British Women's Horror', in *Contemporary British Women Writers*, ed. by Emma Parker (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp.154-170 (p.160).

Moving a step further away from the 'known world', Warner's next novel, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, attempts to imagine a system of rule entirely separate from anything that is currently possible in a country so deeply embedded in the sovereignty tradition. *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* tells the tale of the Reverend Timothy Fortune's stay as a missionary, and the only European, on the volcanic Polynesian island of Fanua. As a missionary, Fortune's stay is a failure. He makes only one convert, Lueli, a boy whom he christens Theodore (meaning 'the gift of God').³⁰⁵ His implicitly homosexual relationship with the boy, who comes to live with Fortune in his hut which is set apart from the dwellings of the other islanders, is accepted by the community who do not adhere to the strict binary divisions which constitute gender and power in the Western world. After discovering Lueli's idol, Fortune realises that the boy has been secretly worshipping his old god and is no true convert to Christianity. In an earthquake which obliterates their home, Lueli's idol is destroyed and he quite literally loses the will to live, which culminates in his attempted suicide. At the same time Fortune loses his faith in God. Having planned to stay on Fanua indefinitely, Fortune realises he must leave, and the novel ends with his departure from the island and his return to civilization at war. On hearing, for the first time, of the outbreak of the First World War, 'Mr. Fortune could not yet gather who was fighting whom, still less what they were all fighting about. However, there seemed no doubt but that it was a very comprehensive dog-fight'.³⁰⁶ In contrast to the generally peaceful island life disturbed only by natural disasters, the 'real world' to which he returns seems the model of wickedness and degeneracy. The actuality of the world at war is juxtaposed with the imagined alternative offered by Fanua.

³⁰⁵ Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1948), p.21.

³⁰⁶ Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, pp.172-173.

As Nigel Rigby affirms, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, with its numerous allusions to Daniel Defoe's novel, is 'Warner's rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*'.³⁰⁷ As the narrator states, 'Mr. Fortune often thought of Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday as he sat on the rocks watching Lueli, [...]. And he thought gratefully how much happier he was than the other man. He was ideally contented with his island and his companion'.³⁰⁸ Indeed, the two novels hold much in common in terms of their thematics and settings; both are set on bountiful though geologically instable islands. Though *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* is set on a volcanic island which, like the island in *Robinson Crusoe* is susceptible to earthquakes, the inhabitants of both islands are generally safe from danger and have a plentiful supply of food.

As a rewriting of this excessively masculine novel (women are barely even mentioned in Defoe's text), which celebrates imperialism, slavery and the ideal of sovereignty, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* could perhaps be read as its direct opposite: an inverted mirror image in which Christianity is renounced rather than found, in which a truly democratic egalitarianism is celebrated over feudal domination, in which masculine and feminine are regarded on equal terms and in which Western civilization is criticised rather than glorified. Significantly, the link with *Robinson Crusoe* begins in *Lolly Willowes*, where we see Lolly placed in direct comparison with Man Friday of *Robinson Crusoe*: 'She could not do better than follow the example of the savages in *Robinson Crusoe*: go up on to a hill-top and say O !

³⁰⁷ Nigel Rigby, "'Not a Good Place for Deacons": The South Seas, Sexuality and Modernism in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*', in *Modernism and Empire*, ed. by Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.224-248 (p.230).

³⁰⁸ Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, p.65.

No pious savage could have ejaculated O ! more devoutly than she did'.³⁰⁹ In *Lolly Willowes*, Laura identifies herself with the colonised, whereas the Mr. Fortune of her later novel becomes symbolic of the sympathetic coloniser, very far removed from Defoe's *Crusoe*.³¹⁰

Warner returns to the hyper-masculine figure of Defoe's *Crusoe* repeatedly, reimagining him in alternative sexual and gender categories. However, in reinventing *Crusoe*, Warner also reinvents *Crusoe's* politics. In direct contrast to Defoe's *Crusoe* who, on his tropical island, epitomises the figure of the unlimited sovereign who is 'absolute lord and law-giver', who 'could hang, draw, give liberty, and take it away, and no rebels among all my subjects', Warner's Timothy Fortune is a model of passivity and acquiescence.³¹¹ From his arrival on the island of Fanua where he finds himself 'like a child a party [...] taken charge of and shepherded in the right direction', Fortune, as the only white man, never attempts to impose his will on the islanders and instead tolerates their customs and lives happily alongside them.³¹²

Mr. Fortune's Maggot is, like its precursor *Lolly Willowes*, inextricably bound with notions of Empire and the borders of sovereign power. Tearing up the map that metaphorically marks

³⁰⁹ Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, p.215.

³¹⁰ Incidentally, *Robinson Crusoe* is a novel to which Warner was to return to again in the course of her novelistic career. In her 1954 novel *The Flint Anchor*, the allusion to this novel is made through the bisexual fisherman named *Crusoe* who is in love with Thomas. In the seafaring community of Loseby, as *Crusoe* articulates, 'we go man with man and man with woman, and nobody think the worse'. Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Flint Anchor* (London: Virago, 1997), p.183.

³¹¹ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), p.190; p.118.

³¹² Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, p.13.

the borders of Empire in *Lolly Willowes*, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* starts with uncharted territory; a blank slate for the formation of new notions of sovereignty and power.³¹³ Just as the desert romance has as its backdrop an apparently imaginary domain, so too Warner's South Sea island, Fanua, is conceived within this fantasy realm. Rigby argues that 'Warner's Polynesia is entirely textual, anecdotal and imaginary: she never travelled to the Pacific'.³¹⁴ In contrast to the landscapes of her other 1920s novels, of which she had an intimate knowledge, Warner had no first-hand experience of the exotic setting in which she chose to base this novel.

Constructing an unfamiliar landscape, Warner self-consciously reflects on the artificiality of her scene; by way of a preface she writes that '[t]he scenes and characters of this story are entirely imaginary'.³¹⁵ Before he arrives on the island, Fortune can only see it from the prospect of an adjacent island shrouded in mist: 'the island was hidden in the evening haze, and Fanua seemed more remote than ever'. From the neighbouring island, Fanua 'could only be seen in imagination'.³¹⁶ Although Timothy Fortune inhabits Fanua for many years, as soon as he leaves it its reality fades. As Nesbitt states, 'Fanua will return to its place as an imagined country, "sinking back into the sea from whence it had arisen" at the beginning of

³¹³ Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt interprets Lolly's map (marked with red and green) of the area surrounding Great Mop in terms of Empire. She writes that '[t]he colour red marks man's inroads into nature, and alludes subtly to the imperial red that marked British colonies. The green suggests both a natural landscape and one that has not been fully organised and known by the state'. Jennifer Poulos Nesbitt, *Narrative Settlements: Geographies of British Women's Fiction Between the Wars* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 11.

³¹⁴ Rigby, p.224.

³¹⁵ Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, p.7. Emphasis in original.

³¹⁶ Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, p.11; p.10.

the novel'.³¹⁷ As in *Lolly Willowes*, it is in this space of unreality that Warner is at her most compelling. As a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* points out, '[t]he element of unreality is here throughout, but it does not matter, because the story is a fable: and few fables contain characters as beautifully drawn as that of Mr. Fortune'.³¹⁸ It is in this entirely imaginary realm that Warner is perhaps best able to assemble a true alternative to conventional models of power.

Owing to the multiple subjectivities that constitute Fanua, the functioning of power that is generated on Warner's island is distinct from the inflexible singular reality of sovereignty in Hull's desert romances. Though he goes to Fanua as a missionary, Fortune's undertaking falls flat as he has no desire to impose his will on the other inhabitants. Instead, he recognises that the power structures on the island are such that there is no absolute authority and that power on the island is multifaceted. This is revealed when he goes to Lueli's mother to ask her to allow Lueli to live with him:

Taking off the hat and bowing, he addressed her with a long speech in which he drew a careful distinction between obedience to God and obedience to lawful authority. [...] On the other hand, as Lueli's only visible parent and lawful guardian she had an absolute right to decide whether Lueli should remain at home, and if she wished him (Lueli) to do so, far from opposing her he (Mr. Fortune) would enforce her authority with his own and insist on the boy's return.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ Nesbitt, *Narrative Settlements*, p.73.

³¹⁸ 'Review of *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 May 1927, p.316.

³¹⁹ Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, p.25.

Though he uses legal rhetoric and, to a certain extent, imposes his own European conceptions of legal order onto Fanua, this passage reflects the fact that Fortune recognises that power emanates from multiple sources. Foucault claims that power does not emanate from the state but rather is dispersed through multiple institutions, including 'the head of the family, the superior of a convent, the teachers or tutor of a child or pupil', and this is reflected in Fortune's speech.³²⁰ Lueli's mother's seeming unconcern as to her son's dwelling place, and the fact that Lueli is free, under his mother's 'guardianship', to roam the island and its waters as he pleases, demonstrates the extent to which this notion of legal guardianship is irrelevant to the society on the island. Ori, the closest figure Fanua has to a chief, responds to the same speech with a similar nonchalance, revealing his lack of desire for power.³²¹ To draw once again on Foucauldian notions of government and rule, the type of power that is represented on Fanua begins to depart from the patriarchal notions of monarchical sovereignty (as seen in Hull's novels) in favour of a networked system in which power emanates from less well defined origins. In fact Fanua apparently exists in a kind of extra-legal idyll.

Despite his South Sea location, Fortune's life on the island is surrounded by motifs of domesticity. For instance, the items Fortune chooses to take to the island with him have a decidedly domestic feel. They include 'tinned meat, soup squares, a chest of tea, soap, a tool-box, a medicine chest, a gentleman's housewife, a second-hand harmonium [...] and an oil lamp', along with 'rolls of white cotton and a sewing-machine to make clothes for his

³²⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. by Graham Burchell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp.87-104 (p.91).

³²¹ Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, pp.25-26.

converts'.³²² Hinnov argues that 'Fortune is clearly characterized as a masculine, colonialist missionary who becomes enraptured at the idea of providing tutelage for his only convert, the kind and docile young man, Lueli. Yet, like a fastidious housewife, he tidies his surroundings into a feminized domestic space'. As Hinnov continues, 'Warner's queering of Fortune – and his "housewifely mind" – destabilizes him as a legitimate instrument of a masculinist British Empire'.³²³ Fortune is at home abroad as he builds in the quotidian texture of British life to his island existence. As in *Lolly Willowes*, conceptions of power and rule are bound tightly to images of the domestic. However, whereas in *Lolly Willowes* the home is represented as a site for the appropriation of pre-existing structures of power, in *Mr Fortune's Maggot* the domestic acts as a site of its rejection.

Fortune's domestication and his overt effeminisation are tied to Warner's attempt to undermine masculine power structures. In *Hull* I observe that women dress as men in order to assimilate themselves into positions of relative power within the patriarchy. In *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* too, cross-dressing plays a significant role in conveying relations of gender and power. The gender and sexuality conflation in *Mr Fortune's Maggot* has been thoroughly mapped out in recent years. For instance, Wachman states that in this novel '[t]he male/female binary is constantly mocked', and '[t]he heterosexual/homosexual binary is persistently called into question'.³²⁴ Similarly, Garrity reads Fortune and Lueli as 'legible as *female* because of the ways they are overtly feminized', claiming that they 'are not

³²² Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, p.12.

³²³ Hinnov, p.86; pp.88-89.

³²⁴ Wachman, p.93; p.94.

merely gay men but are feminized figures of lesbian displacement'.³²⁵ There are numerous instances in the novel which support these claims of gender conflation, especially in Lueli, the object of Fortune's passive desire. Lueli is, amongst other instances which attest to his effeminacy, described as at one stage 'coquetting like a girl', whilst his whistle is 'of a very girlish incompetent kind'.³²⁶ Lueli is elaborately decorated:

Lueli had greaves and gaiters of a pattern of interlacing bamboo-shoots, and in addition a bracelet round his left wrist and on his right shoulder-blade an amusing sprig. But this was all. And from the elegance of the designs and their wilful disposition it seemed as though he had been decorated for no better reason than the artist's pleasure.³²⁷

Rather than merely inverting the gender binaries however, Warner pushes for their complete eradication. On Fanua, as in *The Flint Anchor*, men love men legitimately. The women in Hull, as I discuss in the following chapter, dress as men but they are always definitely heterosexual women. The gender identity of the men in Warner's novel remains contentious.

This conflation of gender is inextricably linked with ideals of power and rule. Rigby articulates this, noting that 'Warner outlines a difference between a destructive, "colonising", male lust which seeks to control and subordinate otherness to desire, and "homosexual" love which, through its perceived moderation of masculine sexual aggression

³²⁵ Garrity, p.144; p.145. Emphasis in original.

³²⁶ Warner, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, pp.21-22; p.55.

³²⁷ Warner, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, p.23.

by more tolerant feminine qualities, is receptive to difference'.³²⁸ Though Warner's fantasy realm on Fanua might offer a visibly 'feminised' egalitarian society in which 'masculinised' sovereignty is negated, she is powerless to hold back the flood of patriarchal rule that is the inevitable consequence of colonisation:

There would soon be plenty of white men to frighten the children of Fanua, to bring them galvanised iron and law-courts and commerce and industry and bicycles and patent medicines and American alarm clocks, besides the blessing of religion. Had he not come, a single spy? And soon there would come battalions.³²⁹

Rigby argues that 'the ultimate message of *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* is profoundly bleak, and is the complete antithesis of Crusoe's confident vision of the future for western civilisation'.³³⁰ Warner might imagine an alternative system of government on her island, but it is unsustainable against the tide of Western colonising forces. Though the ultimate message might be unpromising, the very fact that Warner has created the space to imagine an alternative to sovereignty is a positive step which goes some way towards countering the deeply troubling unyielding views propounded Hull and her compatriots, who seek only to sustain the patriarchy. Wachman notes that though '[t]he ending of the novel finally reveals that the fantasy has been an elegy all along', the novel does dare to imagine the possibility of alternative models of power.³³¹ For Warner perhaps, the fantasy realm is just that: pure

³²⁸ Rigby, p.239.

³²⁹ Warner, *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, p.163.

³³⁰ Rigby, p.230.

³³¹ Wachman, p.97.

fantasy, a space in which any potential alternate reality might be imagined because, being make-believe, it is free from censure.

In *Summer Will Show*, Warner shows how the demise of the monarchy does not necessarily entail a new optimistic order. 'Gold is', we are told 'always gold'. Warner's narrator has a personified city of Paris state that, '[i]t is true that yesterday we sacked two palaces, havocked every nest where golden eggs are laid, broke, burned, and plundered. But we see how scrupulously we are preserving the ruins'.³³² For Warner, Paris after the revolution is no freer of the schema of sovereignty now that it is without a monarchy. This historically-based fiction reveals that, to Warner, much of the contemporary world is bound up by these outmoded systems that seemingly belong in the past. The revolution of Warner's novel manifests itself in theatrical terms. The characters here are described as 'back once more in the heartiest display of comic opera', in which 'gilded spears and pasteboard helmets still wreathed with artificial flowers mingled in their classical elegance with the morions and pikes which had last appeared in performances of *I Puritani*'.³³³ The revolution becomes a mere performance in which the realities of power remain unchanged. History reimaged serves a similar purpose to the imagined orient in opening up a space in which to re-evaluate conventional notions of power. However, this reimagining for Warner always remains in this fantasy realm. *Summer Will Show* articulates 'desolation of spirit when one beholds the dream made flesh'.³³⁴ As Claire Harman writes in her introduction to the novel, '[i]t is not the dreamers, though, who survive the chaos and desperate aimlessness of the

³³² Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p.177. Emphasis in original.

³³³ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p.165.

³³⁴ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p.146.

revolution when it comes, nor is there any value attached to their ideals retrospectively'.³³⁵ As in *The True Heart* there is a conflation between the real and the imaginary, but always it is this imaginary sphere that opens up the possibility of alternatives even if it does not succeed in realising them.

Warner writes in *The Corner that Held Them* (1948) that 'each one of us lives in his microcosm, the solidity of this world is a mere game of mirrors, there can be no absolute existence for what is apprehended differently for all'.³³⁶ The recognition of multiple realities equates to infinite possibilities in which to reimagine power structures. Warner's novels of the 1920s and 1930s share recognisable tropes with the feminist modernist novelists who serve as her contemporaries. For instance, the familiar argument that condemns patriarchal traditions as repressive and dangerous forces which are represented in conventional sovereign terms is challenged by the now established alternatives which are constructed from variously female orientated perspectives. In Warner's work I see this counter-sovereignty tract emerge as a product of her engagement with the alternative realities offered by the genre of the modernist fantasy novel in which sovereignty is reimaged. In terms of thinking through *Lolly Willowes* through the theoretical framework of *femina sacra*, the connection is not always quite so obvious. The lack of explicit violence makes it hard to characterise life as represented in Warner's fiction as undeniably bare life. There is not the same threat of violence against the individual to provide the irrefutable proof of the lack of political right to life that occurs in in Christie and Mansfield (and as I shall show later, also in West and Lowndes). However, *femina sacra*, the condition of the

³³⁵ Claire Harmen, 'Introduction', *Summer Will Show* (London: Virago, 1987), pp.v-xiii (p.xiii).

³³⁶ Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Corner That Held Them* (London: Virago, 1988), p.215.

woman in the domestic sphere whose rights are distinctly diminished from those of the male figure in the political world, characterise Laura's existence. For instance, Laura attempts to escape the prison-like world of Apsley Terrace but only finds herself moving to a different form of domestic entrapment.

CHAPTER FOUR

Feminism and Sovereignty in E.M. Hull's *The Sheik* and Beyond

*It is time for a matriarchy if the male of the species allows such things to happen. Better rule by masculine women than effeminate men.*³³⁷

In 1921, George Melford's film adaptation of Hull's novel *The Sheik* was released. The ensuing frenzy amongst female fans and the outrage of largely male critics was nothing less than astonishing and, with the release of *The Sheik*, the cult of Rudolph Valentino, who starred as Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan, was born. Today, the little-read author who went by the pseudonym E.M. Hull is largely remembered for this one novel which, along with its sequel, *The Sons of the Sheik* (1925), provides the almost exclusive focus of critical attention on this obscure Derbyshire writer.³³⁸ Hull's entire career was dominated by the success of her first novel and the subsequent film production. Sales of Hull's later novels were marketed primarily on the merit of *The Sheik*; as her publishers, Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, declare in an advertisement for *The Sons of the Sheik*, '[o]ver a million copies have been sold of E.M. Hull's famous novel "The Sheik"; and, therefore, it is no exaggeration to state that

³³⁷ 'Pink Powder Puffs', *Chicago Tribune*, 18 July 1926. Article quoted in full in Allan R. Ellenberger, *The Valentino Mystique: The Death and Afterlife of the Silent Film Idol* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2005), pp.153-154.

³³⁸ Subsequently *The Sons of the Sheik* was adapted for the screen by George Fitzmaurice in 1925. The film *The Son of the Sheik* also starred Rudolph Valentino as the son of Ahmed Ben Hassan.

more than a million readers await the publication of her vivid Eastern romance'.³³⁹ Similarly, in an advertisement for *The Shadow of the East* (1921), the publishers rely almost exclusively on this approach, claiming that 'When it is noted that over a hundred editions in the English language have been sold of "The Sheik", it will be better understood how E.M. Hull without any aid from the Press, has become among novelists the third "best seller" throughout the British Empire and in America. THE SHADOW OF THE EAST is in enormous demand'.³⁴⁰ Indeed, perceptions of the 'desert romance' genre as a whole, to date, have been entirely overshadowed by the overwhelming influence of *The Sheik*.

Although the desert romance saw its heyday in the 1920s, the blueprint set out by Hull and her contemporaries is still in circulation today, as the copious Mills and Boon titles attest.³⁴¹ The desert romance or Sheik fantasy with which Hull is associated, sometimes also described as the 'orientalist' or captivity fantasy, is a genre which grew out of the male-dominated imperial adventure novel of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁴² Hull is credited with appropriating the desert for the female; as Hsu-Ming Teo asserts, 'Edith Maud Hull had not only reiterated orientalist sexual fantasies in *The Sheik*; she had constructed and celebrated the middle Eastern desert as a space of specifically female

³³⁹ *The Times*, 22 January 1926.

³⁴⁰ *The Times*, 23 February 1923.

³⁴¹ So far in 2011 (July) Harlequin Mills and Boon have published ten desert romances with titles such as *Danger in the Desert*, *Vampire Sheikh* and *The Desert Sheikh's Defiant Queen*.

³⁴² Frost, p.95.

sexual fantasies'.³⁴³ Set in the desert, the formulaic Sheik fantasy of the 1920s shows a haughty, white, young and independent woman straying into the desert in search of adventure, only to be captured (and possibly also raped) by the 'Arab' Sheik who teaches her to love. The genre's narrow formula has been well-documented; as Evelyn Bach writes, the desert fantasy is a story 'that we can know like the back of our hand without ever having set foot on a sand dune or oasis; the fantasy of escape, the fantasy of perfect heterosexual love; the fantasies of heroines, readers, novelists and publishers'.³⁴⁴ The genre is one that, despite a decline in popularity towards the end of the 1920s, has enjoyed renewed interest at various points throughout the twentieth century and remains a popular sub-genre in romance writing to the present day. While perceptions of Hull are dominated by the notion of captivity and rape fantasy, not all her fiction adhered as strictly to this formula as it would be easy to think.

My aim here is also to broaden the focus on Hull away from *The Sheik* by suggesting that Hull's subsequent novels, though never straying very far from the lucrative formula she cultivated with her first novel, were, in part at least, written in reaction to the uproar caused by this novel.³⁴⁵ Though still rooted firmly within the masculine imperial politics of conservative 1920s and 30s Britain, they offer a challenge to gendered conceptions of

³⁴³ Hsu-Ming Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance Novels in the Twentieth Century', in *Edward Said: The Legacy of a Public Intellectual*, ed. by Ned Curthoys and Debjani Ganguly (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2007), pp.241-262 (p.243).

³⁴⁴ Evelyn Bach, 'Sheik Fantasies: Orientalism and Feminine Desire in the Desert Romance', *HECATE*, 23.1 (1997), 9-40 (p.11).

³⁴⁵ Q.D. Leavis's claim that *The Sheik* was 'rotten primitive stuff', was fairly typical of criticism of the novel. *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), p.46.

power that might have been left out of *The Sheik*. Arguing that Hull's representation of androgynous and cross-dressing women allow for her heroines to inhabit positions of power in relation to their male counterparts, I maintain that the category of feminism that Hull's fiction espouses is one of moderation and conformity. Hull's fiction became, in part at least, part of the post-war fashion which adopted and played with notions of androgyny. Cross-dressing and androgyny in this era had no fixed and immutable meaning. Laura Doan argues that, '[s]ince in England in the 1920s, fashion-conscious women of all sexual persuasions were obliged to "cross-dress" by donning boyish or mannish attire and by cutting their hair short, we must be receptive to the multiple interpretive possibilities of the performance of female masculinity'.³⁴⁶ Part of this performance of 'female masculinity' in Hull is, I suggest, representative of the movement of women into the masculine public spheres of, amongst others, travel and politics.

Though it is encouraging that Hull's heroines are not bound by their biological sex to subordinate roles, Hull always reverts to what appear to be inflexible gender stereotypes. Though cross-dressing in the works of modernist women writers from the same era has been theorised by, most prominently, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, as well as Dianne Sachko Macleod, who additionally discusses Bloomsbury's reworking of 'the exotic "other" into a vehicle for gender change' in order to counter both oppression by gender and oppression by the West, an examination of cross-dressing in popular 1920s fictions is interesting in light of its very different account of this very much discussed social

³⁴⁶ Laura Doan, 'Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s', *Feminist Studies*, 24.3 (1998), 663-700 (p.667).

phenomenon.³⁴⁷ Whilst Hull might share with her modernist counterparts 'an overt attempt by women to approximate men's social liberties', her portrayal of women dressed as men apparently reinforces gender binaries rather than breaking them down.³⁴⁸ A more radical modernist perspective is epitomised by Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), in which she writes '[v]ain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us'. In contrast, cross-dressing in Hull's fiction reasserts, albeit from an inverted perspective, pre-existing worldviews.³⁴⁹

My reading of Hull's later novels seems paradoxical at times, for whilst on the one hand she apparently wishes to deny or rectify the confusion of gender roles which Melford's film represented, on the other, there is in her writing a powerful drive against her usually conservative approach, which seeks to affirm and almost revel in these differences. I read the later novels as a direct response to criticism surrounding the confusion of conventional gender roles which was levelled at *The Sheik* but also, more prominently, at the film adaptation in which Valentino was slated for his overt effeminacy. I suggest that the film version of *The Sheik* might have subverted Hull's intentions somewhat, in that the effeminate traits of the otherwise overtly masculine Sheik of the novel become massively exaggerated in Melford's film. The novels succeeding *The Sheik* can, in part, be read as a

³⁴⁷ Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'Cross-Cultural Cross-Dressing: Class, Gender and Modernist Sexual Identity', in *Orientalism Transposed: The Impact of the Colonies on British Culture*, ed. By Julie F. Codell and Dianne Sachko Macleod (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp.63-86 (p.67).

³⁴⁸ Macleod, p.67.

³⁴⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (London: Vintage, 1992), p.120.

correction of this apparent misinterpretation or license taken by the filmmakers with regards to the film adaptation. Whilst I make no claims about a radical feminist tract in Hull's body of work, I also see an analysis of her later fiction as exposing a more liberating aesthetics of female power in the context of post-war Britain. Additionally, I read gender politics in Hull as intimately linked to the patriarchal colonial politics to which Hull, as part of conservative Britain, was inexorably bound. Whilst Hull was outwardly pro-imperialist, the instances in her novels in which a certain sense of ambivalence towards colonial rule and a subtle sympathy with the cause of the colonised is made manifest a parallel trend towards female emancipation.³⁵⁰

As John Eisele notes, '*The Sheik*, starring Rudolph Valentino, was even influential in affecting cultural norms and discussions outside the cinema'.³⁵¹ The hype surrounding Valentino's starring roles in *The Sheik* and its sequel was characterised by a kind of paradox

³⁵⁰ As the lack of biographical information on E.M. Hull attests, she was highly guarded as to her identity. Though it is self-evident that she would have feared the reaction of more conservative acquaintances in her quiet Derbyshire village, Hazelwood, I would also suggest that Hull's secrecy was in part due to the fact that she perhaps was not entirely comfortable with the consequences of the film translations of her novels which bred the cult of Valentino, a craze which could be said to have taken away Hull's sense of authorial command, turning *The Sheik* into an ungovernable entity in the hands of the masses. An article run by *The New York Times* commenting on a showing of *The Son of the Sheik*, Valentino's last film before his untimely death, reported on one account 'that at the end of the performance, when the lights were turned on, many women were seen in tears. While hundreds of people were waiting outside New Gallery a quietly dressed woman walked into the vestibule and asked to see the manager. She was Mrs. E.M. Hull, author of the film. She insisted on paying to see it. "This is the first time I have seen the film", said Mrs. Hull, "and I don't want any one to know I am here".' *New York Times*, 21 September, 1926, (p.9).

³⁵¹ John Eisele, 'The Wild East: Deconstructing the Language of the Genre in the Hollywood Eastern', *Cinema Journal* 41.4 (2002), 68-94 (p.77).

which saw the films as simultaneously representative of conventional gender stereotypes whilst also subverting and undermining these very categories. David Ayers asserts that the Sheik embodies both 'an effeminate figure and a threat to Western manhood' and 'a fantasy stereotype of enhanced masculinity'.³⁵² Ayers suggests that this paradox is in part due to the crisis in masculinity in the wake of the First World War. Lucy Bland employs a similar explanation when she writes that 'the men who survived the war were often physically or psychologically damaged. In response, the soldier hero of much *wartime* romantic fiction was superseded by an alternative masculinity: one of brutal, virile, racial "otherness" in the form of an Arab Sheik'.³⁵³ This theme, particularly of the physically damaged male body, is one that recurs throughout Hull's novels and is intimately related to structures of gendered power in its emphasis on the potential fragility of the male body whose physical power is, at times of crisis, inferior to that of the female. The view of Valentino's Sheik that apparently prevailed, perhaps because of its sensationalist appeal, is that of the effeminate beau immortalised by the now infamous 'Pink Powder Puff' attack in the *Chicago Tribune*, the importance of which was highlighted by Billie Melman.³⁵⁴ Linking the decline of masculinity to post-war concerns, the article asks, 'Is this degeneration into effeminacy a cognate reaction with pacifism to the virilities and the realities of the war?'.³⁵⁵ Valentino hit back at the newspaper, writing: 'I welcome criticism of my work as an actor – but I resent

³⁵² David Ayers, *English Literature of the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.27.

³⁵³ Lucy Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', *Gender and History*, 17.1 (2005), 29-61 (p.47). Emphasis in original.

³⁵⁴ Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988), p.91.

³⁵⁵ 'Pink Powder Puffs'.

with every muscle of my body attacks upon my manhood and ancestry'.³⁵⁶ Valentino's valiant attempts to defend his status as the stereotypical 'alpha male' were futile. The bejewelled, overly stylised and elaborately costumed Valentino proved too great a challenge to conventional views on masculinity. As Gaylyn Studlar affirms, Valentino's endeavours to assert his masculinity failed as 'American men interpreted Valentino not as an "athlete" but as a "beauty," a decadent foreign specimen who, like the "flapperoster," confirmed the increasing effeminacy of men and the masculinity of women'.³⁵⁷ In her seminal study on cross-dressing, Marjorie Garber cites Valentino as 'a significant figure of *crossover*, disruption and rupture'. Garber writes that the film sought 'to foreground the elements of gender- and wardrobe switching (Valentino in robes, Agnes Ayers [who plays the heroine Diana] in jodhpurs, both in eyebrow pencil and mascara)'.³⁵⁸ Though the perceived gender conflation evident in the film adaptation is potentially liberating in its deconstruction of conventional gender binaries, Hull's subsequent engagement with this theme fortifies such binaries in favour of their further dissolution.

Although commentators contemporary with Hull derided her for her representations of female sexuality, the very few recent studies of her work that exist tend to reverse this

³⁵⁶ Rudolph Valentino, *Chicago Herald-Examiner*, 19 July 1926. Letter quoted in full in Ellenburger, pp.154-155.

³⁵⁷ Gaylyn Studlar, 'Discourses of Gender and Ethnicity: The Construction and De(con)struction of Rudolph Valentino as Other', *Film Criticism*, 13.2 (1989), 18-35 (p.25).

³⁵⁸ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.361; p.311. Emphasis in original.

notion and instead recognise in them a liberating element.³⁵⁹ To the twenty-first century reader, the reliance on and perpetuation of dominant patriarchal power hierarchies are infinitely more troubling. Elizabeth Gargano argues that '[t]he "sexual freedom" that Hull's novels offered women readers was dearly bought, since it entailed accepting disabling definitions of femininity and masculinity, subject and ruler, and East and West'.³⁶⁰ It is within these problematic binary categories that I chart the invention of a narrative space created by Hull as a place in which to imagine systems of government and rule which, in her case, tend to hark back to the repressive systems of the sovereign state control. As Karen Chow articulates, '[t]he open space of the desert becomes a metaphorical "space" where transgressions can freely occur'.³⁶¹ Hull privileges sovereign rule as she effectively enthrones the figure of the Sheik.

Absolute Sovereignty and *The Sheik*

It cannot be doubted that the prevailing narrative in Hull's novel *The Sheik* is one of masculine dominance. It is the story of a Sheik whose sexual appeal is reliant on the fact that he rules over his domain and his woman with absolute sovereignty, wielding, ultimately, even power over life and death. It would be untrue to claim that recent criticism on *The Sheik* has entirely overlooked the liberatory aspects of Hull's work from a feminist

³⁵⁹ For a more detailed analysis of this see Karen Chow, 'Popular Sexual Knowledges and Women's Agency in 1920s England: Marie Stope's *Married Love* and E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*', *Feminist Review*, 63.1 (1999), 64-87.

³⁶⁰ Elizabeth Gargano, "'English Sheiks" and Arab Stereotypes: E.M. Hull, T.E. Lawrence, and the Imperial Masquerade', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 48.2 (2006), 171-186 (p.172).

³⁶¹ Chow, p.78.

perspective. However, such commentary is usually qualified by the claim that, all in all, Hull's novel is conservative and consequently complicit in the patriarchal system out of which it was conceived. For instance, though she recognises a sexual freedom in Hull's novels, Gargano asserts that ultimately they are constrained by pre-existing patriarchal systems of thought.³⁶² Frost encapsulates this breed of criticism well when she claims that '[o]ne is hard pressed to argue that Hull's politics and writing are anything but "bad"'.³⁶³ One wonders about the extent to which this 'badness' is an effect of their representations of promiscuity, rather than a comment on their lack of literary merit. However there are commentaries on *The Sheik* which buck this trend, starting with one of the most established commentators on Hull, Melman, who reads Hull as offering a radical representation of women's sexual liberation. Likewise, Patricia Raub offers a reading of *The Sheik* which privileges female power, stating that in love, the Sheik's power is deferred as he submits himself wholly to his lover. She argues that '[t]he roles have been reversed; the conqueror now entreats his subject. Within the fantasy world of the romance, the power relations between men and women have been reversed'.³⁶⁴ However, although these relations may have been reversed, if we recognise the distinction between sex and gender, it is always the masculine rather than the feminine that remains dominant. Following similar lines, Susan Blake reads *The Sheik* as both a reaction against and a confirmation of the prevailing social order, asserting that '*The Sheik's* critique of racial discourse, of course, like its critique of English marriage, takes place within the frame of the ideology it protests. The novel is dual

³⁶² Gargano, p.172.

³⁶³ Frost, p.111.

³⁶⁴ Patricia Raub, 'Issues of Passion and Power in E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*', *Women's Studies*, 21 (1992), 119-128 (p.126).

on every level. The Sheik is and is not Arab. Diana rejects English patriarchy and marries an earl'.³⁶⁵ Hull's novels deserve to be read as works of importance in understanding the cultural history of the interwar period. Reading *The Sheik* as 'a dual narrative' which allows for 'the interplay between alternative realities', Blake offers a reading which gives equal weighting to the conformist and reactionary facets of the work.³⁶⁶

It is from such a refreshing perspective that does not automatically assume an overall anti-feminist approach to Hull's work that I wish to move on to an analysis of Hull's work post-*The Sheik*. Reading Hull's work as embracing a multitude of meanings gives weight to the notion that Hull was capable of responding to the paradoxes embodied by the publicity surrounding her work as it negotiated and incorporated such contradictions. Ann Ardis has noted that, '[i]f we bother to read beyond *The Sheik* in Hull's *oeuvre*, we find a number of significant echoes of and allusions to *fin-de-siècle* debates about New Women, decadent men, and sexual anarchy'.³⁶⁷ In addition to reasserting the importance of sexual liberation in Hull's novels, as already noted by Melman, Ardis points to a further emancipatory aspect of Hull's body of work. As she claims, '[i]n the context of post-war efforts to redomesticate women, Hull's romances insist upon women's continued access to the public sphere'.³⁶⁸ I develop Ardis's notion of the entrance into the public sphere in my following reading of

³⁶⁵ Susan Blake, 'What "Race" is the Sheik?', in *Doubled Plots: Romance and History*, ed. by Mary Panaccia Carden (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), pp.67-85 (p.83).

³⁶⁶ Blake, p.83.

³⁶⁷ Ann Ardis, 'E.M. Hull, Mass Market Romance and the New Woman Novel in the Early Twentieth Century', *Women's Writing*, 3.3 (1996), 287-296 (p.228).

³⁶⁸ Ardis, p.294.

Hull's novels to cultivate an appreciation of the political liberation represented by some of Hull's heroines.

Though this chapter concentrates on Hull's later fiction, the enormous success of her first novel necessitates its preliminary analysis. *The Sheik* and its sequel *The Sons of the Sheik* follow the story of the financially secure, independent young woman, Diana Mayo, who embarks on an expedition into the Algerian desert in search of the adventure that her life amongst the English aristocracy has denied her, only to be kidnapped by the fetching, dark and exotic Ahmed Ben Hassan, a notoriously despotic Sheik. The Sheik rapes Diana and keeps her captive for many months, during which time she falls in love with him. The story concludes with the revelation that the Sheik is not in fact the Arab that Diana believes him to be but is actually the son of a Spanish woman who was married to an English Lord. This disclosure neatly coincides with the Sheik's declaration of love towards Diana as their relationship is legitimatised; the 'predicament' of the otherwise socially unacceptable mixed-race union is neutralised. The opening chapter of *The Sons of the Sheik* reveals that Diana and Ahmed Ben Hassan have indeed married and borne twins, one of whom is sent to England to be raised by his grandfather Lord Glencaryll whilst the other remains in the Algerian desert as heir to his father's Sheikdom. The plot centres on the desert-raised son's abduction of a girl of unknown race and origin who is eventually found to be of European descent.

Writing on the desert romance genre, Jessica Taylor claims that '[t]he Sheikhs in the Sheikh romance are often from completely fictional Arab states or Sheikdoms [...] The creation of these fantasy lands is often accompanied by the presence of a map, locating the imaginary

country in a real geographical space'.³⁶⁹ Like the modernist fantasy novel, the setting for the desert romance seeks to construct a geographical terrain of its own in order to escape from pre-existing topographies already imbued with restrictions and conventions of their own. As Bach affirms, '[t]he Oriental desert provides an escape for heroines who feel cramped and repressed by the cultural constraints of the West'.³⁷⁰ This is certainly the case in both Hull's *The Sheik* and its sequel, in which the Sheikdom is vividly and richly imagined. Fuelled by the myths of the orient that were dominant in the early twentieth century and influenced in no small part by the legendary T.E. Lawrence, better known as Lawrence of Arabia, who was portrayed by the media as 'a white Sheikh in Arab robes', Hull constructed her rich, descriptive, but somewhat artificial picture of the desert.³⁷¹ Though the narrative

³⁶⁹ Jessica Taylor, 'And You Can Be My Sheikh: Gender, Race, and Orientalism in Contemporary Romance Novels', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 40.6 (2007), 1032-1051 (p.1038).

³⁷⁰ Bach, p.20. This is affirmed by Taylor when she writes that 'the creation of fantasy Arabian states in the Sheikh romance may allow for spaces for other anxieties to play out' (p.1039).

³⁷¹ Teo, p.258. The image of T.E. Lawrence, a prominent British Army Officer and academic who is renowned for his role in the Arab Revolt of 1916 – 1918, perhaps typifies the representation of, and the obsession with, the orient in the twenties. In large part, Lawrence's image was the post-war media construction of the American journalist Lowell Thomas and, as Alexander Lyon Macfie asserts, Thomas 'not only turned Lawrence into a world figure but also, incidentally, in the process created one of the most powerful orientalist images ever invented'. Alexander Lyon Macfie, 'Representations of Lawrence of Arabia', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 43.1 (2007), 77-87 (p.82). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this project to examine the influence of Lawrence on the desert romance, it is important to note that Lawrence is also associated with the kind of gender conflation and cross-dressing that becomes apparent in much fiction of the genre. This is in some measure due to the impact of his autobiographical work, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922). Although this work was published after some of the first desert romance novels appeared on the market, its success is indicative of a growing trend. As Joseph Boone writes of Lawrence, he is the quintessential

space may have offered a sexual freedom which would have been denied in more familiar surroundings, in large part, drawing as it does on the phallogentric discourses which constructed the myth of the orient, the dominant patriarchal ideals of power are superimposed on the plot. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the role of the Sheik who rules over this fantasy domain.

In Hull's imagined Sheikdom, the Ahmed Ben Hassan wields absolute sovereignty over his domain. Though the novel is set in French-ruled Algeria, the Sheik claims that '[t]he French Government has no jurisdiction over me. I am not subject to it. I am an independent chief, my own master. I recognise no government. My tribe obey me and only me'.³⁷² As Bach affirms, this theme is one of the central facets of the desert romance novel:

In most of the romances the Sheik's authority in his Sheikdom is absolute. He is a law unto himself, commanding the loyalty and obedience of all his people [...]
The Sheik has no need to assert his dominance; it is a simple, unquestionable fact.³⁷³

expression of 'sexual repression, homosexual yearning, and also sadomasochistic surrender.' Boone goes on to write that 'T.E. Lawrence [is] the century's most famous icon of the thrill and contradictions of assuming Arab dress. Costuming in desert gear was foremost for Lawrence a means of "quitt[ing] me of my English self", of attempting to become the other rather than the colonizer'. Joseph Boone, 'Vacation Cruises; Or, the Homoerotics of Orientalism', in *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections* ed. by John Charles Hawley (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), pp.43-78 (p.57).

³⁷² E.M. Hull, *The Sheik* (Philadelphia: Pine Street Books, 2001), p.74.

³⁷³ Bach, p.29.

Furthermore, like the absolute sovereign, his will is unlimited: '[Diana] realised from what he had told her that he recognised no law beyond his own wishes, and was prepared to go to any lengths to fulfil them'.³⁷⁴ Amongst his tribe the Sheik's will is law and he rules with a despotic hand. Possessing the ultimate power and bringing to mind Foucault's formulation of sovereign power as 'the right to *take* life or *let* live', the Sheik 'held life and death in his hand'.³⁷⁵ Additionally, the legend of the Sheik holds that 'he cannot die, for many have sought to kill him and have failed'; 'his strength and power [...] is above that of mortal man'.³⁷⁶ To evoke further Foucault's formulation of the sovereign which states that the sovereign right to take death has gradually transformed so that it has a 'tendency to align itself with the exigencies of a life-administering power', the Sheik's 'will was law, a law that extended to the intimate lives of his people'.³⁷⁷ At first Diana is horrified at his tyranny; reflecting the democratic standards of the Western world, she is repelled by his cruelty. However, as Diana becomes more accustomed to desert life, these considerations subtly shift in tone.

Just before the halfway mark in the novel, Diana realises that she loves the Sheik and her emotional fight against him is over: 'Quite suddenly she knew – knew that she loved him, that she had loved him for a long time, even when she thought she hated him and fled from

³⁷⁴ Hull, *The Sheik*, p.78.

³⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge: The History of Sexuality 1*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p.136; Hull, *The Sheik*, p.94.

³⁷⁶ Hull, *The Sheik*, p.22.

³⁷⁷ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.136; Hull, *The Sons of the Sheik* (London: Eveleigh Nash and Grayson, 1926), p.211.

him'.³⁷⁸ Diana's change of heart serves as a pertinent allegory as she seemingly willingly submits to the Sheik. Under the illusion of autonomy Diana sees her treatment at the hands of the Sheik suddenly gain validation. With this transformation too comes the acceptance of Ahmed Ben Hassan's absolute sovereignty as the natural order of things and the way things should be. After Diana's revelation her world-view starts to shift as the Sheik's previously unacceptable tyranny is represented as increasingly justified and honourable. Indeed, as Hull insinuates in *The Sons of the Sheik*, sovereignty is in fact a necessity. Entering his father's Sheikdom for the first time and experiencing the tyranny in the camp, Caryll is shocked at having been 'brought face to face with the stern necessities that were indispensable to the ruling of a turbulent community that was outside civilisation, [...] for the first time he had been brought in contact with natural law, the ancient law that still demands an eye for an eye, and a life for a life'.³⁷⁹ The Sheik's sovereignty is validated by his innate superiority over his tribe. As Hull's narrator states, '[h]e seemed to stand alone, outside the prescribed conventions that applied to ordinary men. The standards of common usage did not appear compatible with the wild desert man who was his own law'.³⁸⁰ The Sheik, like the sovereign exception, is placed in a position of externality to the laws he makes and enforces.

Acting, as he does, outside the law, the Sheik's power is unlimited. It is this very omnipotence that forms the basis of Diana's love for him. According to the narrator, '[e]verything she saw was connected with and bound up in the man who was lord of it all.

³⁷⁸ Hull, *The Sheik*, p.112.

³⁷⁹ Hull, *The Sons of the Sheik*, p.169.

³⁸⁰ Hull, *The Sheik*, p.258.

She was very proud of him, proud of his magnificent physical abilities, proud of his hold over his wild turbulent followers, proud with the pride of primeval woman in the dominant man ruling his fellow men by force and fear'.³⁸¹ It is not that Diana is prepared to submit to the Sheik with no resistance whatsoever; to the contrary, she puts up a very laudable fight. Diana's behaviour is typical of the genre's formula which dictates that, '[t]o the hero's demand for complete obedience, the heroine responds by continual resistance. She is never keen on obeying, and when she is forced to it, she rebels'.³⁸² The Sheik's sovereignty is not a given, but has been earned through his exceptional displays of strength in 'taming' both tribe and woman.

The Sheik and *The Sons of the Sheik* construct a fantasy space in which outmoded patriarchal notions of sovereignty can be replayed against the backdrop of a world which has been, in Hull's view, 'feminised' by democracy. Diana's revelation of love and subsequent acquiescence to and conviction in the merit of the Sheik's sovereignty reflect a broader consciousness which, in a sense, shows a craving for the return of such a system of rule based on the ousted monarchical model. The Sheik's English-raised son Caryll, upon arriving for the first time at his father's camp, is greeted by '[a]n almost royal progress, an almost royal welcome that stirred some long-forgotten remembrance within him, that made his breath come short and quick'.³⁸³ The reader is prompted to realise the merit of this past system and lament its passing just as Caryll is reminded of the historical greatness

³⁸¹ Hull, *The Sheik*, p.181.

³⁸² Kaler, p.93.

³⁸³ Hull, *The Sons of the Sheik*, p.158.

of monarchy by his proximity to a closely approximated system of rule within the tribe in the Algerian desert.

Several critics have noted the Sheik's status as a liminal figure, which is prefigured by his racial indeterminacy; he is of white European heritage in the role of an Arab. As Taylor writes of the desert romance genre, '[t]he Sheikhs in these romances are liminal, in-between, figures: dark and desirable, but not too dark; masculine and powerful, yet willing to surrender to love; rooted in their "eastern" place, yet international'.³⁸⁴ Yet it is this liminal sphere which furthers the legitimacy of the Sheik's status of sovereign. As Hull's *The Sheik* progresses, the protagonist's true identity is exposed. Bach draws on this point, claiming that, '[a]s the Sheik's image is gradually "whitened", he can no longer be classed as the true villain of the romance. The "real" Arabs become the real villains'.³⁸⁵ Ultimately, legitimate rule in Hull's desert romances is the preserve of the white male. The association with Empire is impossible to ignore as Hull advocates the white man's dominance over the indigenous population. Teo points out that '[r]eaders of *The Sheik* were left with the satisfaction of knowing that the children resulting from Diana's union with the Sheikh would in fact be descended from European blood on both sides, a revitalised British aristocratic, patriarchal race of leaders imperialistically ruling over the Bedouin tribes of the Sahara desert'.³⁸⁶ In *The Sons of the Sheik* Hull clearly attempts to privilege French colonial rule in Algeria by making the Sheik's sovereignty compatible with such power. The Sheik supports the French government in helping to track down the root of anti-colonial

³⁸⁴ Taylor, p.1034.

³⁸⁵ Bach, p.32.

³⁸⁶ Teo, p.248.

sentiment amongst the native population whilst still asserting his independence from the French and his right to absolute sovereignty over his tribe.³⁸⁷ Ultimately Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan becomes (albeit in disguise) the embodiment of European colonial rule.

Hull's representations of power in her fantasy Sheikdoms speak to a monarchical Europe. Seen as brutal and undemocratic, in Hull's 1920s Britain, absolute sovereignty is once again offered legitimacy in the midst of the savagery of the desert. Diana's initial disgust towards the Sheik's assertion of sovereignty, which is evident at the novel's commencement, is tied intimately to her abhorrence of marriage, which amounts, in her mind, '[t]o be[ing] bound irrevocably to the will and pleasure of a man who would have the right to demand obedience in all that constituted marriage and the strength to enforce those claims'.³⁸⁸ The views of this woman riding into the desert are intended to be representative of everything that is wrong with 'modern' society, in which women no longer honour and respect men. Diana's epiphany comes when she learns to respect masculine rule and relinquish, to a great extent, her own autonomy. Read as moral allegory, Hull seems to advocate a return to repressive patriarchal power structures. By using the imaginary space of the desert Hull is able to flaunt deeply troubling perspectives on power and rule with seeming impunity.

³⁸⁷ Ahmed Ben Hassan's ultimate sovereignty is made apparent in *The Sons of the Sheik*, in which a letter for the Sheik is described as 'a frank appeal for help to a Chief who, though independent and acknowledging no suzerainty, was known to be friendly towards the French Government and a powerful factor in his own part of the country. Ahmed Ben Hassan's co-operation was asked, indeed implored, in tracking the instigators of the unrest that had become evident in all parts of the land, and in discovering which tribes were disaffected and which might be counted on to remain loyal to the Administration' (p.62).

³⁸⁸ Hull, *The Sons of the Sheik*, p.35.

Androgyny and Power Beyond *The Sheik*

Between the publication of *The Sheik* and its sequel *The Sons of the Sheik*, Hull wrote two further novels, *The Shadow of the East* (1921), which is not strictly a desert romance but does share a number of themes with the genre, and *The Desert Healer* (1923), a romance which can be read essentially as a repetition of Hull's more successful debut novel. Evident in both of these novels is the same inversion of the power balance, which is noted by Raub and which, I would suggest, is characteristic of the romance genre as a whole, whereby the hero relinquishes his former supremacy in the face of the all-consuming power of love. Hull's novels do not, of course, exist in isolation; rather, they form part of a larger body of romantic fiction that adheres to set conventions and rules which can be read as inherently complicit in patriarchal power structures. For this reason it is unfair to read Hull as detached from this broader tradition.

Many of the observations that Janice Radway makes in her seminal study *Reading the Romance* (1984), which examines the genre in terms of the reader-response criticism of the 1980s, are equally pertinent to the romances of the 1920s. Radway argues that the creators and consumers of romance fiction 'treat that language, therefore, as if it simply designated a world entirely congruent or continuous with their own'. She continues that '[b]ecause they are not aware that the world they inhabit is in part a creation of the codes used to articulate it, they freely assimilate the fictional world to their own, assuming, in effect, that all imaginary worlds "naturally" resemble the world with which they are so familiar'.³⁸⁹ When the hero is confronted with the heroine, Hull employs a stockpile of phrases such as

³⁸⁹ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.191.

'[h]e appeared to be no longer master of himself', he 'was fearful of circumstances that seemed beyond his ordering', and writes about the 'intolerable yearning' that meant he 'could barely trust himself'. This exemplifies the characteristic hero overcome by such overwhelming intensities of feeling which, to the romance reader, seem perfectly natural and acceptable.³⁹⁰ The accumulation of this kind of language amounts to a perpetuation of what Tania Modleski terms 'the myth that men are unable to control their sexual drive beyond a certain point and that women lead men on'.³⁹¹ In this sense the hero's sovereignty over himself is seen as limited by this essential drive, which he is unable to control.

³⁹⁰ E.M. Hull, *The Desert Healer* (London: Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, 1923), p.142; E.M. Hull, *The Shadow of the East* (London: Grayson & Grayson, 1921), p.85; p.92. Though Hull's novels adhere to such a correspondence theory of language, there are 1920s Sheik romances that question this model. For instance Joan Conquest, by using reflexivity, moves beyond this restrictive mode of thinking. Radway's study has further relevance to my project in its association of the conservative linguistic construction of the romance novel with the construction of a fantasy space. Radway notes the seemingly contradictory issue that romances apparently straddle the real and the fantastic; that whilst they represent events that in real-life are improbable, they tend to be set in very precise and exact temporal and spatial spheres which are represented as consistent with reality. Radway argues that '[t]he fact that the story is fantastic, however, does not compromise the accuracy of the portrayal of the physical environment within which the idealized characters move' (p.109). Of the group of romance readers on which Radway's work is based she writes that they 'believe that the universe of the romantic fantasy is somehow congruent, if not continuous, with the one they inhabit' (p.186). Whilst the 1920s romance novel cannot be said to fit Radway's model exactly, as exceptions such as Joan Conquest prove, the model provides us with one way of understanding the romance in opposition to the modernist novel of the same era.

³⁹¹ Tania Modleski, *Old Wives' Tales: Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fictions* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p.49.

Reaffirming the myth that men's power is, at certain times, compromised by external influences beyond their command, these two novels, written in the desert romance vein, do little to take Hull beyond the channel she carved out for herself with *The Sheik*. In 1928, as the popularity of the desert romance was beginning to decline, Hull published a fifth novel, *The Lion-Tamer*. Though it remains firmly within the romance genre, this novel represents a departure from the Saharan setting. Instead this novel is set within the realm of a United States travelling circus. The basic plot follows the marriage of the hero, lion tamer Juan, to a young equestrian, Paul, in order to save the latter from her violent father. At first Paul, only a child, is afraid of Juan's sexual advances, and the marriage is never consummated as Juan vows never to harm the girl who has been through enough trauma already in her short life. The circus travels across the Atlantic to Europe where Paul runs away as she believes Juan only married her for pity and is actually in love with another woman. Meanwhile, Juan is severely mauled by one of his lions and spends months recovering in hospital. Juan, in agony over the disappearance of Paul, whom he loved from the first, returns to New York where he continues his recovery. On discovering that his boss, the extremely wealthy circus owner Marqueray who, in a twist of fate, dies shortly after Juan is mauled, is in fact his father and has left Juan all that he owned, Juan takes over the management of the circus, vowing never to give up the search for his lost love. When Juan learns that Paul is in England working for a small touring circus he immediately leaves to search for her. When he does find her, they both declare their undying love.

Whilst *The Lion-Tamer* does not offer a radical reworking of gendered power roles, it does hint at ideas that Hull was to develop in her 1930s novels. The heroine is given a masculine name, a device Hull went on to use in future novels. However, it is in *The Lion-Tamer* that

this mechanism is most reflexively applied. On learning her name, Juan 'glanced up inquiringly. "But that's a boy's name," he commented, smiling'. Paul replies, 'It's Pauline, really [...] but I'm always called Paul'.³⁹² Paul's appearance is also described as unfeminine: 'Clad in an old storm-coat which, reaching below her knees, completely enveloped her, and with a battered felt hat crammed down over her eyes so that most of her face was hidden, she looked more like a boy than a girl'.³⁹³ Despite this, *The Lion-Tamer*, though divorced somewhat from the very restrictive plot of the desert romance, nevertheless insists on the ultimate superiority of the 'real' male, the hero Juan.

Though *The Sheik* and *The Sons of the Sheik* adhere very rigidly to the formula of the conventional desert romance plot, Hull does depart from certain aspects of these oppressive plot lines in some of her later novels. *The Captive of Sahara* (1931) is one such novel, and I would argue it is the most radical of Hull's predominantly conservative works of fiction. In the novel, Sidi Saïd ben Aissa, son of the Sheik and sister to Messaouda, forces the English Isma to marry him after she ventures into the desert following his invitation. Isma, whose marriage is never consummated despite the fact that her tenderness for her husband increases, realises she is in love with another man who, though he was devoted to her, she has left behind in England. Eventually, Isma's English lover, David Arne, journeys to

³⁹² E.M. Hull, *The Lion-Tamer* (London: Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, 1928), p.43.

³⁹³ Hull, *The Lion-Tamer*, p.53. Paul's androgynous appearance is coupled with a desire for financial independence which would place her firmly within the male-dominated public sphere; as an equestrian circus performer her role is more public, more physically demanding, and more dangerous than most. However, Hull's heroines, from her very first novel *The Sheik*, have always engaged in male dominated activities; one of the key premises of Hull's romances is the independent woman who seeks adventure and excitement.

Algeria to her rescue. As a subplot, Isma realises that the man who accompanied her into the desert, Mr. Hoyt, also referred to as the Sagamore, a friend of David's, has been plotting against the French government of Algeria: 'Isma heard how the Sagamore had duped the government in the north; how for years, except during the great war, he had been flooding the country with guns and munitions under the cover of the archaeological pursuits he used as a screen to his activities'.³⁹⁴ Both Saïd and Messaouda are revealed as complicit in the Sagamore's endeavour to support the cause of independence.³⁹⁵ This is significant in Hull's representation of an anti-imperialist perspective and, though it is not sustained, reflects a potentially non-conformist sentiment which contrasts with her usually somewhat conservative political stance.

³⁹⁴ E.M. Hull, *The Captive of Sahara* (London: Methuen, 1945), p.168.

³⁹⁵The ambivalence that Isma displays towards the anti-colonialism of her hosts/captors in the Sahara is significant in representing one strand of Hull's departure from the predominant patriarchal and imperial stances in *The Sheik* and *The Sons of the Sheik*, which are characterised by a definite pro-colonial position. Initially Isma is repelled by the thought of anti-French sentiment, as is evident in her complete incredulity that the Sagamore could be working against the colonial government: 'No matter who Hoyt was working for it could not be against the French whose hospitality he had enjoyed for years [...] Never could she believe anything so vile of a man she had come to like and respect' (p.68). However, as her relationship with Saïd becomes increasingly close (though it never becomes sexual), so her stance on the colonial question perceptively shifts. Nearing the end of the novel the villainous Ishak, who informs French Government about the group's anti-colonial activities 'turned Isma cold and sick'. Bringing the Government officials to seize the rebels, Ishak utters 'pitiless words spoken as by a master to a slave' (p.261). Here the imperialist binary of colonisers as good and the colonised as bad is temporarily inverted as the language of the colonisers is represented as cruel and merciless; Ishak speaks 'suavely in his villainous French' (p.260).

Hull introduces Saïd in much the same terms as her better known heroes: 'his brown clean-shaven face only a shade more darkly tanned than David's, the short slenderly built man might have been a Spaniard or any other Southern European'.³⁹⁶ Only Saïd is not a Spaniard or Southern European, he is a full-blooded Arab, and therefore he can never be Isma's hero. Isma reiterates the repulsion related to miscegenation that runs through Hull's other novels. Learning of the American Sagamore's love for Messaouda, an Arab, 'a little shiver of repulsion went through her'.³⁹⁷ Isma can only reconcile her acceptance of this love with the prerequisite of Sagamore's mixed heritage:

[S]he remembered his ancestry, the native blood that ran in his own veins, and struggling against deep ingrained prejudice tried to convince herself that there was perhaps some excuse for him after all. With his antecedents it was hardly to be expected he should share in the general aversion to mixed marriages; when one owned a pure-bred Red Indian for a great-grandmother, as he did, one probably didn't look at the matter in quite the same light as most people.³⁹⁸

To Isma, 'if the thought of marriage was horrible and revolting to her, marriage with a native was ten times more horrible and revolting'.³⁹⁹ Though Saïd plays the hero role up to a point, Isma retains a degree of separation from him and her eventual hero is the white English David Arne; Hull sees that the status quo is restored.

³⁹⁶ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.40.

³⁹⁷ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.122.

³⁹⁸ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.122.

³⁹⁹ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.173.

Hull's treatment of gender in the wake of the reception of her earlier novels shows a much more liberating and constructive move away from her usual conservatism. For instance, in this novel set post-First World War – 'this mad, unrestrained world turned topsy-turvey since the War' – some of the power structures are inverted, drawing them more in line with those represented in the film adaption of *The Sheik*.⁴⁰⁰ Some of the trends for the dominant male are reversed, to an extent, in *The Captive of Sahara* so that the women are placed in positions of power reserved, in previous novels, to the men. This later novel can be read as a reaction to the uproar surrounding the film as Hull seems almost to draw in some of its criticism and incorporate it into her own novel. The unlikely hero, David Arne, invokes the very kind of criticism that was levelled at the film when he says, 'Bright Young Things, are they? My God! Girls who play at being boys, and boys who look like girls – slack-backed, unsexed decadents the lot of them, with minds like sewers'.⁴⁰¹ Invoking notions of androgyny, Hull is not merely taking aim at fashions that were prevalent amongst the youth of the post-war decade, but directly commenting on a craze incited, in part at least, by her own first novel. Cross-dressing and notions of androgyny were not entirely absent from *The Sheik*. For instance Diana, *The Sheik's* heroine, 'looks like a boy in petticoats', with 'loose, red-gold curls that she wore short, clubbed about her ears'.⁴⁰² However there is never any doubt that 'Diana Mayo, with the clothes and manners of a boy, was really an uncommonly beautiful young woman'.⁴⁰³ Diana's masculinity is always qualified with an assertion of her essential femininity, her masculinity seeming little more than a fashion

⁴⁰⁰ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.9.

⁴⁰¹ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.5.

⁴⁰² Hull, *The Sheik*, p.2; p.4.

⁴⁰³ Hull, *The Sheik*, p.20.

choice. As Doan argues, '[t]he fashionably boyish figure never pretends to herself or to an outside observer that she is anything more than a boyish female'.⁴⁰⁴ In Hull's first novel androgyny is more about fashion than it is about power.

However, representations of androgyny go beyond the reach of fashion in Hull's later novels. The opening of *The Captive of Sahara* reveals that Isma has been nursing a severely injured First World War soldier, one of the many mutilated battlefield victims: 'the men that Daddy had once told me about – the men who aren't men any more but just disfigured, dismembered fragments of men, who are hidden away and not talked about because people can't bear to think of them, to remember what they represent'. Of these men Isma wonders 'if they ought to be allowed to live at all' and considers 'if it wouldn't be kinder to put them out of their misery'.⁴⁰⁵ Reading Arne's observations on androgyny alongside these descriptions of the war wounded, men who are so atrociously mutilated that even their gender is effaced, takes the engagement with conflated genders to a deeper level. As the woman's physical strength exceeds that of the man her power of him is augmented, giving real space for an inversion of the customary gendered power dynamics.

In accordance with these intimations of androgyny, it is to a woman that sovereign power is granted in the Algerian desert. Messaouda, the daughter of the elderly Sheik, is here the holder of power. As Hull's narrator explains, 'Messaouda wasn't like an ordinary Arab woman, any more than the ben Aissa were like an ordinary Arab tribe. Both she and they were – queer. There was no other word to describe it'. It is to her that the tribe 'always

⁴⁰⁴ Doan, p.675.

⁴⁰⁵ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.10; p.11.

appealed when any dispute arose, and it was she who always seemed to decide any differences of opinion'. As we are told, '[h]er word was apparently law. And not only in her own rooms. In all matters that concerned the tribe she had a voice, and her influence extended far beyond the mere ordering of her father's house'.⁴⁰⁶ After the death of Saïd his followers ask for the two women Messaouda and Isma and hail them as, effectively, their rulers.⁴⁰⁷ Likewise, physically, Isma, becomes comparable to her captor:

[H]is eyes ranged over the slender graceful figure that so closely resembled his own. The clothes she was wearing were his and, except for his few extra inches and the greater breadth of his shoulders, seen standing or riding together there was little, at a casual glance, to distinguish the one from the other.⁴⁰⁸

Isma is a model for the fashionable androgynous woman of the 1920s and this is seen as a move towards gender equality in Hull's novel.

It is not just gender distinctions that are conflated in this description; notions of race are also dissolved as they become equivalent. Hull's representation of sovereignty, race and gender is not easily unravelled. Though she is on the one hand able to invert the gender hierarchy by placing these women in positions of relative power over the men of the tribe, on the other hand her portrayals are still deeply conservative and rooted in the same binary structures that enable patriarchal models of power. Rather than reimagining any radical change Hull places, to an extent, the women in the conventional male roles, thereby preserving prevailing and oppressive systems of thought.

⁴⁰⁶ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.135; p.137.

⁴⁰⁷ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, pp.253-254.

⁴⁰⁸ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.221.

Isma's role in the conventional patriarchal position of the sovereign is hinted at from very early on in the novel. Before she has even left for the desert, Isma, 'playing Bess of England', imagines herself enthroned:

In the chestnut-panelled room where centuries before the Virgin Queen had slept Isma stood looking about her with a smile that held memory and pleasure and the faintest touch of doubt. Who was she to occupy the Queen's Chamber? She asked herself frowning [...] playing Bess of England.⁴⁰⁹

Isma's reverence for the monarchy seems analogous to that of Sukey in *The True Heart* and, like Laura in *Lolly Willowes*, she finds herself (more literally) in the position of the sovereign. The significance of the parallels drawn between Queen Elizabeth I and Isma is even more far-reaching than a simple suggestion of monarchical privilege bestowed on Hull's heroine; the connection also raises the matter of androgyny and power.⁴¹⁰ As Constance Jordon points out, Elizabeth I 'was known at home and abroad as a "female prince"'.⁴¹¹ As she goes on to write, 'given both costume and Christian doctrine; given, in fact, the commonly accepted notion of woman as the "weaker vessel," no woman could assume magistracy over a people without undergoing some sort of transformation of her social and political

⁴⁰⁹ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.27.

⁴¹⁰ The connection with Queen Elizabeth I has potential parallels with Woolf's *Orlando*, which contains strong ties to the Elizabethan era.

⁴¹¹ Constance Jordon, 'Representing Political Androgyny: More on the Siena Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I', in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*, ed. by Anne M. Haselkorn (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp.157-176 (p.157).

character'.⁴¹² Isma's power, then, can be read as a result of her adoption of the masculine rather than a deeper acceptance and validation of feminine attributes as valuable. Legitimacy in the public sphere is qualified by a complicity with conventional notions of masculinity.

Ultimately the gendered power struggle that plays out in the desert concludes in favour of the masculine. Though the gender battle that takes place on the sand is won by women, on British turf the *status quo* remains unchallenged. Perhaps Hull saw herself as righting the wrong of the racial confusion surrounding the Sheik in her eponymous novel by ensuring that the ultimate hero of *The Captive of Sahara* is unmistakably entirely British. Indeed, David is set up as the eventual hero right from the outset of the novel. In light of criticism on *The Sheik* this can be read as a reaction to the notion that masculinity was under threat on British shores and must be sought elsewhere. In *The Captive of Sahara*, David inherits many of the traits of the Sheik. At the beginning of the novel David displays his power over Isma as he is described in terms reserved for the hero of the story. Hull's narrator describes the 'powerful arms that wrapped her like bands of steel', and 'the long suffocating kiss he forced on her'.⁴¹³ David is the one to sexually violate Isma. David, a white man, exercises brutalities that he ordinarily manages to repress in the same manner that the 'Arabs' of her previous stories repress their sensitivity. As Hull writes of Isma, '[t]he sense of fear and powerlessness she had experienced in his arms that afternoon rushed over her again with renewed force. [...] His will was stronger than hers. [...] in the end he would get his way in

⁴¹² Jordon, p.157.

⁴¹³ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.19.

this and in everything else'.⁴¹⁴ In a certain sense Hull's fiction here reasserts the existence of traditional masculinity within a British context; in Hull's narrative, the white British hero mimics a pre-war sense of superiority in the dominant imperial power that was perceived as under threat in the interwar era.⁴¹⁵

Studlar's claim that the Valentino cult served to affirm the 'increasing effeminacy of men and the masculinity of women' is very pertinent to my discussion of the gendered power inversions in which woman gain ascendancy in some of Hull's novels.⁴¹⁶ This is because Hull's inversion of power does not re-imagine a new feminine power but rather insists, in a sense, on the old order of power whereby the attributes of masculinity and femininity remain intact but are severed from biological gender categories. In contrast with more

⁴¹⁴ Hull, *The Captive of Sahara*, p.24.

⁴¹⁵ *The Forest of Terrible Things* (1939), though attempting to assert female power, by its superimposition of masculinity onto the heroine, serves ultimately to reassert this same ideology. Despite her uncommon feminine beauty, in the forest 'dressed in khaki shirt and shorts like the others', [Hull's heroine] Ray's appearance resembles that of a boy'. E.M. Hull, *The Forest of Terrible Things* (London: Hutchinson, 1939), p.92. Ray states explicitly that she has no wish to be treated any differently to the men on the expedition: 'I'm very strong and I'm used to taking my share, so if you'd please not make any difference between us, I'd be most awfully grateful' (p.103). Of the Europeans whom Orde is leading through the forest, Ray is described by N'gagi, Orde's right-hand-man, as 'the best man of the three of them' (p.123). Ray's physical strength appears in direct contrast to the body of the maimed male resembling the war wounded that recurs throughout Hull's novels. Echoing scenes in *The Lion-Tamer* and *The Captive of Sahara*, in *The Forest of Terrible Things*, it is the man who has been mauled by the gorillas in the forest whose 'mangled, mutilated body [...] had been torn literally into fragments' (p.246). Significantly, in *The Forest of Terrible Things*, the alternative form of masculinity that Bland identifies in the Arab Sheik of the desert romance genre is supplied by a woman.

⁴¹⁶ Studlar, p.25.

recent poststructuralist thought in gender binaries, which is exemplified by Judith Butler's claim that 'there is no reason to assume that genders ought to remain as two', gender in Hull is always maintained along a strict binary divide.⁴¹⁷ Power, in Hull, always belongs to the masculine and in this sense her novels remain a tool of the imperialist patriarchy.⁴¹⁸ However, an incorporation into patriarchy is what Hull ultimately achieves; rather than attempting to carve out a new space for women she merely slots them into a pre-existing masculine imperialist ideology. On her own expedition through Algeria, Hull encountered the Mozabite women, who she describes as enjoying 'a greater freedom than is usual amongst Mohammedan females', because, '[l]eft for long periods alone, they are forced to take the place of absent husbands and fathers, and to buy and sell and conduct affairs that otherwise would be entirely in the hands of their menkind [sic]'. Following the example of these women, female emancipation is, for Hull, an adoption of the masculine role.⁴¹⁹

I do not wish to undermine Hull's contribution to the broadening horizons for women within the public sphere, because her involvement, though not overtly feminist, was worthwhile. Although the texts might not imagine radical ways of thinking on gender and power, they

⁴¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p.6.

⁴¹⁸ Hull's heroines, resonating with her own real world experiences, undoubtedly represent a move towards the incorporation of women within the male-dominated spheres of travel and exploration. As various sources attest, Hull had visited Algeria numerous times. In *Camping in the Sahara*, the non-fictional account of a trip she and her daughter took to Algeria, Hull reveals her previous travels to the country when she writes that she 'first visited Algeria, as a child'. *Camping in the Sahara* (London: Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, 1926), p. 48.

⁴¹⁹ Hull, *Camping in the Sahara*, p.57.

are exciting in that they have a tendency to allow the inversion of male/female binaries. I am clear, though, that Hull's thinking is very much constrained by conventional binaries of power and gender. For Hull, power is always masculine; in her novels a woman may wield power but this power always belongs to the masculine order. By rejecting the conflation of gender exemplified in the film adaptations of her early novels, Hull places herself firmly within a conservative patriarchal tradition; a tradition on which power is assumed to be the reserve of the male. It seems that Hull endeavours to undo the paradox of the effeminate but simultaneously masculine hero. However, Hull's feminism embodies a paradox of its own: though apparently inexorably tied to the patriarchal power structures of her day she still strives for female entry into the public sphere. Here Hull joins the ranks of the female modernists for whom, says Doan, 'masculine dress was the only way to "usurp male privilege"'.⁴²⁰ However, where Hull differs most ostensibly from, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar put it, the 'literary women [who] generally persisted in seeking an ontological "wild free thing," a third sex beyond gender', is in her continued insistence on two distinct genders with no room for a 'third way'.⁴²¹ Likewise, notions of sovereignty, which are invariably gendered as masculine, are maintained with no room for an alternative outside of the binary which delineates the ruler and the ruled, the sovereign and the subject.

⁴²⁰ Doan, pp.667-668.

⁴²¹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, II: Sexchanges* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p.365.

How (Un)scrupulously We Are Preserving the Ruins

In Christie's *The Secret of Chimneys* (1925), Lord Caterham states that 'modern young people seem to have such unpleasant ideas about love-making'. His daughter Bundle's response is to say that '[i]t comes from reading *The Sheik* [...]. Desert love, throw her about, etc'.. Caterham is somewhat bemused: 'What is *The Sheik*? [...] Is it a poem?'.⁴²² Bundle, who appears as the archetype of 1920s style, is slightly patronising about her father's lack of knowledge of this contemporary cultural reference. Nevertheless, it is clear from this exchange that works like Hull's *The Sheik* had infiltrated the popular consciousness along with their 'unpleasant ideas about love-making'. However, despite Hull's perceived radical views on sexual relationships this radicalism does not extent to representations of power. Warner's novels offer a more radical reworking of gender relations and sovereignty which may have been more difficult to digest for a 1920s readership.

Although, geographically, Hull's novels might seem further from home than Warner's (with the exception of *Mr Fortune's Maggot*), they only serve to replicate pre-existing forms of power. While generally Hull's novels are not bound by the kind of domesticity that Warner's might be, they more faithfully seek to transplant British conceptions of sovereignty onto their narrative space, the space of the desert. Though the desert can in some senses be viewed as a potential emancipatory space, this potential is never realised. Ultimately, the desert is represented as a colourful and exotic backdrop against which British ideologies of power can be superimposed. In contrast to these distant lands, Warner's concern with the

⁴²² Agatha Christie, *The Secret of Chimneys* (London: HarperCollins, 1925), pp.188-189.

quotidian and the domestic serves to illustrate that a radical reformulation of conceptions of power can take place within such familiar and homely environments. Though many of Warner's later novels use the recasting of historical, rather than geographical, spaces to reimagine power, much of her fiction is implicitly bound with the politics of space. As Mary Jacob's writes, '[a]lthough remarkably various in content, style and setting, her writing in this period, whether set in the Chilterns, the Essex marshes, a Dorset Valley, Polynesia or South America, shares a preoccupation with the lie of the land'.⁴²³ The unfolding of the map in Warner's fiction is akin to a kind of enchantment, under which a new land of possibility is revealed. In Hull, however, uncharted territory has no such meaning. Referring specifically to Warner in relation to lesbian fiction, Castle writes that this fiction 'often looks odd, fantastical, implausible, "not there" – utopian in aspiration if not design. It is, in a word, imaginative'.⁴²⁴ That Warner's novels seem to offer the most radical revisionings of power might largely be due to their situation in the realm of fantasy; they are largely implausible. The desert romance plotlines of Hull's novel's might be equally incredible but the power structures that they represent, like the gender relations represented as part and parcel of notions of power, are entirely conceivable because they reflect actuality.

In contrast to Hull's desert romances, which depict the Algerian desert with a degree of realism and detailed descriptive passages, Warner's deliberately subjective rendering of the island in *Mr Fortune's Maggot* heightens the fantasy element of her work. Attesting to this, Rigby writes that 'Warner studiously avoids giving the island a single reality, and, more

⁴²³ Mary Jacobs, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Politics of the English Pastoral 1925-1934', in *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner*, ed. by Davies *et al.*, pp.61-82 (p.61).

⁴²⁴ Castle, p.91.

significantly, her narrative voices eschew the possession of the islanders' thoughts which is typical of imperial writing'.⁴²⁵ While Hull, content to be carried by myth of the east, maintains a sense of the exotic throughout, Warner familiarises island life in an attempt to deconstruct this myth.⁴²⁶ In terms of constructing a narrative space for the negotiation of alternative realities, Warner's text is open to the possibilities of multiple alternative realities; in refusing to privilege any one truth she avoids the rigid and didactic tone of Hull's novels. In refusing to map the island definitively, Warner's construction of the exotic provides a liberating space rather than the restrictive one of Hull's, which exists as its polar opposite.

The novels of Warner could be described using the seemingly incongruous label of the modernist reworked romance. As Radway writes, 'romantic novels function for their reader, on one level at least, as the ritualistic repetition of a single, immutable cultural myth'.⁴²⁷ In Warner's work this is especially the case in the fairytale-like novel *The True Heart*, which is explicit in its structure as the retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche in Victorian form. Her other novels, according to this definition, are also inverted romances, but often less explicitly so; they are retellings of the immutable cultural myths surrounding gender roles, imperialism and sovereignty but, unlike Hull's conservative romances which sustain and reproduce these myths, Warner's rewritings attempt to deconstruct them. In juxtaposing

⁴²⁵ Rigby, p.228.

⁴²⁶ As Kwon writes of *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, "[t]he exotic" (the Polynesian island, the abroad) tends to become increasingly mundane and banal while "the familiar" (England, the home) turns into something peculiarly bewildering and estranging' (p.306).

⁴²⁷ Radway, p.198.

Hull and Warner my goal has been to recognise how similar forces and themes might be differently employed; one as a largely (though not wholly) conservative force complicit in the patriarchy within which it writes, and one as a radical reworking of this theme. Both draw on themes of gender ambiguity and sexual liberation, and both work from within a shared imperialist consciousness embedded within sovereignty discourse. Warner represents, through the discourse of the old society, new potential. She writes in *Summer Will Show*: '[h]abit, method, the facets of a daily routine, she had been amassing them against the menace of that day when everything would fall to pieces, when the roof of the waiting room would fall in'.⁴²⁸ Whilst Hull constantly amasses the buttresses to hold up the roof, Warner lets it fall in so that the pieces might be reassembled in a better order.

⁴²⁸ Warner, *Summer Will Show*, p.346.

SECTION THREE

The Modernist Fantasy versus the Popular Thriller

The work of both Rebecca West and Marie Belloc Lowndes reveals a mutual and deep-seated concern with the domestic and its complex relationship with power and rule. In the work of these two writers, the figure of the policeman – the embodiment of the law – features prominently as a symbol for sovereignty. In this section I compare West's *The Judge* (1922) and *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (1929) with Marie Belloc Lowndes' *The Lodger* (1913), *Letty Lynton* (1931) and *Lizzie Borden: A Study in Conjecture* (1939). I draw on motifs from the Gothic tradition to explore the uncanny in relation to images of domesticity that find themselves tainted by the threat of murder. As Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace note, investigations into the connections between modernism and the Gothic have been largely neglected. One possible reason they cite for this is the Gothic genre's common association with popular fiction. As they assert, '[g]iven the Gothic's appeal to a mass readership and modernism's associations with elite culture, such oversights seem initially justifiable'.⁴²⁹ Smith and Wallace challenge this, pointing to psychoanalysis as a uniting factor:⁴³⁰

The sense that the subject is not in possession of itself, because riven with desires which motivated it in telling if obscure ways, was always a key element

⁴²⁹ Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace, 'Introduction: Gothic Modernisms: History, Culture and Aesthetics', *Gothic Modernisms*, ed. by Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp.1-10 (p.1).

⁴³⁰ For example, Lyndsey Stonebridge's *The Destructive Element: British Psychoanalysis and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998) and Maud Ellmann's *The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

of the images of compulsion that were at the heart of Gothic transgressions.

Psychoanalysis, in other words has the aura of the Gothic about it.⁴³¹

More recent debate has only served to reaffirm the link between modernism and the Gothic on the grounds of the psychoanalytic axis of both.⁴³² I draw on the Freudian psychoanalytic notions of the death drive and the uncanny to unravel parallels between the works of these two authors. Like the Gothic house in which some inaccessible secret is concealed, psychoanalysis sets out to ascertain the veiled truth of the self; the buildings which harbour a potential skeleton or at least a kind of enigma to be resolved seem remarkably like the Freudian conception of the psyche.

I use the term 'psychoanalysis' to refer broadly to the Freudian undertaking to privilege the unconscious in the constitution of identity. In my use of the term I designate a kind of phallogocentric discursive system which necessarily implies a bias towards patriarchy in its centring of the figure of the father. I use the term also to refer to a discursive practice which characterises its interpretation of the unconscious in terms of law; that is, it imagines the unconscious to be subject to, and bound by, immutable rules and conditions. As Luce Irigaray writes, 'psychoanalytic "science" claimed to have found the universal law of the

⁴³¹ Smith and Wallace, p.4.

⁴³² As Maria Beville writes of the origins of the Gothic in modernism, 'it is worth considering that the Gothic of the *fin de siècle* is significant as the first dialogic interaction between its own inherent psychoanalytic explorations and those of the theories of Freud. From this point onwards the Gothic would take on a more intense psychoanalytic tone and delve even deeper into the dark corners of self-knowledge'. Maria Beville, *Gothic-Postmodernism: Voicing the Terrors of Postmodernity* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p.62.

functioning of the unconscious'.⁴³³ As such, psychoanalysis mistakenly reads the unconscious as that which is wholly separate from societal forces. To the contrary, as I will suggest, this particular psychoanalytic narrative falls under the schema circumscribed by a kind of sovereignty discourse.

I read West's fiction through a theoretical perspective that recognises Freudian psychoanalysis as necessarily embedded within such biases. Where psychoanalytic concepts are not consciously embedded within the texts, as is the case with Lowndes, the concepts of law and sovereignty are represented as external to the self and imposed upon it rather than emerging from within. In West's novels, most poignantly in *Harriet Hume*, the domestic space has something of a doll's-house ambience to it: Hume has no front door, but has to step through the large French windows to enter her apartment. Likewise, in *The Return of the Soldier*, Baldry Court is represented as an artificial, magazine cut-out house: the house had been massaged 'into matter for innumerable photographs in the illustrated papers'.⁴³⁴ Baldry Court is described as an 'empty stage'.⁴³⁵ The theatrical quality of the domestic space is mirrored in the novels of Lowndes, where quite often a barn or shed is turned into a kind of Wendy house. Susan Stewart's description of the secret at the centre of the doll's house illustrates well the sensation the reader of these novels gets on encountering the domestic sphere: '[o]ccupying a space within an enclosed space, the doll-house's aptest analogy is the locket or the secret recess of the heart: center within center,

⁴³³ Luce Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, trans. by Gail Schwab (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 208; emphasis mine.

⁴³⁴ Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (London: Virago, 2006), p.12.

⁴³⁵ *The Return of the Soldier*, p.17; p.21.

within within within. The dollhouse is a materialized secret'.⁴³⁶ Like the object of study for psychoanalysis, the doll's house epitomises this hidden jewel. As is the case with the motives that drive the characters, we are witness here to their deeds of murder and violence; there is something suppressed in the homes that West and Lowndes create that we struggle to locate or pin down. Katy Mezei and Chiara Briganti affirm the notion that houses in fiction have a tendency to mirror the internal world of the self: 'novels and houses furnish a dwelling place – a spatial construct – that invites the exploration and expression of private and intimate relations and thoughts'.⁴³⁷ This, they explain, is particularly apparent in modernist fiction. They claim that 'for writers like Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, the use of private domestic space as a frame and metonym of inner, psychological space reflects this recent validation of privacy and intimacy'.⁴³⁸

My discussion of the representations of houses and homes has more to do with the propensity of the domestic space to become inherently public, meaning that representations of the self which become analogous with representations of the domestic are also susceptible to this process of osmosis. When this happens, the law, which is otherwise shut out and distinct from the domestic realm, is allowed into the house. In writing that '[t]he unhomey is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world', Homi Bhabha exposes one of the core features of uncanny domesticity

⁴³⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature and the Gigantic* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p.61.

⁴³⁷ Katy Mezei and Chiara Briganti, 'Reading the House: A Literary Perspective', *Signs*, 27.3 (2002), 837-846 (p.839).

⁴³⁸ Mezei and Briganti (p.839).

in the fiction that I explore.⁴³⁹ The shock of recognition that is evident in both the fiction of West and that of Lowndes is that the law is already inside the home. In the case of West the law is part of the domestic, just as it is already an intrinsic part of the self, whereas in Lowndes, it has the tendency to creep into the home seemingly unnoticed.

As Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace note, '[a]ttention is [...] beginning to be paid to the use of Gothic modes by Modernist and inter-war women writers as diverse as Daphne du Maurier, May Sinclair and Stella Gibbons'.⁴⁴⁰ Though the Gothic and modernism have, in the past, been viewed in diametrically opposed terms, there is an increasing body of critical work which aims to draw connections and close the gap between these representatives of the lowbrow and highbrow.⁴⁴¹ John Paul Riquelme, for instance, writes that '[t]he essentially anti-realistic character of Gothic writing from the beginning creates in advance a compatibility with modernist writing'.⁴⁴² The connection between the Gothic and modernism runs much deeper than a mere disruption of realism. The Gothic was a form

⁴³⁹ Homi Bhabha, 'The World and the Home', *Social Text*, 31/32 (1992), 141-153 (p.141).

⁴⁴⁰ Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace, 'The Female Gothic Then and Now', *Gothic Studies*, 6.1 (2004) 1-7 (p.2).

⁴⁴¹ As Catherine Spooner writes, 'Gothic is sometimes positioned as a kind of counter-narrative to the major high-cultural movements of the twentieth century: a principally popular form, the stuff of cult readership and mass-market paperbacks, its sensationalism at odds with the serious, avant-garde experimentalism of modernism and postmodernism'. 'Gothic in the Twentieth Century', in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), pp.38- 48 (p.38).

⁴⁴² John Paul Riquelme, 'Toward a History of Gothic and Modernism: Dark Modernity from Bram Stoker to Samuel Beckett', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46.3 (2000), 585-605 (p.586).

which could embody the kind of contradictory and paradoxical world-view evoked by a modernity which was seen as simultaneously progressive and degenerative; a world-view to which literary modernism was responding. Modernism can at times be characterised by its refusal to accept clear boundaries. It tends to describe the world in terms which are neither one thing nor the other, and acts as a borderland in which binary distinctions become blurred and the world is viewed in shades of grey rather than black and white. For Fred Botting, the Gothic is typified by a similar conflation of opposites:

Gothic texts open to a play of ambivalence, a dynamic of limit and transgression that both restores and contests boundaries. This play of terms, of oppositions, indeed, characterises the ambivalence of Gothic fiction: good depends on evil, light on dark, reason on irrationality, in order to define limits. The play means that gothic is an inscription neither of darkness nor of light, a delineation neither of reason and morality nor of superstition and corruption, neither good nor evil, but both at the same time.⁴⁴³

In Botting's account of the Gothic, whilst terms rely on their opposite in order to substantiate their existence, both are ultimately confounded and obscured as the overall substance of the text reveals them to be, at times, indistinguishable. Good and evil, light and dark, life and death are eventually exposed in the revelation that they might potentially belong to the same substance: they share an essential core in the same way that two sides of a coin are comprised, fundamentally, of the same matter.

⁴⁴³ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (Oxford: Routledge, 1996), p.9.

In West's early fiction, modernism and the Gothic are brought together as the binary separation of the represented world is thrown into confusion.⁴⁴⁴ In this section this conflation of opposites, which is evident in the Gothic and appears as a feature of a number of the texts analysed, is linked closely to the representation of sovereignty and law. Notions of law and power are, in both West and Lowndes, bound to the masculine. Lowndes places a positive value on this whereas in West the law as a masculine concept is aligned with the death drive. This section is concerned with the permeability of the domestic sphere into the public world outside; it is about the representations of the failed attempts to shore-up the home against the threat of the law. In contrasting West's early novels, which variously represent the law as a part of the dangerously masculine grand narrative of sovereignty, with three of Lowndes' novels, which instead offer a picture of the law as that which might potentially curb a dangerous femininity, I offer a comparison of West's potentially radical slant on gender and relations of power with Lowndes' more conservative approach.

Lowndes was over twenty years West's senior, and so in some respects it is inevitable that certain historical contingencies have been brought to bear on her rather more retrogressive stance, in relation to a comparatively more innovative West, whose formative years saw in the turn of the century. Lowndes, by contrast, was brought up in late Victorian Britain. In recognising that there are multiple reasons as to why Lowndes may appear less

⁴⁴⁴ In this section I look to the Female Gothic, a term coined by Ellen Moer's in *Literary Women* (1976). Whilst it has been noted that 'there has been an ongoing debate as to whether the Female Gothic constitutes a separate literary genre', I use the term to refer to writings by women in the Gothic tradition. Smith and Wallace, 'The Female Gothic Then and Now', p.1.

groundbreaking in her representation of the gendered dynamics of legal (and other) forms of power, I in no way intend to be disparaging towards her work. To the contrary I suggest that Lowndes' fiction exhibits, in embryonic form, much of the conflation between the public and private that West more fully developed. I argue that in West, the law is, in a sense, already inside the house, regardless of the impenetrability (or otherwise) of the walls. Perhaps this is because the law that West represents, though it may be offered using very similar terminology, is actually already an intrinsic part of the psyche. Law in West seems ultimately to be represented as internal to the self, whereas in Lowndes it is very much that which is external and 'real' in that it craves material representation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Rebecca West's 'Gothic' Modernist Fantasy Novel: Sovereignty, the Self and the Threat from Within

*So when the will and earth and fire and water set about to make a new system it is bound to be like the old. In revolution there is a vast explosion of the creative powers, and nothing is created; nothing is even altered. The appetite for death that is in us all is immensely gratified and that is all.*⁴⁴⁵

Rebecca West's novels from the 1910s and 1920s have a distinctly modernist quality. as Marina Mackay writes, '[h]er first three novels, *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), *The Judge* (1922), and *Harriet Hume* (1929), demonstrate classically modernist preoccupations – formal experiments with limited point of view and non-linear narration, thematic experiments in the representation of memory, sexual desire, and the micro-detail of everyday experience'.⁴⁴⁶ The modernist traits in West's novels emerge from their concern with the minutiae of life and its effects on the psyche. It is these three novels, as identified by Mackay that will be discussed in the present chapter in which my overall goal is to provide a reading of these novels which essentially returns to the theoretical framework of *femina sacra*. As in the Mansfield and Christie section of this project, *femina sacra* becomes

⁴⁴⁵ Rebecca West, *The Meaning of Treason* (London: The Reprint Society, 1952), p.105.

⁴⁴⁶ Marina Mackay, 'The Lunacy of Men, the Idiocy of Women: Woolf, West, and War', *NWSA Journal*, 15.3 (2003), 124-144 (pp.125-126). Though I do not claim that West's entire body of work (which spans a range of genres over a period of over sixty years) is modernist, a substantial amount of fiction that she produced during the period of high modernism can be classified as modernist. Though there is much in her fiction which might seem to cross into what could be termed postmodernism, it still retains that which makes it essentially modernist despite (or perhaps even because of) its deviations.

explicit in the perpetration of violent acts that take place in a domestic sphere devoid of political protection.

The attempt to define West according to genre generally leads to her being situated (sometimes uncomfortably) in terms of her overlapping affiliations with multiple and diverse influences. There is little consensus regarding West's position within the modernist movement other than that she does not fit precisely the conventional modernist mould. As Ann Norton writes, '[s]he does not inhabit a recognizably modernist or postmodernist space'.⁴⁴⁷ However, West is increasingly included amongst key modernists. Bonnie Kime Scott has argued persuasively that West, alongside her female contemporaries Virginia Woolf and Djuna Barnes, was a central figure in the modernist movement. She asserts that '[r]efiguring occurred as Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, and Djuna Barnes were selected as central representatives of modernist writing, where typically a cluster of male figures have stood'.⁴⁴⁸ Though West has not traditionally been part of the modernist canon, her inclusion in it today seems dependent on how modernism, in any given instance, is defined. Bernard Schweizer concurs with Scott's call to modify the term modernism to make it more inclusive when he states that 'if West stands in a problematic relationship to modernism, then we should see this as less a shortcoming on her part than as an opportunity to develop

⁴⁴⁷ Ann V. Norton, *Paradoxical Feminism: The Novels of Rebecca West* (Lanham; New York; Oxford: International Studies Publications, 2000), p.xi.

⁴⁴⁸ Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism, Volume 1: The Women of 1928* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp.xv-xvi.

a more inclusive modernist cultural theory that can accommodate figures like West'.⁴⁴⁹ I find it liberating to read West's work as that which transcends usual conceptions of the borders of modernism. It opens up new ways of reading her texts which are informed by the multiplicity of genres contained within her work. My reading of West in relation to the Gothic is sanctioned, in part, by this particular receptiveness to manifold interpretations.

This chapter, which concentrates on West's earlier fiction, will read her as a writer of the modernist fantasy novel, but also as a writer embedded within the tradition of the Gothic romance. Whilst the modernist fantasy element of West's work has been well theorised,⁴⁵⁰ her engagement with the Gothic remains largely unmapped. For the most part, the general consensus is that *Harriet Hume* is West's most explicitly modernist work. Scott has argued that in *Harriet Hume* '[t]extual play qualifies it as traditionally modernist in form, and in its minimal cast of a single couple satisfies the pared down version of modernism approved by Pound and achieved in Joyce's *A Portrait*'.⁴⁵¹ Schweizer terms it a 'self-consciously modern text, complete with stream-of-consciousness, psychological dramatization, and fantastically fractured story line, [which] was evidently written with West's left (non-

⁴⁴⁹ Bernard Schweizer, 'Introduction', in *Rebecca West Today*, ed. by Bernard Schweizer (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), pp.21-40 (p.25).

⁴⁵⁰ For instance Jane Marcus, 'A Wilderness of One's Own: Feminist Fantasy Novels of the Twenties: Rebecca West and Sylvia Townsend Warner', in *Women Writers and the City*, ed. by Susan Merrill Squier (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), pp.134-60.

⁴⁵¹ Bonnie Kime Scott, 'Refiguring the Binary, Breaking the Cycle: Rebecca West as Feminist Modernist', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 37.2 (1991), 169-191 (p.180).

realistic) hand'.⁴⁵² However, this consensus is not universal. In her biography of West, Victoria Glendinning surveys the reception that this novel received at its time of publication and concludes that it was less than flattering. She writes that 'St. John Ervine's review, in Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, was headed "Rebecca West's Worst Book,"' and goes on to claim that '[s]ubsequent critics of Rebecca West's work have tended to pass over *Harriet Hume* rapidly, labelling it mannered and insubstantial'.⁴⁵³ The novel is, like *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Judge*, very sinister in many respects, as all seems to be driven ultimately by the inner laws of the self, which lead time and again to death. West's early work, though it attempts to break free of the restrictive binaries of power and law, always seems to come back to them in a circular and cyclic fashion. If the law is embedded within the psyche then attempts to escape it are futile.

Of West's modernist novels, it is *The Judge* which most effectively fulfils the criteria of both modernism and the Gothic. Writing only a year after its publication, Joseph Collins identifies many features that define it as an example of modernism. He writes that '[t]he mode in which *The Judge* is cast is noteworthy because of its novelty and of the success attending it. Here is no sequential narrative, no time-table of events in the order in which they happened'.⁴⁵⁴ In this respect *The Judge* is explicitly modernist because it breaks with the realist modes of narrative representation. Likewise, Scott places *The Judge* firmly in the

⁴⁵² Bernard Schweizer, *Rebecca West: Heroism, Rebellion, and the Female Epic* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), pp.55-56.

⁴⁵³ Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p.126.

⁴⁵⁴ Joseph Collins, *The Doctor Looks at Literature: Psychological Studies of Life and Letters* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923), p.179.

context of the modernist novel when she likens it to some of the most archetypal instances of literary modernism. She writes that '[t]he death of the mother – particularly in modernist texts like *Ulysses*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *The Judge* – may be death at its worst. It presents a loss of origin'.⁴⁵⁵ As a novel, *The Judge* places great emphasis on this notion of origins and of the troubling causal laws which make the present an inevitable result of the past. The past impinges dangerously and with a circularity which sees West's character locked in destructive cycles which seem to be repeated from generation to generation. This cyclic mode in the second half of *The Judge* hints at its associations with the Gothic.

The Judge's debt to the Gothic has been well established, and I argue that much of the novel's use of the Gothic prefigures themes in *Harriet Hume*. Philip E. Ray describes how, in *The Judge*, the movement 'from an orderly universe in which virtue and sanity prevail to a nightmare universe in which vice and madness undermine all order', means that it can be assimilated with the Gothic romance.⁴⁵⁶ Ray's argument is based on the premise that, re-evaluated as an example of the Gothic romance, the novel is liberated from accusations of inadequacy. *The Judge* has, in the past, been read as somehow lacking.⁴⁵⁷ Shirley Peterson notes that 'with *The Judge* [West] produced what many readers then (as well as today)

⁴⁵⁵ Scott, 'Refiguring the Binary', p.175.

⁴⁵⁶ Philip E. Ray, 'The Judge Reexamined: Rebecca West's Underrated Gothic Romance', *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*, 31.3 (1988,) 297-307 (p.298).

⁴⁵⁷ In her biography of West, Glendinning quotes a letter from Virginia Woolf to Ottoline Morrell in which Woolf states that though she thought *The Judge* was a 'stout, generous, lively voluminous novel'. It 'burst like an over-stuffed sausage', meaning that she was unable to finish it (p.82). Glendinning also cites H.G. Wells's criticism of *The Judge* (p.80).

perceived as a very uneven and perplexing novel'.⁴⁵⁸ As Ray contends, critics objected to the fact that the novel apparently changes course and tone halfway through and is divided into two distinct sections, the latter of which is suffused with a dark, death-desiring bleakness.

However, Ray goes on to make the claim that it is this structure that makes the novel distinctively Gothic. According to Ray, Ellen Melville, *The Judge's* heroine, is aligned with the heroine of Daphne DuMaurier's *Rebecca* (1938), and the divide in the novel can be read as typifying the Gothic genre in 'the tendency of the hero or heroine to experience a weird distortion or diminution of personality [...] especially when he or she moves from the safe, sane world to the dangerous, insane world'.⁴⁵⁹ Norton reiterates Ray's claims, writing that Melville is 'sincerely caring, deeply but innocently sensual, shy, and genuinely untouched by sexual knowledge. In these aspects, and in her unprotected and impoverished state, she is like a Gothic (or romance) heroine'. Furthermore she reads 'Richard Yaverland, the man who sweeps into Ellen's life and carries her away to a new world' as 'a decidedly Gothic and romantic hero'.⁴⁶⁰ Indeed, this assessment seems very true of Yaverland with his almost fairytale-like aura. He is described as 'so very big. And he looked as though he had gold rings in his ears, although he hadn't; it was just part of his sea-going air'. Later he is

⁴⁵⁸ Shirley Peterson, 'Modernism, Single Motherhood, and the Discourse of Women's Liberation in Rebecca West's *The Judge*', in *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-reading*, ed. by Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), pp.105-116 (pp.106-107).

⁴⁵⁹ Ray, p.301.

⁴⁶⁰ Ann Norton, 'Rebecca West's Ironic Heroine: Beauty as Tragedy in *The Judge*', *English Literature in Tradition (1880-1920)*, 34.3 (1991), 295-308 (p.302).

portrayed as 'the ghost of an Elizabethan seaman'; even his voice is 'charged with suppressed magic'.⁴⁶¹ More recent assessments of the novel have tended to be in agreement. Peterson, for instance, comments on the 'Gothic overtones of danger' which emerge over the course of the novel.⁴⁶² These overtones coincide with the realisation that the home is not a sanctuary from the law.

While a vocabulary of sovereignty features prominently, it is the supposedly innate laws of the psyche which always seem to override what West sees as the other arbitrary and socially constructed law. *Harriet Hume* is an exemplar of the interplay of conflicting impulses and desires that apparently originate from opposing sides of the psyche. Feminine versus masculine, submissiveness versus dominance, loyalty versus treachery, light versus dark, disorder versus the rule of law, and the drive to life versus the drive to death all vie with their partners for supremacy. There is, however, both a fear and a thrill attached to the thought that both sides might merge and become one and the same thing. I see the drive to life and the drive to death, as they are conceived by Freudian psychoanalysis, as part of the same structure that defines systems of thought on government.

Matters of Life and Death

West's fiction, particularly that belonging to her earlier modernist work, exists in a complex location between the old values, or grand narratives, of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which it seeks both to endorse and to resist. As Norton writes:

⁴⁶¹ Rebecca West, *The Judge* (London: Virago, 1980), p.26; p.42; p.29.

⁴⁶² Peterson, p.111.

Although she delights in ripping apart aspects of the patriarchy, she craves its support and in fact desires its continuance, though in altered form. She despises certain male systems of religion and politics as icons of the death wish, but she does not imagine a new order so much as she desires to patch up the old one.⁴⁶³

Norton's recognition of the death wish as symbolic of a distinctly masculine form of government is a central premise of this chapter. Here I link the notion of the death drive with a discourse of sovereignty under which, it would seem, early Freudian theory is subsumed. Owing to her own personal engagement with psychoanalysis and the overtly Freudian themes of her early novels, West's work is routinely read according to such terms.⁴⁶⁴ West's first novel, *The Return of the Soldier*, and her later work *The Judge* draw on overtly psychoanalytic themes.⁴⁶⁵ West held a vehemently anti-psychoanalytic stance, however, as Glendinning writes, she nevertheless 'belonged to the same European tradition' which was inexorably embedded within the phallogocentric psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Carl Jung. Insofar as West belonged to this dominating narrative of the early twentieth century, she inevitably 'suffered from some of the same prejudices and preconceptions, having been conditioned to do so'.⁴⁶⁶ Having necessarily been cultivated

⁴⁶³ Norton, *Paradoxical Feminism*, p.82.

⁴⁶⁴ See Susan Varney, 'Oedipus and the Modernist Aesthetic', in *Naming the Father, Legacies, Genealogies, and Explorations of Fatherhood in Modern and Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Eva Paulino Bueno *et al.* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2000); Wyatt Bonikowski, 'The Return of the Soldier Brings Death Home', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51.3 (2005), 513-535.

⁴⁶⁵ *The Return of the Soldier* is centred around the protagonist's psychoanalytic cure from shell-shock and *The Judge* is ostensibly an Oedipal Freudian story. Later West was to undergo a programme of psychoanalysis herself.

⁴⁶⁶ Glendinning, p. 1.

within particular systems of thought, West found herself, as Glendinning suggests, inevitably tied to the very tradition she abhorred.

Law and the juridical system, which are usually perceived to function as the fundamental apparatuses of sovereign control, can be seen additionally as the instruments of psychoanalysis insofar as they constitute the discursive structure on which Freudian psychoanalytic theory appears to be founded. In its reliance on a kind of discourse of sovereignty, Freudian psychoanalysis reveals itself, like the representation of power within which it finds it situated, as characteristic of a modernity dominated by such totalising grand narratives which seek ultimate realisation in an overarching language based around the concept of sovereignty. As Michel Foucault argues:

Starting at the [latter] end of the nineteenth century, we can trace the theoretical effort to reinscribe the thematic of sexuality in the system of law, the symbolic order, and sovereignty. [...] whence the Freudian endeavour (out of reaction no doubt to the great surge of racism that was contemporary to it) to ground sexuality in the law – the law of alliance, tabooed consanguinity, and the Sovereign-Father, in short to surround desire with all the trappings of the old order of power.⁴⁶⁷

West's *Harriet Hume* overtly turns towards the Freudian account of the 'death drive'. Her use of psychoanalytic theory situates her work in a tradition which is centred within what I term a discourse of sovereignty. I argue that Freudian psychoanalytic theory belongs to an outmoded system of thought that finds legitimation in this discourse. In *Harriet Hume*,

⁴⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will To Knowledge*, trans. by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 150.

West's sometimes paradoxical involvement with the Freudian conceptions of opposing life and death drives is prefigured by the interplay of the sadistic and masochistic fantasies of the novel's male protagonist, Arnold Condorex. *Harriet Hume* can be interpreted as, concurrently, both an enactment and a rejection of the Freudian meta-narrative. West's fiction also serves as an enactment and rejection of the narrative of sovereignty.

Harriet Hume is ostensibly a novel in which the domestic and the political commingle. Whilst the more dramatic action of *Harriet Hume* takes place within the very feminine and delicate domestic confines of Hume's apartment, this is a realm which is permeable and affected by the harsher political realities embodied by Condorex. Hume's apartment, like Yaverland's End in *The Judge*, becomes the site of a recognisably Gothic transformation into the uncanny. *Harriet Hume* thus takes the domestic setting and converts it into an unsettling space by subverting expectations. Kilgour writes of the Gothic in terms of this reinvented unnerving supernatural domestic sphere: '[i]n the female gothic, the private world is turned temporarily into a house of horrors; the domestic realm appears in distorted nightmare forms in the images of the prison, the castle'.⁴⁶⁸ Hume's apartment mimics the Gothic mode of representation in that it seeks to defamiliarise and make strange the home. Small details such as the fact that 'fantastically enough, there was no entrance to Hume's abode' and consequently visitors had to enter through the French window, 'the door in the wall of Blennerhassett House', contribute to the sense of strange otherness that the apartment holds.⁴⁶⁹ From the outset, Hume's apartment is situated in its apartness from the realm of the ordinary, a distinction which is characterised by the connection of the inner

⁴⁶⁸ Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.38.

⁴⁶⁹ Rebecca West, *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (London: Virago, 1980), p.13.

world of the psyche to the material world of objects. For instance, Hume's piano reverberates to the sound of her voice: '[a]ny piano will answer any voice that speaks to it deeply enough'. Likewise, the material reality of Hume's apartment takes on the mood and tone of its occupants. When Hume telepathically hears Condorex's thoughts of infidelity, the brightness of the house slides away, 'for in the brief string-match time that it takes to think a thought there had been broomed out of its doors and windows a great deal of prettiness and happiness that till then had appeared to be part of its fittings'.⁴⁷⁰ Within these uncertain bounds of the domestic realm, a realm which allows for leakages as the outside world seems to flow in as the inside flows out, public and private become confused.

As in *Harriet Hume*, it is the domestic sphere which conceals the Gothic heart of *The Judge*. In the first half of the novel, Melville's home in Edinburgh, though surrounded by poverty, remains uncontaminated by the degradation which is all about it. It is a house which is depicted as lacking breathing space: '[i]t was a corner house, and of all the houses in the square it looked the most put upon, the most relentlessly squeezed by its neighbours'.⁴⁷¹ The house that Melville shares with her mother backs on to a music hall. West's narrator describes how '[b]y nothing more than a thin wall which shook to music was this little home divided from a thick-aired place where ugly people lurched against each other lustfully; and yet it had been made an impregnable fort of loveliness and decency by this virtuous ageing woman'. Protected by some force resembling magic the two inhabitants of these walls exist in an impoverished but fairytale state. The Cinderella-like Melville 'had made a faery ring where heavy-footed dancers could not enter; her gravity had made a sanctuary as safe as

⁴⁷⁰ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.34; p.52.

⁴⁷¹ West, *The Judge*, p.76.

any church crowned with a belfry and casketing the Host'.⁴⁷² This safe domestic space is not echoed in the second half of the novel in which Melville's move to Yaverland's End and the presence of her soon to be mother-in-law, Marion Yaverland, seems to strip her of this enchantment. The house there, like both Hume's apartment and the houses that we see represented in the fiction of Marie Belloc Lowndes, is not such a sanctuary from the law.⁴⁷³

The second half of *The Judge* witnesses the movement of this external danger into the domestic sphere. On arriving at Yaverland's End, Melville is filled with an instinctive distaste for the place. Marion tries to compensate for this:

Oh, I know it's ugly! [...] I should have had it pulled down when I built on the new rooms. But it's been here two hundred years, and there are some of the beams of the house that were here before it, and we have lived here all the time, so it was too great a responsibility to destroy it.⁴⁷⁴

Marion only increases the eeriness of her home by emphasising the history which has imprinted itself on the very architecture of the building. However, the aspect of the house that Melville finds particularly repugnant are the large windows, which seem to allow the outside world to seep in and the inside world to seep out. While Melville understands that

⁴⁷² West, *The Judge*, p.79.

⁴⁷³ In *The Return of the Soldier*, the shell-shocked Chris Baldry is sent home from the front with an amnesia which means he cannot remember the last fifteen years and he does not know his wife. He still believes himself to be in love with the woman he was involved with as a young man. Baldry Court, the grand house to which he returns, appears to him with uncanny strangeness; though he has lived here as a married man, all he remembers of it is the place it was during his youth. Baldry Court here is the haunted house in a comparable way to Yaverland's End in *The Judge* and Harriet's Kensington apartment in *Harriet Hume*.

⁴⁷⁴ West, *The Judge*, p.234.

her bedroom at Yaverland's End is of a much higher standard than that to which she has been accustomed, 'it was spoiled for her by that large window'. She dislikes this 'not because she was afraid that anyone would look in, but because Marion had told her that someone had once looked out'. The home here is not a place from which the outside world can be hidden. The living room has a similar effect upon Melville. It is described as 'too like a lighthouse in the way that all who sat within were forced to look out on the windy firmament and see the earth spread far below as the pavement of the clouds on which their shadows trod like gliding feet'.⁴⁷⁵ Melville feels this intrusion of the outside as an oppressive force:

She had never before been in a room so freely ventilated by beauty, and yet she knew that she would find living on the ledge of this view quite intolerable. All that existed within the room was dwarfed by the immensity that the glass let in upon it, like the private life of a man dominated by some great ideal.⁴⁷⁶

For Melville, Yaverland's End affords her no protection. The fact that the house seems so permeable to the outside world seems also to function as a symbol of the danger, as in the morning room in Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, which already lurks inside the house. That the structure of the house allows for this movement in which inside and outside intermingle is symbolic of the impossibility of shutting out the laws of nature, as they are part of the psyche, and so long as the house is inhabited by people, these laws will be situated within its walls.

⁴⁷⁵ West, *The Judge*, p.237; p.241.

⁴⁷⁶ West, *The Judge*, p.241.

This movement of the law inside the home is a process that is reinforced in *Harriet Hume*. Inside Hume's apartment, on the first pages of the novel, we witness the political being enacted on the level of the domestic. At one and the same time there is confusion in the mingling of the inside with the outside. There are different types of law at play here which complicate any simplistic understanding. Bare life (akin to the law of nature and perhaps the law of the psyche) symbolise that which seems to be the opposite of political or state law. Bare life, or *femina sacra* (the vacuum from political protection) seems to enter the domestic sphere simultaneously with the actual "law." Both vie with each other for supremacy. In this sense, the entry of the law in the political sense into the home is a direct challenge to the notion of *femina sacra*.

Harriet Hume is saturated with discourses relating to outmoded conceptions of government and law which are reminiscent of a violent and repressive sovereign system of control, and this reveals itself primarily through the use of a shared vocabulary. In its reliance on a vocabulary centred on conceptions of violence and law, *Harriet Hume* appears to be trapped within a discourse of sovereignty. Condorex reveals the extent to which this system of thought governs his everyday life when he imagines that the hostile daylight is punishing his sexual transgressions with Hume; he narrates, in what could be described as a discourse of law, that 'it was amusing to swagger back into the daylight, challenging it to punish one for having been where one had been'. The reference to punishment for perceived wrongdoings serves as a reminder that the discourses that operate within juridical and political institutions are not limited to this realm but rather spill out to constitute all systems of thought in all spheres of life, including the private space of the bedroom. Likewise Kensington, the setting for the scene, is imbued with menacing intent. As Condorex

proclaims, '[i]t has been waiting for us all the time! It has been threatening us!'. Here, with the first words he speaks on the opening page of the novel, Condorex sets up the whole world, including the impartial nature that the daylight represents, as his adversary, as that which will reprimand him for his misdemeanours: 'his fretted vigilance saw enemies everywhere'.⁴⁷⁷

Though the novel is written in the third person, the narrator is by no means impartial; instead West gives the impression that all events are filtered through Condorex's consciousness. Condorex is a man who cares for nothing else than to rise in the world though he feels this desire to be 'like lead in his bosom'. This thought 'dominated him, he was its instrument'; he was 'rigid in contemplation of unseen glory'. For the man who above all else hopes '[t]hat fame, that power over the people, that house with the pillars and the pediments, and a park with the wooded knoll in which one can see five counties' should be his, Condorex is the embodiment of the patriarchal system of sovereignty. Condorex has internalised the discourse of law and punishment to such a degree that he reads its force into every aspect of life. Hume's act of casually weeding the garden is read through this same filter, as becomes apparent when we are told that walking in her garden, '[a]t the first flower-bed she stooped to dismiss a weed from service'.⁴⁷⁸ In this example, an external interpretation of Hume inverts the power relationship that existed in the previous instance, for here she is placed, in the eyes of Condorex, in the privileged position of power over nature.

⁴⁷⁷ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.7; p.24.

⁴⁷⁸ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.60; p.57; p.113; p.31; p.37.

There are numerous further instances throughout the novel which demonstrate Condorex's well-established predisposition to imagine the world through the lens of this particular system of thought; even his manner of speech is described as 'judicial'.⁴⁷⁹ When Condorex meets Hume unexpectedly after their initial parting, he envisages the pleasure it would bring him to assert over her the sovereign power of the king. He imagines that he 'were the King and could give her what she wants'.⁴⁸⁰ Though he imagines that he would use his sovereign power to provide for her in what he perceives to be positive comforts, he is nevertheless asserting his wish to dominate her by invoking this image of monarchical privilege. Though this instance seems relatively harmless, more violent and hostile manifestations of this theme become apparent as the novel progresses. For instance, in Condorex's house, Hume is described glancing up the staircase 'as if she saw an armed man descending it with sword prepared for flesh'; this subtle threat draws on the symbol of the sword as an instrument of repressive power.⁴⁸¹ As the proliferation of such instances suggest, *Harriet Hume* is firmly rooted in vocabulary characteristic of a consciousness invested in the discourse of sovereignty.

This suffusion of sovereignty discourse is prefigured in *The Judge*. Even in the opening pages of *The Judge*, long before the Gothic house of Yaverland's End is introduced, place is

⁴⁷⁹ These references range from the superimposition of this discursive system onto the natural world as is evident from the description of 'sword-sharp airs' (p. 104) and 'bludgeoning heat' (p. 126), to instances which make a more direct connection to the monarchical system on which the system of sovereignty is based. For example, Harriet states that 'To sit alone at one's instrument is to be like an unlimited monarch' (p.143) and Condorex is described as 'cross[ing] the road with a swinging, monarchic gait' (p.245).

⁴⁸⁰ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.130; p.84.

⁴⁸¹ West, *Harriet Hume*, p. 131.

described in dark, haunting tones. This atmosphere, however, is suffused with the violence of language inundated with battle imagery. Holyrood in Edinburgh is thus described as lying 'under a black bank surmounted by a low bitten cliff [...] like the camp of an invading and terrified army'. West continues: 'There is a sinister air about palaces. Always they appear like the camp of an invading army that is uneasy and keeps a good look out lest they need shoot. Remember they are always ready to shoot'.⁴⁸² Here, Melville's Edinburgh is menacing. It is here that her mother dies and Melville is driven into the house of her mother-in-law. While the Edinburgh house from which Melville moves effectively shuts out the dangers of the outside world by offering her the protection afforded by her mother, when she moves into the home of her future husband, the danger moves within the walls of the home. In the first half of the novel the sovereignty discourse in *The Judge* is situated outside the home, but in the second half it moves within the domestic sphere. The concept of law shifts from an external force to one embedded within the psyche. It is in this shift that we can also recognise the space for *femina sacra* to take hold. If law does not mean the actual law in the political sense then it can imply a vacuum from the protection of that law. Whilst law in the sense of the law of the psyche is a law in a certain sense, it offers none of the protection of the former.

In an attempt to free herself from the patriarchal systems of thought exemplified by the discourse of sovereignty in which *Harriet Hume* is firmly entrenched, West uses Freudian psychoanalysis as a tool in the recreation of an 'alternative' system of thought around which the world of her novels can be organised. Psychoanalysis itself already finds itself subsumed by pre-existing systems of thought which are governed by the concept of law.

⁴⁸² West, *The Judge*, pp.9-10.

This paradox comes into play from West's first novel onwards. In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris Baldry is invalidated from the front with shell-shock, which has manifested itself as an amnesia which has caused him to forget the last fifteen years. The conclusion of the novel sees him cured in an instant at the hands of a psychoanalyst. As Norton writes of *The Return of the Soldier*, '[t]he irony of using the "new" psychoanalysis, which purports to unlock the "truth" and thus seems to promise new freedoms, is that it is used to maintain the old falsehoods, to keep Chris in lockstep as the good soldier. But Freudian theory also stresses a patriarchal view of men's roles as providers and women's as nurturers'.⁴⁸³ Furthermore, as Mackay asserts, '[t]he motivation for returning Chris to mental health in *The Return of the Soldier* is a desire to restore the old order'. Mackay reads the novel as an undulation between the old and new orders with the conclusion that ultimately the old order triumphs as the story comes full circle. As she writes of the novel's conclusion, '[b]eing cured here means being well enough to return to the war, and the multiplicity of the "coming back" – to health, to sanity, to home, to the trenches – underlines the novel's cyclical mode'.⁴⁸⁴ Insofar as West sees psychoanalysis as upholding the *status quo*, she recognises the problematical nature so attempts to use such a theoretical basis on which to develop her resistance.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ Norton, *Paradoxical Feminism*, p.12.

⁴⁸⁴ Mackay, p.132; p. 134.

⁴⁸⁵ Thematically then, the novel can be said to take the form of a constant conflict between the new and the old. The metanarratives of the past are disrupted in this conflict but ultimately they prove to be an inexorable force which subsumes Chris. However this is not a simple story which makes the claim that the old is bad and the new good. And paradoxically, though Chris is fighting against the forces of the past which manifest themselves in the present, his amnesia which means that he has forgotten the present and remembers only a happier past is constantly driving him backwards into a very different and positive

In 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920) Freud hypothesises that there exist two competing drives. He writes that it is possible to discern 'two different kinds of drives: those that seek to guide life towards death; and others, the sexual drives, that continually seek and achieve the *renewal of life*'.⁴⁸⁶ As I argue, this idea was to become central to West's philosophy. In *Harriet Hume*, Hume comes to represent the 'female' drive towards life as Condorex apparently represents the 'male' drive towards death. That conceptions of dualism form an integral part of West's fiction is now very much established. Scott, for instance, has detailed West's 'obsess[ion] with dualism'. Like *The Judge*, she claims that '*Harriet Hume* works just as deliberately with binaries [...] insisting more on gender within the system'.⁴⁸⁷ As Schweizer writes, West's dualism has its foundation in the religious dualism of both Blaise Pascal and Manichaeism: 'The pessimistic implications of Manichaeism are written into its very cosmology, a narrative emphasizing the titanic struggle between light and darkness, highlighting the potent force of evil and execrating the demonic infection of all earthly life'. Schweizer describes *Harriet Hume* as 'a modernist fantasy in the shape of a Manichean parable' within which 'Arnold [Condorex] represents the qualities of gross matter, worldly ambition, evil, and ultimately death, while Harriet Hume represents the manifestation of the past. It is this happier past with Margaret that he is constantly trying to recreate in the present by resisting the urges of the other women in his life to come back to their present and remaining with Margaret in the safety of their old love. In *The Return of the Soldier*, the grand-narrative that makes up the past is simultaneously necessary and troubling.

⁴⁸⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick (London: Penguin, 2003), pp.45-102 (p.85). Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸⁷ Scott, 'Refiguring the Binary', p.169; p.181.

essence of spirit, music, pleasure, and life'.⁴⁸⁸ The drive to life is associated with the feminine and the drive to death with the masculine. It is this antagonistic pairing of the life-affirming feminine and death-desiring masculine which marks most perceptibly *Harriet Hume's* Gothic influence. The binaries of life and death and their ultimate conflation and confusion at the novel's conclusion, an issue to which I will return later, denotes yet another step in *Harriet Hume's* inclination towards the Gothic.

In *Harriet Hume* the symbolics of sovereignty and law have an intimate relationship with the symbolics of death. Notions of death seem to run unconsciously through *Harriet Hume* and are seamlessly interwoven with the representations of power previously described. The bag of cherries that Hume eats whilst walking in the street serves to illustrate the oppositional content of the death's symbolics. As Hume passes the area-railing of a building in the street she hangs 'on one of the spearheads a fine red doublet of cherries, which dangled from it like an earring'.⁴⁸⁹ The bag of cherries that Hume has been clutching closely against her dress have, as her lover testifies, left 'a faint purple stain beneath [her] left bosom, that might well lead a passerby to conclude that you had stabbed yourself for love'.⁴⁹⁰ However, even in these early intimations of Hume's eventual fate there exists a kind of antagonism immanent in the conception of death as it is represented in the symbol of the cherries. The cherries, emblematic of feminine beauty, youth and fertility, could be said to evoke the idea of the life instinct or *eros* that Freud identifies. To juxtapose this with death is to see West's own schema aligned with that of Freud in his supposition that '[s]ome instinctual impulses

⁴⁸⁸ Schweizer, *Rebecca West*, p. 71.

⁴⁸⁹ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.123.

⁴⁹⁰ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.128.

make their appearance almost from the first in pairs of opposites – a very remarkable phenomenon'.⁴⁹¹ The world-view that *Harriet Hume* represents is one which imagines the subsistence of existence divided up into strictly dichotomised binary pairings. The drive to life and the drive to death, two contradictory instincts, are here intimately and inextricably linked.

This idea of *eros* (the life instinct) and *thanatos* (the death instinct) has been associated a number of times with West's overarching philosophy.⁴⁹² In her biography of West, Glendinning adds a number of valuable observations on West's own understanding of the opposing forces of life and death. Glendinning quotes West's book *Black Lamb, Grey Falcon*, in which West writes that, in opposition to the part of ourselves that seeks pleasure and life, '[t]he other half of us is nearly mad. It prefers the disagreeable to the agreeable, loves pain and its darker night despair, and wants to die in a catastrophe that will set back life to its beginnings and leave nothing of our house save its blackened foundations'.⁴⁹³ Glendinning writes that '[t]his world-vision, which is like a reflection of the Freudian *eros* and *thanatos*, of the pleasure principle and the death wish, was compatible with [West's] own personality and [West's] own perception of experience'.⁴⁹⁴ The notion of the Freudian death wish in *The*

⁴⁹¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychoanalytical Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. and ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1915), pp.275-300 (p.281).

⁴⁹² This theme is especially evident in her non-fictional works such as *The Meaning of Treason* and *Black Lamb, Grey Falcon*, in which it becomes a central theme.

⁴⁹³ Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006), p.1102.

⁴⁹⁴ Glendinning, p.155.

Return of the Soldier has been detailed by Bonikowski, who recognises that '[t]he figure of the returning soldier leads both Freud and West to a similar conclusion about the significance of the First World War: namely, that war is not only something *out there*, happening in another place; rather, war, like death, is present *within* the subject'.⁴⁹⁵ In linking this to *Harriet Hume*, Norton suggests that the fact that Condorex can simultaneously desire Hume and wish her dead 'illustrates West's Freudian belief that men are overpowered by the death instinct rather than love of life'.⁴⁹⁶ In West, the death drive is predominantly associated with the masculine law.

This binary pairing of love and hate, which enacts the intertwined notions of the drive to life and the drive to death, is prefigured in *Harriet Hume* by the enactment of what could be called, in Freudian terms, a sadistic impulse within Condorex. As Jean Laplanche understands it, sadism is identified as 'the activity directed towards an external object' in which the goal of the sadist is to 'destroy the other, make him suffer, aggress him'.⁴⁹⁷ Hume notes Condorex's strange tendency to enjoy the infliction of pain on others: 'Oh, what perversity', she tells him, 'to cling with love to the idea that you have inflicted pain!'. Condorex confirms this tendency again and again. He feels pleasure at Hume's tears and states that her crying 'pleases me a little, for I am very cruel, and would like to hurt you'. Not only does he enjoy inflicting pain on Hume, he also enjoys suffering pain himself, exhibiting what Freud would have termed a masochistic tendency. Condorex expresses a

⁴⁹⁵ Bonikowski, p.514. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹⁶ Norton, *Paradoxical Feminism*, pp.55-56.

⁴⁹⁷ Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.89.

gratification towards emotions that are normally perceived to be painful. Condorex reveals that he 'deriv[es] a most exquisite satisfaction from being all hate'.⁴⁹⁸ However, Condorex's impulses towards pain are most fully realised in his preoccupation with death; it is here also that we see most clearly the link between the narrative of psychoanalysis and the narrative of sovereignty as we witness the two discursive systems collide.

In *The Judge*, however, this reading of the feminine life drive and the masculine death drive is further complicated. While in the first half of the novel the feminine is aligned with the drive to life embodied by Melville's youthful vitality and her mother's protective sphere, this feminine drive to life mutates into a drive to death in the second half of the novel. Marion is apparently, at certain times, the paradoxical embodiment of both the drive to life and the drive to death. While she nourishes her illegitimate love child, Yaverland, with her own body and almost smothers him with excessive love through both childhood and adulthood, she refuses to nurture her second child Roger, who is the result of rape within a loveless marriage. Even while Roger is still in her womb her body and soul wish him dead: 'The plain fact was that she was going to have a child, and that she was trying to kill it'. During an easy labour with Roger, '[s]he was going through a process that should have produced life: but because of the lack of some essence which works through pain, but nevertheless is to the breeding womb what sight is to the eye or sanity to the brain, it was producing something that was as much at variance with life as death'.⁴⁹⁹ As she is giving birth to Roger, she is also wishing death on him. Though Marion's suicide could be read as the ultimate enactment of the death drive, it differs from that of Condorex in *Harriet Hume* in that, although it brings

⁴⁹⁸ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.99; p.200; p.262.

⁴⁹⁹ West, *The Judge*, p.293; p.294.

about her death, she does it so that her son, Yaverland, may escape her smothering love and happily marry Melville. Allowing him to do this and to have children with Melville is something of a renewal of the cycle of life, even though it emerges from death. West reads the law as it is conceived in terms of the psyche as operating with a frightening and immutable inevitability.

The fantastical turn of events at the conclusion of *Harriet Hume*, in which all sense of normality is left behind, functions as the medium for the transmission of these ideas. The novel's concluding scene sees Hume and Condorex displaced from the 'real' world and transferred into a liminal sphere between life and death which suggests a kind of afterlife. Here the figures of the two ghostly policemen are introduced. These custodians of the law allow Condorex to choose for himself whether or not he should be punished for his crime of (attempted) murder. As one of the policemen says to Condorex, 'We will leave you to decide whether or not you shall be arrested'. Condorex replies in astonishment: 'Do I hear that from the custodians of the law themselves! This is a very disorderly plot of ground, where that which keeps our Constitution rigid shows such flagrant signs of laxity!'.⁵⁰⁰ Such a system does not seem to provide a satisfactory way of dealing with those who commit such a crime as murder and, from an Agambenian theoretical framework, becomes suggestive of the condition of *femina sacra*. Where law exists in the psyche and not in actuality, it can offer no 'real' protection. Harriet's apartment here is a realm devoid of the real law; a void that is only exaggerated by virtue of the fact that the fantasy law in its place exists so strongly. Hume herself is prepared to admit that '[h]umanity would be unbearably lackadaisical if there were none but my kind alive'. In other words, if those who enforced the power of the

⁵⁰⁰ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.269.

law did not exist, society would be unable to function. As she says, 'I should be churlish if I blamed those who have the power I lacked, and went out into the world, and did what they knew to govern it'. Speaking to Condorex she affirms that '[t]is the sturdy desire you have to shape the random elements of our existence into coherent patterns that is the very pith and marrow of mankind'.⁵⁰¹ In other words, the drive to formulate the kind of destructive discourses of law and sovereignty characterises our existence as human-beings; the predisposition to do so is at once necessary and innately problematic.

West's earlier novel *The Judge* serves as a precursor to this theme. The novel's title provides an initial indication of its engagement with notions of the juridical: law, justice and punishment. Though the novel uses as one of its central plot devices the theme of Melville's engagement in the suffrage campaign, the idea of government and law is not limited to the political realm; in fact, it is law in the social and psychological sense that becomes paramount in the novel. The image of a policeman patrolling the night streets of Edinburgh, 'a black figure walking with that appearance of moping stoicism that policemen wear at night', becomes a symbol for the manner in which conceptions of order and the discourse of law are not necessarily tied to their conventional place in public order as the figure transcends his law-keeping purpose.⁵⁰² Just as the discourse of law enters the bedroom in *Harriet Hume*, here too we find it leaking out of its usual realm and infecting the private sphere. For Richard Yaverland, Melville's lover, the policeman 'participated in the fantasy of the place, for it seemed possible that he had never arrested anybody and never would; that his sole business was to keep away bad dreams from the little people who were

⁵⁰¹ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.267.

⁵⁰² West, *The Judge*, p.75.

sleeping in these little houses'.⁵⁰³ The notion of the fantasy policemen suggests the assimilation of systems of thought surrounding law into even the depths of the unconscious; a realm which is symbolised by sleeping people hidden out of sight behind the walls of their houses.⁵⁰⁴ As in *Harriet Hume*, the policeman becomes symbolic of an old order of power which, by virtue of its existence in a fantasy realm, becomes that which has been relegated to a sphere of unreality that is therefore suggestive of an outmoded system of power.

The Goal of All Life is Death

Foucault affirms that, '[f]or a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death'.⁵⁰⁵ Foucault sees sovereign right, as it is reformulated in Hobbesian terms, as 'in reality the right to *take* life or *let* live'.⁵⁰⁶ It is this definition of sovereignty which ties it to the schema of psychoanalysis. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud famously wrote that '*the goal of all life is death*',⁵⁰⁷ and since West's novel culminates in a dramatic death scene which has been insinuated throughout the novel, it could be argued that the schema of *Harriet Hume* too rests on this principle – that

⁵⁰³ West, *The Judge*, pp.75-76.

⁵⁰⁴ Interestingly, in *The Return of the Soldier*, Baldry too sees the home as a place in which he is imprisoned and metaphors of law and punishment are used to describe this sense of captivity. Jenny describes how she and his wife Kitty ('we who loved him') were like 'stout police men', and asks whether 'Baldry Court so sleek a place that the unhappy felt offenders there?' (p.59). In his amnesia, '[a]ll the inhabitants of this new tract of time were his enemies, all circumstances his prison bars' (pp.61-62).

⁵⁰⁵ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.135.

⁵⁰⁶ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p.136. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁰⁷ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p.78. Emphasis in original.

is, that the objective of her novel is death. Dramatising the notion of suppressed intentions that West was later to convey in *The Meaning of Treason*, in which she wrote that '[h]uman beings are mercifully so constituted as to be able to conceal from themselves what they intend to do until they are well into the doing of it',⁵⁰⁸ Condorex seems to be able to hide from himself his violent purpose. When he arrives at Hume's home in order to murder her he proclaims: 'I had no notion that I meant to kill you till I saw the moonlight shining on the brass knob of your door'. Hume, having had the capacity to read his mind, weeps in reply that she had 'mastered that trick of yours so long ago'.⁵⁰⁹ Indeed, if consciously Condorex managed to convince himself of his lack of murderous intentions, his unconscious has betrayed him otherwise; his imagination prior to his final meeting with Hume is saturated with metaphors of violence.

At the beginning of the novel these fantasies about doing harm to Hume are relatively mild; as an instance of this we might take the example of Condorex as 'he vehemently slammed the door, the vehemence was because he imagined himself slamming it on the prodigiousness of Harriet Hume'. As the novel progresses these fantasies intensify. In his head he hears the words to the nursery rhyme: 'Here is a candle to light you to bed. Here is a chopper to chop off your head...' and thinks 'what a sinister rhythm those words tread out on the ear! It is the very gait of a murderer, stealing behind his victim!'. In his mind's eye the headlight beams from passing cars appear to him as 'swords'. Even the straight road he

⁵⁰⁸ West, *The Meaning of Treason*, p.94.

⁵⁰⁹ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.265.

sees on his journey across London to Hume's apartment takes on 'the beauty [...] of a weapon pointed at the heart of its due victim'.⁵¹⁰

If Condorex is sincere when he claims to have had no knowledge of his intention to take Hume's life then he has been deluding himself, for he repeatedly has thoughts to the contrary which seem to state explicitly his wish to destroy Hume, who he perceives to be his opposite. For him, it is the very fact that she is his opposite that compels him to take her life, for his totalising world-view, which consists of opposing binary pairings, suggests to him that his opposite must be destructive. As he freely admits, 'What pleasure it would give me to shut you away from all the heat of living!'.⁵¹¹ The kind of fallaciously realised philosophy which leads Condorex to these extremes of hatred towards his 'opposite' are more fully developed in West's essay from *What I Believe*:

His mind, which is quite inadequate for the purpose of mastering his environment and therefore always oversimplifies, sees the universe in antithesis, in dichotomies. He says, foolishly enough, for one cannot cut into clean halves two substances that pass into each other by insensible gradation, that there is light and darkness, life and death, pleasure and pain.⁵¹²

It is Condorex's inability to escape this innate drive which leads him to believe that everything must be compartmentalised into what he imagines to be neatly hierarchical

⁵¹⁰ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.67; p.243; p.245; p.246.

⁵¹¹ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.209.

⁵¹² Rebecca West, *What I Believe: 13 Eminent People of our Time Argue for their Philosophy of Life*, ed. by Mark Booth (New York: Crossroad, 1984), pp.128-142 (p.141).

categories. He mistakenly assumes that the world must conform to this world view and this is what ultimately leads him to seek confirmation in death.

In developing his theory of the death drive, Freud speculates that '[i]n our unconscious impulses we daily and hourly get rid of anyone who stands in our way, of anyone who has offended or injured us'. In order to demonstrate the operation of this unconscious impulse to kill he writes that '[t]he expression "Devil take him!" which so often comes to people's lips in joking anger and which really means "Death take him!" is in our unconscious a serious and powerful death-wish. Indeed our unconscious will murder even for trifles'.⁵¹³ Freudian theory reads the death drive as an inexorable condition of the human psyche; as that upon which grand narratives are necessarily and inextricably founded.

Condorex's thoughts express a similar unconscious desire embedded within a seemingly inescapable discourse. It is a desire that he is not content to leave latent. For Condorex it is a drive that he must see literalised in order to defend his own sense of self against his opposite. As Condorex reveals, through her ability to read his thought (as he puts it himself, 'she had burgled his mind'), he senses that Hume has done him harm. Condorex feels violated because Hume 'had come between him and every human being's right not to know quite what he is doing'. To attack Hume and defeat her is to regain this sovereignty. Condorex feels that '[t]o concede to one's opposite, in the most infinitesimal degree, is to die'; that Hume will continue to do him harm 'so long as she lives'.⁵¹⁴ As Condorex theorises it in his own mind, '[t]here is not a particle of accommodation for opposites' and to let

⁵¹³ Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death', p.297.

⁵¹⁴ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.109; p.110; p.205; p.217.

Hume live is to sacrifice his own life. Condorex articulates his belief clearly when he avows that 'nothing is more sure that so long as one's opposite survives one will be liable to be plunged into conditions utterly contrary to one's being, which are an attack on one's essence; ay, which is to condemn one to death'. Condorex's predisposition to divide the world up into binary opposites, one half of which must be perceived to be malign for the other to thrive, reveals a further inclination of a world view which is ordered according to deeply ingrained pre-existing categories. Condorex feels that the 'confusion of substances' that allow the opposites in himself and Hume to mingle 'prevent a man from standing upright, they cut out his most vital parts, they yield him utterly to his opposite, who by necessity must wish his death'. Hume relates poignantly to her lover much earlier in the novel, '[w]rite me down [...] as all that Arnold Condorex rejected'.⁵¹⁵ As Scott writes, in *Harriet Hume* '[t]he most violent potentials of dualism are realized in late scenes of the novel'.⁵¹⁶ In killing Hume, Condorex asserts his own individual sovereignty over Hume; he supposes that he is exercising his right to self-defence over this imagined threat of death and in doing so is achieving, on his own terms, a degree of justice.

Condorex's own suicide can be read according to a similar schema whereby he asserts his own individual sovereignty by choosing his own death. Freud writes of a paradoxical condition in which the drive towards self-preservation steers the organism away from any external threats 'that could help it take a short cut to its life's goal (to short-circuit the system as it were)', in order to clear the path for the organism 'to die in its own particular

⁵¹⁵ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.204; p.229; p.230; 93.

⁵¹⁶ Scott, 'Refiguring the Binary', p.183.

way'.⁵¹⁷ Condorex clearly fears the uncontrollable force of death, for instance, when the scene in which he witnesses a woman dying in the street is repeated with horror in his mind: "Things can go wrong," he mourned, "women can die in the street, catastrophe respects no one'." Later he says to himself, '[m]uch in this world goes wrong! That woman was dying in the street!' as the narrative voice unsettlingly asserts, '[t]error made the hot room chill'. The thought of death in a controlled manner surrounded by conventions and ceremony is, for Condorex, a far less alarming prospect. As he asserts in response to the 'improper' death in the street, '[d]eath would be different with an Abbey hushed, and the pomp of a public event'.⁵¹⁸ Death for Condorex is only acceptable if it takes the form of the death of a sovereign. He creates for himself what he perceives to be a death on comparable terms in his act of suicide, which, for him, is additionally gratifying in that he also asserts his sovereignty over another.

Despite Hume's seemingly perpetual acquiescence to the will of Condorex—as he himself notes 'if Hume had a fault it was that her oval face was almost insipid with compliancy'—Hume eventually gains the upper hand over Condorex as death conspires with her to fool him. Though Condorex reflects on 'how kindly she had bent herself to his will', in retrospect we see that Hume's apparent complicity with Condorex's scheme is not quite as it seems. As Condorex realises, but fails to reflect upon early in the novel, Hume 'must be in league with formidable forces'. He goes on to think, '[i]f that were so, would it not be certain that she despised him, and that the illumination to which he had been

⁵¹⁷Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p.79.

⁵¹⁸West, *Harriet Hume*, p.120; p.152; p.120.

subject at the door was an explosion of mocking laughter?'.⁵¹⁹ The key to understanding West's apparently paradoxical position (in this instance Hume resists the patriarchal discourses, which are epitomised by Condorex, by simply yielding to his ultimately self-destructive schemes), is to look to her later non-fictional writings. In *Black Lamb, Grey Falcon*, West writes of 'a kind of human being, terrifying above all others, who resist by yielding'. As she continues, '[l]et it be supposed that it is a woman. A man is pleased by her, he makes advances to her, he finds that no woman was ever more compliant. He marvels at the way she allows him to take possession of her and perhaps despises her for it'.⁵²⁰ Hume typifies this very idea. As Condorex has always suspected, Hume is 'the embodiment of some principle', and it is here that we find it realised.⁵²¹

In *Black Lamb, Grey Falcon*, West resumes this line of thought, claiming that the man, when he reflects on the woman's compliancy, is struck by the notion 'that she failed to resist him in the first place because simply nothing he could do seemed of the slightest importance. He may even suspect that she let him come into her life because she hated him, and wanted him to expose himself before her so that she could despise him for his weakness'.⁵²² In due course Hume's submissiveness serves only to reveal the limitations of the discourses according to which Condorex constructs his schemes.⁵²³ To situate the conclusion of *Harriet*

⁵¹⁹ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.19; p.21; pp.25-26.

⁵²⁰ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p.301.

⁵²¹ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.93.

⁵²² West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, p.302.

⁵²³ West's 'Goodness Doesn't Just Happen' (1952) should be mentioned in light of the current discussion. West wrote that in her youth she 'thought human beings were naturally good, and that their

Hume in terms of the Gothic, this ultimate restoration of culturally accepted norms fulfils the formula of the Gothic romance novel. As Kilgour writes, '[t]he gothic thus both represents in the story of its heroine and offers to its readers a momentary subversion of order that is followed by the restoration of a norm, which after the experience of terror, now seems immensely desirable'. In *Harriet Hume's* final fantasy sequence the blurring of binaries is effectively a death sentence for its protagonists. The norm may not have been restored (in fact, if anything, the boundaries become even more conflated as life and death commingle), but it by no means goes on unpunished. Kilgour further claims that '[l]ike the carnivalesque, the gothic appears to be a transgressive rebellion against norms which yet ends up reinstating them, an eruption of unlicensed desire that is fully controlled by governing systems of limitation'.⁵²⁴

In *Harriet Hume* wholly negative notions of death and notions of sovereignty are fused together to the extent that the one *becomes* the other as Condorex imagines that the only way in which he can assert his own sovereignty is through death. Furthermore, the death

personal relations were bound to work out well, and that the law was a clumsy machine for dealing harshly with people who would cease to offend as soon as we got rid of poverty'. Rebecca West, *Woman as Artist and Thinker* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), p.40. She continues, 'I realize now that what is good on this earth does not happen as a matter of course, it has to be created, it has to be maintained, by the effort of love, by submission to the Rule of Law' (p.41). For West, the Rule of Law and its contingent discursive structure centred on sovereignty is as necessary as it is damaging. However, *Harriet Hume* has little time to spare with regard to the constructive aspects of the sovereignty discourse. The part of the death drive that West recognises as giving 'man as much as it destroys', that which means that '[s]ince he is half in love with death he has courage' (p. 21), is, for the most part, absent from *Harriet Hume*.

⁵²⁴ Kilgour, p.8.

that Condorex assumes will be the enactment of an absolutist principle fails him in this respect as the life that persists in death confuses its absolutist nature as it merges with its opposite. As Condorex apparently subconsciously predicts early in *Harriet Hume*, 'All is ended in a general levelling'.⁵²⁵ That psychoanalysis is bound by the systems of thought that constitute the discourse of sovereignty is very much apparent in *Harriet Hume*. Though West used psychoanalysis as a tool to break free of the restrictive discourses of the past, it served only to uphold them because, as is ultimately revealed, psychoanalysis is inseparable from this very grand narrative. Freudian theorisations of the death drive are constituted by the same discourses that characterise thinking on sovereignty and it is blind faith in this system that leads Condorex to murder and suicide. Likewise, West's adherence to a discourse based, to a degree, on the Freudian psychoanalytic model necessarily places her within the grasp of a sovereignty discourse, a discourse which upholds, predominantly, the oppressive patriarchal structures she sought to overturn.

The Meaning of Treason (1949), a non-fictional work concerning British citizens who betrayed their country during the Second World War, reveals West's profoundly disconcerting attitude towards the conception of law which she perceives to be a defining characteristic of early twentieth-century systems of thought. Though West's commitment to the rule of law and the duties of citizenship is made obvious in this work, it is equally apparent that she perceives there to be a certain elemental quality about humanity which makes treachery both inevitable, and also, to an extent, desirable. As she writes: 'There is always loyalty', however 'there is always treachery, since there is the instinct to die as well

⁵²⁵ West, *Harriet Hume*, p.54.

as the instinct to live, hatred as well as love'.⁵²⁶ Her contradictory attitude towards law forms part of a broader cynicism regarding all forms of totalising narratives. Almost a decade before, in an essay published in 1940, West wrote that she had 'no hunger for a creed that shall reveal to me the secret of the universe'.⁵²⁷ For West, such creeds are merely dogmatic in that '[t]hey pretend to explain the total universe in terms comprehensible to the human intellect', rendering them, as she claims, 'bound to be invalid'.⁵²⁸ For Schweizer, West's essay in *I Believe* takes the form of 'a manifesto against fundamentalism'.⁵²⁹ This tract against universalised schemas can be superimposed onto the context of law as it finds itself embedded, as I show, in an overarching narrative of sovereignty, revealing a deep distrust of the juridical and political systems which West simultaneously venerates. In drawing out the connection with the Gothic, the scope of this chapter is to read notions of the death drive in West's fiction as representative of a broader discourse of sovereignty despite West's own explicit reservations about such discursive systems.

In West's early novels this ambiguous response to the grand narrative of sovereignty is played out. This is inevitable because it is embedded within the psyche, and this inevitability makes it particularly troubling. In both *The Judge* and *Harriet Hume*, law is represented as that which has been internalised by the superego. Law, in its externalised political form, is a redundant force as the self is essentially self-policing. In its manifestation as the governing aspect of the self, it is already in the domestic sphere because of the self's

⁵²⁶ West, *The Meaning of Treason*, p.272.

⁵²⁷ West, *What I Believe*, p. 129.

⁵²⁸ West, *What I Believe*, p.130.

⁵²⁹ Schweizer, 'Introduction', p.34.

omnipresence; wherever the self is, law is there too. The following chapter, which looks at the novels of Lowndes, sees a similar discourse of law being employed, but the vocabulary here is less metaphorical. Law in Lowndes refers to the enforcement of set of rules which have been imposed upon a population and are external to the self. Nevertheless, the following chapter sees the discourse of law infiltrate the domestic sphere as the inhabitants of Lowndes' fictional world are depicted as incapable of self-governing their essentially immoral natures. It is through looking at *The Judge* and *Harriet Hume* as exemplars of Gothic modernism that we see most clearly the interplay of the competing perspectives on the grand narrative of sovereignty. Kilgour writes that the ending of the female Gothic 'seems reactionary, allowing us to indulge our imaginations safely because preaching the joys of ultimate conformity'.⁵³⁰ West's novels are gratifying in that they make allowances for the inevitable confusion and entanglement of opposites, whilst admitting that this transgression of conventional binaries cannot take place with impunity.

⁵³⁰ Kilgour, p.38.

CHAPTER SIX

Marie Belloc Lowndes' Popular Gothic

*I wish I had a woodland house,
The littlest ever seen,
With funny little red walls
And roof of mossy green.⁵³¹*

Like Christie, Lowndes was prolific, publishing over forty novels in addition to plays, memoirs and a large number of short stories spanning the first five decades of the twentieth century. Most of these, as is the case with the works of E.M. Hull, are now largely forgotten. Despite her obvious popularity, evidenced by a significant number of film adaptations of her novels, Lowndes has not yet reached the radar of literary studies. Though the work of Lowndes features relatively regularly in anthologies and compilations of criticism of mystery and detective fiction, this rarely exceeds a few sentences and there is little scholarly work on her significance outside this limited sphere. With rare exceptions,⁵³² these brief mentions of Lowndes deal almost exclusively with her most famous novel, *The Lodger* (1913), which was initially filmed by Hitchcock in 1927 as *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*.⁵³³ *The Lodger* was subsequently filmed by Maurice Elvey

⁵³¹ J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan: Or the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up*, in J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ll.1.319-322.

⁵³² Jane Potter is one of these rare exceptions when she who looks beyond *The Lodger* in Lowndes' oeuvre by providing a reading of *Good Old Anna* (1917) in *Boy in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵³³ These brief mentions include works such as *Great Women Mystery Writers: Classic to Contemporary*, ed. by Kathleen Gregory Klein (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994) and Albert Borowitz,

in 1932, John Brahm in 1944 and again by Hugo Fregonese in 1953 as *The Man in the Attic*. 2009 saw the most recent remake of *The Lodger* in David Ondaatje's adaptation.

As is the case with Hull, Lowndes' writing can be read as modernism's antithesis. But, also like Hull, this does not mean that her work can be read as entirely separate from its counterpart. Rather, in some senses, popular writing such as this can be understood in terms of its relation to modernism in that it relies on its binary opposite as a means by which to define itself. Contextually the two forms are not always entirely distinct from one other. Lowndes may have produced a very different form of writing, eschewing the narrative experimentalism that has come to define modernism, but she was nevertheless part of the period that produced this literary form and mixed in circles which brought her into contact with some of the key figures of the modernist movement, including Katherine Mansfield, Rebecca West, May Sinclair, Henry James and Graham Greene.⁵³⁴ In fact Lowndes praised West highly, writing that, along with G.B. Stern, she was one of '[t]wo women whose personalities live through and in all their works'.⁵³⁵ Lowndes argues that '[i]n

Blood & Ink: An International Guide to Fact-Based Crime Literature (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002).

⁵³⁴ Lowndes was personally acquainted with Mansfield. Mansfield, in a letter to Eddie Marsh (who was a poet and top civil servant), praises her whole-heartedly: 'I feel I must write and thank you for the delight of meeting Mrs Belloc Lowndes this afternoon. I can hardly believe that I met her for the first time today for she is one of those rare loveable women whom one's heart goes out to. [...] It's late evening now and there is nobody here but the fire, but the salon is still sounding faintly with those warm, sincere, generous tones. I loved seeing her'. Katherine Mansfield to Eddie Marsh (26 February 1921), Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lowndes, M.A.B. box 19, Recip. M-MAQ.

⁵³⁵ Marie Belloc Lowndes, 'Seventh Talk: What Shall I Read?', Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lowndes, M.A.B. box 7, Works W-Z.

Return of the Soldier, Rebecca West wrote one of the two or three most moving and original stories inspired by the Great War'. Lowndes continues this praise, stating that West 'also possesses what is, to my thinking, extremely rare in the creative artist, that is, a fine critical mind'.⁵³⁶ While Lowndes was not writing as part of the modernist movement, she was nevertheless greatly informed and influenced by it.

As in the case of Hull, Lowndes' fiction exists in a complex and at times contradictory relationship with modernism. Laura Marcus writes in her introduction to a 1996 edition of *The Lodger* that Lowndes received applause from some unlikely candidates: it is 'surprising to find Stein and Hemingway, those two American modernists, praising so fulsomely a writer who seems, at first sight, to be an archetypal Edwardian novelist, bred in the schools of sensation and romance'.⁵³⁷ Again like Hull, we see Lowndes' literary reputation defined according to its juxtaposition with those of her modernist contemporaries. Whilst Lowndes was under no illusion about the fact that she was writing for the masses, she still

⁵³⁶ Lowndes, 'Seventh Talk: What Shall I Read?', Lowndes, M.A.B. box 7, Works W-Z.

⁵³⁷ Laura Marcus, 'Introduction', in Marie Belloc Lowndes, *The Lodger* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) pp.ix-xxiii (p.ix). In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway quotes Stein: 'If you don't want to read something bad, and want to read something that will hold your interest and is marvellous in its own way, you should read Marie Belloc Lowndes. [...] I had never heard of her, and Miss Stein loaned me *The Lodger*, that marvellous story of Jack the Ripper, and another book about murder at a place outside Paris that could only be Enghien-les-Bains. They were both splendid after-work books, the people credible and the action and terror never false. They were perfect for reading after you had worked and I read all the Mrs Belloc Lowndes that there was. But there was only so much and none as good as the first two and I never found anything as good for that empty time of day or night until the first fine Simenon books came out'. Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964), p29.

attempted to distance herself from the kind of 'bad' writing that she associated with the proponents of the desert romance genre. When asked in an interview, 'Have you any views about the best-seller? What in your opinion makes a great best-seller?', Lowndes responds by saying that certain novels classed under the category of 'best-seller' have little or no literary merit:

The Sheik is utter rubbish [...]. The large sale of *The Sheik* type of best-seller is undoubtedly owing to an unscrupulous use of the lascivious note. [...] Best-sellers of the bad type have a brief period of popularity because they have no appeal apart from that to the reader's sensuality.⁵³⁸

Elsewhere, however, she seems to soften to this type of best-seller and reveals an inconsistent opinion towards popular fiction: though with one hand she slates *The Sheik*, with the other she opposes the kind of snobbery which views literature hierarchically. There is a very obvious tension in her accusations against *The Sheik* and other similarly lowbrow fiction when she proceeds to make a claim against elitism in literature:

In my view, a great deal of pompous nonsense is talked about reading. I am not only amused, I am disgusted, when I hear superior people shake their heads when some friend of theirs indulges in reading what they consider to be rubbish. All reading is good, and is likely to do the reader good, unless it is definitely what old fashioned folk still call "bad reading." It has constantly happened in the past, and it will happen again and again in the future, that a novel or humorous

⁵³⁸ Marie Belloc Lowndes, 'Answers to Questions', Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lowndes, M.A.B.

book destined to quite a short life, gives hundreds of thousands of people intense pleasure.⁵³⁹

Lowndes is somewhat contradictory in denouncing *The Sheik* when clearly it falls under the latter category of a short-lived phenomenon that nevertheless sold to a voracious public at a huge rate. The 'bad' literature onto which Lowndes pours scorn is clearly that which offends her Victorian sensibilities with its overt displays of sensuality; in Lowndes' opinion, then, it is perfectly acceptable to read 'trashy' fiction so long as it does not contain any hint of what she sees as dangerous sexuality. Though at times Lowndes may appear unsympathetic towards the fleeting appeal of the best-seller, her own fiction (perhaps with the exception of *The Lodger*) arguably falls into this category.⁵⁴⁰

Lowndes' body of work is vast and varied and is by no means limited in terms of genre; Lowndes published short stories and plays as well as romance and crime novels. Here I focus on three novels, *The Lodger* (1913), *Letty Lynton* (1931) and *Lizzie Borden: A Study in*

⁵³⁹ Marie Belloc Lowndes, 'First Talk: What Shall I Read?', Austin, Harry Ransom Center, , M.A.B. box 7, Works W-Z.

⁵⁴⁰ West wrote disparagingly of the best-seller of the sort being produced by authors such as Hull and Lowndes, stating that, '[i]n trying to understand the appeal of best-sellers, it is well to remember that whistles can be made sounding certain notes which are clearly audible to dogs and other of the lower animals, though man is incapable of hearing them'. 'The Tosh Horse', in *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1928), pp.319-325 (p.323). Woolf, though rather condescendingly, wrote too of the lowbrow bestseller stating that as essential for the existence of the highbrow of which she recognised herself as a proponent. She writes that 'I honour and respect lowbrows — and I have never known a highbrow who did not. In so far as I am a highbrow (and my imperfections in that line are well known to me) I love lowbrows [...]'. 'Middlebrow' in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1947), pp113-119 (p.114).

Conjecture (1939). All three novels are at least loosely based on 'real-crime'. Murder in Lowndes is not punished by fantasy policemen who let the perpetrator decide on his own fate but rather are, in most instances, put through the justice system. Though Lowndes repeatedly states that her novels are works of fiction rather than fact, they are nevertheless represented in a realist mode which sees the accused subjected to judge and jury. There is, at first sight, not so much of the fantastic or supernatural in these accounts; in contrast, Lowndes represents murder trials with an apparent attempted authenticity. Likewise, there is nothing in her writing style which sets her apart from a conventionally realist mode of representation. Nevertheless, Lowndes' fiction shares West's concern with the binaries of life and death, masculine and feminine, light and dark and good and evil. Whilst in the West novels I look at in this section the drive to life is associated with the feminine and the drive to death with the masculine, in Lowndes' novel we see this tendency reversed: murder here is firmly associated with the feminine. Even in *The Lodger*, the murderer Mr Sleuth, the Jack the Ripper character, is decidedly feminised. Whereas in *Harriet Hume* murder represents the antithesis of the feminine, a manifestation of the masculine desire for success in the public sphere, death in Lowndes is centred in a very domestic space.

The Home as the Fortress

The Lodger, as in the case of *The Sheik*, unavoidably inflects itself on readings of Lowndes' other works. In large part owing to the successful film adaptations, *The Lodger* and *The Sheik* have become virtually the sole representatives of their authors' work and have been assured a continued readership as a consequence of their relatively regular republications.

Lowndes was aware of the fact that *The Lodger* would come to be the defining work of her career despite its initially slow launch:

When it came to finding a quotation for an advertisement of the American edition, I was not able to find even one sentence of tepid approval. Then, to my surprise, when *The Lodger* had been out two or three years reviewers began to rebuke me for not writing another 'Lodger', and reviews of the type of "Mrs. Belloc Lowndes' new book is a disappointment" appeared. One review began, "How strange that the same hand should have written that masterpiece *The Lodger*, equally compounded of horror and a knowledge of human nature," etc. etc. Even so, some years went by before the advance which was, I think, two hundred and fifty pounds, on *The Lodger* was paid off.⁵⁴¹

The *Times Literary Supplement* review of 1913 was indeed favourable: 'Comparatively guileless people – people who would take a pitiful teaspoon to a drowning fly – can appreciate a really good murder. A tinge of the morbid, some sensitiveness to what is known as "the creeps," must be theirs'.⁵⁴² Elsewhere Lowndes states that she is 'mournfully aware that a good many intelligent people will not read [her] books because they are afraid they are going to be frightened or horrified. This is largely owing to the fame of *The Lodger*, which I admit does contain some horrible passages'.⁵⁴³ The *TLS* review of the novel confirms this, reporting that '[h]orror thickens into horror – probably *ad nauseum* for the

⁵⁴¹ Marie Belloc Lowndes, Undated Diary Extract, Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lowndes, M.A.B. box 2, Diaries and Journals 1 of 6.

⁵⁴² 'Review of *The Lodger*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 September 1913, p.364.

⁵⁴³ Lowndes, 'Answers to Questions', Lowndes, M.A.B. Box 1, Works Unidentified-B.

queasier of her readers'.⁵⁴⁴ Whilst by today's standards *The Lodger* is fairly tame, Lowndes here anticipates the reality of her future works being dwarfed by the reputation of this one book.

The Lodger is, as Chris Steinbrunner and Otto Penzler describe it, '[a] psychological suspense thriller rather than a tale of detection, [...] more a "why-done-it" than a "who-done-it"'.⁵⁴⁵ Though the novel, which was initially conceived as a short story, was inspired by real crime, Lowndes made it clear that she did not intend it as a factual account. She states that '[b]efore writing either the long or short version of *The Lodger* I avoided reading the contemporary records of Jack the Ripper's activities. When his crimes startled and horrified London I was not only very young, I was actually living abroad, so I only knew the story in a vague outline'.⁵⁴⁶ The story is centred around the London home of Mr and Mrs Bunting. In the novel, the Buntings, who are in financial crisis, rent out their spare rooms to a mysterious but gentlemanly stranger, Mr Sleuth, who knocks on their door in search of lodgings where he might also carry out what he claims are to be scientific experiments. Based on the case of Jack the Ripper, Lowndes' novel tells the tale of Mr and Mrs Bunting's gradual suspicion that their house-guest is in fact the infamous murderer. Both husband and wife are apprehensive about Mr Sleuth but they do not comprehend that they are both harbouring the same unease until they realise that Daisy, Mr Bunting's daughter from a

⁵⁴⁴ 'Review of *The Lodger*', p.364.

⁵⁴⁵ Chris Steinbrunner and Otto Penzler, *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p.252.

⁵⁴⁶ Marie Belloc Lowndes, 'The Novelist's Creative Mind: How does the Story Come', Austin, Harry Ransom Center, 'The Novelist's Creative Mind: How does the Story Come', box 5, Works Me-O.

previous marriage, has been left alone in the house with their lodger. The scene that concludes the novel is one of the few incidents that takes place outside of the house, in Madame Tussauds.⁵⁴⁷ Confronted with a party of policemen who are being shown around the museum, Mr Sleuth believes that Ellen Bunting has tipped off the police about his identity as murderer and escapes through a side exit of the museum and does not return to his lodgings; the reader is left with the assumption that Mr Sleuth is indeed the serial-killer known as 'the Avenger'.

Like *Harriet Hume*, *The Lodger* is a London-based novel set in large part within the domestic sphere of the Buntings' home. Whilst, as in *Harriet Hume*, the focus of the action in the novel is always brought back to the private sphere, *The Lodger* shares a concern with the continual breaching of the domestic by the public world outside the house. As Marcus asserts, in *The Lodger* '[t]he action is thus divided almost entirely between the house and the sites of law, policing, and criminality – the Black Museum, with its "relics" of infamous nineteenth-century murderers, the Coroner's Court, and Madame Tussauds'.⁵⁴⁸ This breaching of the safety of the home is something that Marcus emphasises:

The traditional role of the butler is to guard the threshold of the house and to protect the inner sanctum, but for the ex-servants who let in lodgers the boundaries between inside and outside are no longer secured but crossed [...]. Mrs Bunting's response to such transgressions of boundaries and spaces is to

⁵⁴⁷ Pamela M. Pilbeam charts the history of the waxworks and the public reaction to the Chamber of Horrors in *Madame Tussauds And the History of Waxworks* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003).

⁵⁴⁸ Marcus, p.xiii.

attempt to 'lock in', and thus to both guard and make safe, the danger that has entered from outside.⁵⁴⁹

In *The Lodger* class becomes a major concern in setting out the boundaries of the domestic. The feminine domestic realm is associated with the lower class whilst the lodger, whose status remains unknown but who is apparently a gentleman, penetrates the tranquillity of the home. Daisy's suitor, the detective Joe Chandler, who has been placed on the Avenger case, represents the public sphere but, as an embodiment of the legal system, represents the antithesis of the Avenger. As Marcus affirms, Chandler 'also represents a Law that comes knocking and, like the lodger, cannot be kept out'.⁵⁵⁰ Both become symbolic of the breaking or the enactment of justice and law; notions that find themselves manifested in the newspapers which document the development of the Avenger case, the newspaper itself becoming another way in which public sphere manifests itself.

Initially, it seems that Mr Bunting at least welcomes the intrusion of the public into the private, even if Mrs Bunting does not agree. When the Buntings have to give up their newspaper in a money-saving effort Mr Bunting feels that '[i]t's a shame – damned shame – that he shouldn't know what was happening in the world outside! Only criminals are kept from hearing news of what is going on beyond their prison walls'.⁵⁵¹ For him it is a distraction from his own troubles. Mrs Bunting is less keen to have these harbingers of bad news brought into her home. Whilst the husband feels a sense of entrapment within the domestic, the wife is keen to guard her home against the encroachment of the outside

⁵⁴⁹ Marcus, p.xii.

⁵⁵⁰ Marcus, p.xiii.

⁵⁵¹ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *The Lodger* (see Marcus, above), p.7.

world. It is only when Ellen Bunting's suspicions about the identity of their lodger begin to weigh heavily on her mind that she actively seeks out news of the Avenger: 'Oddly enough, she was the first to wake the next morning; odder still, it was she, not Bunting, who jumped out of bed, and going out into the passage, picked up the newspaper which had just been pushed through the letter-box'.⁵⁵² It is Ellen Bunting who has the initial inklings about Mr Sleuth and it is she who takes on the role of defender of the domestic sphere.

Despite her horror at the realisation that her lodger is likely to be a serial killer, Mrs Bunting's abhorrence is outweighed by her compulsion to guard her house-guest against the force of the law: 'To her sharpened suffering senses her house had become a citadel which must be defended; aye, even if the besiegers were a mighty horde *with right on their side*. And she was always expecting that first single spy who would herald the battalion against whom her only weapon would be her woman's wit and cunning'.⁵⁵³ The Buntings' home, though only a modest abode, is their castle and in it reside their wards. Mrs Bunting's feeling of duty towards her lodger outweighs her sense of obedience to the law. Mrs Bunting's actions form part of a larger tradition of women concealing fugitives; as Lowndes' narrator professes:

In the long history of crime it has very seldom happened that a woman has betrayed one who has taken refuge with her. The timorous and cautious woman has not infrequently hunted a human being fleeing from his pursuer from her door, but she has not revealed the fact that he was ever there. In fact, it may almost be said that such a betrayal had never taken place unless the betrayer

⁵⁵² Lowndes, *The Lodger*, p.47.

⁵⁵³ Lowndes, *The Lodger*, p.77. Emphasis in original.

has been actuated by love of gain, or by a longing for revenge. So far, perhaps because she is subject rather than citizen, her duty as a component part of civilized society weighs but lightly on a woman's shoulders.⁵⁵⁴

Lowndes here refers to a woman's sense of public responsibility before universal suffrage made women equal citizens. As in Mansfield's story of 1913, 'Millie', *The Lodger* presents a woman sheltering a law-breaker and thus communicates a degree of reverence toward the criminal and a desire to protect him from the law.⁵⁵⁵ The Buntings see their home as a sphere that should be protected from the infiltration of law and the public world. Lowndes' narrator describes Mrs Bunting's fear of the law: 'Again and again the poor soul had agonized and trembled at the thought of her house being invaded by the police, but that was only because she had always credited the police with supernatural powers of detection'. To the Buntings, the law is a source of fear and an almost mystical force. Mr Bunting echoes his wife's sentiments: 'Bunting, like Mrs Bunting, credited the police with almost supernatural powers'. The police in *The Lodger* are very real, not the ghostly presence as which they appear in *Harriet Hume* and *The Judge*, but in the minds of the Buntings their power remains something of a mystery and with this lack of understanding comes a sense of fear. As Lowndes' narrator articulates, 'Londoners of Bunting's class [the

⁵⁵⁴ Lowndes, *The Lodger*, p.985.

⁵⁵⁵ There is a similar scene in West's *The Judge* when Ellen Melville's mother is reluctant to let the relative stranger Yaverland leave the protection of her house. Yaverland is no criminal but Ellen's mother still desires to shelter him: 'she was distressfully wondering if her reluctance to let him go was a premonition of some disaster that lurked for him outside. She so strangely wanted him to stay. She could actually have wound her arms about him, which was a queer enough thing to want to do, as if the feelers of some nightmare-crawling horned beast were twitching for him in the darkness beyond the door' (*The Judge*, pp.81-82).

class of ex-servants] have an uneasy fear of the law. To his mind it would be ruin for him and for his Ellen to be mixed up publicly in such a terrible affair'.⁵⁵⁶ While the Buntings' fear of the law is based in part on a very real and practical sense that any dealings with it could lead to a loss of respectability, these concerns are engulfed by a more intuitive trepidation. The workings of the law are, to the Buntings, menacing by virtue of their appearance as part of some huge and almost monstrous machinery. When Daisy's suitor, Joe Chandler, takes her father to the Black Museum, the 'regular Chamber of 'Orrors' (the place where murder weapons and objects associated with crimes are kept at Scotland Yard), Daisy senses this impression of the law as an almost ungovernable and autonomous entity: 'The moment she passed through the great arched door which admits the stranger to that portion of New Scotland Yard where throbs the heart of that great organism which fights the forces of civilized crime, Daisy Bunting felt that she had indeed become free of the Kingdom of Romance'.⁵⁵⁷ The buildings at Scotland Yard are the physical manifestation of this 'creature', this living being with its own beating heart.

Mr and Mrs Buntings' view of the law as a kind of machinery which operates independently of its individual actors makes it a menacing spectre which might creep into their house unnoticed at any given moment. On hearing a tap at the door to their house the Buntings wonder whether it was 'possible that, in their agitation, they had left the front door open, and that *someone*, some merciless myrmidon of the law, had crept in behind them?'.⁵⁵⁸ These 'myrmidons', the brave warriors who are the loyal servants of law in Lowndes' novel,

⁵⁵⁶ Lowndes, *The Lodger*, p.175; p.177; p.182.

⁵⁵⁷ Lowndes, *The Lodger*, p.63.

⁵⁵⁸ Lowndes, *The Lodger*, p.191. Emphasis in original.

are held in the tide of this superior force. Even Chandler, though a family friend and the future husband of Daisy, is seen, to a degree, as part of this inauspicious mechanism. When Chandler goes to Mr Bunting asking for his daughter's hand in marriage Bunting fears he is about to confront him about their lodger. When he realises that this is not the case he is overcome with relief but nevertheless senses the potential threat that Chandler symbolizes: 'And, indeed, the relief was so great that the room swam round as he stared across at his daughter's lover, that lover who was also the embodiment of that now awful thing to him, the law'.⁵⁵⁹ Chandler's position is problematic for the Buntings because his presence in their lives is twofold; he is at one and the same time an impersonal representative of the thing they most fear and a personal friend who they are ready to welcome into their home and family. Chandler, being representative of both the public and the private, makes the boundaries of their home less secure.

The Lodger treats the law critically as a force to be feared. While it in no way condones the crimes of the Avenger it nevertheless expresses sympathy with the criminal hunted by this greater force. Part of this stems from the notion that whilst the criminal might take lives, the law exerts a similar power over life and death. Looking at the relics in Scotland Yard's Black Museum, Daisy 'guessed that these strange, pathetic, staring faces were the death masks of those men and women who had fulfilled the awful law which ordains that the murderer shall be, in his turn, done to death'.⁵⁶⁰ The law is represented rather ambiguously in *The Lodger*; capital punishment is not portrayed as essentially unjust, but the novel expresses a typically conservative sense that perhaps justice in itself is terrible. There is a

⁵⁵⁹ Lowndes, *The Lodger*, p.184.

⁵⁶⁰ Lowndes, *The Lodger*, p.65.

sense that human nature can be atrocious and that therefore justice has to be equally appalling.

Murder in the Wendy House

Letty Lynton, published eighteen years after *The Lodger*, is another novel loosely based on a real-life murder. It was made famous by a 1932 film adaptation starring Joan Crawford and directed by Clarence Brown.⁵⁶¹ In the foreword to the novel Lowndes writes that '[a]lthough many readers will realise that the two chief characters of *Letty Lynton* were suggested by a famous Scottish murder trial, the writer wishes to make clear that this story is fiction'.⁵⁶² Drawing on the Madeleine Smith case, which has provided inspiration for other works of fiction and film including Wilkie Collins' novel *The Law and the Lady* (1875) and Dorothy L. Sayers' *Strong Poison* (1929), Lowndes' aim was not to provide an accurate account of the actual events but rather to make a study of the motivations that might lead to murder. She writes in the foreword:

Every memorable murder trial opens a window through which can be surveyed a section of a human ant-hill, suddenly isolated and exposed. Of all these people two, the victim and his supposed murderer, stand out with startling clearness; but the writer has always felt particularly interested in the subordinate, what

⁵⁶¹ Lowndes was not impressed with the film of *Letty Lynton*. As she writes in a letter to Alexander Woollcott, 'It seems so strange that the only novel of mine made into a real talking picture was *The Lodger*. I do not count *Letty Lynton*, for I am convinced (secretly) that that was only bought for a blind, for nothing could be more unlike the novel than the film that was called by this name'. Marie Belloc Lowndes to Alexander Woollcott (7 May 1935), Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lowndes, M.A.B. box 12, Letters to Woollcott, Alexander.

⁵⁶² Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Letty Lynton* (London: Associated Newspapers, 1931).

may be called the accessory characters, who remain to the onlooker but dim and shadowy figures. And yet, some of them, at least, may be far more profoundly affected in their lives than even the chief actors in a drama, and this makes them, from the creative point of view, of absorbing interest to the novelist.⁵⁶³

Lowndes repeats this sentiment in a letter to Alexander Woollcott in which she responds to praise of her novel, stating that 'character is what interests me, not plot or environment'.⁵⁶⁴ Though Lowndes claims that she is not interested in environment, as in *The Lodger*, the very domestic setting of the murder would suggest otherwise. My discussion of *Letty Lynton* here will focus on the movement of the site of murder to within the domestic sphere. Whereas *The Lodger* represents the beginnings of the border-crossing between public and private, *Letty Lynton* sees this threshold effectively dissolved. My reading of *Letty Lynton* is one that draws on many of the concerns I address in relation to *The Lodger* concerning the domestic but also sees the novel aligning itself more closely with West's fiction. Although the eponymous protagonist of *Letty Lynton* has much in common with

⁵⁶³ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, n.p.

⁵⁶⁴ Marie Belloc Lowndes to Alexander Woollcott (29 December, 1930), Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lowndes, M.A.B. box 12, Letters to Woollcott, Alexander. Lowndes goes on to write that '[t]he enigmatic character of Madeleine Smith has always puzzled me, and always I have meant to write a story about her. I have been a good deal in Scotland, and at various times I have met people who knew members of her family. The young woman, I can't remember her name as I have carefully avoided reading any record of the trial, who certainly loved Angelier, did go to the Smiths' house the day after his death, and undoubtedly told Madeleine what had happened. That was why Madeleine rushed off in a foolish aimless way to the Smiths' country house whence she was brought back to the unfortunate Minoch, to whom she was engaged. That fact has never been published, but was told me by someone who knew the Smiths'.

that of *Harriet Hume*, Lowndes' novel reverses the notion that it is the masculine which embodies the murderous death drive, presenting instead a dangerous and deadly femininity. Transgressing the bounds of the domestic serves as a moral rejoinder in this more conservative popular work of fiction; such transgressions are shown to be highly dangerous.

Letty Lynton narrates the story of 'Lovely' Letty Lynton, an upper-middle class eighteen-year-old girl who, finding herself restricted by the limitations of her privileged but dull home life, embarks on various trysts with men who consequently fall in love with her and desire her hand in marriage. The first of these is one of her father's employees, Maclean. He is followed by the Swede, Axel Ekebon, who is at first perceived by Letty to be a 'splendid looking, fair young man, [...] a true hero of romance in her eyes', and then finally by Lord Tintagel.⁵⁶⁵ Letty murders Ekebon by poisoning him with the arsenic that she obtains from her father's chemical works when the Swede threatens to hold her to her prior agreement to marry him whilst she is engaged to Tintagel. She is let off the crime on the verdict of 'not proven', but the reputation of her family is left in tatters by the controversy caused by the court proceedings. Maclean, her initial suitor (and the only character in the novel who has definitive proof of her guilt), agrees to marry Letty and emigrate with her at the novel's conclusion. Unlike *The Lodger*, in which the protagonist's guilt is only (albeit strongly) implied, the reader is left in no doubt as to Letty's culpability as we directly witness her crime. Whilst Letty might appear to most of her acquaintances to be the model of innocent wholesomeness, we, the reader, know that this to be a falsehood. In a *Times Literary Supplement* review from 1931 *Letty Lynton* is described as 'painful not because Mrs Belloc

⁵⁶⁵ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.49.

Lowndes, who has told it admirably, is among those who take pleasure in emphasizing what is painful, but because in her very willingness to distinguish human weakness from depravity she makes it clear that all is not well with a world which visits one and the other with the same penalty'.⁵⁶⁶ I recognise this lack of distinction in the punishment meted out for Letty's crime of murder, which turns out to be a mere telling-off for her social digressions rather than punishment through law.

Letty, in her deceitful virtuousness, is represented in much the same other-worldly way as both Ellen Melville and Harriet Hume⁵⁶⁷: 'Though it was a hot early September day, there was no hat on her pretty little head, and, as she moved among the rose bushes, clad in a flesh-coloured cotton frock, she looked like a beautiful nymph whom neither age nor trouble could touch – much less destroy'⁵⁶⁸. Physically, Letty epitomises an ideal of femininity to such a degree that 'a connoisseur in feminine beauty would have agreed that all Letty Lynton's "points" were perfect'. Being this epitome of the feminine, Letty apparently exerts an almost supernatural force over those who surround her. Even at the outset of the novel Letty is aware of this influence; she 'had learnt something of the almost miraculous power exceptional beauty confers on its fortunate feminine possessor. Not only

⁵⁶⁶ 'Review of *Letty Lynton*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 February 1931, p.114.

⁵⁶⁷ Ellen Melville is described in much the same fairy tale terms that her Edinburgh house is. As West's narrator writes, '[t]hat she should have grown to beauty in these infect surroundings made [Richard Yaverland] feel, as he had often done before, that she was not all human and corruptible, but that her flesh was mixed with precious substance not subject to decay, her blood interpenetrated with the material of jewels. Perhaps some sorcerer had confusioned it of organic and inorganic beauty and chosen some ancestress of Ellen for his human ingredient' (p.162).

⁵⁶⁸ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.11.

did she attract almost every man she met; women too were softened and subjugated'. Letty appears almost ethereally as a timeless beauty, '[s]o different [...] from those bold, cocktail-drinking young minxes one hears so much about!'.⁵⁶⁹ Seemingly unpolluted by the supposedly lax morals of her contemporaries, Letty is in all her conventionally good and innocent guile, at first, an unlikely candidate for murderess.⁵⁷⁰

In a review of the novel it is noted that, '[h]ad [Lowndes] not dwelt on the commonplace routine of a sheltered life her catastrophe would have been less poignant'.⁵⁷¹ It is this focus on the quotidian which make Letty's actions exaggeratedly disconcerting and provide them with an added strangeness. Paralleling Letty's overt femininity, the murder in *Letty Lynton* takes place in a rather playfully exaggerated and almost uncanny sphere of domesticity. Whilst in *The Lodger* murder takes place both outside the home and off the page, and we

⁵⁶⁹ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.15.

⁵⁷⁰ In the film adaptation of *Letty Lynton*, which was released a year after the publication of Lowndes' novel, Letty is represented in decidedly masculine terms. As Robert J. Corber writes of the film, 'With its complex gender coding, one of Adrian's designs in particular, the famous Letty Lynton dress, worn by Joan Crawford in the movie's love scene and copied by many of the fashion industry's top designers, captured the tensions in Crawford's image. On the one hand, the dress, made of white chiffon and featuring ruffled mutton sleeves, embodied the type of femininity promoted by Hollywood (glamorous, decorative, and alluring). On the other, the enormous sleeves – mirrored by a peplum – or apron-like extension of the tightly fitted bodice, which accentuated the star's slender hips – emphasized Crawford's masculine mode of embodiment by making her shoulders appear even broader. Thus, like many of Adrian's designs for the actress, the dress simultaneously called attention to the masculine elements of Crawford's persona (her drive and ambition, her focus on career) and held them in check'. 'Joan Crawford's Padded Shoulders: Female Masculinity in *Mildred Pierce*', *Camera Obscura* 21.2 (2006), 1-31 (pp.3-5).

⁵⁷¹ 'Review of *Letty Lynton*', p.114.

only hear the crimes reported after they occur, in *Letty Lynton*, as in *Harriet Hume*, the 'home' becomes the site of the crime. In *Letty Lynton*, the barn, also the scene of the previous secret meetings of the lovers, in which the murderess administers the fatal dose of arsenic disguised in hot chocolate, has been assembled so that it resembles, in miniature, the essence of domesticity. The barn which 'had been [Letty and her brother's] playroom in summer weather' is described as 'still retain[ing], inside, something of a nursery character'.

⁵⁷² Lowndes' narrator describes the building:

About the centre of the barn, to the left, there stood a small cooking stove and, hung on to a board close to the stove, a row of tiny shining pots and pans. This miniature kitchen was shut off from the door side of the barn by a high six-leaved screen on which were pasted, and varnished over, all kinds of funny pictures, engravings, and photographs. [...] The farther side of the barn contained a queer medley of sofas, easy chairs, and heavy tables – all things which had been banished from Lee Stoke Place last year by the London decorator, and which Mrs Lynton had thought too good to give away.⁵⁷³

The mismatched household articles and various rejected items of furniture give the barn something of the eerie and otherworldly presence that Letty herself embodies. As in Stewart's notion of the doll's house as that place which contains a hidden secret, there is something rather artificial and conceited about the doll's house world in which Letty conducts her relationship with Ekebon, and Letty has a doll-like quality within this world. The action within the barn similarly has the quality of a game; it has a fantastical and almost dream-like feeling. Running to her old nurse (still known to Letty by the childhood

⁵⁷² Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.41.

⁵⁷³ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.41.

nickname of Squelchy), who is still in the service of the household, and holding tea parties, Letty is portrayed as a child still inhabiting a child's world.

In his essay 'The Uncanny' (1919), Freud discusses the linguistic particulars of the German term *das Unheimliche* (the uncanny) and its peculiar conflation with its opposite. According to Freud, *heimlich* 'merges with its antonym *unheimlich*': 'The uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, "the unhomely") is a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, "the homely")'.⁵⁷⁴ Freud writes that the word *heimlich* 'belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other – the one related to what is familiar and comfortable, the other to what is concealed and kept hidden'.⁵⁷⁵ Julia Kristeva elucidates this phenomenon when she writes that, 'in the very word *heimlich*, the familiar and intimate are reversed into their opposites, brought together with the contrary meaning of "uncanny strangeness" harboured in *unheimlich*'.⁵⁷⁶ In the uncanny, the strange is harboured in a position of interiority to the familiar.

The imitation of domesticity which the barn in *Letty Lynton* exemplifies can be perceived as an instance of the uncanny; it is at once familiar, in that it is apparently made up of the components of a home, and unfamiliar, in that there is something askew with its presentation. The fantasy world of this space is one that in childhood may have appeared playful and entirely commonplace, but it recurs in adulthood with a sinister aspect. In her

⁵⁷⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), p.134.

⁵⁷⁵ Freud, *The Uncanny*, p.132.

⁵⁷⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. by Lean S. Roudiez (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p182.

analysis Kristeva explores the uncanny in terms of its temporality, writing 'that which *is* strangely uncanny would be that which *was* (the past tense important) familiar and, under certain conditions (which ones?), emerges'.⁵⁷⁷ It is in very much this sense that both the barn and Letty herself seem to be almost out of place in an adult world, and it is in this sense that we see an element of the Gothic creep into *Letty Lynton*.

However, Letty's defence against the outside world is not water-tight. In fact, the barn in which she has constructed her play-like world is literally porous. Her imaginary world is breached by reality when a gap in the wood of the barn allows an outside onlooker to witness one of Letty and Ekebon's meetings. This onlooker happens to be another of Ekebon's lovers, the daughter of his landlady at Napier Street. On suspecting Ekebon of unfaithfulness, Kate Roker follows him one evening to the barn:

Putting out her hand, Kate found that there was a small hole or chink between two of the planks. Though she could see nothing, for the barn was in darkness, by pressing one side of her head towards the aperture, she could hear plainly all that the two standing in the barn, a few feet from where she herself stood outside, were saying.⁵⁷⁸

When later testifying in court to what could be crucial evidence in the murder trial, Kate's account is undermined because in the intervening time the crack in the barn wall has been repaired: '[t]he hole through which Katherine Roker says she heard clearly various sentences, declared by her to have been burnt into her brain, simply does not exist'. Despite her culpability, it seems that forces are still at work to protect Letty from a guilty sentence.

⁵⁷⁷ Kristeva, p.183. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷⁸ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.81S.

Although there is not enough evidence to convict Letty of the crime, there is a sense that Letty gets her just deserts. After the trauma of the court proceedings, Letty finds her own and her family's reputation in tatters; her engagement to Lord Tintagel is broken off and the novel ends with her marriage to Maclean imminent. Letty finds that the tables of power have turned on her. She has never been physically attracted to Maclean; '[w]hat had enchanted her had been the exercise of her power over a man who had always appeared to be both cold and extremely reserved'.⁵⁷⁹ By the end of the novel, however, Letty finds that her only possible course of action is to submit to him. Though 'Letty was a child of nature, and nature is predatory', she finds herself ultimately ensnared. Whilst *Harriet Hume's* protagonist has the telepathic gift of reading her lover's mind, Letty has a similar, although not supernatural, aptitude for mind reading: 'Letty always knew what any man with her desired her to say and almost invariably she said it'.⁵⁸⁰ She might have found this gift could get her out of a number of scraps, but she would not get be getting away with murder.

The reversal of the gendered power dynamics that occurs here is the culmination of a broader theme that runs throughout the novel, pitting the masculine against the feminine in a kind of battle of the sexes. For instance, although Ekebon is under the power of Letty, he still seeks to prove his dominance over his other lover, Kate. The narrator describes how in relation to this other woman '[t]here swept over him a violent, irrational wish to prove his mastery anew over her heart and senses'.⁵⁸¹ This is a view of sexuality very similar to the

⁵⁷⁹ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.209; p.20.

⁵⁸⁰ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.110; p.117.

⁵⁸¹ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.46.

one that Hull expounds in her desert romances. Like Condorex towards Hume, Ekebon has a vehement and fierce desire to conquer Kate in a way that he is unable to do with Letty. Ekebon has a 'brutal desire to tame her, to bend her to his will', which seems to be a reaction to his impotence in relation to his other lover.⁵⁸² There is the suggestion throughout *Letty Lynton* that Ekebon's demise might be in part due to his effeminacy. In *Letty Lynton* it is the masculine which is aligned with law and ultimately comes out triumphant having put feminine guile in its 'proper' place. In *Letty Lynton*, Letty is not punished by law, she is not convicted of murder, but, nevertheless, it is the legal and courtroom proceedings which provide justice for her moral 'crimes' aside and distinct from the crucial act of murder; the fact that she was behaving in what was seen to be an improper manner by meeting men by moonlight seems to be her more serious offence, or at least the offense for which she is punished. Nevertheless it is the enactment of the courtroom process that sentences Letty to social ostracism. As Letty is shepherded into the courtroom there is a sense that it is as a social and sexual deviant rather than the murderess she truly is:

A stinging double-line of police men still form a blue hedge between which Letty and her escort have just hurried up the wide row of steps which lead to the high doors of the State Building. But by now those high doors are shut and bolted, and it needs but one uniformed man to shepherd the miserable little group along the broad passage broken by fluted columns.⁵⁸³

Whilst the police are there to protect the party from the baying crowds, the single policeman who steers them into the court represents a symbolic show of authority. The

⁵⁸² Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.85.

⁵⁸³ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.204.

mob from which the police are protecting Letty represents the social order which has condemned Letty's behaviour and which is endorsed by the apparatus of the law. Though the building in which the proceedings take place is literally a centre of the law in that it is a tangible architectural manifestation of the concept—'the inquest is to take place in a huge hall, lit by a skylight, situated in the centre of the State Building, and known by its old name of Court-House'—the building retains something of the domestic.⁵⁸⁴ The fact that the law has become conflated in *Letty Lynton* with social norms is further illustrated by the homely appearance of the court-room:

[Letty] realises with a pitiful sense of relief, that the scene, that the scene round her is very different from that which she remembers having witnessed in the Assize Court. There is no grim judge in long red robes and grey-white wig, sitting up aloft ready to put on a black square of cloth which means the coming of a horrible death. Instead of a judge, Dr. Powell, the coroner of the district, with whom Lady Lynton and her daughter have always had a bowing acquaintance, is sitting in an ordinary arm-chair, with a table before him.⁵⁸⁵

Letty, the murderess, gets an embarrassing telling off rather than a criminal conviction or death sentence. Rather than law entering the sphere of the domestic it seems that the domestic has entered the sphere of law; either way, as in *The Lodger*, the two are most definitely conflated.

The Doors are Bolted but Still the Law Seeps In

⁵⁸⁴ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.204.

⁵⁸⁵ Lowndes, *Letty Lynton*, p.205.

Lowndes' 1939 novel *Lizzie Borden: A Study in Conjecture* is written along a similar premise to *Letty Lynton*, providing a possible account of the actions and motives of the infamous 1892 Fall River, Massachusetts murder case in which Lizzie plays the role of key suspect in the murder of her father and stepmother. For Lowndes, the process of writing *Lizzie Borden* was a foray '[i]nto the dark secrets of motive [that] only surmise can penetrate'.⁵⁸⁶ Whilst Lowndes' *Lizzie Borden* did not repeat the success of *The Lodger*, it still enjoyed a good reception. In a letter Flora Merrill wrote to Lowndes praising her work and claiming that '[a] friend of mine who lives at London Terrace told me that the lending library there had eight copies of "Lizzie" and that the book was so popular she had quite a time getting it'.⁵⁸⁷

Lizzie, though certainly beautiful, is not the embodiment of feminine perfection that Letty is; nevertheless there are certain features of these protagonists which mean that we can read them as analogous. Although, at thirty-one, Lizzie is over ten years older than Letty,

⁵⁸⁶ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden: A Study in Conjecture* (New York: Longmans, 1939), p.vi. Like other authors who have been attracted to the Borden case, for instance Elizabeth Engstrom in *Lizzie Borden* (1990), Evan Hunter in *Lizzie: A Novel* (1984) and Sharon Pollock in her play *Blood Relations* (1980), Lowndes does not seek to solve the crime but she does seek to 'offer a possible, even a probable solution' (*Lizzie Borden*, vi). Lowndes continues to write that '[t]his study in conjecture tries to relieve, by offering a credible solution, the staring that arises when the incredible has happened, and no reason can be found for it. For on the fourth of August, 1892, the incredible did happen. As was so powerfully pressed in the closing Argument for the Commonwealth, 'It was a terrible crime. It was an impossible crime. But it was committed...Set any human being you ever heard of at the bar, and say to them, "You did this thing", and it would seem incredible. And Yet it was done. It was done' (p.vi).

⁵⁸⁷ Flora Merrill to Marie Belloc Lowndes (undated), Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Lowndes, M.A.B. box 19, Recip. Mar-Mh.

her story shares the backdrop of an overly restrictive domestic existence which means she is largely cut off from the broader society of her peers. Unlike Letty's loving father, Mr Borden is a tyrant in his home: 'Even his attachment to her, his wife, was a tyrannical attachment. [...] He did not often quote the scripture, but when he did so, invariably when they were alone together, it was always some verse concerning the duty of a wife to submit to her husband'.⁵⁸⁸ However, despite this, Lowndes' Lizzie believes it is her stepmother who holds sway over the family. In the novel Lizzie's crimes are motivated by her attachment and secret engagement to a man she believes herself to be in love with. In an uncharacteristic decision, Mr Borden sends his daughter away to Europe with a party of women. On this trip she meets and falls in love with the rather pathetic and dour Hiram Barrison. She realises, however, that her father will never let her marry this man who, like the man her sister was engaged to long before and was forbidden to marry, is in a rather unfavourable financial situation.

In a remarkably similar style to *Letty Lynton*, Barrison meets Lizzie secretly in a barn which is a very short distance from the house. It is here that the future weapon of murder is revealed to Barrison with a distinct sense of the Gothic as 'he noticed the glint of a moonbeam on what looked like an oddly shaped knife. But, as he stared down at it, he told himself it was the steel belonging to a handless axe'. Lizzie's stepmother is witness to Barrison, and then Lizzie, leaving the barn. She confronts Lizzie and threatens to tell her father for, as Lowndes' narrator reveals, 'Abby Borden had not lived for sixty-five years in this strange, and so called civilised, world, without becoming aware, even if unwillingly so, of certain curious and sinister facts concerning the part sex plays in the hidden lives of many

⁵⁸⁸ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.131.

women'.⁵⁸⁹ It is this idea of a potentially promiscuous sexuality that is at the heart of Lowndes' fiction; it is this that ultimately constructs the 'dangerous' femininity which must be curbed. The day after Lizzie and Barrison's secret meeting, when her stepmother reveals that she knows about this man, Lizzie violently kills both Mr and Mrs Borden in the house they share, using an axe from the barn. This is no 'unobtrusive' poisoning but a bloodthirsty attack which Lowndes depicts in a concise and measured yet gruesome manner. Though we never gain access to the inner workings of Lizzie's mind and motives are only implied, there is a clear link between the murders and the restrictions of Lizzie's home and family life.

Even when Lizzie is away from home on another continent, her American home continues to haunt her. Lizzie has her fortune told in Paris by Madame Pythagora (who reveals to Lizzie her more commonplace name of Ann Hopkins). Though the fortune-teller never reveals the fact to Lizzie, she sees a future disaster befalling her. Thus, it is the fortune-teller's house which, in its uncanny similarity to Lizzie's own, strikes dread into her heart. Lowndes' narrator tells of how, '[w]ith hesitating steps Lizzie followed the English-woman into a plainly furnished bedroom which, oddly enough, reminded her of her own home'. Here 'Lizzie suddenly felt frightened. She longed to escape from this commonplace bedroom, and from this commonplace woman'.⁵⁹⁰ Though there is an ocean between this room and her own there is a sense of trepidation with which Lizzie unconsciously contemplates the home she has temporarily left and is soon to return to. *Lizzie Borden is,*

⁵⁸⁹ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.106; p.136.

⁵⁹⁰ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.52; p.53.

like both *Letty Lynton* and the earlier *The Lodger*, very much concerned with the boundaries of the private sphere. As Marcus writes:

The most striking aspect of *Lizzie Borden: A Study in Conjecture* is not, in fact, the portrait of Lizzie, but the depiction of domestic space in the novel. The unhappy family members – and the asymmetry of father, stepmother, and daughter repeats that in *The Lodger* – turn themselves or are turned into prisoners inside their home. Belloc Lowndes gives us a house in which entrances and connecting doors are locked, but in which family secrets make themselves heard through the walls.⁵⁹¹

Gina Wisker, in describing the Gothic, writes that '[k]nowing what we fear, we know what we desire: safety, mother, friends. Our worst fears arise from dangerous domestic disillusionment [...]The removal or undercutting of the dependable domestic is the stuff of horror'.⁵⁹² The house, as it is described in the early pages of the novel, has something of the uncanniness that the barn possesses in *Letty Lynton*. Initially there is nothing peculiar about the house: it 'stood on the east side of the street, and was separated from the sidewalk only by wooden fence, in which there were two gates'. The first indication that the reader gets as to the slight oddities of the house is when Lizzie, approaching the door, 'proceeded to take out a steel ring on which were four keys, out of the pocket of her pretty pink dress'.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹¹ Marcus, 'Introduction', p.x.

⁵⁹² Gina Wisker, 'Viciousness in the Kitchen: Sylvia Plath's Gothic', *Gothic Studies*, 6.1 (2004), 103-119 (pp.106-107).

⁵⁹³ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.9.

Though the house she grew up in is normalised in her own mind—'[t]o Lizzie Borden there appeared nothing strange in the fact that number Ninety-Two Second Street, while looking exactly like the other houses clustered round about it'—the house contains peculiarities which make it the ideal Gothic setting:⁵⁹⁴

There were three outside doors, and as to that there was nothing strange or unusual. But what to most people who were aware of it seemed very strange was that on each of these doors had been fixed an outside lock of a substantial make, and on the inside, a spring latch, and also a strong bolt. [...] Even the doors to the barn and the cellar, where there was nothing of any value, were kept locked all day, as well as all night.⁵⁹⁵

As the Bordens' servant, Bridget Sullivan, ponders to herself, 'What a constant, unending source of trouble were all those locks and bolts and bars! Why couldn't the Bordens go on like other folk?'.⁵⁹⁶ Kate Ferguson writes that the eighteenth-century Gothic novel 'can be distinguished by the presence of houses in which people are locked in and locked out. They are concerned with the violence done to familial bonds that is frequently directed against women'.⁵⁹⁷ With its vast quantity of locks and bolts, the Borden house is like a prison. There are locks on both sides of the doors as if the Bordens are trying to shore up the domestic from the public, but this also serves to stop the interior seeping through the doors and escaping into the outside world.

⁵⁹⁴ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.9.

⁵⁹⁵ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.9.

⁵⁹⁶ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.169.

⁵⁹⁷ Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1989), p.3.

There is a very poignant moment in *Lizzie Borden* which exemplifies the importance of the locked doors. After Lizzie has murdered her stepmother she hears her father returning to the house only to realise that she has locked him out. Lowndes writes that '[h]earing that angry voice, there swept over Lizzie a wild impulse to burst into hysterical laughter. To think she had locked out her own father! How angry he would be if he ever found that out!'.⁵⁹⁸ That Lizzie is thinking of her father's annoyance at the triviality of being locked out of his house when she has just murdered his wife tells us something about her state of mind. She does not distinguish proportionately between the crime of murder and a purely domestic and commonplace mistake. This occurrence shows how the measures taken to preserve and protect this tyrant's kingdom and those within it have been turned around on him, if only in this brief and seemingly inconsequential moment. It seems that it is only possible for Mr Borden to lock out the outside (public and masculine) world if he accepts the possibility that he too might be excluded from the household.

Mr Borden had not only sought to exclude the outside world from his home, but also to manage and have control over the internal workings of his house by segmenting its interior. 'Even more strange, in some ways', than the locked and bolted doors, 'was a fact only known to the inmates' close friends. This was that the second floor of the house was practically divided into two parts, each part having its own set of stairs'. This home is not a home but a prison in which inmates have their own set of keys but are segregated from one another. It is not through force that the inmates of this prison conform, but fear that makes them self-regulate their own behaviour. Lowndes writes that '[t]here was a door between

⁵⁹⁸ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.167.

the listener's [Lizzie's] room and their room, but it was locked and barred. Locked on [Mr and Mrs Borden's] side, bolted on hers'. Lizzie too, though shut out of the other side of the house, is complicit in this division. Despite all attempts by both parties to shut out the other, noise could still pass between the rooms: 'The door between her room and theirs might be locked and bolted, but she could not but overhear a good deal the couple said to one another'.⁵⁹⁹ The boundaries that have been set up within the home are permeable in much the same way as the house is porous to the outside world. Though Mr Borden has attempted to make his home secure against the outside world, parts of it creep in. Just as Lizzie hears the goings on from her father and stepmother's side of the divided house, sounds that mirror the process in *The Lodger* are capable of penetrating the walls. Having just killed her victims, Lizzie hears joyous voices from outside which 'seemed to belong to another planet from that on which she was now living. Theirs was a simple, normal, everyday world, remote from the world where deeds of darkness and of secret cruelty might be committed without remorse or even fear of discovery'.⁶⁰⁰ The world that Lizzie now inhabits, and arguably has always inhabited, is far removed from this place that exists on the other side of her front door.

The police and the law are one aspect of public world from which Mr Borden is seeking to shield his home. Though, as far as we are aware, Mr Borden is no criminal, he sees the police as a threat to his own sovereignty over the home. When some money goes missing from his desk, the police are called in but dismissed without a resolution: 'he intimated to

⁵⁹⁹ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.10; p.17; p.20.

⁶⁰⁰ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.186.

the City Marshal that he did not wish the matter to be pursued further'.⁶⁰¹ The police briefly feature at the end of the novel in the aftermath of the murders, but other than on these occasions mention of the law is largely absent from the novel. Just as Lizzie thinks only of her father's wrath, considerations of the law seem to be entirely missing from the page. This absence seems all the more glaring in light of the high-profile nature of the Borden case and Lowndes' focus on legal proceedings in other novels. Though in both *The Lodger* and *Letty Lynton* the notion of law is cast ambiguously, it is central to the plot in both instances. In *Lizzie Borden*, law is notably left out and the figure of the father, arguably the figure who has sought to exclude a more public law from his home, comes to bear instead.

Despite her fear of her father, in the aftermath of the first murder Lizzie re-enters the home which has been the scene of her brutal murders; she unlocks the door 'and lifting the latch, walked into the hall'. To Lizzie, the hallway she enters remains unchanged and the fact '[t]hat everything there looked as everything had always looked there filled her with a sense of dull surprise'. Lizzie knows, however, that 'behind the door of the living-room on her right everything was different from what it had always been, and in a sense presented what might be called an incredible sight'.⁶⁰² Maria Tatar writes of the uncanny house that '[w]hether we are dealing with the marvelous legend, the fantastic romance, or the strange novel, it is knowledge that transforms the sinister habitation of supernatural powers into the secure haven of a home'.⁶⁰³ Tatar's sense of the uncanny originates in the mystery at

⁶⁰¹ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, pp.59-60.

⁶⁰² Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.184.

⁶⁰³ Maria M. Tatar, 'The Houses of Fiction: Toward a Definition of the Uncanny', *Comparative Literature*, 33.2 (1981), 167-182 (p.182).

the heart of the home. In Lowndes' thrillers, though a possible explanation of events is given, it is never given as knowledge, only as conjecture, and for this reason the home always remains unhomely. While none of the novels discussed here are explicitly supernatural, they retain their uncanniness as mystery always remains. As Lowndes writes of the Lizzie Borden case in the preface to her novel, 'the more we know what happened, the deeper the mystery' as to why 'Lizzie Borden killed her father and stepmother'.⁶⁰⁴ The mystery here is essentially unfathomable.

The impenetrability of the concealed is what gives Lowndes' fiction its distinctively Gothic tone. Furthermore, there is, as Tatar affirms, an intimate connection between the home and that which is kept secret. This becomes even more pertinent when considered in relation to the Freudian reading of the uncanny. Tatar explains:

A house contains the familiar and congenial, but at the same time it screens what is familiar and congenial from view, making a mystery of it. Thus it comes as no surprise that the German word for a secret (*Geheimnis*) derives from the word for home (*Heim*) and originally designated that which belongs to the house. What takes place within the four walls of a house remains a mystery to those shut out from it. A secret, for the Germans in any case, literally ex-cludes others from knowledge.⁶⁰⁵

While in both *Letty Lynton* and, more exaggeratedly, in *Lizzie Borden*, we are witness to the crime, the motive always remains something of a mystery, just as the houses in which the murders occur appear uncanny. However, the susceptibility of the domestic sphere to the

⁶⁰⁴ Lowndes, *Lizzie Borden*, p.vi.

⁶⁰⁵ Tatar, p.169.

influences of the outside world means that we are able to catch stolen glimpses the hidden; the very nature of the Gothic house with its indefinite threshold necessitates this. Both Anthony Vilder, who states that the house in the Gothic becomes uncanny through the fact that this 'most intimate shelter of private comfort' is subject to 'the terror of invasion by alien spirits', and Homi Bhabha, who writes that in the uncanny the 'border between home and world becomes confused', affirm this tendency.⁶⁰⁶ Bhabha's claim that, 'uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing us upon a vision that is as divided as it is disorientating, 'supports this argument.⁶⁰⁷ In Lowndes' fiction, however, the transgression of this border means that the threat of law is ever present to punish those who overstep the bounds of proper domesticity.

In Lowndes' fiction the Gothic is manifested in a palpable way; her novels employ many of the genre's tropes such as suggestions of the supernatural, madness and concealed secrets. Most pertinently for this present section, the theme of the haunted house is one that recurs, implicitly but repeatedly, in Lowndes' novels. In Lowndes, the Gothic is tied up with notions of law and sovereignty in that it represents a feminine sphere saturated with repressed and dangerous sexuality which attempts to exclude the law with murderous results; the masculine law attempts to penetrate and make safe this sexuality. Drawing on Judith Walkowitz's argument that cultural representations of the Ripper case exclude the narrative of the female, Elyssa Warkentin argues that such early narratives provided a space

⁶⁰⁶ Anthony Vilder, 'The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime', *Assemblage*, 3 (1987), 6-29 (p.7); Bhabha, p.141.

⁶⁰⁷ Bhabha, p.141.

for moralization.⁶⁰⁸ As Warkentin writes, 'the cultural narrative or "modern myth" of the Ripper's crimes developed as a warning for women: if they transgress the margins of traditional, domestic femininity, they risk incurring the ferocious meted out by the Ripper. Thus the Ripper narrative is one means of controlling potentially subversive female behaviour'.⁶⁰⁹ Though Lowndes' *The Lodger*, functions in much the same way, her later novels too serve as moral warnings against the transgression of the domestic sphere.

⁶⁰⁸ Judith Walkowitz, 'Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence', *Feminist Studies*, 8.3 (1982), 542-574.

⁶⁰⁹ Elyssa Warkentin, "'Jack the Ripper" Strikes Again', *Feminist Media Studies*, 10.1 (2010), 35-49 (p.38).

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With the exception of *The Lodger*, Lowndes writes about murderesses, usually upper-middle class women who falsely envisage murder to be the way out of the restrictions of their class and gender. These restrictions usually manifest themselves in the form of seemingly unfathomable romantic entanglements. In comparison with that of West, Lowndes' morality tends to have much more clearly defined parameters: good is good and bad is bad and ostensibly rarely do the two intermingle. Murder is always unambiguously evil and entirely unjustified. Where there is more of a conflation of these binaries is in the involvement and reaction of both accessory characters and readers. Ultimately I argue that, in Lowndes' work, though it exists on the masculine side of the gender binary division, law and order is privileged over the law-breaking and destructive feminine. Lowndes represents a rather conservative approach whereby positively endorsed notions of order and justice are symbolised in terms of the masculine. The notion of law in Lowndes is articulated in terms of a totalising system of thought in which notions of justice are always fed back to the legal system.

The domestic space within which the final fantasy scenario of *Harriet Hume* takes place, like the houses that appear in Lowndes' novels, represents the domestic made unfamiliar: it is a site of psychic disruption. Smith and Hughes write that the uncanny operates in the Gothic, so that a 'conflation of opposites (which occurs because the home is also the place of dangerous 'private' secrets) enables a Gothic collapse between living/dead, human/non-

human, and self/other'.⁶¹⁰ The domestic space becomes a place too for the disturbance and re-evaluation of narratives of sovereignty and government. The personal and the public bleed together as it is revealed that one is the product of the other. The drive towards political power, a drive which is emergent from the private space of the self, is, in *Harriet Hume* and *The Judge*, irrepressible, since it is intrinsically tied to hidden and ultimately uncontrollable unconscious desires. *Harriet Hume* and *The Judge* can be read as Gothic not only in terms of their macabre and morbid thematic content, but also in their insistence on the darker and more sinister element of the human psyche which makes the kinds of systems of thought which sustain institutions such as sovereignty an objectionable inevitability. Lowndes' fiction, on the other hand, is Gothic in its insistence on a dark and dangerous feminine sexuality which resides within the home. Law, in Lowndes, is that which must step in from the outside to punish these transgressions; it is not, as it is in West, intrinsic to the self. As such, it relies upon an artificially constructed law which manifests itself in realistically represented material evidence of the presence of law.

Where the institutions of sovereignty and law in West are inevitable is in their pre-existence in the make-up of the psyche. West begins *The Judge* with the epigraph: 'Every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father'.⁶¹¹ Laws here, as West understands them in their Freudian sense, do not need to be upheld by some external and artificial construction, as they will be assured continuance in the cyclical nature of human existence. There is a certain sense of inevitability that can be felt running throughout the

⁶¹⁰ Andrew Smith and William Hughes, 'Introduction', *Empire and the Gothic: The Politics of Genre*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.3.

⁶¹¹ West, *The Judge*, n.p.

novel; that events could happen no other way because they are being dictated all the time by networks of hidden laws. Perhaps the most prominent of these laws that we see functioning in this novel are the laws of the individual's unconscious and this is evident from the novel's reliance and incorporation of certain Freudian psychoanalytic principles. That the novel manifests in its plot an overt retelling of the oedipal complex is widely acknowledged. For instance Norton asserts that *The Judge* is a 'Freudian melodrama of a son unable to get past his Oedipal conflict, whose mother must commit suicide in order to allow her son the freedom to love another woman'.⁶¹² Like *The Return of the Soldier* which incorporates Freudian themes, so too the plot of *The Judge* seems to be largely determined by the laws of the unconscious. This sense becomes apparent when Richard's mother Marion recognises the extent to which the never changing principles of the unconscious means that the mistakes of the past that originate in the unconscious are destined to be repeated infinitely.

As Marion proclaims, ' "Ah, how the old tyrannise over the young..." And there came upon her a sudden chill as she remembered of what character that tyranny could be'.⁶¹³ Marion battles against the forces that see her bound to her son, even into his adulthood, that threaten to destroy his relationship with Ellen. Marion's tragic suicide at the novel's conclusion can be seen as the cultivation of all her attempts to break free from the maternal instincts and drives which rule her in order to set her son free. However, this attempt fails

⁶¹² Ann V. Norton, *Paradoxical Feminism: The Novels of Rebecca West* (Lanham; New York; Oxford:

International Studies Publications, 2000), p.96.

⁶¹³ West, *The Judge*, 223.

for indirectly it leads Richard to murder his detested younger brother and forces him to flee from the law (and consequently from Ellen), as it reverts back to its more conventional legal sense. This final scene in which the novel ends in the anticipation of Richard's capture and punishment (as Philip Ray notes, 'as the novel concludes Richard stoically anticipates arrest, trial and prosecution'⁶¹⁴), is evocative of an incident earlier in the novel in which Marion recalls punishing the young Richard for his childhood misdemeanours. Out of love for Richard, Marion believes that she must punish her son for disobeying her even though it goes against her strong maternal instincts. 'I must whip you – you've broken the law, and if you do that you must be punished'. She continues, '[t]here, you see, whenever you break the law people will hurt you like this. So take notice'. Marion's warnings to her son prove ineffectual against the laws of nature that appear to drive the world. Later on, once the novel has returned to the present Richard notices that his mother looks at him in a peculiar way and says to her 'You were looking at me like a judge who's passing sentence.' and Marion replies 'Well, perhaps I am, [...] Every mother is a judge who sentences the children for the sins of the father'.⁶¹⁵ It is almost as though Marion's sincere belief in the system of crime and punishment, and the fact this belief too has become internalised by her son, is what causes the dangerous cycle to be perpetuated.

⁶¹⁴ Philip E. Ray, 'The Judge Reexamined: Rebecca West's Underrated Gothic Romance', *English Literature in Transition* 31.3 (1988), 297-307 (303).

⁶¹⁵ West, *The Judge*, p.300; p301; p.346.

Scott writes that 'West's unexpected definition of the judge not only resituates the "judge" in a material person; it also locates evil in "the father"'.⁶¹⁶ These laws, however, the laws of nature, mean that this becomes 'a frightening universe to live in, when the laws of nature behaved like very lawless men'.⁶¹⁷ In both *The Judge* and *Harriet Hume*, the only way to escape the terrible inevitability of these laws is through death. In *The Return of the Soldier*, too, through psychoanalytic treatment, Chris is cured of his shell-shock and returns 'every inch a soldier'.⁶¹⁸ By contrast, in Lowndes, the absence of a controlling external form of law with which to govern behaviour is disturbing. Incapable of self-policing, the individual as represented in Lowndes' fiction is an unpredictable entity whose dangerous sexuality must be curbed by an external set of rules and regulations.

The concept of *femina sacra*, in which individuals are denied the right to a political existence and therefore can be killed without the threat of legal punishment, can be employed productively in unravelling the functioning of law in West and Lowndes. West's contradictory attitude to the law which she sees as both a necessary and a destructive force opens the door for *femina sacra*. In *Harriet Hume* particularly, the rejection of Cordorex's politics in favour of the internal laws of the psyche invites into the domestic *femina sacra* in its casting aside of political law. In a sense then, *femina sacra* and the threat of violence and murder, becomes the alternative to the repressive system of law. In Lowndes *femina sacra* functions rather differently. Here it seems that certain conservative forces are at work in fighting to maintain the condition of *femina sacra* within the home and this is why we see

⁶¹⁶ Scott, 'Refiguring the Binary', p.173.

⁶¹⁷ West, *The Judge*, p.189.

⁶¹⁸ West, *The Return of the Soldier*, p.188.

the home buttressed as a fortress against the outside world. The home in Lowndes's fiction is very often represented as a realm in which violence and murder can occur and remain unpunished so long as the law is kept at a safe distance. Law in these novels is represented as a source of less ambiguous salvation rather than the necessary evil that it is in West.

CONCLUSION

Writing Within and Against Interwar Sovereignty Discourse

Within quite a small space are crowded together St Paul's, the Bank of England, the Mansion House, the massive if funereal battlements of the Law Courts; and on the other side, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. There, we say to ourselves, pausing, in this moment of transition on the bridge, our fathers and brothers have spent their lives. All these hundreds of years they have been mounting those steps, passing in and out of those doors, ascending those pulpits, preaching, money-making, administering justice. It is from this world that the private house (somewhere, roughly speaking, in the West End) has derived its creeds, its laws, its clothes and carpets, its beef and mutton.⁶¹⁹

This project has been unpinned by the theoretical framework of *femina sacra*, a concept which unites notions of sovereignty in the state of exception with the domestic sphere in which all of the fiction that I explore in this project is set. Lentin writes that although 'Agamben's theorization of the state of exception is compelling [...] it is surprising that, like other state theorists, he engenders neither his theorization of "the state of exception" nor his concept of "bare life"'.⁶²⁰ Reading the fiction that has been the subject of this project through the framework of *femina sacra* validates the instinct to adapt Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* to fit a gendered interpretation. In Chapter One, the focus on Mansfield's New Zealand stories, set in the context of their pre- and post-First World War status, tells of

⁶¹⁹ Virginia Woolf, 'Three Guineas' in *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.151-367 (p.176).

⁶²⁰ Ronit Lentin, 'Migrant Women's Networking: New Articulations of Transnational Ethnicity', in *Ethnicities and Values in a Changing World*, ed. by Gargi Bhattacharyya (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp.65-72 (p.69).

the impact that this global trauma had on perceptions of state-sanctioned violence. I chart in this chapter the movement of Giorgio Agamben's state of exception from the New Zealand backblocks to the very heart of the domestic realm. The backblock houses that Mansfield creates in her pre-war stories are, quite literally, flimsy shacks which provide scarce protection against the outside elements; structures which would have difficulty keeping the wind and rain out, not to mention lawlessness and violence. Mansfield's representations of violence at the heart of the domestic sphere reflect what I show to be an evolution that is analogous with Agamben's universalisation of the state of exception. Life inside this state of exception is reduced to bare life. I have shown it to be particularly well articulated in gendered terms, belonging as it does to the feminised domestic sphere, as *femina sacra*. My pairing of Christie with Mansfield in Section One broadens out this discussion of sovereignty understood as the state of exception and uses the concept of *femina sacra* to conclude that a similar conception of bare life was at play in Christie's representations of those who stand beyond the reach of legal protection. What I demonstrate is that Christie's detective, Hercule Poirot, is the embodiment of the sovereign in his position of simultaneous immanence and transcendence to the legal system. In my chapters on Mansfield and Christie I make obvious the importance of the body in demonstrating *femina sacra* through a reading of the alive but almost already dead. My project is predicated upon a comparison of modernist and popular fiction writers and asks whether their place on the highbrow/lowbrow scale bares any resemblance to the degree of radicalism in their various representations of law and sovereignty. In Section One, through reading the modernist and the popular in conjunction with one another, I see Mansfield and Christie as exploring very similar trajectories in their work.

In Section Two, however, I draw very different conclusions, as here I see the engagements of notions of sovereignty and power as diverse. My comparative readings of Warner and Hull reveal that radicalism rests on the side of modernism and the popular remains tied to the conservative. There could be many reasons for the very dissimilar outcome here. Firstly, I recognise that in using Christie as my example of a popular fiction writer in Section One I am dealing with an author who has already been identified in terms of the modernist. With Hull, my starting place is very different, as she has only ever been identified in relation to modernism in terms of her antithetical positioning. Additionally, in Section One I discuss how the manifestation of a concept could be read in fictional works. This is less about trying to understand a normative or value-laden message than about understanding how this concept evolved in relation to the two world wars and the ways in which this evolution was represented. By contrast, in exploring how Warner and Hull make use of the concept of sovereignty to complement their own political agendas, I ask a different type of question. In enquiring into ways in which these authors use the freedom of the fantasy realm in their narratives to open up a space in which to variously appropriate or rework and amend traditional formulations of power, my argument shifts towards a question of whether sovereignty is bad, and therefore requires reconfiguration, or if it is good and should therefore be preserved and upheld. The former can be placed on the side of the radical, where I locate Warner, and the latter aligned with the conservative, as is the case with Hull.

In Chapter Three I read in Warner's novels a propensity to attempt to undermine conventional notions of sovereignty. I conclude that it is in her earlier novels from the 1920s that Warner is most concerned with finding a narrative space in which she can reimagine power either through a process of appropriation or through a conscious attempt at

refiguring the idea. However, because she never escapes the confines of the domestic, *femina sacra* is ever present. Warner's fiction becomes the exception and the most hopeful in its overall outlook in that the threat posed by *femina sacra* is never fully realised. In Chapter Four, although Hull's Sheik romances might have been shocking for some in their day, the emancipatory realm offered by the desert in terms of sexual freedom for women is shown not to be fully realised in terms of its representation of power. Representations of sovereignty are upheld and, even where we see power placed in the hands of women, it remains in its unaltered traditional form. Despite her scandalous representations of women's sexuality, which has given her novels the name of 'bad' literature, Hull's account of power is ultimately conformist. Furthermore, taking the theoretical framework of *femina sacra* to read the absolved rapes that are typical of the desert romance genre provides a clearer understanding of why perhaps readers have accepted the inclusion of such scenes in the novel. It is always extremely troubling to read rape as uncondemned as it is in these novels, but, in viewing the world that the heroine strays into in the desert as, in essence, a world of domesticity, the violence that takes place here can be read as an enactment of the concept of *femina sacra* in the same way that it can be understood in Christie and Mansfield.

In Chapter Five, in which I read law as embedded within the self as it is defined from a psychoanalytic approach, a discourse of sovereignty finds itself very much at the centre of the domestic sphere just as it is internalised by the superego. I illustrate how West's contradictory and paradoxical attitude to conceptions of law are played out via the Gothic. On the one hand, West seems critical and almost afraid of a conception of law which is, to her, an escapable fact, and on the other, she finds a certain sense of reassurance in its ever-

present readiness to punish those who transgress it. Law in West is less something that is enforced by the outside world as something that emerges from within. Consequently, in comparison to the section on Mansfield and Christie, in which we see law seep into the domestic, in West it flows in the opposite direction. By contrast, in Chapter Six I read in Lowndes a version of law which acts as a conservative force. Law still enters the home but it stems from external political institutions which are read as necessary to curtail the tide of the dangerous female sexuality which emerges from within. As is the case with Hull, Lowndes ultimately conforms with and upholds conventional notions of power. In Lowndes, the fragile walls of the domestic sphere are regarded as a necessity in policing a murderous sexuality within the home. Whereas in Mansfield these flimsy boundaries are represented in terms of their negative inability to exclude danger, in Lowndes they are endowed with a positive sense of protection by the law of that which might potentially reside within the home. *Femina Sacra* is, in both these cases, that which fills the space of an absence of the political sphere from these spaces.

To bring this project to a close I want to draw attention to the representation of Manderley in Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938). Dreaming of Manderley, du Maurier's narrator describes the approach to the house:

Nature had come into her own again and, little by little, in her stealthy, insidious way had encroached upon the drive with long, tenacious fingers. The woods, always a menace even in the past, had triumphed in the end. They crowded, dark and uncontrolled, to the borders of the drive. The beeches with white,

naked limbs leant close to one another, their branches intermingled in a strange embrace, making a vault above my head like the archway of a church.⁶²¹

Louise Harrington explains that the drive to Manderley, 'with its absence of government and control[,] suggests a place gone wild and undisciplined from within'. She goes on to argue that 'the locked gates of Manderley which are eventually overcome suggest an isolated space that is threatened and invaded by alien forces'.⁶²² For Harrington, this opening passage, with its mingling of the native and foreign – 'trees I did not recognise'— posits the garden at Manderley as a site for the conflict between home and abroad in its expression of imperial decline: '[t]he foreign is at the heart of the English home, not in the far corners of the empire'.⁶²³ Though Harrington's discussion of *Rebecca* is not directly concerned with representations of sovereignty, it nevertheless emphasises the 'absence of government', which is read as an imminent threat. In the works I have explored in this project this fear of a breakdown of government in the wake of the First World War is the consequence of a perceived disintegration of sovereign power.

It is the absence of government with the home that transforms life in this realm into *femina sacra*. Du Maurier's novel indicates that this model of thinking about the home as a sight of danger is one that is limited to the immediate aftermath of the First World War but one that is present in the lead up to the Second World War and potentially beyond. The menacing trees that du Maurier depicts serve as an apt analogy to the various external

⁶²¹ Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca* (London: Arrow, 1992), p.5.

⁶²² Louise Harrington, 'Imperialism, Class, and the English Country House in *Howards End* and *Rebecca*', *English*, 56 (2007), 283-298 (p.291).

⁶²³ Du Maurier, *Rebecca*, p.5; Harrington, p.292.

threats (either perceived or actual) which surround the domestic. In Mansfield's early stories, the external threat is the lawless New Zealand settler society but, in the post-world stories, the threat becomes the excess of sovereignty, which sees the state of exception move within the home. In Christie this external threat of legalised murder is somewhat neutralised by Poirot's embodiment of the sovereign. In Poirot's feminised role as arbitrator of the law, he takes decisions of life and death into his own hands in an era when the state is seen as incapable of taking on this role. In Warner the external threat is sovereignty itself which, in its conventional formulation, is seen as repressive and overbearing. In both Hull and Lowndes, however, it is this very concept which is emphasised as providing the foundations of an orderly society. West perhaps remains the anomaly amongst the writers I address since, for her, the concept of law and sovereignty is always part and parcel of the home and the self rather than an external menace.

To return to the issue of gender in the representations of sovereignty I have encountered here, it is necessary to remark on the nature of sovereignty discourse and its alignment with masculine systems of thought. Traditionally, sovereignty and law have always been concepts aligned with a language of patriarchy. Virginia Woolf writes in *Three Guineas* (1938) that, 'though many instincts are held more or less in common by both sexes, to fight has always been the man's habit, not the woman's. Law and practice have developed that difference, whether innate or accidental'.⁶²⁴ For Woolf, law is the man's domain; it is administered by the patriarchy and serves the requirements of that patriarchy. As Woolf goes on to enquire, '[w]hat real influence can we bring to bear upon law or business, religion or politics — we to whom many doors are still locked, or at best ajar, we who have

⁶²⁴ Woolf, 'Three Guineas', p.158.

neither capital nor force behind us?'.⁶²⁵ For women to write about law and sovereignty is for them to engage with and react to a set of questions which have been seen to belong to the patriarchy. As I discussed in my Introduction, Joseph Camilleri and Jim Faulk assert that sovereignty 'is a way of speaking about the world, a way of acting in the world': that is, to speak within a sovereignty discourse is to speak within an inescapable web of patriarchy.⁶²⁶ While I see a more radical stance emerging in relation to sovereignty, as I have shown to be the case with Warner, and, to a lesser extent, West, the authors I have discussed here use the sovereignty discourse in which they find themselves inevitably constricted. All these authors, popular and modernist, construct from its broken fragments potential alternatives for envisioning new kinds of relationships between the private and public spheres.

In my introduction, I used Charlotte Perkins Gilman's comments on the dogma of the domestic and its inherent link with notions of power and sovereignty which, alongside the concept of *femina sacra*, set up the theoretical framework for this project. It seems fitting to return to the comments from Gilman at this point. Writing about the early twentieth century, Gilman states that, though the state of nature in which there prevailed a war of all against all is long gone, nevertheless, 'the *feeling* that home is more secure and protective than anywhere else is not outgrown'.⁶²⁷ However, in the decades of uncertainty surrounding the two World Wars, in which the exclusion of some lives from the political realm posed a threat that existence might once again take on a character resembling this

⁶²⁵ Woolf, 'Three Guineas', p.181.

⁶²⁶ Joseph A. Camilleri and Jim Faulk, *The End of Sovereignty?, The Politics of a Shrinking World* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1992), p.11.

⁶²⁷ Gilman, *The Home*, p.38. Emphasis in original.

condition of anarchy, the notion of home as a sanctuary was endowed with a new urgency. My readings of the authors studied in this thesis have shown that fears surrounding the structural integrity of the home and its ability to ward off external threats are ever-present in interwar literary representations. Over the course of this project I have explored a range of texts in which the concepts of sovereignty and law, concepts which hold a particular prominence in a half-century dominated by war, are persistent. The suspicion that the home may not be the place of safety it was once conceived to be can be better understood through the framework of *femina sacra*. *Femina sacra* posits life in the domestic realm as that which is devoid of the protection of law meaning that there is the constant threat of violence and murder which is essentially unpunishable by law.

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