SOFT METAFICTION(S): MARY STEWART AND THE SELF-REFLECTIVE MIDDLEBROW

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the romantic thrillers of Mary Stewart, which were internationally bestselling novels in the post-war British fiction marketplace. Through my reading of Stewart, I nuance current critical perceptions of the mid-twentieth century middlebrow novel, which, I argue, is characterised in part by a self-conscious investigation of its position within the parameters of highbrow literature and popular fiction. As a critical category which is defined by its relation to literary value, I argue that works considered to be middlebrow are inherently self-reflective and metafictive, seeking to discreetly undermine the hierarchical structures which attempt to contain them. I posit the term 'soft-metafiction' to describe this; as opposed to 'hard' metafiction, which explicitly and insistently proclaims its self-awareness, soft-metafiction is involved in an understated, often sub-textual, exploration of its status as text. I argue that Stewart's work is characterised by frequent use of intertextual reference and metafictive reflection on the nature and purpose of text as a concept. In Chapter One, I discuss Stewart's engagement with notions of canonicity and literary value, showing how she defends the reading of middlebrow fiction against such figures as Q.D. Leavis, and how she challenges the position of women within the masculinised canon. In Chapter Two, I demonstrate how Stewart reflects upon the generic conventions of romance, fairytale, crime and gothic fiction to raise questions about gender and genre. Chapter Three explores how Stewart reflects on the nature of texts, and how they function in relation to history (both personal and national), memory, and identity. Throughout, I demonstrate Stewart's interest in the various ways that text is categorised: generically, hierarchically and canonically. In doing so, I demonstrate that Stewart's novels are more than, as one reviewer writes, 'charming little love stor[ies]': rather, they are intellectually searching, self-aware works, with a serious interest in their wider literary context. By mapping Stewart's work in terms of the soft-metafictive, I aim to open this term up as a wider area for study within the middlebrow, and to prompt a recalibration of critical understandings of the British fiction marketplace in the mid-twentieth century.

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INTRODUCTION

'It is time, I think, to make a confession.
Though I was a student of literature […] I wrote science fiction'.[1]

Mary Stewart did not write science fiction, but this 'confession' from Rose Fenemore, protagonist of her penultimate romantic thriller *Stormy Petrel* (1991), speaks to a preoccupation with the notion of literary value that appears throughout her work. Rose is a lecturer in English Literature at Cambridge University, and 'a serious poet who [has] gained some small recognition' (33). That Rose understands these identities to be at odds with her career as an author of genre fiction is clear from how she keeps her writing of science fiction secret – she publishes her novels under a pseudonym, choosing to associate her real name only with her less commercially successful poetry – and in her fear of being 'embarrass[ed]' when the subject of science fiction arises in conversation with her students (33; 102). Rose's attitude is, I argue, the result of her awareness of the supposed incompatibility between highbrow literature – which as a Cambridge don and poet is where her allegiances would generally be expected to lie – and popular fiction. She fears that her writing of popular science fiction will undermine her position within the academy. Yet Rose gleans the same satisfaction from and exerts the same effort in producing both her poetry *and* her science fiction. As the novel progresses, she finds herself tentatively defending the genre against a student who 'contemptuously' dismisses it as 'fairy tales': Rose argues that 'all the stories that feed the modern hunger for the super-natural – they do tend to be more or less moral' (102-3). By the novel's close, her star student – Megan Lloyd – enthusiastically deems the revelation of her tutor's alter-ego as 'lit. and met. [literally and metaphorically] fantastic' (184). In *Stormy Petrel*, then, the boundaries between the highbrow and the popular are shown to be less than clear-cut. The troubling of these boundaries is characteristic of Stewart's recurring preoccupation with literary hierarchies, categories, and definitions, and it is an investigation of this preoccupation which constitutes the project of this thesis. With a focus on her romantic thrillers published between the 1950s and the 1970s, I argue that Stewart's work expresses a metafictively self-conscious interest in exploring wider questions concerning the nature and purpose of text, and how it is categorised and defined.

[1] Mary Stewart, *Stormy Petrel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2011), p.33. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.

'The Mother of Twentieth-Century Romantic Suspense':
Mary Stewart's 'Romantic Thrillers'

Born in Sunderland in 1916, Mary Florence Elinor Rainbow grew up in Co. Durham where her father, Frederick Rainbow, served as an Anglican minister. Her mother was Mary Edith (née Matthews), from New Zealand. Stewart began writing and illustrating stories at an early age, but at school her intelligence resulted in bullying. The experience stayed with her – 'I still have no self-confidence', she said – and also made its way into her fiction; the protagonist of *Thornyhold* (1988), Geillis 'Gilly' Ramsey, remembers her school days as 'a hell of teasing and torture'.[2] Having turned down places, for financial reasons, at both Oxford and Cambridge, Stewart enrolled at Durham University to read English and gained a B.A. (First Class) in 1938, a teaching certificate in 1939, and a M.A. in 1941.[3] During the Second World War she taught in Middlesbrough, where she travelled from house to house to teach children at home, and from 1941 until 1956, at which point she and her husband relocated to Edinburgh, she taught English at Durham University. She married geologist Frederick (later Sir) Stewart, who was also lecturing at Durham, in 1945. It was he who, following an ectopic pregnancy which left the couple unable to have children, encouraged Stewart to publish her work, and in 1954 the manuscript of *Murder for Charity* was sent to Hodder and Stoughton, where it was published as *Madam, Will You Talk?* the following year.[4] Stewart went on to produce a number of bestselling titles until the mid-1990s. Her last romantic thriller, *Rose Cottage*, was published in 1997, when she was 81. All her novels were extremely popular, with many dramatised or serialised for radio, and *The Moonspinners* (1962) adapted for film by Walt Disney Productions in 1964, starring Hayley Mills.[5] Stewart received a number of awards in recognition of her work: the

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[2] Rachel Hore, 'Mary Stewart Obituary', *Guardian*, 15 May 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/15/romance-suspense-novelist-mary-stewart-dies> [accessed 27 August 2015]; Mary Stewart, *Thornyhold* (London: Hodder, 2011), p. 20. There are other echoes of Stewart's life in this novel as Gilly's father is a minister and her mother is from New Zealand.

[3] In 2009, Durham University awarded her an honorary doctorate degree.

[4] Robin Denniston, 'Mary Stewart Obituary', *Independent,* 17 May 2014 <http//www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/mary-stewart-obitury-author-whose-storytelling-gift-and-mastery-of-the-romantic-thriller-made-her-a-bestseller-on-both-sides-of-the-atlantic-9389834.html> [accessed 2 September 2015]. Stewart originally intended to publish under her maiden name, Mary Rainbow, but this was considered by Hodder to be unsuitable.

[5] This Walt Disney film was the fifth of Mills' six contracted films with the company, and her starring role (after the international successes of *Pollyanna* (1960) and *The Parent Trap* (1961)) is indicative of the international profile of the adaptation. Novels serialised for Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* include *Madam, Will You Talk?* and *Wildfire at Midnight* in 1957, *Nine Coaches Waiting* in 1959, *My Brother Michael* in 1960, *The Moonspinners* in 1963, *This Rough Magic* in 1964, *The Gabriel Hounds* in 1968, and *Airs Above the Ground* in 1978. Novels dramatised for Radio 4's *Saturday Night Theatre* include *Wildfire at Midnight* in 1974, *The Gabriel Hounds* in 1975 (repeated 1978; 1991) *Airs Above the Ground*

Crime Writers Association Silver Dagger in 1961, the Frederick Niven Award in 1971, a Scottish Arts Council Award in 1975, and in 1968 she was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.[6] She died in 2014.

Stewart was an internationally recognised, award-winning novelist in the mid to late-twentieth-century British literary landscape, whose books remain in print today. Despite this she has received little critical attention. One reason for this, I suggest, is the fact that her work spans a range of genres. As this thesis argues, an interest in history and intertextuality permeates her romantic thrillers, but this is also evidenced by her second career as an historical novelist: having already produced ten-plus successful romantic thrillers, in 1970 Stewart published *The Crystal Cave*, a novel which reimagined the early life of Merlin, and was the first in an internationally best-selling trilogy (followed by *The Hollow Hills* [1973] and *The Last Enchantment* [1979]).[7] After the trilogy, two other novels based on Arthurian legend followed, as well as four more romantic thrillers, three children's books, and a volume of poetry.[8] The Merlin books mark an intriguing move for Stewart: it is uncommon for a writer who is successful in one genre to switch openly to another. When Stewart eschewed the romance thriller in favour of historical fantasy with *The Crystal Cave*, her publishers were worried that the shift in style might impact upon sales: as she explained, 'they [the publishers] like you to be categorised and go on producing the same books' to better guarantee a readership, and a profit.[9] That Stewart disregarded this demonstrates her lack of interest in the commerciality of her work: 'I've never written for a market. In fact, if I'd ever thought about markets I would have never written *The Crystal Cave* because it was such a big

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in 1977, *The Ivy Tree* in 1978, and *My Brother Michael* in 2000. *Nine Coaches Waiting* was Radio 4's *Book at Bedtime* in 1963, as was *The Moonspinners* in 1966 and *This Rough Magic* in 1973. Stewart's three children's novels were featured on the BBC's *Jackanory*: *The Little Broomstick* in 1973, *Ludo and the Star Horse* in 1975, and *A Walk in Wolf Wood* in 1981 (*BBC Genome Project* <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/> [accessed 3 September 2015]).

[6] Kay Mussell, 'Mary Stewart', in *Twentieth Century Romance and Gothic Writers*, ed. by James Vinson (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 645-7 (p.645).

[7] The trilogy was adapted for television by the BBC in 1991.

[8] The Merlin trilogy is comprised of *The Crystal Cave* (1970), *The Hollow Hills* (1973), and *The Last Enchantment* (1979); *The Wicked Day* (1983) and *The Prince and the Pilgrim* (1995) are two subsequent novels which reimagine Arthurian legend. Although the material of these latter two texts is separate from the earlier trilogy, they do inhabit the same world. The children's books are *The Little Broomstick* (1971), *Ludo and the Star Horse* (1974) and *A Walk in Wolf Wood* (1980). Her poetry collection is *Frost on the Window* (1990).

[9] *Off the Page with Mary Stewart*, STV, 8 October 1992, online video recording, YouTube, 20 December 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiExIrgwPaE> [accessed 3 September 2015]. I say 'openly' because it is not unusual for genre writers to experiment with different styles – though they often use different names. Agatha Christie, for example, wrote romance novels under the name Mary Westmacott, whilst romance novelist Nora Roberts writes crime novels under the name J. D. Robb.

change. But it was the historical novel I'd always wanted to write'.[10] Stewart wrote for her own pleasure. As I discuss in Chapter One, the notion of pleasure is frequently considered to be incompatible with serious literature. By prioritising her own pleasure – and, while doing so, crossing generic boundaries – Stewart undermines the assumption that genre fiction is a purely commercial pursuit, and by extension disturbs the established hierarchies which frame how texts should be defined, valued, and categorised.

When asked in 1965 whether she could define the type of novels she produced, Stewart responded: 'Heavens, no. I realise there is a fashion, now, for categorising books, and I find this extraordinarily difficult and irritating'.[11] It is true that Stewart's (non-Merlin) novels, with their blend of romance, mystery, crime, and thriller tropes, work to defy categorisation. This is frequently discussed in what little scholarly work on Stewart's novels exists. Kayla McKinney Wiggins refers to them as 'novels of intrigue', and 'mystery novels', before conceding that they are 'literate works which defy categorisation as either pure romance, mystery, thriller, or suspense'.[12] Kay Mussell includes Stewart in her work on 'modern gothics', although she elsewhere remarks that 'it may be unfair to label her a genre writer', on the basis that she 'plays off the resonance of the literary history of romance against the modern heroine's sensibility and experience' and that although 'she may work within a formula [...] her scene is the larger setting of romance through centuries of literature'.[13] For Mussell, writers who display an awareness of the history and tropes of the genre within which they write potentially exclude themselves from categorisation within that genre. Like Mussell, Monetha Reaves also places Stewart within the category of modern gothic, but she goes on to discuss the other generic tropes – including those of historical and detective fiction – which Stewart 'weav[es] [...] into a formula which preserves their original form while, at the same time, allowing her to do things with them which grow out of her own creativity'.[14] I would add that whilst combining genres in a creative way, Stewart's work also – as I discuss in Chapter Two – self-consciously investigates and challenges those genres' attendant assumptions. Wiggins' term 'mystery novel', then, does not sufficiently convey

[10] Raymond H. Thompson, 'Interview with Mary Stewart' in <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/interview-with-mary-stewart> [accessed 29 January 2016].
[11] Roy Newquist, *Counterpoint* (London: Allan & Unwin, 1965), p. 564.
[12] Kayla McKinney Wiggins, "I'll Never Laugh at a Thriller Again': Fate, Faith, and Folklore in the Mystery Novels of Mary Stewart', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 21 (2000), 49-60 (p. 49).
[13] Kay Mussell, 'Beautiful and Damned: The Sexual Woman in Gothic Fiction', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 9 (1975), 84-89; Mussell, 'Mary Stewart', pp. 646; 647.
[14] Monetha Roberta Reaves, 'The Popular Fiction Tradition and the Novels of Mary Stewart' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 1978), p. 99.

the range of generic tropes that appear in Stewart's works, whilst 'novel of intrigue' seems too vague a moniker. Pamela Regis describes Stewart as 'the mother of twentieth-century romantic suspense', a category which she defines as a sub-genre of the romance novel, but which draws on and is inextricably linked with conventions of the thriller, adventure, mystery or gothic novel.[15] However, I read this phrase as too specifically linked to the romance genre. Returning to the reviews and advertisements around their original publication, then, I use 'romantic thriller' in relation to Stewart's non-Merlin novels. By explicitly referring to two genres, often seen as quite distinct from each other, this term more firmly gestures towards the propensity of Stewart's work to draw equally on a wide range of generic tropes, which, I argue, constitutes one of its defining characteristics.

Mussell and Reaves both tentatively place Stewart in the category of modern gothic, and a gothic sensibility does run throughout her work; I discuss in Chapter Two, for example, the role of gothic tropes in *Airs Above the Ground* (1965). Joanna Russ defines modern gothic in terms of book covers (all of which, she argues, 'seem to have evolved from the same clone') reflecting her sense that, in the case of modern gothics, generic features are simply put on, garment-like, with no real regard for their provenance.[16] Russ argues that these novels 'bear no resemblance to the literary definition of 'Gothic' and are not related to the works of Monk Lewis or Mrs. Radcliffe', instead resembling 'a crossbreed of *Jane Eyre* [1847] and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* [1938]'.[17] In light of more recent scholarship on the gothic, I challenge this assumption that neither *Jane Eyre* nor *Rebecca* are 'literary' gothics (many have argued otherwise),[18] and that Radcliffe's work has less in common with these novels than with Lewis's. The former have all been positioned within the female gothic, in which 'the central figure is a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine', as opposed to the male gothic (of which Lewis's *The Monk* [1796] is an example) in which male protagonists 'attempt to penetrate some encompassing interior' and 'women characters tend to be objectified victims'.[19] Moreover, as Victor Sage and

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[15] Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 143.
[16] Joanna Russ, 'Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 6 (1973), 666-691 (p. 666).
[17] Russ, p. 666.
[18] See for example, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979); Heta Pyrhonen, *Bluebeard Gothic* (2010); Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (1998); Gina Wisker, 'Dangerous Borders', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 12 (2003); Judy Simons, 'Rewriting the Love Story' in *Fatal Attractions*, ed. by Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker (1998).
[19] Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: W. H. Allen, 1977), p. 91; David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic*

Allan Lloyd Smith have noted, 'there is no point in thinking of the Gothic as 'pure": the gothic is inherently changeable, and despite Russ's squeamishness at suggesting that the modern gothic might bear resemblance to a literary definition of the gothic, implying that it is somehow unworthy of the association, the gothic has in fact always been associated with the trashy, the lowbrow, and, indeed, the feminine.[20] I thus reject the term 'modern gothic' because it implies a disconnect from the supposedly distinct 'literary' gothic, which is misleading. In contrast to Russ, Mary Cadogan positions Stewart alongside such nineteenth- and twentieth-century novelists as Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Wilkie Collins, Joyce Carol Oates, Victoria Holt, and Mary Higgins Clark, as well as du Maurier, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that she 'transcends restrictions of genre and formula'.[21] This list combines serious canonical writers and commercially popular authors (not that these categories are necessarily mutually exclusive, as I discuss more in Chapter One). What unites them all is the use of gothic elements in their works, variously combined with tropes from romance (Holt), crime (Collins) and magical realism (Oates). Cadogan, then, reads Stewart's novels as part of a gothic literary tradition that has evolved and developed over time. Whilst Daphne Watson asserts that Stewart's novels merely repeat gothic tropes 'unquestioning[ly]', I agree with Cadogan's implicit suggestion that the novels explore and challenge these tropes, and that it is this which locates them within the gothic tradition.[22] Stewart borrows elements from formula fiction, just as she borrows aspects and intertexts from literature and its history more broadly. She combines different generic conventions in order to explore the past, present and potential literary text.

Although, as I argue, they cannot be tied to a single genre category, Stewart's non-Merlin works can still be viewed as a homogenous group which display metafictive interests in the workings of text and which similarly blend genre conventions (hence the necessity for a single term with which to describe them). Wiggins argues that some texts do this less successfully than others, stating that '[Stewart's] books set in the British Isles [...] are not as compelling [...] as if the danger of mystery, and the trauma of tragedy, have no place in domestic settings'.[23] On the contrary, I argue that some of these books set in the United Kingdom – particularly *Wildfire at*

(Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 278.

[20] Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, 'Introduction', in *Modern Gothic: A Reader*, ed. by Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 1-5 (p. 2).

[21] Mary Cadogan, *And Then Their Hearts Stood Still...: An Exuberant Look at Romantic Fiction Past and Present* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 24.

[22] Daphne Watson, *Their Own Worst Enemies: Women Writers of Women's Fiction* (London: Pluto Press, 1995), pp. 26, 25.

[23] Wiggins, p. 51.

Midnight (1956) and *Touch Not the Cat* (1976) – constitute the most complex renderings of Stewart's project to investigate the nature of text. I find some relevance, though, in Wiggins's further assertion that 'in the last two books, *Thornyhold* and *Stormy Petrel*, the mysteries are trivial and, in the case of *Thornyhold*, virtually non-existent': these later novels, as well as *Rose Cottage* (which Wiggins does not discuss), do lack something of the urgency and sense of threat which so drives the earlier works. Indeed, it is worth noting that two of these – *Thornyhold* and *Rose Cottage*, published in 1988 and 1997 respectively, are historical fiction set (respectively) in the late 1940s and early 1950s – the period in which Stewart first started writing. I read these texts as Stewart reflecting on the spirit of her early work, as is emphasised by the fact that both novels deal with the theme of returning: literally in *Rose Cottage*, in which the protagonist Kate Herrick returns to her titular family home, and metaphorically in *Thornyhold*, in which Gilly inherits her cousin's cottage, and feels spiritually fulfilled for the first time since her childhood. *Stormy Petrel* is similarly self-reflective – it is about a writer, and contains frequent reflections on the writing process. There are other elements in the novel which imply an autobiographical streak: whilst its heroine, Rose is, like Stewart, both a writer of popular fiction and a lecturer in English literature, its hero is a geologist, like Stewart's husband. That the novel depicts their initial meeting and early courtship creates the sense, as with *Thornyhold* and *Rose Cottage*, that Stewart is looking backwards. Furthermore, though *Stormy Petrel* is set at the time of its writing in the late 1990s, Rose seems, in her desire for 'a good *old-fashioned* ivory tower', to be actively attempting to minimise the impact of modernity on her life, a desire which her acquisition of a secluded Hebridean cottage, without telephone or electricity, eventually satisfies (2; my emphasis). All three novels convey a strong feeling of nostalgia. For these reasons, I do not discuss these three later novels, but consider only Stewart's romantic thrillers published between 1954 and 1976. It is perhaps tempting to end my study at *The Wind off the Small Isles* (1968), Stewart's last romantic thriller before the Merlin trilogy, but I also include *Touch Not the Cat*, which was published after the trilogy's second instalment, *The Hollow Hills*. Whilst this might seem an awkward addition to the more conveniently grouped eleven texts which precede the Merlin trilogy, I argue that *Touch Not the Cat* more naturally aligns itself with these earlier romantic thrillers: it lacks the valedictory note I have described in the three later novels, and thematically it explores similar concerns to the earlier works. All of the twelve romantic thrillers I discuss are interested in the nature and meaning of literary texts. They variously experiment with genre, reflect upon the

politics of literary value, and investigate the potential of text to cross the boundaries of fact and fiction, past and present, and life and death.

'The Genuine Triumphs of a Minor Art': The Art of the Gendered Review

'The ladies would all be taken more seriously as writers' remarks Lois Mitchison in her 1966 *Sunday Telegraph* profile of Stewart, du Maurier, Monica Dickens, and Georgette Heyer.[24] I argue that gender as a deciding factor in determining literary value is readily apparent in reviews of Stewart's books in the 1950s and 1960s. In this section, I compare reviews of Stewart's work with those of Ian Fleming's Bond novels, to demonstrate the impact of gender on the way writers were perceived.[25] Fleming is a useful comparison, as he is in many ways similar to Stewart: both were extremely successful and extremely popular in the 1950s and 1960s. They are also more or less contemporary to each other: Fleming published his first novel, *Casino Royale*, in 1953, whilst Stewart's first novel, *Madam, Will You Talk?*, appeared in 1955, and both continued to publish roughly one novel every eighteen months throughout the 1950s and into the late 60s (Fleming's last novel was published posthumously in 1966). Reviewers categorised both of their work within the 'thriller' genre: Fleming's in spy thrillers and Stewart's in romantic thrillers. I argue they were perceived as existing in the same broad field, producing masculine and feminine versions of the same type of endeavour in genre fiction. Indeed, aside from the fact that Fleming produced a series of Bond novels, while Stewart's are all stand-alone works, the only other major distinction between Fleming and Stewart is their gender, and this, I argue, significantly impacts on the way they were reviewed – and by extension, the way they were perceived as writers. Despite the considerable popularity of both authors – they each produced numerous bestsellers – there are noticeably fewer reviews of Stewart's work than of Fleming's.[26] One publication, *The Listener*, which regularly reviewed Fleming, never reviewed Stewart's novels, and *The Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*) reviewed each of Fleming's new novels

[24] Lois Mitchison, 'What Makes the Lady Spell-Binders Tick?', *Sunday Telegraph*, 16 October 1966, p.10.
[25] Publications consulted include *Guardian*, *Listener*, *Daily Mail*, *New Statesman*, *Observer*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Times*, *Sunday Times*, and *Times Literary Supplement*.
[26] Fleming's *Thunderball* (1961) was top of the *Sunday Times* 'Bestseller List' in April 1961, falling to 4th place in May 1961 while *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1962) was 3rd in April 1962, 5th in May. *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1963) was 2nd in May's list and 4th in June's, and *You Only Live Twice* (1964) was the 2nd bestseller for April, 3rd for May. Comparatively, Stewart's *This Rough Magic* was top of the *Sunday Times* 'Bestseller List' in August 1964, and *Airs above the Ground* featured in the lists for September 1965, February 1966, and September 1967. *The Gabriel Hounds* was top of the October 1967 list, falling to 7th place in November, and the paperback edition of *Touch Not the Cat* also featured in the list for January 1978.

as a matter of course, whilst only covering four of Stewart's: *Wildfire at Midnight*, *Thunder on the Right* (1957), *My Brother Michael* (1960), and *Airs Above the Ground*.[27] Even within publications which regularly reviewed Stewart's work – such as the *Times*, *Telegraph*, and *Observer* – there are some noticeable exceptions: there are only reviews of *The Ivy Tree* (1962) in the *Daily Telegraph*, and *Thunder on the Right*'s only review (in the publications I have chosen) is one of the few of Stewart's work to appear in *TLS*.[28] I argue that the discrepancy in volume of reviews for each author is connected to gender; both the gender of the author, and the implied gender of their readers.

In his 1965 extended review of *Airs Above the Ground* for *New Statesmen*, which also discusses all of Stewart's previous works, F.W.J. Hemmings describes Stewart's novels as 'the genuine triumphs of a minor art'.[29] The term 'minor art' implies that the novels are of low-to-middling literary value – that they are 'high art' is out of the question. Indeed, an attempt to reduce the potential literary value of Stewart's work occurs in a number of her reviews. For example, much attention is paid to the labour of writing and the specific working processes undertaken by Stewart (no such attention is paid to Fleming). One reviewer reports that she produces 'four drafts of every novel', whilst another notes that her study contains 'two IBM recording machines, an electric typewriter, an ordinary typewriter, and an elaborate filing system'.[30] This suggests that the novels are the result of *work* as opposed to *art*, whilst references to the machinery used in their production creates a sense of distance between Stewart and her writing, which, combined with frequent mention of her 'never failing formula', conveys the notion that the novels are factory-made, mass-produced cultural products; they are manufactured, rather than created.[31] This sense is heightened by the regular references to the novels in relation to their economic value. One reviewer explains that 'with her royalties [Stewart] has bought a

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[27] Philip John Stead, 'Making Crime Pay', *TLS*, 23 March 1956, p. 179; Philip John Stead, 'Search and Discovery', *TLS*, 30 August 1957, p. 517; 'Spot 'Tec Cheek', *TLS*, 14 October, 1965, p. 925; David F. Williams, 'Withholding and Abetting', *TLS*, 26 February 1960, p. 133.

[28] Violet Grant, 'Latest Thrillers', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 October 1961, p. 20. These novels are the two which most noticeably move away from Stewart's usual formula: *Thunder on the Right* is written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, whilst Stewart's other romantic thrillers are in the first person. *The Ivy Tree* is longer than most of the novels which precede it, takes place in the English countryside rather than a European holiday location, and is the first to take place solely within a domestic setting. Its exclusion therefore implies that reviewers were less inclined to discuss texts more securely placed within the (female) sphere of the domestic.

[29] F.W.J. Hemmings, 'Mary Queen of Hearts', *New Statesman*, 5 November 1965, pp. 698-99, (p. 699).

[30] Celia Haddon, 'Lady Mary', *Sunday Times*, 13 June 1976, p. 36; Hunter Davies, 'The Two Faces of Edinburgh', *Sunday Times*, 5 September 1965, p. 7.

[31] Violet Grant, 'Murder at Large', *Daily Telegraph*, 30 September 1965, p. 21.

Mark 10 Jaguar, Chinese porcelain, and a deep freeze', referring to the wealth acquired by Stewart as a result of her success.[32] Reviewers also discuss the novels themselves in terms of monetary value: 'Mary Stewart's novels are, above all, superb value for money. She stints nothing'.[33] Connecting the novels to money in this way again implies that these are commercial products, which has the effect (as I discuss in Chapter One) of further reducing their literary value.

The impulse to minimise the literary value of Stewart's work is also apparent in the vein of ambiguous criticism which runs throughout her reviews, in spite of the fact that most appear, on the surface, to be broadly positive about her work. Explanations of character and plot are often delivered with a strong sense of patronising irreverence: in a review of *Madam, Will You Talk?*, for example, Charity is described as 'a perfectly sweet little school mistress', whilst the protagonist of *My Brother Michael* is described as 'cultured but cosy Camilla'.[34] Lucy in *This Rough Magic* (1964) is noted to be 'an attractive out-of-work actress [...] [who] spends a lot of time in her bikini', and Gianetta in *Wildfire at Midnight* is dismissed as 'a plucky, vivacious little mannequin'.[35] There is an overwhelming sense that these women, and by extension the books in which they appear, are not to be taken seriously. Some praise is simply unenthusiastic: *This Rough Magic* is 'literate and readable' whilst *Nine Coaches Waiting* (1958) is 'carefully written, comfortably padded' and 'has *some* tantalising moments'.[36] Of *The Ivy Tree*, Violet Grant states that 'Miss Stewart doesn't penetrate far beneath the skin, but [...] tells a story, in a quiet way, as well as anyone'.[37] Such comments convey a sense of smallness about Stewart's novels; they are characterised as unobtrusive and inconsequential. The most common type of review is that which undercuts any praise it has imparted by including a negative comment in its final sentences. In *Wildfire at Midnight*, for example, 'Miss Stewart manages the suspense sequences cleverly and though some of her people do not come to life, the principals are lively enough to make the reader anxious about their fate', whilst *This Rough Magic* 'may be a little sentimental at times, a little witless in the presentation of some of its characters (especially men), a little

[32] Mitchison, p. 10.
[33] Mary Stott, 'Violence...and Love at Second Sight', *Daily Mail*, 15 July 1976, p. 7.
[34] Maurice Richardson, 'Crime Ration', *Observer*, 6 March 1955, p. 8; Maurice Richardson, 'Crime Ration', *Observer*, 6 March 1960, p. 19.
[35] 'Novels in Brief', *Observer*, 26 July 1964, p. 26; Maurice Richardson, 'Crime Ration', *Observer*, 18 March 1956, p. 17.
[36] 'Short Reports', *Sunday Times*, 26 July 1964, p. 35; Maurice Richardson, 'Crime Ration', *Observer*, 23 November 1958, p.12; A.P.D., 'Novels in Brief', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 November 1958, p.15. My emphasis.
[37] Grant, 'Latest Thrillers'.

patronising about the 'simple beauty' of the Greeks; but it keeps one awake through the long night's journey into day'.[38] Although the severity of criticism is more pronounced in the second example, I note that the result is the same for each: the reviews are imbued with an apologetic quality, as if the reviewers are aware that these texts are somehow inherently unworthy of praise. This is more readily apparent in other reviews. For example, Francis Iles concludes his review of *The Moonspinners* by noting that it features 'a heroine who is by no means the usual nit-wit of such tales'.[39] In doing so he is explicitly drawing attention to his own awareness that this type of novel – and its female protagonist – is ordinarily not taken seriously; by denigrating the romantic thriller genre as a whole, he reduces his risk of appearing to endorse the lowbrow.

The tendency of reviewers to temper their positive reviews of Stewart's work is partly a symptom, I argue, of the still prevalent sense in the 1950s and 1960s that genre fiction is not serious literature. However, I also argue that it is more precisely connected to Stewart's gender. This is illustrated by a comparison of Stewart's reviews with Fleming's. Whilst reviewers of Stewart criticise her work whilst ostensibly praising it, reviewers of Fleming do the opposite. Julian Symons, for example, ends his review of *Diamonds are Forever* (1956) by stating that 'the flashes of good observation, the knowledgeable asides, and the exciting passages *are few*'; Symons here emphasises the positive qualities of Fleming's writing, even while stating that, in this case, they are absent.[40] Similarly, of *Dr No* (1958), Philip Stead states that 'Mr Fleming's mastery of the Secret Service thriller has encouraged him to offer too opulent a feast'; Stead does not like *Dr No*, but admits this only while acknowledging Fleming's 'mastery' of his genre.[41] Fleming is frequently allowed to get away with crimes for which Stewart is roundly criticised. Like many female writers, she is often condemned for unrealistic plots which bear little resemblance to real life: one reviewer notes that 'there is something irritating about the very neatness with which she collects all the loose ends'.[42] However, Fleming is positively celebrated for his preposterous storylines: 'the plots are outrageous – yes, but [...] Fleming knows what he's talking about', and he 'shrug[s] off all trifling concern with probability'.[43] Where Stewart is accused of using 'too many of the old clichés of human thriller-behaviour' and characters who are 'nauseatingly nice

[38] Benedict Nightingale, 'Smother Love', *Guardian*, 17 July 1964, p.5; Stead, 'Making Crime Pay'.
[39] Francis Iles, 'Criminal Records', *Guardian*, 7 December 1962, p. 9.
[40] Julian Gustave Symons, 'Contemporary Pictures', *TLS*, 27 April 1956, p. 251. My emphasis.
[41] Philip John Stead, 'Old Tricks', *TLS*, 11 April 1958, p.193.
[42] 'Short Reports', p.35.
[43] Julian Symons, 'Enough to Make Sapper Turn Over...', *Sunday Times*, 26 March 1961, p. 27; Philip Day, 'Welcome Bondage', *Sunday Times*, 1 May 1955, p. 5.

and wooden and unreal', Fleming is praised for 'the lightheartedness, almost amounting to mockery, with which [he] uses the stock situations and stock characters of the thriller'.[44] It is assumed that 'his tongue [is] in his cheek however unobviously'.[45] Whilst this may be true of Fleming, what is significant is that there is no suggestion in the reviews that Stewart might also be experimenting with the conventions of the genre(s) in which she works. Symons further excuses the lack of realism in Fleming's work by stating 'Bond's appeal is that he expresses the fantasies about power and sexual fulfilment felt by many who live under the twin shadows of communism and the hydrogen bomb'.[46] The argument that Bond constitutes an appropriate hero for mid-twentieth-century (male) readers is one that is often made, and this is seen to excuse the fantastical nature of his portrayal. I argue that this reflects the privileging of masculinity in literature: if the Bond novels – in which female characters are secretaries and/or sex-objects, and almost invariably end up dead – act out a fantasy of 'power and sexual fulfilment', it is certainly a masculine fantasy.

The commercial success of Stewart's novels, then, represents a threat to that privilege. In effort to combat this, many reviews attempt to undermine Stewart by focusing unnecessary attention on her appearance. Much attention is paid to her physical attractiveness: one reviewer describes her as 'a handsome middle-aged woman', whilst another states that 'Mary Stewart's photographs never do her justice. She is tall and very pretty, with a beautiful complexion and striking grey-blue eyes'.[47] These descriptions undermine Stewart's cultural status as writer by reasserting that, as a woman, she is first and foremost a sexual object. There are no corresponding descriptions of Fleming's appearance. Similarly, there are no references to Fleming's wife, Anne Charteris, whilst the fact that Stewart's husband 'is the distinguished geologist Professor Frederick Stewart' is often repeated.[48] Celia Haddon, for example, states that Stewart is 'married to Sir Frederick Stewart, a distinguished geologist whose *Who's Who* entry outruns hers by two lines', whilst Hemmings asserts that 'it's odds on that Mrs Stewart's husband is the most heavily taxed professor of geology in the country'.[49] Here there is a perceived underlying

[44] Francis Iles, 'Crime Corner', *Sunday Times*, 8 April 1956, p. 5; Margaret Forster, 'Lady Novelists', *Sunday Times*, 5 September 1965, p. 40; Philip Day, 'Unbreakable Bond', *Sunday Times*, 4 April 1954, p. 5.
[45] Raymond Mortimer, 'James Bond and the Admass Daydream', *Sunday Times*, 31 March 1963, p. 28.
[46] Julian Gustave Symons, 'The End of the Affair', *TLS*, 12 April 1957, p. 230.
[47] Davies; Philippa Toomey, 'The Three R's of Mary Stewart: Reading, Writing, and a Rolls-Royce', *Times*, 18 June 1973, p. 10.
[48] Davies.
[49] Haddon; Hemmings, p. 698.

competetivism between the couple, and both reviews serve to reassert the authority of Frederick Stewart over his wife: Haddon implies that his cultural significance exceeds that of Stewart, if only 'by two lines', whilst Hemmings subtly reassigns Stewart's personal monetary earnings to her husband. This betrays a sense of unease associated with the idea of women as independent professionals: discreet reassertions of her husband's dominance serve to compensate for the discomfort which results from the idea that Stewart – a woman – may be self-sufficient. The same effect results from the many references to her domestic proficiencies: according to Hemmings, 'she likes to throw small dinner parties; she enjoys good food and its preparation and is an expert on the subject', whilst Haddon notes that her 'soot-blackened house in Edinburgh [...] is so well-arranged that every room looks beautiful'.[50] Meanwhile, Philippa Toomey is keen to report that 'she runs her pleasant stone-built house in the south-west of Edinburgh herself, does the cooking and shopping [...] writes until six [...] and gets dinner for her husband at seven'.[51] These references to Stewart's domestic arrangements place her firmly within the traditionally female realm of the domestic. Like the references to her husband and her physical appearance, they seek to emphasise her position as a woman over her status as a writer – to reinforce her femininity in light of her espousal of a supposedly unfeminine profession.

The most explicit example of a reviewer attempting to relocate Stewart and her work to the domestic is Hemmings' review, which is entitled 'Mary Queen of Hearts', a reference to the positioning of Stewart as a romance novelist, but also alluding to that nursery rhyme figure famous for making tarts.[52] A metaphor of cooking-as-writing is used throughout the review: Hemmings asserts that 'it is no condescension to say that Mary Stewart confects her books with the same loving care one imagines her devoting to the delicacies of the kitchen'.[53] He argues that 'the novels are nearly all concocted to a formula, or if you like, *baked* according to a *recipe*', and that it is 'the attractiveness of her basic *ingredients*' which makes Stewart so successful, though 'there must be a judicious variation in *blending*' with each new offering 'to prevent custom stalling'.[54] Rather bizarrely, he concludes by comparing Stewart's work with '*lasagne al forno*';

[50] Haddon; Hemmings, p. 698.
[51] Toomey.
[52] 'The Queen of Hearts/She made some tarts/All on a summer's day'. From 'The Queen of Hearts', first published in *The European Magazine*, 1:4 (1782).
[53] Hemmings, p. 698.
[54] Hemmings, p. 698. My emphases.

both, apparently, 'do not pretend to offer anything but delight'.[55] The reasoning behind Hemming's frequent culinary references reveals itself within his discussion of Stewart's novels. He describes the typical Stewart protagonist as 'no professional, [who] goes about the job [of solving the mystery] with entirely credible timidity and occasional ineptitude'.[56] This constitutes a gross misreading of Stewart's protagonists, and Hemmings' assertion that women being timid and inept in the face of uncertainty is 'credible' reflects more on his own values than on Stewart's work. He goes on: 'when it comes to the crunch they [the heroines] have to let the men take over; and the man is suffered to read them a quietly crushing lecture on the proper place of women in the scheme of things'.[57] Hemmings then quotes a short extract – with no reference to context – from *My Brother Michael*, in which Simon admonishes Camilla for putting herself in unnecessary danger. What is telling is that Hemmings is citing these qualities as a positive aspect of Stewart's work; he views the representation of female characters who are rescued and rebuked by men as something which should be celebrated. It should be of little surprise, therefore, that his review of Stewart's work constitutes an attempt to remind readers of what he believes is her 'proper place [...] in the scheme of things': the kitchen.

Stewart's gender significantly effects the way her work is discussed by reviewers. A sense of tension with regards to literary value can be traced throughout the reviews of Stewart's novels: by focusing on the physical production and economic value of the novels, the reviewers imply that they are manufactured as opposed to created, emphasising their position in the literary landscape. Similarly, the half-hearted or irreverent language reviewers use implies that these are not novels which should be taken seriously, whilst a tendency to undercut praise with criticism betrays an eagerness to display their awareness that these novels are low value, and to reassure readers that they recognise this. These tendencies are far more common in reviews of Stewart's work than reviews of Fleming's. I argue that this is as a result of the privileging of a masculine perspective in terms of assigning literary value (as I discuss in more detail in Chapter One). Because her commercial success constitutes a threat to this privileging, Stewart's gender is frequently used to undermine or distract from her work in her reviews, with abundant references to her physical appearance, domestic arrangements, and husband: 'Mary Stewart is the wife of Professor Frederick Smith of the Geology Department of Edinburgh University', and

[55] Hemmings, p. 699.
[56] Hemmings, p. 698.
[57] Hemmings, p. 698.

has recently purchased a deep freeze 'to hold Professor Smith's home-cooked meals while she is away'.[58] This is an indicative example of a reviewer emphasising Stewart's role as wife and homemaker, even whilst discussing her work as a writer. However, there is a telling mistake here; Stewart's husband is, of course, Frederick Stewart, not Smith. I read this as an inadvertent acknowledgement of the actual irrelevance of this information: it makes no difference who Stewart's husband is. Unfortunately, this fact does not stop Stewart's gender impacting the way she is discussed and perceived. This thesis shows how Stewart's novels display an awareness of the gender politics surrounding literary value: they metafictively reflect on the context into which they are created, in doing so challenging the structures which are put in place to determine hierarchies of literary value.

'Betwixt and Between': The Middlebrow in the Mid-Twentieth Century

In her 1966 overview of the state of the English thriller, Marghanita Laski takes for granted a distinction between 'literature' and 'fiction' – the former term serving as a value judgement, the latter simply a description of form. Laski states that in spite of 'the angry misery of those who want the novel to be literature or nothing', the novel as fiction has 'flourished continuously', a fact to which the wide selection of high-quality thrillers published in the mid-sixties testifies (Laski cites Stewart as a key novelist in the 'romantic thriller' sub-genre).[59] I argue that Laski's description of the thriller, which emphasises the notions of writing as craft and reading as pleasure, connects the genre to the 'middlebrow', a category which Virginia Woolf characterises as existing in a space 'betwixt and between' highbrow, elevated literature on the one hand, and popular lowbrow fiction on the other.[60] In this section I discuss how the notion of 'middlebrow' developed as a derogatory term in the mid-twentieth-century British literary landscape, and how it has since been adopted as a category for critical consideration. Whilst critical accounts of the battle-of-the-brows see it ending in the mid-late 1950s, I argue that Stewart's work and its reviews throughout the 50s and 60s with their accompanying references to her domesticity, serve as evidence that these debates were still taking place well into the second half of the twentieth century.[61] Scholars of the middlebrow suggest that a metafictive self-interest should be

[58] Mitchison, p. 10.
[59] Marghanita Laski, 'Fiction and Literature', *TLS*, 6 October 1966, p. 919.
[60] Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1970), p 185.
[61] Nicola Humble ends her study of the middlebrow in the 1950s; Erica Brown and Mary Grover end their focus

understood as a crucial component in our understanding of the middlebrow novel, especially the feminine middlebrow novel, in this period and beyond. Stewart's novels' frequent metafictive self-reflection on their position within a hierarchy of literature, and on the generic conventions from which they are constructed, are characteristics which firmly locate her within the category of the middlebrow.

The term 'middlebrow' may be applied to a person, or to a cultural artefact, such as a book, film, or play, as well as the modes through which those artefacts, and awareness of those artefacts, are disseminated, such as book subscription services, radio programs, or newspaper columns. I discuss below the origins of the term in the twentieth century, but do note that passing scholarly interest in the middlebrow as a category for critical consideration arguably begins in the early 1980s with Nicola Beauman's study of the interwar woman's novel, and continues in the work, for example, of John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, and in Alison Light's study of Agatha Christie, Ivy Compton-Burnett, du Maurier, and Jan Struther in the early 1990s.[62] Whilst these do refer to the term middlebrow, it is usually in passing, and with little or no dissection of its implications. Since Nicola Humble's seminal 2001 study of the feminine middlebrow from the 1920s to 1950s, however, there has been increased interest – evidenced in the work of, for example, Faye Hammill, Erica Brown, Mary Grover, and Ina Habermann – in the notion of middlebrow as a specific critical category, with explicit discussion of how this category might be defined and understood, as well as how gender, class, and nationality function within and in relation to it. Middlebrow is not a genre: it is not, for the most part, a category that novelists explicitly or consciously write into. Rather, it is a term imposed upon works by external parties; by reviewers, publishers, readers, other writers, and, of course, by literary scholars. Furthermore, as Baxendale and Pawling have stated, the term 'middlebrow' is 'not part of a precise literary vocabulary, but emerges from a particular cultural discourse which itself lacks rigour': the particular criteria for judging a book as low-, high-, or middlebrow are never explicitly laid out because 'the whole point is that readers are supposed to share them already'.[63] As such, determining which works fall into the category of middlebrow is potentially problematic.

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on the same in the 1960s.

[62] See: Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession* (1983); John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties* (1996); Alison Light, *Forever England* (1991).

[63] John Baxendale and Chris Pawling, *Narrating the Thirties: A Decade in the Making, 1930 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 49, 51.

Loosely, the term can be applied to works which, as Victoria Stewart states, 'would not align themselves, or be aligned by critics, with either high-modernism or genre fiction' – 'intellectually unchallenging' but not entirely unstimulating.[64] Stewart gestures towards a tension here about who it is that decides how texts should be categorised; whether this is something which is inherent in the text, or something which is externally applied by critics. These 'alignments' are subject to change: Humble points out, for example, that whilst writers such as Elizabeth Bowen and Rose Macaulay may once have fallen into the category of middlebrow, they have more recently also been 'co-opted into a newly feminised modernist history'.[65] Although she does suggest that the feminine middlebrow novel in the mid-twentieth century is 'united by shared generic features and ideological preoccupations' (namely establishing new class and gender identities after the First World War), Humble argues that the parameters of the middlebrow are ultimately decided by factors which are external to the texts: by who is reading them (the middle class) and by how they are read (for pleasure).[66] This notion of pleasure is crucial: the middlebrow is characterised by a style of reading which is completely distinct from the highbrow emphasis on solemn erudition. Again, though, these factors are far from stable: one text may be read by individuals from different classes, for both work and for pleasure. 'Middlebrow', then, is an inherently slippery term. Nonetheless, as a category for critical consideration it has thus far proved fruitful, and this thesis opens it up to further lines of inquiry in thinking about value, genre, history, and in examining its metafictive self-reflective tendencies.

The first printed use of the term 'middlebrow' in Britain occurred in *Punch* magazine on 23 December 1925: 'The B.B.C. claim to have discovered a new type, the 'middlebrow'. It consists of people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like'.[67] Here, the middlebrow individual is characterised as aspirational, but also as a phony: it is implied that they are *performing* particular tastes in order to gain acceptance. It is also implied that an actual 'standard' of taste to be used to sort the cultivated from the plebeian really exists.

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[64] Victoria Stewart, 'The Woman Writer in Mid-Twentieth Century Middlebrow Fiction: Conceptualizing Creativity', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 35 (2011), 21-36 (p. 22).
[65] Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 24-25. Since Humble's book was published, yet more authors have been drawn into the modernist orbit.
[66] Nicola Humble, 'Sitting Forward or Sitting Back: Highbrow v. Middlebrow Reading', *Modernist Cultures*, 6 (2011), 41-59.
[67] *Punch*, 23 December 1925, qtd. in 'Middlebrow' in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/252048?redirectedFrom=middlebrow#eid> [accessed 20 June 2016].

The margin for entry into the ranks of the cultivated is therefore slim: it is not enough to simply display an appreciation of the approved cultural products; they must also be appreciated in the correct way, or risk association with what Woolf termed 'the bloodless and pernicious pest, […] the middlebrow'.[68] Woolf's scathing approach to the middlebrow is representative of what is commonly termed the 'battle of the brows'; a period of antagonistic relations between the high- and middlebrows, which Brown and Grover situate as occurring roughly between 1920 and 1960. For Brown and Grover, these antagonistic relations were symptomatic of 'fear of cultural change and hostility to vaguely illegitimate processes of cultural transmission' within the highbrow academy.[69] 'Vaguely illegitimate processes of cultural transmission' essentially constitute processes which were not instigated and actively endorsed by the highbrow elite, who feared that increased access to high culture for the general population, combined with a diversification (over which they had no control) of reading material to incorporate a wider range of tastes, would diminish the cultural authority of the highbrow intelligentsia to the point of irrelevance. Again, the notion of pleasure is crucial here, as this leisurely way of reading undercuts the highbrow emphasis on reading as a serious, studious pursuit. The highbrow responded to these shifts in literary culture by, as Brown and Grover argue, 'attempting to fix the identity of this group of newly aspirant individuals and by homogenizing their supposed tastes'.[70] In doing so, they also homogenised the notion of the middlebrow reader. These were largely assumed to be women, or at least the choice of middlebrow reading material was largely attributed on women: Q. D. Leavis, for example, claims the fact 'that women rather than men change [library] books (that is, determine the family reading)', as an important factor in the 'disintegration of the reading public'.[71] It is taken as read that women's involvement will automatically lower intellectual standards. The characterisation of the middlebrow reader as 'phony' (as per *Punch*) further reinforces the notion of their cultural illegitimacy. By challenging the middlebrow's cultural legitimacy in this way, the highbrow is able to protect its own position of cultural authority.

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[68] Woolf, *The Death of the Moth*, p. 185.
[69] Erica Brown and Mary Grover, 'Introduction: Middlebrow Matters', in *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960*, ed.by Erica Brown and Mary Grover (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1-24 (p. 4).
[70] Brown and Grover, p. 4.
[71] Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 4, 130.

Who, then, were the highbrow elite in the twentieth century? One figure who spoke to highbrow attitudes is Leavis, who, in 1932, argues that, by pandering to popular demand rather than allowing the public to 'receiv[e] their amusement from above', the publishing industry engages in a process of 'levelling down', by substituting less widely enjoyed but more edifying literature with repetitive imitations of those novels which have already proved their popularity, and in doing so 'standardising [literature] at the middlebrow level'.[72] Leavis asserts that the 'commonplace sentiments' pedalled by this 'middling' fiction are at best 'soothing and not disturbing' and at worst encourage 'a habit of fantasying that will lead to maladjustment in actual life': middlebrow fiction is, for Leavis, uninspiring at best and, at worst, dangerous.[73] As a critic and essayist, Leavis's association was with the academy – university lecturers, reviewers, cultural commentators – which remained a relatively stable locus of highbrow opinion throughout the twentieth century.[74] The texts which were perceived as highbrow, though, were subject to change. Throughout the inter-war period, the category of highbrow text is more or less synonymous with what would now be referred to as modernist – those texts which experimented with form and language, exemplified in the works of, for example, Woolf, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot. However, as Rubin Rabinovitz notes 'English writers who first achieved fame, or first began writing, in the 1950s participated in a rejection of experimental forms and a return to a more traditional style'.[75] Indeed, as Raymond Williams points out in 1961, the highbrow returned to the forms it had previously disdained: there was 'a sharp reaction against the methods of Virginia Woolf as between the wars there was a reaction, led by Woolf herself, against the 'realism' of Bennett or Wells'.[76] As the pre-eminence of modernism waned, the highbrow shifted. As with 'middlebrow', then, 'highbrow' is a slippery term, and the individuals and texts with which it is associated shift as the decades progress.

This is not to say that the notion of the highbrow from the 1950s onwards began to resemble the middlebrow works from earlier in the century; the preoccupations of those authors who

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[72] Leavis, pp. 78, 184.
[73] Leavis, pp. 43, 55.
[74] The structure of university English departments changed dramatically in the early part of the twentieth century: whilst previously English as an academic discipline was confined to the study of the history of the English language, in the 1920s and 30s the study of the novel as an art form, influenced by the work of F.R. Leavis (Q.D.'s husband), became more widely spread.
[75] Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction Against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-60* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 2.
[76] Raymond Williams, 'A Changing Social History of English Writing' *Audience*, 76 (1961), qtd. in Rabinovitz, p. 10.

received acclaim from the academy – Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, to name a few – were concerned primarily with working as opposed to middle class narratives, and were decidedly masculine (they were termed 'the angry young men' and wrote exclusively from a male perspective, in which female characters had significance only in terms of their relationship to men),[77] whilst the middlebrow was associated with the feminine, being, 'largely written and consumed by women'.[78] In the middlebrow novel, this change resulted in a movement away from measuring itself against the contemporary highbrow, and towards an investigation of the middlebrow's position in relation to highbrow canonical works (although interrogations of both appear in middlebrow novels from the 1920s onwards).[79] Unlike the fashionable and contemporary highbrow of modernism, these works were those which, to borrow a phrase from Harold Bloom, have long been considered 'authoritative in our culture'.[80] Whilst the contemporary highbrow is transient (as is evidenced by the highbrow rejection of modernism in the 1950s) the canon possesses (at least the illusion of) stable authority. By measuring itself against the canon the middlebrow begins to challenge this stability.

Other scholars have noted the middlebrow's tendency to reference canonical literature. Leavis, for example, characterises middlebrow fiction as 'bring[ing] nothing to the novel but [...] an outworn technique', which contains 'echoes of the Best People of the past', but ultimately lacks any trace of originality.[81] According to Leavis, these echoes of highbrow literature leave the readers of such novels 'with the agreeable sensation of having improved themselves without incurring fatigue'.[82] Leavis argues that references to other literatures within the middlebrow exist purely to cater for readers' bogus desire to feel themselves intellectually minded. Humble offers an alternative view on the 'determined intertextuality' of the middlebrow, stating that 'continual references to other books is [...] one of the key ways in which the women's middlebrow novel establishes itself a distinctive generic identity'.[83] Humble tracks the aspirational reading habits of mid-twentieth-century middlebrow readers as portrayed in the

[77] For more on this see: Michael John Anderson, *Anger and Detachment* (1976); Daniel Lewis, "Say It, Don't Do It': Male Speech and Male Action in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning', *Journal of Men's Studies*, 20 (2012); Linda Hall, 'Sex and Class in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 7 (1984).
[78] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 2.
[79] Measuring against the experimental does not disappear completely, though – see, for example, my reading of *My Brother Michael* in Chapter One.
[80] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and the School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 1.
[81] Leavis, p. 43.
[82] Leavis, p. 44.
[83] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 47.

middlebrow novels of that period. The references range from children's fiction to highbrow poetry, 'encompassing many genres of literature, and combining high and lowbrow interests in a daring disregard for conventional judgements'.[84] For Humble, these intertextual moments do more than provide an easy fulfilment of their readers' intellectual aspirations: they constitute the framework within which middlebrow fiction defines its parameters within the cultural and literary landscape of the twentieth century. Victoria Stewart also explores self-reflexivity in the middlebrow novel. In her work on E. F. Benson's *Secret Lives* (1932), Elizabeth Taylor's *Angel* (1957) and Mary Renault's *The Friendly Young Ladies* (1944), she explores how these novels 'reflect on and indeed depict the creative process in their work' and how in doing so they contribute 'to debates about creativity, reader-author relations and the protean identity of the female writer'.[85] Similarly, Hammill reads Stella Gibbons' *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932) as 'a sophisticated parody', which, 'in the complex attitudes it evinces toward cultural hierarchy, [...] reflects on its own status'.[86] I argue that this metafictive self-reflexivity is a common concern of the novels which are now broadly positioned as middlebrow, and in this thesis I demonstrate how Stewart's novels similarly interrogate notions of literary value. Humble, Victoria Stewart, and Hammill all present readings in which middlebrow novels self-consciously work to 'dramatise their own cultural status[es]'.[87] However, none of them describe this as metafictive. I argue that to do so is important and useful: this has the effect of uniting these moments of self-reflection under one term, allowing us to better understand it as a feature which occurs throughout the feminine middlebrow novel.

Humble's study of the feminine middlebrow ends in the mid-1950s, a time in which she notes 'a valedictory note in the middlebrow women's novels [...] as many of the fundamental concerns of the fiction are overtaken by changing historical circumstance'.[88] Stewart's first novel was published in 1954, which, according to Humble's timeline, would place her (just) outside of the middlebrow category. However, I agree with Beth Driscoll's assertion that, rather than being confined to one cultural moment, the middlebrow is 'a deep-rooted, widespread cultural

[84] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 8.
[85] Stewart, 'The Woman Writer', p. 21.
[86] Faye Hammill, *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture Between the Wars* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), pp. 154, 155.
[87] Hammill, p. 288.
[88] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 4 [in footnote 7].

formation, with an influence that extends to the present'.[89] Many middlebrow novelists who were writing during the category's inter-war 'height' continued to publish well into the second half of the twentieth century: Gibbons' last novel, for example, was published in 1970, as too was du Maurier's, who also went on to publish a collection of short stories in 1980. Compton-Burnett's posthumous last novel appeared in 1971, Taylor's also posthumously in 1976, and Dodie Smith's in 1978. I argue that Stewart's novels, which can be comfortably located within Humble's 'broad working definition' of the middlebrow novel – which exists in the intervening space between the trashy genre novel on the one hand and the 'philosophically or formally challenging' on the other – represent a continuation of the middlebrow into the second half of the twentieth century.[90] Hammill's assertion that 'the middlebrow provide[s] a vantage point from which high culture, popular culture, and middlebrow culture itself [can] be critically observed' applies to Stewart's novels as much as it does to the works of Gibbons, Delafield, and Margaret Kennedy which Hammill discusses.[91] In their constant metafictive self-reflexivity, Stewart's novels work – as, according to Humble, does the middlebrow in general – 'to affirm and renegotiate [their] own values in the face of cultural challenges from all directions'.[92] This process of critical observation and self-reflection constitutes a significant metafictive streak in the twentieth-century feminine middlebrow.

Fiction upon (Meta)Fiction: Feminist, Historiographic, 'Soft'

I argue that the mid-twentieth-century feminine middlebrow novel is characterised, in part, by its use of metafictive devices. 'Metafiction' describes fiction that self-consciously acknowledges its status as created literary artefact. The term has been attributed to William Gass, who stated in 1970 that 'many of the so-called anti-novels are really metafiction'.[93] Gass refers to the novels of Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth and Flann O'Brien, which he describes as works 'in which the forms of fiction serve as the material on which further forms can be imposed'.[94] The image here

[89] Beth Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), p. 8.
[90] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 11.
[91] Hammill, p.12.
[92] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 21.
[93] William Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 25. The term 'anti-novel' was coined by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1948, and refers to novels that reject the accepted conventions of their genre, instead seeking to establish their own, new conventions.
[94] Gass, p. 25.

of fiction upon fiction speaks to the idea of metafiction reflecting on its own nature; fiction which is about fiction, or which fictionalises the process of its own creation, in doing so acknowledging its constructed-ness. I argue that the metafiction in Stewart's work, and within the middlebrow more generally, is a 'soft' metafiction; one which does not explicitly proclaim its created-ness, but which nonetheless is involved in a process of reflecting on the conditions of its own production. This soft metafiction, which I discuss in more detail below, shares characteristics with both feminist and historiographic metafiction, in that it frequently works to challenge the position of woman writers in relation to the masculinised canon, and is interested in reflecting on the relationship between the construction of text and the communication of history. Soft metafiction proves that the use of metafictive devices are not confined to postmodernism. Rather, soft metafictive techniques enable middlebrow novels in the twentieth century to reflect on the value-judgements surrounding them, and to investigate the generic elements out of which they are created.

Metafiction works to disrupt the distinction between life and art: as Patricia Waugh argues, it 'pose[s] questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text'.[95] By self-consciously acknowledging the artificiality inherent within themselves, metafictions demand consideration of the potential artificiality which exists beyond the confines of literary text. In doing so, they can serve as tools to challenge and unpick societal structures and hierarchies. This can occur in a number of ways: works might draw attention to their status as constructed text by directly addressing their readers, or by featuring characters which attempt to communicate with their author and in doing so influence events within the narrative. Meanwhile, overly complicated, unrealistic plots draw attention to their own artificiality and the insertion of features such as footnotes continue the story whilst simultaneously commenting on it. This is what Luigi Cazzato refers to as 'hard metafiction': novels which '*overtly* expose their fictionality to expose their 'real' reality'.[96] He contrasts this with 'soft metafiction', which he describes as 'only *covertly* hint[ing] at its fictionality and constructedness'.[97] Monika Fludernik

[95] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 2.
[96] Luigi Cazzato, 'Hard Metafiction and the Return of the Author-Subject: The Decline of Postmodernism?', in *Postmodern Subjects/Postmodern Texts*, ed. by Jane Dowson and Steven Earnshaw (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 17-34 (pp. 20-21) Google ebook. My emphasis.
[97] Cazzato, pp. 19-20.

also explores this distinction, explaining that 'rather than contravening the rules of realism directly, [soft metafictions] obstruct the readers' attempt at narrativization on a more general interpretive level'.[98] Stewart's works do not contain characters attempting to communicate with their author, footnotes, or overtly complex and unrealistic plots. However, in her novels, as I discuss in this thesis, episodes depicting the processes of reading and writing reinforce the novels' literary context, and combinations of different generic techniques serve to critique the assumptions frequently associated with different genres. Stewart's novels use soft metafictive techniques to reflect upon their literary context, and, in doing so, interrogate the structures which shape it.

A major function of the soft metafictive features in Stewart's work is an investigation into the place of the middlebrow novel by women within the wider context of the masculine western canon of literature. In this way, I argue, soft metafiction shares characteristics with feminist metafiction – defined by Gayle Greene as fiction about women writing fiction. Greene argues that, despite the masculine associations that result from its connection to postmodernism, metafiction is a 'powerful tool of feminist critique' because 'to draw attention to the structures of fiction is also to draw attention to the conventionality of the codes that govern human behaviour'.[99] By highlighting the constructedness of fiction, feminist metafiction gestures towards the constructedness of the patriarchal structures which define women's position within society, and thus to the possibility of changing them. Greene states that part of the way woman writers challenge these structures is through the 'use of metafiction to challenge the cultural and literary tradition they inherit'.[100] I argue that a similar process characterises the soft metafictive qualities of the feminine middlebrow novel in the mid-twentieth century: as I will show, novelists such as Stewart use metafictive techniques to measure themselves against, and to challenge, the masculine highbrow and canon. In contrast to Greene, who argues that metafiction in women's writing emerges with the second wave feminist movement in the late twentieth century, Joan Douglas Peters argues that feminist metafiction is not necessarily confined to writing by women, and has been 'revising and regenerating the novel from its beginnings'.[101] Peters shows that feminist metafiction works throughout pre-twentieth-century

[98] Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 274.
[99] Gayle Greene, *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 1-2.
[100] Greene, p. 2.
[101] Joan Douglas Peters, *Feminist Metafiction and the Evolution of the British Novel* (Gainesville: University Press of

novels by men and women, such as Daniel Defoes's *Moll Flanders* (1722), Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), and *Jane Eyre*. In this thesis, I offer a nuanced view of Greene and Peters' positions: I agree with Greene's assertion that feminist metafiction culminates in a specific literary and cultural moment in the 1970s and 1980s, and that it should be considered as significant a movement for study in that era as postmodernism. I also agree with Peters' assertion that metafictions which investigate the position of the woman writer predate this era, though I would add that these do not cohere into the recognizable form which Greene terms feminist metafiction until the later twentieth century. I argue that soft metafiction in the twentieth century is a precursor to this, the final stage in the evolution of feminist metafiction, if you will. Like feminist metafiction, soft metafiction is involved in an investigation of women's place within and alongside the masculine canon. However, whilst feminist metafiction (emphasis is here on 'feminist') regularly extends this interest to examine the position of women within society, soft metafiction (emphasis here is on 'fiction') extends its interest to explore ideas concerning the nature and purpose of written text in general.

As well as sharing feminist metafiction's preoccupation with woman writers and their relationship to the masculine canon, soft metafiction is interested in the relationship between text and history. Linda Hutcheon coined the term 'historiographic metafiction' to describe fictions which are simultaneously and paradoxically involved in an inward-facing preoccupation with their own form and createdness and an outward-facing desire to locate themselves firmly within a recognised historical context, stating that the category's 'theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs [...] is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past'.[102] Historiographic metafiction exposes the potential fictionality of history: by exposing its own createdness, it reminds us that as all history is textual, all history is subject to influence from its writers. Hutcheon cites John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) as examples. All of these are by male authors and, while Hutcheon does briefly discuss the use of historiographic metafiction amongst women writers, for the most part her explanation of the category is one that is grounded in the postmodern (and largely the masculine). More recently, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llwellyn have explored the presence of historiographic metafiction in writing by women, arguing that 'it is in part by reclaiming

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Florida, 2002), p. 2.

[102] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 5.

historical events and personages as subjects and participants in contemporary fictional accounts that woman writers can begin to assert a sense of historical location'.[103] Heilmann and Llwellyn speak to a shared interest between historiographic and feminist metafiction. Soft metafiction also shares this interest. However, I argue that where soft metafiction can be distinguished from the historiographic and the feminist is in its interest in the structures that decide literary value beyond gender (for example, as I discuss in Chapter One, commerciality) and its focus on text as a communicator of personal as well as national history.

The soft metafiction I describe is specific to women's middlebrow fiction in the mid-twentieth century. Hammill states that 'it is important to recognise the forms of stylistic experimentation which middlebrow writers engaged in, and which are often overlooked because they do not correspond to the experimental strategies of high modernism'.[104] I hope that by uncovering the use of metafiction in the middlebrow, I take part in the recuperative project which Hammill here calls for. Metafiction is frequently identified with postmodernism and is more commonly associated with male writers. It is true that many postmodern novels do employ metafictive techniques, and that the linguistic discourse with which we describe these has largely been created in response to such works. One might argue that applying the terminology of highbrow (and masculine) postmodernism to the (feminine) middlebrow novel is self-defeating: why shoehorn in a theory that does not wholly fit? Is it not better to examine the strategies of the middlebrow novel in their own context(s)? However, metafiction is not confined to the postmodern; often-cited examples of metafictive novels predating postmodernism are Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1604) and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759). The example of feminist metafiction, which I discuss above, also serves to illustrate this. I argue, then, that in drawing attention to the category of soft metafiction within the middlebrow, I am taking part in a broader project to extract metafiction from the postmodern context within which it is ordinarily considered, and to show that it is a manner of expression which constitutes an important aspect within many literary groupings and categories. I position soft metafiction somewhere between historiographic and feminist metafiction: whilst it shares historiographic metafiction's interest in the construction of history, it expresses this in a less overtly experimental manner. Although it shares feminist metafiction's preoccupation with the place of

[103] Ann Heilmann and Mark Llwellyn, 'Introduction', in *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing*, ed. by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llwellyn, pp.1-12 (p.2).
[104] Hammill, p. 6.

woman writers within and alongside the masculine canon, it is not grounded in the ideas of second wave feminism, and therefore cannot be considered part of that particular cultural category (although it does exist as a precursor to it). Combined with these interests in history and women's place within it is, as I discuss in Chapter One, a particular preoccupation with notions of literary value and how literature is categorised and defined. By suggesting that soft metafiction is a category with particular relevance to the mid-twentieth-century middlebrow, I demonstrate that notions of literary value not only help to define the middlebrow externally, but also function within the middlebrow, gesturing towards the notion of a middlebrow which is, to some extent, self-defining.

Thesis Structure

In Chapter One, I consider the representation of women writers and demonstrate their struggle to succeed in a field historically dominated by men. I discuss how Stewart investigates the relationship between low- and middlebrow texts and the highbrow, and how this is impacted by gender, in *Nine Coaches Waiting*, *This Rough Magic*, *My Brother Michael*, and *The Wind off the Small Isles*. Through the relationship of out-of-work actress Lucy Waring and celebrated thespian Julian Gale, *This Rough Magic* explores the relationship of middlebrow woman writers in the twentieth century with canonical giants such as Shakespeare. In *My Brother Michael*, aspiring writer Camilla Long's access to Western literary history is metaphorically restricted by her inability to speak the Greek language – an inability that is related to her sex. In *Nine Coaches Waiting*, Léon de Valmy is presented as a reader of highbrow literature, whilst governess Linda Martin reads a wide range of texts indiscriminate of their supposed literary value. However, contrary to assumptions made by Leavis in the 1930s, which stated that overconsumption of low- and middlebrow literatures would leave readers unable to relate to reality, it is Léon whose reading has rendered him psychologically unstable. *The Wind off the Small Isles* presents a tension between Cora Gresham – a highly successful author of children's books – and James Blair – a famous playwright. Despite the fact that both writers are extremely successful in their own fields, Cora displays resentment towards the inequality with which she and James are treated: whilst he is considered a serious artist, her work is viewed merely as a commercial product. I argue, however, that this text ultimately shows these inequalities to be absurd: through its themes of repurposing and repetition, it demonstrates the inherent relatedness of all literature. All of the novels discussed in

this chapter engage with debates surrounding the notion of literary value, in doing so defending the reading of middlebrow fiction and challenging the under-privileged position of women within the masculinised canon.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the use of genre in *Madam, Will You Talk?*, *The Moonspinners*, *Airs Above the Ground*, and *Thunder on the Right*. I argue that, in these novels, the merging and manipulation of generic conventions – such as romance, fairytale, crime, and the gothic – raises questions about gender, sex, and power. I examine how femininity and masculinity function in the novels, and discuss how these representations problematise the assumptions about gender that are ordinarily associated with particular genres. *Madam, Will You Talk?* undercuts the widely-held view of romance heroines as weak and passive, as its protagonist, Charity Selborne, wields sexual dominance over the villain, Paul Véry. Similarly, *Thunder on the Right* inverts the stereotype of the fairytale hero in order to reimagine Sleeping Beauty as an independent and active figure, who is able to storm her own castle, unaided by Prince Charming. *The Moonspinners* queries the romance novel's conventional happy ending by showing the potential misery of marriage to a domineering man. *Airs Above the Ground* – in which Vanessa March realises that her husband Lewis has been keeping significant secrets from her – draws on the conventional gothic theme of the uncanniness of marriage and the powerlessness of wives who realise their husbands are unknowable. However, Vanessa breaks out of this prescribed cycle by adopting, as in international spy fiction, the role of lead investigator, uncovering her husband's other life and, in doing so, saving her marriage. All of these novels self-consciously evoke a wide-range of generic conventions in order to complicate or challenge the gender assumptions with which they are usually associated. In doing so, I argue, they demonstrate the enormous potential for imaginative diversity – of plot, and of character – within genre.

I discuss Stewart's use of intertextuality in Chapter Three. Focusing on *The Ivy Tree*, *Wildfire at Midnight*, *The Gabriel Hounds* (1967) and *Touch Not the Cat*, I show how the novels metafictively reflect on the nature of texts and their function in relation to history (both personal and national), memory, and identity. Intertextuality is characterised in *The Ivy Tree* as the trace remnants of old text in new: the novel alludes to Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and du Maurier's *Rebecca*, and draws out the similarities between them. *The Ivy Tree* explores the interrelatedness of text, memory, and identity to show that the self is textual: as is demonstrated by Annabel Winslow's

self-impersonation, the self is constructed and can be rewritten and performed, whilst retaining traces of its previous manifestations. Meanwhile, *Wildfire at Midnight* explores the space in which text, history, and reality meet: the novel is linked intertextually with Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), which is itself based on real historical events. By naming its protagonist after the historical figure rather than Scott's tragic heroine, *Wildfire at Midnight* draws attention to the fallibility of historical record, and the ability of text to distort the truth of historical events. In *The Gabriel Hounds* the boundaries of past and present, reality and fiction, are similarly blurred as Harriet Mansel transforms her Lebanon mansion into an Arabian Nights palace, and herself into the historical figure of Lady Hester Stanhope. Finally, I explore the representation of text as an uncanny space in *Touch Not the Cat*, in which text in its many forms – including diaries, legal documents and poetry – possesses the ability to transcend the boundary between life and death, as it allows the dead members of the Ashley family to communicate with and influence their living relatives. In all of these novels, text is shown to be a powerful force, which, by lending a physical presence to past events, possesses the ability to transcend the boundaries of life and death, history and fiction, and reality and fantasy.

This thesis nuances current critical perceptions of the mid-twentieth-century middlebrow novel, a novel form which, I argue, is characterised in part by a self-conscious investigation of its position within the parameters of highbrow literature and popular fiction. As a critical category which is defined by its relation to literary value, I argue that works by women which are considered to be middlebrow are inherently self-reflective and metafictive, seeking to discreetly undermine the hierarchical structures which attempt to contain them. I adopt the term 'soft metafiction', building on its previous use by Cazzato, to describe this; as opposed to 'hard' metafiction, which explicitly and insistently proclaims its self-awareness, soft-metafiction is involved in an understated, often sub-textual, exploration of its status as text. I argue that Stewart's work is characterised by frequent use of intertextual reference and metafictive reflection on the nature and purpose of text as a concept. Throughout, I demonstrate Stewart's interest in the various ways that text is categorised: generically, hierarchically and canonically. In doing so, I demonstrate that Stewart is more than, as one reviewer writes, 'a dispenser of blameless dreams': rather, her novels are intellectually searching, self-aware works, with a serious interest in their wider literary context.[105] By mapping Stewart's work in terms of the

[105] Philip Norman, 'Fiction', *Times*, 7 June 1973, p. 14.

soft-metafictive, I open this term up as a wider area for study within the middlebrow, and prompt a recalibration of critical understandings of the British fiction marketplace in the mid-twentieth century.

CHAPTER ONE

'Snob Value': Woman Writers, Literary Value, and the Middlebrow

All of Stewart's novels are rich in reference to other texts: most possess titles and epigraphs taken from a range of literary sources, and many of their plots are influenced by other works. When asked about these allusions in her 1991 interview for the television program 'Off the Page', Stewart ponders whether they possess 'a little bit of sort of snob value', as they allow those readers who recognise them to 'preen' themselves for identifying the reference.[1] She also states: 'when I first started writing novels [...] it was almost like writing an essay, I felt I had to quote about every second paragraph just to show I'd read the stuff'.[2] Stewart here demonstrates an awareness of the value connected to these allusions: they act as a symbolic gateway into an exclusive group, one which is characterised by a superior knowledge and understanding of literature. Stewart describes feeling that she needed to prove her worth to this group; that she was required to demonstrate a particular level of literary awareness in order to earn her title as a particular kind of writer. However, the implied seriousness with which Stewart takes this is undercut by her use of the phrase 'the stuff', as well as by her assertion that the literary epigraphs she includes in each novel are 'just for fun. [They're] like the icing on the cake, [and she] always enjoy[s] looking [them] out'.[3] Stewart associates her literary allusions with pleasure, something which, as I discuss, undermines their literary value as it is calculated by the highbrow. This mixed attitude towards literary value is characteristic of Stewart's work: I argue that a complex negotiation of cultural capital and canonicity can be read throughout her oeuvre. With a focus on *Nine Coaches Waiting*, *This Rough Magic*, *My Brother Michael* and *The Wind off the Small Isles*, this chapter discusses the representation and exploration of the concept of literary value in Stewart's work. I show how these novels work to undermine the notion of the canon and redefine traditional notions of literary value, as well as reflect upon the challenges faced by woman writers. In doing so they metafictively consider their own position within the literary landscape.

[1] 'Off the Page'.
[2] 'Off the Page'.
[3] 'Off the Page'.

What do I mean when I use the term 'value' in relation to literature? The definition provided by the OED firmly situates the term within an economic context: '1.a. the *material* or *monetary* worth of something', '2.a. the equivalent *monetary* worth of a specified sum or amount', '3.a. a standard of *estimation* or *exchange*'.[4] However, the etymology of the term – from the French '*valu*' – opens its definition out to a wider range of interpretive possibilities. True, it is still associated with 'material worth' and 'price', but also, in the Anglo-Norman, 'social standing', and, in the thirteenth century, 'reputation' and 'personal merit'.[5] These latter understandings of value come closer to my meaning, because literary value does not refer to the value of texts in a monetary or economic sense, but rather to the way they are perceived and the importance placed upon them by the society in which they exist (which of course changes over time); the extent to which, for example, they are deemed worthy of reading, of studying, and of teaching. This is not to say that the economic value of literature is entirely irrelevant. Indeed, there are some who view economic and artistic success as deeply connected, in the sense that they are mutually exclusive: Pierre Bourdieu describes Symbolist poetry as one field in which 'the economy of practices is based in a generalised game of 'loser wins', on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all other economies'.[6] This is an example of what Bourdieu terms the 'autonomous principle' of hierarchization, in which art and literature are valued for their own sake, and any value-signifiers external to them – for example, economic success, popularity, even literary prizes – are seen to diminish this.[7] Bourdieu argues that this principle of hierarchization is involved in a constant struggle for dominance with its opposite, the 'heteronomous principle', which does measure value in terms of these external factors.[8] This model can be used to understand the 'battle-of-the-brows' which took place in the mid-twentieth century, in which proponents of highbrow modernism valued literature as artistic endeavour, and resented the emphasis on pleasure and economic value implied by the success of middlebrow works. What is at stake in this struggle is 'the monopoly of literary legitimacy': the power to determine what qualifies as 'genuine' literature, and who qualifies as a 'real' writer.[9] It

[4] 'Value', in *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/221253?rskey=Klrw2w&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> [accessed 1 May 2016]. My emphases.
[5] 'Value', *OED*.
[6] Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed', trans. by Richard Nice, in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. by Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 29-73 (p. 39).
[7] Bourdieu, p. 40.
[8] Bourdieu, p. 40.
[9] Bourdieu, p. 42.

is this legitimacy which Stewart, writing her early novels 'like writing an essay', seeks; this is why her works are so rich in literary reference. Stewart is trading on what Bourdieu refers to as 'cultural capital', where familiarity with certain literary (as well as visual and aural) texts functions as a kind of currency, signifying their consumer's position within a perceived cultural hierarchy; the greater the literary value of the product consumed, the more knowledgeable, intellectual, discerning, is the consumer.

Stewart's literary references are, by and large, to canonical and classic texts. These are texts which are generally considered to be of great cultural significance: texts which regularly appear on exam-board syllabi and university reading lists, are published by *Oxford World's Classics* or *Penguin Classics*, and, in a bookshop, would be shelved under 'literature' as opposed to 'fiction' (one a qualification of value, the other merely a description of form). I argue that the texts in this category are valued highly in both the autonomous and heteronomous systems of hierarchization: some, such as Bloom, argue that their value is aesthetic, but it is also true that many of these texts were and are extremely popular and economically successful. This duality makes the canonised classics useful case-studies to demonstrate that literary value is not inherent in text, but rather is externally applied to it: texts are not inherently classic or canonical, high or low value, and the value which is applied to them is subject to change. Rather, as Humble has stated, 'middlebrow and highbrow books are distinguishable, fundamentally, not by any stable intrinsic differences but by *how they are read*'.[10] A case in point: I referred earlier to *Oxford World's Classics* and *Penguin Classics*. I argue that the design of the physical books produced by these and other publishing lines like them is formulated to emphasise the texts as items of serious scholarly interest, as historical, artistic artefacts, and in doing so to de-emphasise their potential as items which give pleasure: they feature introductions and notes by eminent scholars, contain timelines depicting events in their authors' lives, and offer suggestions for further reading – not, significantly, other literary works in a similar vein, but academic books and essays containing intellectual analyses of the text in question. The assumption is that these texts are being read for study rather than pleasure. However, owing to copyright laws, most canonical-classic texts exist in numerous editions. In 2006, for example, Headline Review reissued the complete works of Jane Austen (an author whose works fall into the category of canonical-classics, and are published by both *Oxford World's Classics* and *Penguin Classics*) with covers which

[10] Humble, 'Sitting Forward or Sitting Back', p. 46. Emphasis in original.

Fig. 1: Headline Review's 2006 edition of *Sense and Sensibility* mimics covers of popular contemporary romance novels. I discuss references to canonical literature in chick lit. novels in the Conclusion.

mimicked the style of contemporary romance and chick lit. novels, featuring pastel colours, swirly fonts, and an emphasis on the novels' romance plots (see Fig. 1). Whilst the volumes published by *Oxford World's Classics* emphasise the texts as items to be studied and market them as if they are to be read as such, the Headline editions are clearly intended to pull in readers who habitually read for pleasure. That the same text can be presented in such different ways – can be read in such different ways – speaks to the notion of literary value as external to text.

In the first part of this chapter I examine the representation of reading in *Nine Coaches Waiting*. Two of the novel's central characters are shown to be readers: Léon de Valmy, the novel's villain, is portrayed as a reader of highbrow canonical literature, as evidenced by his frequent allusions to the work of John Milton. Linda Martin, the novel's heroine and narrator, is a middlebrow reader whose reading habits range from the high- to the lowbrow, incorporating a wide range of texts indiscriminately. I argue that this portrayal of differing reading habits culminates to obliquely critique Leavis's claim that the reading of popular fiction leads to 'maladjustment in actual life'.[11] Léon is immersed in a plot to murder his nephew Philippe, an act that certainly indicates 'maladjustment'. Meanwhile, Linda uses information gleaned from her wide-ranging reading to rescue Philippe. Linda's attitude to her reading changes through the course of the novel: at its outset, she appears to have internalised an attitude similar to that espoused by Leavis, as she frequently berates her 'damned romantic imagination', and attempts to repress the literary allusions that occur to her as a result of her reading.[12] However, by the end of the novel, she is able to successfully mediate and manipulate information garnered from reading. The romantic relationship portrayed in the novel plays an important role is this process: Linda is initially resistant towards her feelings for Raoul (Léon's son), and even alludes to fairytale and romance narratives as evidence of their naivety. Linda briefly submits to her feelings, accepts Raoul's marriage proposal, and self-consciously assumes the role of Cinderella. In conventional romance narrative, this would constitute the climax of their relationship. However, Linda rejects romantic convention by abandoning her relationship with Raoul in favour of protecting Philippe. *Nine Coaches Waiting* undercuts Leavis's claim that middlebrow novels lead to 'maladjustment', and in doing so challenges the notion that middlebrow novels have less value than their canonical counterparts.

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[11] Leavis, p. 54.

[12] Mary Stewart, *Nine CoachesWaiting* (London: Hodder, 2011), p. 50. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.

I then explore the representation of Shakespeare as a canonical figure in *This Rough Magic*. Bloom describes Shakespeare as 'the central figure of the western canon'.[13] *This Rough Magic* initially seems to reinforce this notion, as the playwright is equated with the Corfiote patron saint, Spiridion, thus elevating him to the position of religious myth. However, a closer reading of the novel reveals a more complex exploration of canonicity. Discussing references to Shakespeare in twentieth-century women's writing, Julie Sanders states that 'the act of engagement is rarely passive; Shakespeare is not invoked simply as an authenticating male canonical presence in these works but, rather, as a topos to be explored, dissected and reconfigured'.[14] This is certainly the case in *This Rough Magic*, which challenges not only Shakespeare's position within the canon, but the very notion of canonicity itself. Middlebrow women writers are shown to be of equal value to their canonical counterparts – despite pretentions of inferiority. Lucy Waring, the novel's heroine and narrator, is an out-of-work actress who is visiting Corfu to recuperate after receiving bad reviews for her latest role. There she meets Sir Julian Gale, a celebrated and famous thespian whom she admires greatly. However, despite Lucy's outward veneration of Julian's acting abilities, within the novel she repeatedly outperforms him. I show how the relationship between these two characters is representative of the relationship between middlebrow woman writers, such as Stewart, and celebrated canonical figures, such as Shakespeare. In doing so I demonstrate how *This Rough Magic* constitutes a critique of conventional views of canonicity, and a dissection of the position of middlebrow women writers within the literary arena.

Following on from this, I examine the portrayal of the twentieth-century woman writer and her relation to the western canon in *My Brother Michael*. The novel's protagonist, Camilla Long, is a teacher of Classics at an all-girls school. She is also shown to be an aspiring writer, 'spend[ing] the rather long evenings writing up notes for the wonderful book [she] was always going to write'.[15] Writing, for Camilla, is depicted as a lonely and ultimately futile process. This is accentuated by the landscape that she inhabits: as Camilla holidays in Greece, she struggles to negotiate its terrain. Despite her difficulties, though, Camilla does display, via the frequent

[13] Bloom, p. 2.
[14] Julie Sanders, *Novel Shakespeares: Twentieth Century Women Novelists and Appropriation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p.13.
[15] Mary Stewart, *My Brother Michael* (London: Hodder, 2011), p. 5. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.

references she makes to Greek mythology and literature, an 'historical sense'.[16] T. S. Eliot argues that such an appreciation of literary heritage is vital in the composition of successful literature; that for writers to produce work of true literary value, they must display an in depth awareness of their cultural past, whilst simultaneously creating something which is original and individual to themselves. Camilla's ability to do this is restricted by her status as a woman writer: the physical landscape of Greece is depicted as masculine and hostile, reflecting the metaphorical landscape of literary culture. The novel's exploration of gender in relation to the literary canon is further displayed through the character of Nigel Barrow, a struggling young artist encountered by Camilla. Nigel is dissatisfied with the criticism his art receives, and as such is attempting to reinvent his style. Whilst Nigel's original work is characterised as feminine, his reinventions are distinctly masculine. In this way, *My Brother Michael* explores how gender impacts on what is and what is not accepted into the artistic and literary academy.

Finally, I discuss how *The Wind off the Small Isles* ultimately reveals the absurdity of the notion that some texts are of greater value than others. Two writers feature in the novella, one a female author of highly popular children's fiction, and one a critically acclaimed male playwright. The former, Cora Gresham, is shown to be resentful of the difference between the way she and the latter, James Blair, are viewed: whilst Cora's work is proven to be economically valuable (it is made clear that she is a wealthy woman), it is James who is taken seriously by literary critics and by the academy. *The Wind off the Small Isles* demonstrates the irrationality of this imbalance by showing that all texts are involved in an ongoing process of recycling and repurposing traces from other texts, thus illustrating that it is in the literary marketplace and through the academy that different literary values are assigned; they are not inherent in text. The theme of recycling and repurposing which appears throughout the novella works to signal this. The most significant example of repurposing within the novella is its use of John Keats's poem 'The Eve of St. Agnes' (1820): quotations from the poem are used as epigraphs, and the elopement it describes mirrors a similar episode in *The Wind off the Small Isles*. Like the novella, Keats's poem speaks to a blurring of the distinction between highbrow and popular literatures. Its inclusion then serves a dual purpose: as an example of literary repurposing within the novella, and as a demonstration that this process occurs in all text.

[16] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Perspecta*, 19 (1982), 36-42 (p. 36).

'Middlebrow' is a value term; in the mid-twentieth century, it was deployed in an attempt to pin down the precise extent to which particular texts should be considered valuable. The category of middlebrow fiction is therefore inextricably linked with notions of literary value. It is, as such, unsurprising that many of the novels that are considered within the category are writ through with considerations and interrogations of the notion of literary value and its accompanying assumptions and qualifications. That women have been left out of the canon is a widely explored phenomenon: critics from Woolf to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have articulated the difficulty and frustration experienced by woman writers throughout history as they attempt to insert themselves into the literary academy.[17] Stewart's novels metafictively investigate a range of issues surrounding this: they are preoccupied with representations of female creative artists, including writers, and the various constraints they face, including the veneration of male writers in western culture, and with notions of female reading as damaging. The novels contain numerous representations of woman readers, as well as frequent references to other texts. These combine to form a more general investigation into the position of middlebrow novels by women within twentieth-century literary culture. In exploring the challenges faced by woman writers, Stewart's novels ask necessary questions about the type of texts which are considered valuable, and why.

'Awfully Good Material for Thinking With': Highbrow and Middlebrow Readers in *Nine Coaches Waiting*

Nine Coaches Waiting is full of references to other literary works: literary quotations are peppered throughout the novel, and its protagonist is compared to Jane Eyre and Cinderella. Each chapter has an epigraph taken from canonical, mostly Renaissance, English poetry and drama, and the novel's title is borrowed from Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607). These literary allusions constitute a meta-textual exploration of the uses of reading, with the titular coaches providing a metaphor for reading's transportive and transformative potential. The uses of reading manifest in different ways for different characters. Léon is identified as a reader; that his plot to murder his nephew Philippe bears close resemblance to a Renaissance tragedy conveys the extent to which his reading has influenced his real life. Linda, the novel's heroine and narrator, is also a voracious reader, and is at pains to undercut the literary allusions inspired by her romantic

[17] In *A Room of One's Own* (1928) Woolf associates the economic dependence of women on men throughout history with the lack of women-centred literature. Meanwhile, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), Gilbert and Gubar read nineteenth-century writing by women as an expression of creative frustration and dissatisfaction.

imagination. However, she learns to use the story-book inferences and references which so frequently occur to her to save both her and Philippe's lives. In contrast to Léon, Linda retains control over her textually-informed imagination. Through Léon and Linda, *Nine Coaches Waiting* explores the boundary between textually-induced fantasies which overwhelm and distort reality and coherent literary allusions that can be used to negotiate a path through the real and every-day world.

Linda travels to the Châteaux Valmy, an estate near the French Alps, to act as governess to the nine-year-old Comte de Valmy, Philippe. She is employed by Philippe's paternal uncle and his wife, Léon and Héloise de Valmy, who are caring for their nephew whilst his legal guardian, another uncle, Hippolyte de Valmy, is working abroad. Léon, who, since an accident in his youth, is confined to a wheel-chair, is also the acting custodian of the Châteaux, which Philippe stands to inherit. A number of accidents befall Philippe: he is shot at in the woods on the Châteaux's estate, and narrowly escapes falling from a broken balcony. Linda then meets Raoul, Léon's son from a previous marriage. At the estate's annual ball, they become engaged. However, later that night Linda learns from the housemaid, Berthe, that Léon, Héloise and Raoul are conspiring to murder Philippe, so that Léon can inherit his title and property. Linda wakes Philippe, and they escape the Châteaux unnoticed. They travel to Hippolyte's house, only to find that Hippolyte, Raoul, and Héloise are already there. When Héloise confesses to the conspiracy, Raoul, who, it transpires, was not involved, flies into a rage, and drives to Valmy to confront his father. Worried for his safety, Linda follows him. However, when they arrive they discover that Léon has already committed suicide.

Nine Coaches Waiting presupposes a reader who is familiar with the many canonical texts it references, as such undercutting Leavis's assertion that 'the common reader' eschews highbrow poetry and drama, and simultaneously challenging the assumption that such literature is worthy of possessing greater literary value than its 'middling' counterparts.[18] Léon's connection with books and reading is clear: he makes frequent literary allusions, and has adopted the library at Valmy as his 'private study-cum-office' (60). His descent into villainy, then, constitutes a caricatured example of the 'maladjustment in actual life' which Leavis feared: Léon imitates scenes from his reading, and in doing so becomes a criminal. *Nine Coaches Waiting* therefore

[18] Leavis, p. 36.

mocks the notion that reading certain books might yield dangerous consequences: it is not non-highbrow literature that leads Léon to his actions. Rather, his murder plot is reminiscent of highbrow Renaissance tragedy.[19] Unlike Léon, Linda is presented as a typical reader of middlebrow fiction: her reading list is comprised of 'children's books thrust cheek by jowl with English and French classics and a good deal of lighter reading' (60). This eclectic collection reinforces her status as a middlebrow reader, whose reading habits are defined by their hybridity, and who, as Humble states, 'ranges widely in her interests, encompassing many genres of literature, and combining high and lowbrow interests in a daring disregard for conventional judgements'.[20] Linda's reading habits also undercut Leavis's assertion of the incompatibility between highbrow literature and the popular. Furthermore, despite her fantasising, Linda is far from maladjusted: she mediates and manipulates her romantic imagination throughout the novel, which is what ultimately leads to her success, both in terms of preventing Léon from fulfilling his plans, and in reaching a romantic resolution with Raoul.

At the beginning of the novel, Linda's attitude ranges from wry amusement to angry frustration as she attempts to disregard her mind's romantic wanderings: she repeatedly refers to her 'damned romantic imagination' and berates herself for indulging in 'stupid fancies' (36; 243). When travelling to the Château Valmy, Linda imagines 'the fairy-tale castle of a dream, something remote and romantic and impossible' (9). Here, the rolling indulgence of the alliterative R is undercut by the sudden plosivity of the word 'impossible'. This undercutting is emphasised by Linda's subsequent supposition that such an image might constitute 'a sort of Walt Disney advertisement for Gibbs Dentifrice' – Gibbs Dentifrice was a popular brand of toothpaste in the 1950s, thus yielding associations with excessive whiteness and cleanliness (9). Coupled with the figure of Disney – that purveyor of saccharine simulacrum – this comparison exposes the farcical nature of the fairytale image. Upon arriving at Valmy, though, Linda momentarily succumbs to her fantasy. She describes how:

[19] Murder for personal gain, often in the form of money, property or advanced social status, frequently occurs in Renaissance drama. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623), for example, the title character and his wife murder King Duncan so that Macbeth can take his crown. Similarly, in *Hamlet* (1603), Claudius murders his brother in order that he might inherit both his throne and his wife. In John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623), Ferdinand and The Cardinal go to extreme lengths to prevent their sister from marrying, in order that they might keep her share of their father's inheritance. In a similar vein, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1604) features a protagonist who sells his soul to the devil in return for power and influence.

[20] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 8.

> What met [her] with the rush almost of a wind was the sunlight and the space and the music of the trees. Everywhere was the golden light of late afternoon. The air cool and sweet and very pure, heady with the smell of pines and with the faint tang of the snows. (30)

The repeated use of the word 'and' here lends the passage a sense of immediacy, whilst phrases such as 'the music of the trees' feel overtly poetic and romanticised. However, this wistfulness is swiftly extinguished by the bathos of Linda's dry observation that she is 'a far cry, certainly, from Camden town' (30). The abrupt change in tone typifies Linda's early attempts to negotiate her romantic imagination: she is aware of its presence, yet is determined to prevent it from influencing her perception of the world around her. That such emphasis is placed on Linda's internal struggle with her imagination speaks to Leavis's assertion that a rich fantasy life results in 'maladjustment' to the real world: it is this maladjustment that Linda seems to fear. However, as the novel progresses Linda's relationship with her imagination changes, as an understanding gleaned from her reading proves instrumental in ensuring her survival.

Linda's initial resistance to her 'romantic imagination' might be explained by the guilt she experiences when reading: though she admits to 'devouring' books and indulging in 'hours and hours of reading' at Valmy, she also confesses that she must force herself 'to ignore that irrational feeling drilled into [her] in the seven years at the Home that Reading was a Waste of Time' (61). This psychological prohibition on reading extends to the palpable when her access to certain books is constricted: books in French, for example, must be read in secret, as Linda has told her employers that she does not speak that language. The only books and authors she reads which are explicitly named are 'a battered old copy of *Treasure Island*', the novels of John Buchan and Arthur Conan Doyle, and *Tristan et Isuet* (60). Humble argues that such references to particular books in middlebrow fiction invoke different aspects of the genre's identity; Victorian novels, for example, 'suggest an adherence to traditional narrative values'.[21] Here, references to detective and adventure stories foreshadow the novel's central murder plot, whilst *Tristan et Isuet* reaffirms its dual status as a romance. However, what is significant is that whilst the English detective novels can be openly read by Linda, the French romance must be consumed in secret. The reading of romance is doubly suppressed: by the guilt Linda associates with reading, and by the fact that it is written in French. This conflict mirrors Linda's complex relationship with her romantic

[21] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 55.

imagination: though they are capable of rendering her 'rapt and oblivious', she frequently attempts to repress the imaginative wanderings that occur to her as a result of reading (61).

The physical prohibition on Linda's reading is further extended by the fact that her access to books from the château's library is restricted: despite the fact that it 'almost certainly contain[s] English books', it is Léon's 'private study-cum-office', and thus is inaccessible to her (60). Léon's occupation of the library reflects the distortion of his perception of reality. This is exaggerated by the fact that the library also functions as his symbolic lair: Léon, who is repeatedly referred to as 'Lucifer' and 'The Demon King', has his private quarters 'above the library', and 'has a lift' to move between the spaces (36; 43). As Lucifer descends to Hell, so Léon descends to the library, mirroring his corresponding descent into moral iniquity. When he is first introduced to her, Léon ironically self-identifies as Lucifer, which unsettles Linda, who has privately made the same comparison. Similarly, just as she tells herself 'it [is] absurd to people the lovely Château Valmy with the secret ghosts of Thornfield', Léon says 'Come out, Jane Eyre' (109; 110). In these examples, Léon undercuts Linda's private frustrations: just as she berates herself for making 'absurd' mental references, Léon makes the same connections, conveying that Linda's literary inferences are less ridiculous than she believes (109). That Léon and Linda regularly draw the same analogies is indicative of similarities between them: both are keen readers who perceive frequent parallels between life and literature. However, whilst Linda is able to retain some control over her romantic imagination (initially by repressing it, and later by using it to save Philippe), Léon is not.

As well as differing responses to their reading, Linda and Léon are shown to have differing relationships with transport. Coaches, modernly manifested as cars, serve as a metaphor for the way that reading and its consequences are represented in the novel. Coaches are like stories: both yield associations with movement, journeys, and progression, both are types of vehicle that transport their users to alternative and sometimes unfamiliar destinations, both can be directed (or driven) by an individual, or can be used by individuals to direct (or drive) others, and both can be dangerous if used inappropriately, often with disastrous effect. The association between coaches and stories in *Nine Coaches Waiting* is made initially apparent by the novel's title, and is re-emphasised by its structural format: the chapters are arranged into eight parts, each corresponding with a car journey undertaken by Linda, and are subsequently entitled 'Third

Coach', 'Fourth Coach', and so on.[22] Thus, coaches symbolically control how the novel's plot is transmitted. The association is also apparent in the fact that Linda's evolving engagement with her romantic imagination is reflected by her increasing ability to control the cars which transport her. During the early stages of their courtship, Linda is frequently driven by Raoul towards Valmy.[23] However, following her discovery of the murder plot, she hikes and hitch-hikes away from Valmy as she orchestrates her and Philippe's escape: having abandoned her relationship with Raoul, the newly independent Linda moves from a state of passivity to one of activity. This is made clear by the novel's *dénouement*, which again sees Linda driven towards Valmy. The fact that on this occasion she is not driven by Raoul but by the otherwise ironically named William Blake provides a symbolic representation of the interrelatedness between coaches and stories: that Linda has used her knowledge of literature to get her to this point in the novel is represented by the fact that a canonical English poet now (symbolically) provides her transport.[24] Having used her textually-informed imagination to untangle the de Valmys' murder plot, Linda deliberately and insistently undertakes this journey: she wields control over the manner in which she is transported, just as she wields control over her romantic imagination.

There are also instances when cars are shown to possess greater control than the individuals who drive them. One example of this occurs when Raoul, enraged by his father's plans, drives away to confront him. All actions are assigned to the car rather than to Raoul: it is 'an engine' that 'roars to violent life', 'a door' that slams seemingly independently, and 'the Cadillac' that 'gain[s] the road, pause[s], whine[s] up through *her* gears, and snarl[s] away into silence' (422; my emphasis). This anthropomorphism, which characterises the vehicle as a violent, unruly beast, conveys Raoul's lack of agency in this scene: he is overpowered by his vehicle just as he is overpowered by his vengeful instincts. A similar relationship exists between Léon and his wheel-chair. That they are inextricably connected is made clear, as Léon's presence is frequently signalled by his chair rather than any aspect of his physical person; it is 'the wheel-chair [that comes] quietly out of some outbuilding' before 'Léon de Valmy's voice' speaks (269). Furthermore, it is the chair's 'thinnest of humming whispers' that alerts Linda to Léon's

[22] The first part is named 'First and Second Coach', so despite the eight-part structure, there are nine coaches, as per the novel's title.
[23] For example, after their first meeting (133), after their first outing (176), and when Raoul picks Linda up from the village and offers her a lift home (194).
[24] Many of Blake's poems reference, rewrite, and respond to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the poem which inspires the frequent comparisons of Léon to Lucifer. That Linda travels with a man named Blake, then, reflects her intentions regarding Léon's plan: she wishes to rewrite the murder narrative he has set in motion.

presence (298). As with Raoul's car, this anthropomorphism conveys Léon's lack of control: the chair always precedes him, just as his 'impossible and outlandish' scheme precedes his moral judgement (280). In both of these examples, the overpowering of individual by wheeled vehicle corresponds with the overpowering of individual by story: Raoul temporarily subscribes to a narrative of revenge, reminiscent of Renaissance tragedy, which is emphasised in the novel by an epigraph taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: 'so, Uncle, there you are' (381). Similarly, Léon, as has previously been discussed, also imitates Renaissance tragedy. However, whilst Raoul's dramatic re-enactment is merely momentary, Léon's is part of a gradual and all-encompassing transformation.

Restricted by his disability, Léon is confined to his wheel-chair throughout the novel. The injuries that necessitate this were sustained when he 'cracked his back at polo', although Cadogan describes him as 'severely disabled after a motor accident' (16).[25] Cadogan's mistake is forgivable, and somewhat revealing, for the novel places great emphasis on Léon's erratic driving prior to his accident. Indeed, Héloise's admonishment of Raoul, in which she asks 'how do you know what *you'd* have been if you'd smashed your car up one fine day on the zigzag and cracked your spine?', almost implies that his injuries *are* the result of a motor accident (411). What Héloise's remark certainly does convey, though, is that Léon's disability is the outcome of his own reckless behaviour. That this behaviour is characteristic of him is established early on by the housekeeper Mrs Seddon's recollection of Léon's passion for a range of dangerous pastimes, 'all sorts, motor-cars, horses, speed-boats… fighting with swords, even', and her description of his driving as so erratic that 'you would think a *devil* was driving him' (49; my emphasis).[26] An association between Léon and the devil occurs repeatedly throughout the novel. The figure of the devil supplies obvious connotations of sin and deception, both activities in which Léon, by dint of his murder plot, is engaged. That Linda specifically refers to him as a 'fallen angel' consolidates this, as well as placing particular emphasis on Lucifer as a transformed being. This is connected to his transition into the literary: Léon moves from being driven by a devil as he drives his car, to actually embodying the devil when confined to his wheel-chair, a type of coach. In this way,

[25] Cadogan, p. 25.

[26] The decision to name the housekeeper and butler of Valmy 'Seddon' is worthy of note: Frederick and Margaret Seddon were a married couple famed in Edwardian England for their involvement in the murder of Eliza Mary Barrow. That a play – 'A Dead Secret' by Rodney Ackland – inspired by these events was produced in 1957, the year before *Nine Coaches Waiting* was published, makes it likely that Stewart was aware of their story. Indeed, the similarities between the Seddon's case and Léon's scheme are many: both murders are motivated by monetary gain, both committed by married couples.

Léon is transformed into a literary figure. This is accentuated by the fact that once his plot to murder Philippe has been revealed, Léon does not appear, alive, in the text again: rather, he becomes a story that is told by Raoul and by Héloise within the text, and by Linda in the novel's actual narrative, completing his symbolic transformation into the literary. This means that Léon finally loses all control over himself and how he is presented: he is unable to speak for himself, instead becoming a story that is spoken by others.

Léon's immersion in his Renaissance-like plot is emphasised by the fact that when speaking with him, Linda feels 'as if [she] was acting in a play where all the cues were marked' (217-18). This conveys a sense of inevitability surrounding Léon's plan: all action is determined by the script, with the players powerless to change its course. When she first learns of the de Valmys' plot to murder Philippe, Linda briefly submits to this inevitability; reality merges with the theatrical as she observes once more that she is 'acting in a play'. Linda describes delivering her 'lines' in a 'dead and uninflected voice', conveying her unwillingness to comply with Léon's scheme and pre-empting her eventual rejection of it as she orchestrates Philippe's escape (278). The feeling of literature coming alive is encapsulated by the image of the housemaid Berthe incessantly wringing her hands, which ordinarily, as Linda acknowledges, 'one reads about' but 'never sees': here, then, a literary cliché is transferred into the real and everyday world (278).[27] This theatrical theme continues when Linda encounters the sleep-walking Héloise in Philippe's bedroom: Linda, who 'knew nothing about sleep-walkers except what [she] remembered of that scene in *Macbeth*' describes how 'the verses marched through [her] brain': 'Lady Macbeth had talked. Was it possible that I could get Héloise de Valmy to do the same? *Observe her, stand close*' (303; emphasis in original). Linda uses the quotations from literature to her advantage: they allow her to identify that Héloise is sleep-walking, and to decipher the manner in which Philippe's assassination has been attempted – poison. Linda uses further information gleaned from her wide-ranging reading to aid her and Philippe's flight to safety. For example, she uses 'a trick [she] had read about somewhere in John Buchan – a gentle pressure below the left ear' to quietly awaken the boy (304). She also draws comfort from the fact that in the 'dozens of 'pursuit' books' she has read, 'the chief and terrible miracle had been the unceasing and intelligent vigilance of every member of the population', but that 'in sober fact, nobody was much

[27] The naming of the housemaid constitutes another allusion to *Jane Eyre*; to Bertha, Rochester's secret wife, the 'mad woman in the attic'. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Bertha helps Jane by attempting to alert her to Rochester's deceit, just as Berthe alerts Linda.

interested' (361). Here, Linda draws deliberate distinction between what is fictional and what is real: she is able to consciously negotiate which literary allusions are appropriate, and which are not. As such, she is able to control her imagination.

Thus, Linda progresses from consciously berating her 'damned romantic imagination' to actively invoking textual inferences and using them to her advantage (50). Part of what allows her to make this transition is her relationship with Raoul. Much as she does her romantic imagination, Linda initially attempts to ignore her feelings for Raoul, disregarding them as 'silly' and ironically describing her 'besotted dreaming' (183; 191). It is 'absurdly' that her heart 'beg[ins] to race' when she realises his approach (193). Nonetheless, Raoul's presence seems to relieve Linda of her self-imposed repression, as scenes that she 'hadn't really noticed' before are brought to life: seated in Raoul's Cadillac, Linda describes a profusion of sensory impressions, from the sounds of 'music' and 'voices loud in argument', to the 'smell of new bread' and the vivid colours of 'green and scarlet peppers' and 'ruby and amber and purple' wines (193). Allusions to poetry and to 'Aladdin's cave' lend literary and mythological undertones to this otherwise prosaic scene, and references to 'bare boughs' and 'the wet street' provide a subtle eroticism, whilst 'ripe oranges' and vegetables 'spilled [...] in prodigal piles' convey a sense of virility (193). Significantly, Linda does not recognise Raoul's presence by his physical appearance, but by the 'soft hush of wet tyres' from his 'big car' (193). This crude acknowledgement of the size of Raoul's vehicle, particularly combined with the sensuous sibilance it emits, underlines the sexual connotations of the scene. However, the precedence of Raoul's car also yields other connotations: it conveys the nurturing effect of the notion of Raoul on Linda's romantic imagination, and implies that her impression of his personality may be more influenced by this than by his actual character.

That the subtly erotic and sensuously stimulating street scene described by Linda is viewed from within Raoul's car, then, is significant: Linda temporarily subscribes to the narratives of romance and fairytales, viewing the world anew because she is symbolically placed within a story. In fact, much of Linda and Raoul's burgeoning courtship is associated with stories, and much is located within and around Raoul's car: their first meeting, which closely resembles that of Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester, takes place because Raoul almost knocks Linda over whilst driving his Cadillac

towards Valmy.[28] Their first outing together, which results in Linda's initial acknowledgement of her love for him, occurs because Raoul offers to drive her into town, and their first kiss, though 'not such stuff as dreams are made on', also takes place in Raoul's car (199-200). Linda's less than enamoured description of her kiss with Raoul is significant, for it provides the first hint that he may not live up to the Prince Charming persona that she has, albeit, at this stage, ironically, assigned to him. Indeed, Linda's early identification with Cinderella is deliberately facetious: she rationalises her new-found feelings for Raoul by claiming that she 'would be a very odd Cinderella' if she could encounter him 'without something of the sort happening' (183). She self-consciously acknowledges that her growing emotions subscribe to a particular fairytale narrative, gleaned from 'a quantity of romantic reading', and as such determines that they are a 'myth that [she] knew was nonsense' (183; 226). However, as their relationship progresses, the comparisons between Linda and Cinderella multiply.

Following her less than perfect first kiss with Raoul, Linda jokes that 'if Cinderella was out, so decidedly was Prince Charming', and having prepared her party dress, she acknowledges that 'now Cinderella ha[s] no excuse to stay away from the ball' (200; 226). These fairytale references reach their climax at the de Valmys' annual ball, during which Raoul proposes to Linda. Following the proposal, Linda's allusions to Cinderella lose their irony: for example, noticing, as 'the clock was beating twelve', that she has lost a shoe, Linda cheerfully mutters 'bring on your pumpkins' (254). In conventional romance narratives, a marriage proposal would constitute the climax of the couple's courtship. However, Linda and Raoul's happiness is interrupted when Linda discovers the plot against Philippe's life, which necessitates her abandonment of their attachment. By rejecting Raoul as a romantic partner, Linda rejects the conventions of fairytale and romantic fiction narratives. This is most clearly demonstrated towards the end of the novel: having safely guided Philippe to his uncle Hippolyte's house, Linda is confronted by Raoul. Rather than look to him for help and guidance, Linda rejects romantic convention by 'shriek[ing] 'Run Philippe!' and preparing to defend him from Raoul (387). Raoul is innocent, so what Linda's actions display is her ability to control her romantic imagination: to protect Philippe, Linda rejects both Raoul, and, by doing so, the conventions of romance narratives. Freed from prescribed narrative, she is able to use information gleaned from her reading to aid her. It is for

[28] In *Jane Eyre*, Jane first encounters Rochester when she is out walking and he out riding. Rochester's horse slips on some ice, dismounting Rochester, and very nearly colliding with Jane.

this reason that, as Regis states, 'solving the mystery helps to illuminate Raoul's personality'.[29] Regis here refers to the fact that once the mystery is solved and Léon, not Raoul, is revealed as the murderer, Raoul is shown to be innocent and his proclaimed love for Linda sincere. However, I argue that this illumination of Raoul's personality goes further: once Linda has learned to incorporate the textual inferences that she previously berated herself for indulging into her real-life environment, she is able to view Raoul 'not any more as Prince Charming, the handsome sophisticate, the tiger [she] thought she preferred', but as an actual individual, who is capable of existing independently of textual comparison (453). It is only once she has accepted that it is she who is in charge of her 'damned romantic imagination' that Linda is able to see Raoul as the man he is, and not the story-book hero she thought he might be.

Nine Coaches Waiting contains a great deal of references to other literary works, which are vital to the novel's exploration of the uses of reading. This exploration is precipitated by the image of coaches/cars as a metaphor for reading: whilst Linda, who consciously uses information learned from her reading in a measured manner, gains a corresponding control over the vehicles that transport her in the novel, Léon, who is fully immersed in a scheme that is reminiscent of a Renaissance tragedy, permanently inhabits a type of coach in the form of his wheel-chair. Linda learns to use information gleaned from her reading of both highbrow canonical literature and middlebrow detective fiction to assist her and Philippe's flight from Valmy. An important factor in enabling her to do this is her relationship with Raoul: whilst at the outset of the novel, she is frustrated by the literary quotations that occur to her as a result of her eclectic reading, her interactions with Raoul unleash her romantic imagination. Linda temporarily indulges in this, comparing herself to Cinderella and he to Prince Charming. However, by rejecting Raoul, Linda simultaneously rejects the romantic narratives to which she previously subscribed, and by doing so gains full control over her literary understanding: freed from the confines of narrative context, she is able to mediate and manipulate her 'damned romantic imagination' (50). In contrast to Linda, who uses her knowledge of literature for the essential benefit of society, Léon, who is associated with literature throughout the novel, uses his textually-informed imagination to unleash a sequence of events that constitute an act of social deviance. *Nine Coaches Waiting*, then, appears to parody the assertion made by Leavis that an over-indulgence in middlebrow fiction might lead to 'maladjustment in actual life'. Léon's plot certainly constitutes such a

[29] Regis, p. 146.

maladjustment, but his actions are informed by highbrow literature, not middlebrow fiction. In contrast, Linda, whose eclectic choices of reading material range from children's books to Shakespeare, is clearly representative of a typical middlebrow reader, whose personal libraries were, as Humble asserts, defined by their 'hybridity'.[30] Unlike Léon, Linda is able to control her imagination in order to consciously select information that may prove useful. In this way, *Nine Coaches Waiting* demonstrates the potential of all literature – from highbrow poetry and drama, to fairytales and detective stories – as a tool for untangling real-life problems, whilst simultaneously gesturing towards the significance of life as a tool to untangle literature. As Linda acknowledges, literature of all kinds, and all brows, when rightly used, can be 'awfully good material for thinking with' (126).

'A Benevolent Machiavelli': Shakespeare, the Canon, and Woman Writers in *This Rough Magic*

In *The Western Canon*, Bloom describes Shakespeare as 'the largest writer we will ever know', claiming that he 'invented us'.[31] Bloom's comments illustrate the cultural capital with which Shakespeare and his works are commonly endowed. Indeed, though perhaps the most emphatic champion of Shakespeare's significance, Bloom is by no means alone in his view: Michael D. Bristol acknowledges Shakespeare's 'extraordinary currency in contemporary culture', while Stanley Wells asserts that 'Shakespeare is all around us', and his plays are 'central to the theatrical repertoire'.[32] David Bevington describes Shakespeare as 'the greatest English writer, perhaps the greatest writer of all time', and points out that he 'is cited by more modern writers than any other in the canon'.[33] Amongst these modern writers is Stewart, whose eighth novel, *This Rough Magic*, repeatedly references *The Tempest* (1611). The novel associates Shakespeare's play with the Corfiote patron saint, Spiridion. As a result, Shakespeare and his works are seemingly elevated in the novel to the position of religious mythology, locating Stewart alongside Bloom *et al*. in their veneration of the playwright. However, I argue that the novel constitutes a more complex exploration of Shakespeare and the literary canon of which he is emblematic. The novel's focus on performance, disguise, and deception serves to illustrate the fallibility at the heart of

[30] Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow*, p. 8.
[31] Bloom, pp. 3, 40.
[32] Michael D. Bristol, *Big Time Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 3; Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: A Life in Drama* (New York and London: Norton, 1995), p. 1.

canonicity: the canon is shown to be explicitly constructed, and therefore susceptible to deconstruction. Theatricality is a recurring theme: Lucy, the novel's protagonist, frequently adopts the role of audience member, whilst the Castello in which much of the novel takes place bears resemblance to a theatre, complete with balcony, trapdoor, and prop-cluttered backstage area. These features foreground the artificial, and therefore temporary, nature of theatre, and in doing so gesture toward similar artificiality and temporality within and around notions of literary hierarchy and canonicity. The canon exists not as an entity but as a concept that is innately unstable and therefore vulnerable to manipulation, both by those who endorse its authority and those who seek to undermine it.

Out-of-work actress Lucy visits her sister, Phyllida Forli, on the island of Corfu. Phyllida's husband's family own an estate on the island, consisting of two bungalows, Villa Forli and Villa Rotha, and the Castello dei Fiori, an elaborate and imposing manor house. The Forli family retain use of the Villa Forli as a holiday home, and it is here that Lucy and her sister are staying. The other properties are rented: Villa Rotha to Godfrey Manning, an English photographer, and the Castello to Sir Julian Gale, a renowned English actor, now a recluse. Whilst bathing in the estate's private cove, Lucy encounters the antagonistic Max Gale, Julian's son. Lucy learns that a young man, Spiro, named for the Corfiote patron saint Spiridion, and whose mother, Maria, and sister, Miranda, work for Phyllida (as housekeeper and maid respectively), has drowned whilst assisting Godfrey on a night-shoot. When Lucy accidentally strays into the Castello's gardens, she meets Julian, who offers her a drink. This encounter enables Lucy to form a warmer opinion of Max, which is solidified later that night when the pair rescue a dolphin, who has become stranded on the cove's shore, and subsequently declare their love for one another. Max introduces Lucy to Spiro, who is not dead and has been hiding in the Castello's basement. She learns that Godfrey attempted to murder Spiro – and believes that he succeeded – because he feared that Spiro was aware of his involvement in illegal activities. When Miranda unwittingly leads Lucy to a hidden stash of forged currency, Lucy realises that this is what Godfrey has been smuggling. She searches his boat, but Godfrey arrives and takes it out into the water. When Godfrey realises her presence, Lucy, having secured his confession, throws herself overboard, and swims to shore. When she arrives at the estate, she provides the deciding evidence against Godfrey. Godfrey manages to escape, but when he attempts to depart on his boat, it explodes and he is killed. The novel ends with Lucy and Max becoming engaged.

An explicit connection is made between the isle of Corfu and the island setting of *The Tempest*. This is evident from the opening page, where Lucy and Phyllida discuss Julian's theory that 'Corfu was Shakespeare's magic island for *The Tempest*'.[34] This theory is based on similarities between the island Shakespeare describes and the geography of Corfu – 'there are young limes growing all down the cliff [...] and the whole coast is honeycombed with caves' – and apparent parallels between the Corfiote patron saint, Spiridion, and the character of Prospero (87). These parallels reach their climax in a key scene towards the end of the novel in which Miranda, Julian's god-daughter and a native Corfiote, confuses the two tales to the extent that they are rendered inseparable: she believes she has 'proof of St Spiridion and his miracles' because she has discovered 'a cave, very deep in the cliff' containing what she believes are his 'drowned [...] books' (277; 279).[35] The association between *The Tempest* and the tale of Spiridion lends Shakespeare's play some of the status of a national mythology, as if it is not a constructed piece of literature invented by one individual, but rather the dream-product of a unified unconscious. George Schöpflin describes mythology as 'a necessary part of the way in which collectives define their universe': such stories form part of the framework of common identity that allows nations to distinguish themselves as individual cultures.[36] They are how cultures and societies understand themselves, their histories, and their environment. In *This Rough Magic* Spiridion is believed to control the weather, take care of the island's inhabitants, and is generally assumed to retain power over everything. In equating him with this saint, the novel reinforces the notion expounded by Bloom that Shakespeare 'invented us'; that he is the defining figure not only in western literature, but in western culture more broadly, and, by extension, in western consciousness.[37] However, a more nuanced reading of the novel's portrayal of these characters complicates this, and shows that, whilst venerating Shakespeare, the novel simultaneously challenges his position by drawing attention to the socio-political conditions which allow him to retain it.

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[34] Mary Stewart, *This Rough Magic* (London: Hodder, 2011), p.1. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.

[35] Miranda unwittingly refers to the scene in *The Tempest* in which Prospero swears to cease his magic: 'I'll break my staff/ Bury it certain fathoms in the earth/And deeper than did ever plummet sound/I'll drown my book'. (William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York and London: Norton, 1997), 3055-3107 (p. 3099), v.1.56-57).

[36] George Schöpflin, 'The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths', in *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. by Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 19-35 (p. 19).

[37] Bloom, p. 40.

The similarities between Spiridion and Prospero are made initially apparent by their names: as Phyllida notes, 'Spiro may not be short for Prospero, but sounds very like it' (1). Julian points out that each is presented as 'a father-figure, a magician in control of natural forces like the winds and the sea, a sort of benevolent and supernatural Machiavelli who controls the island and all who are in it' (89). For precisely this possession of omniscient, omnipresent power, Prospero can be read as a cipher for Shakespeare, the 'playwright-creator' who controls not only *The Tempest*'s enchanted isle but the entire world of the play.[38] Evidence for this popular interpretation of *The Tempest* is found in the frequent moments of metatheatricality that Prospero invokes. An oft-quoted passage is the 'Epilogue', which, as *The Tempest* was his last sole-authored work, Stephen Greenblatt views as 'the expression of Shakespeare's own personal leave-taking'.[39] The speech contains a number of allusions to the theatre and to theatricality: for example, Prospero states that the aim of his 'project' was 'to please', and insists that he requires 'the help of [the audience's] good hands' before he can take leave of 'this bare island'.[40] Here, alongside talk of applause and appealing to an audience, the 'bare island' refers to the image of an empty stage. That Prospero's magic is discussed in this theatrical context reinforces its association with artistic creation, an association that is built up throughout the play. As Greenblatt states, 'it is difficult not to associate the skill of the great magician with the skill of the great playwright'.[41] Prospero also refers to his talents as 'rough magic'.[42] By adopting this phrase as its title, Stewart's novel explicitly draws attention to *The Tempest*'s theme of artistic creation, and implicitly to the similarities between Prospero and Shakespeare.

In light of this association between Prospero and Shakespeare, and the association in the novel between Prospero and Spiridion, I read the scene depicting the Palm Sunday procession in honour of Spiridion as a complex renegotiation of the celebration of Shakespeare as an iconic cultural figure. Initially, the very fact of the procession seems to reinforce the assertion made by Bloom that 'Shakespeare *is* the canon'.[43] It features much pomp and splendour: there are 'forest[s] of tall white candles' each with a 'gilt crown and wreath of flowers', 'ribbons of white

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[38] Thomas Cartelli, 'Shakespeare in Africa: *The Tempest* as Colonialist Text and Pretext', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. by Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 99-115, (p. 105).
[39] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Introduction to *The Tempest*', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3047-3054 (p. 3047).
[40] Shakespeare, *Tempest*, V.1.10-13.
[41] Greenblatt, p. 3047.
[42] Shakespeare, *Tempest*, V.1.50.
[43] Bloom, p. 47. My emphasis.

and lilac and scarlet', 'great gilded lanterns', and a 'gold palanquin' (57). Frequently, however, these attractive images are undercut by less inviting details. For example, whilst the church dignitaries' 'robes of saffron and white and rose' initially appear luxurious, shining 'splendidly in the sun', at closer range their 'rubbed and faded patches' become clear (57). Meanwhile, the boys wear 'shabby coats' and the girls 'cheap shoes' (57). The band is 'gorgeously uniformed', but they play 'rather badly', and the legends on the village banners are 'pious', but are 'crudely painted' and 'cruelly heavy', so that the men who carry them '[sweat] and [tremble]' (56). There is a sense that the act of worship is somehow detrimental to the worshipers. The resulting unease is compounded by the fact that it is 'not an image of the Saint' that is paraded through the streets but, uncannily, 'his actual mummified body' (54). The presence of a corpse is intrinsically disturbing, and despite assurances from Phyllida that 'you'd think it would be creepy, but it's not', Lucy's report of the Saint does little to counteract this (54). She describes him as 'tiny', 'withered', 'sagging', his features 'dead', 'flattened and formless', and recounts feeling her 'throat tighten, as if with tears' (57; 58). It is unclear why Lucy feels tearful; it may be pity for Spiridion or his followers, or it may be that she feels a genuine spiritual connection with the act of worship. Her ambiguous response does, however, gesture toward a more complex representation of Shakespeare's status within the supposed hierarchy of cultural capital: the rightfulness of his position, and indeed the desirability of that position, is challenged.

The sense of disturbance in this scene is indicative of an undercurrent of ambivalence towards canonicity that runs throughout the novel. As Sanders argues, reference to Shakespeare 'raises undoubted questions of canon formation', allowing women writers to acknowledge their 'often tense and occasionally resistant relationship' with the wider literary academy.[44] Sanders positions Shakespeare not at the centre of the canon, as Bloom does, but rather on the outskirts: he functions as a bridge between the canonical and the non-canonical, a gate-keeper rather than a king.[45] It is, for Sanders, through Shakespeare that otherwise marginalised female writers seek entrance to – or reject – the canon. By invoking his presence in *This Rough Magic*, Stewart positions herself and implicitly writers like her in relation to Shakespeare. This alignment is

[44] Sanders, p. 4.

[45] Sanders also notes that, of all Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest* is the one most often referred to by twentieth-century woman writers. This may have something to do with the position of *The Tempest* within Shakespeare's oeuvre: usually considered to be his final full-length work, it is also the most metafictive and metatheatrical of his plays, in which he looks back at his career as a play-wright and self-reflectively explores the artifice of theatrical performance. The introspective nature of the play sets it in good stead to act as a catalyst for woman writers' exploration of their own literary project(s).

gestured towards when Julian reveals that alongside Spiridion there is 'another saint, a female', whose mummified body 'is also in a church in town' (90). However, as Corfu is a 'man's country', the female saint 'doesn't get the outings' that Spiridion does, Julian 'can't even remember her name', and Lucy has 'never heard she existed' (90). Reading Spiridion as Shakespeare, his marginalised female counterpart recalls Woolf's famous suggestion of Shakespeare's sister, who, forgotten and unfulfilled, lies hypothetically 'buried at some crossroads where the omnibuses now stop'.[46] This exploration of gender difference in connection to canonicity is also apparent in Lucy and Julian's relationship. Julian is associated with Prospero, and therefore Shakespeare: '*The Tempest* was his swan-song' (he played Prospero), he lives on the island in a form of exile, and at the end of the novel he leaves Corfu to return to London, just as Prospero leaves the magic isle for Milan (9). Julian is considered a figure of authority on the island, evidenced by the fact that 'everything gets to the Gales' ears', and he even exercises a form of benevolent rule over some of its inhabitants, as he supplies Miranda and her family with regular financial assistance (258). Julian is a distinguished and highly regarded performer, and is frequently the subject of Lucy's self-deprecating admiration. Whilst she describes him as 'one of the more brilliant lights of the English theatre', she describes herself as 'a mediocre young actress' who will 'never be in the top class' (8; 83; 40). Lucy's persistent insistence on her own inferiority in relation to Julian can be read as a reflection of the attitude of middlebrow women writers to Shakespeare, and by extension, the wider canon. However, I argue that there is a more complicated relationship at work here.

Lucy's repeated insistence that she is 'a darned bad actress' who is 'not anywhere near [Julian's] league' is symptomatic of an underlying discomfort in the novel concerning the negotiation of gender dynamics within the canon (246; 82). If Julian represents the celebrated Bard, then Lucy is his female counterpart: not quite Shakespeare's sister, as with Spiridion and the unnamed female mummy, but perhaps a disgruntled great-granddaughter. I read Lucy as the twentieth-century middlebrow woman writer who, as Sanders states, 'self-consciously range[s]' herself 'within or alongside the academy' by referencing Shakespeare.[47] In this context, Lucy's persistent self-effacement is disquieting, and seems to reinforce the assertion made by Bloom *et al.* that Shakespeare's artistry is not worth competing with. However, whilst Lucy is clear that Julian is the superior actor on stage, in the novel she frequently outperforms him. Indeed, Julian is

[46] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 50.
[47] Sanders, p. 4.

presented as an amiable yet largely redundant figure: an alcoholic, he is frequently shown to be less help than hindrance, and remains largely inactive throughout the novel. In contrast, Lucy consistently plays an active role within the narrative: she rescues the dying dolphin, discovers the body ofYanni Zoulas (a local smuggler who is murdered by Godfrey), and, most significantly, secures the crucial confession from Godfrey that he is trafficking forged currency. That Lucy's agency within the novel far eclipses that of Julian undermines her vocally avowed subordination to him. Despite her claim that 'being bracketed with [Julian] [...] is putting [her] too high', at the end of the novel, Lucy is set to marry Max Gale, Julian's son, and as such will be elevated to a similar social position as he, and as a result, we can infer, will receive greater career opportunities (391). However, this success is tempered by the fact that it is conditional on Lucy's association with men: her husband, and her father-in-law. Thus, whilst Lucy might conduct the lion's share of the work within the novel, it is still only when she is viewed within the context of her relationships with men that she begins to receive recognition. Her position, like that of the middlebrow woman writer, is unstable, and can only be deemed valuable when measured within established, masculine models.

The instability of Lucy's position in the novel is reflected by the fact that she oscillates between the roles of active performer and passive audience member. This is demonstrated when she first encounters each of the novel's three lead male characters –Julian, Max, and Godfrey. All of these meetings are firmly, yet variously, couched in the discourse of performance: when Lucy meets Godfrey, for example, her 'first, quick impression' is of 'a mask of rather chilly control, held hard down over some strong emotion' (31). Masks wield obvious associations with the theatre, as well as with disguise and deception. That Godfrey is described in this way, then, prefigures his later unveiling as the novel's villain: Lucy assumes that the control displayed is a mask to conceal Godfrey's emotional response to Spiro's sudden death, when in fact the opposite is true; he performs emotion to mask his control of the situation. When Lucy first encounters Max, she is simultaneously observed performer and observing audience member, as she watches him watching her from the Castello's 'wide balcony' (21). A balcony is a traditional facet of a stage's mechanics, but also recalls the conditions of audience seating. Thus it is unclear here who is the performer and who the audience, an ambiguity which mirrors the uncertain nature of Max and Lucy's relationship throughout the early stages of the novel. Lucy's initial meeting with Julian occurs in a similarly dramaturgic context: they meet in the Castello's rose garden, which bears

close resemblance to a theatrical set. This theme is compounded by the fact the first words this pair speak to each other are taken from a script: from *The Tempest*. That Lucy moves between the role of passive audience and active player in this way is reflective of the novel's complex representation of the position of women writers in relation to Shakespeare: oscillating between passive intimidation and active renegotiation of his role.

Lucy's role as audience member is demonstrated when she frequently gleans information by watching the actions and interactions of other characters: she deduces the romantic relationship between Adoni and Miranda by observing their conversation after the Palm Sunday parade, and she discreetly watches Max when he investigates Zoulis's corpse. These instances frequently bear theatrical undertones: for example, when Lucy observes Zoulis the evening before he is killed, she describes 'shrinking back behind [her] screen of leaves' (96). Here, the screen of leaves functions like a theatre's heavy stage curtain, subtly drawing attention to Lucy's position as observing audience, and as such highlighting her lack of agency in this scene. In contrast, when Lucy encounters Godfrey on board his boat, she uses her acting abilities to retain control over the situation. This is reflected by her surroundings, as in this scene the boat and its boathouse are presented as performance spaces. For example, the fact that the boathouse is described as 'a vast structure with a high roof lost in shadows' recalls the internal architecture of a stage, which often have high ceilings in order to promote good acoustics, and are often large in size (306). Stages also typically contain trapdoors, as does Godfrey's boat. References to 'big, curtained windows' allude to a curtained stage, whilst 'settee berths with cushions in bright chintz' recall an audience seating area (302). Indeed, the scene between Lucy and Godfrey on the boat, which Lucy describes as an 'elaborate pantomime', contains a number of theatrical flourishes: Lucy begins by 'tidying [her] hair', much like an actress preparing to enter the stage. This theme of pre-performance ritual is also reflected when Lucy describes how the 'light spread' as Godfrey 'draw[s] the curtains', reminiscent of the beginning of a theatrical performance, when the stage lights are lit and the curtains drawn back to reveal the opening scene (350; 315; 314). Lucy's twin roles of performer and audience member are finally united in the novel's *dénouement*, which sees her, having survived throwing herself overboard the boat, discreetly arrive at Godfrey's house. There, she covertly observes a confrontation between him, Max, Miranda, Spiro and the local police, before actively intervening in their exchange. At first Lucy simply watches and listens to the scene before her unfold, observing through 'a gap in the curtains' (360). This

explicit reference to the curtains of a stage seemingly positions Lucy in the role of audience member. However, the fact that this is a small gap, just 'some three inches wide' implies, I argue, a slightly different scenario: rather than the audience role, Lucy adopts the role of performer poised for action, glimpsing at the current scene through the stage's back-curtain in order to determine their appropriate cue. Indeed, Lucy anticipates 'the entrance of [her] life', and when she finally does move into the house, states that 'no actress ever had a better cue' (376). That Lucy is firmly placed within the role of actress at the novel's close, and the fact that she drives so much of the action, underlines the novel's argument that woman writers are capable of making as (if not more) meaningful contributions as their male counterparts.

The exploration of the canon's gender dynamics challenges the cultural authority assigned to Shakespeare, a challenge which is further articulated through the themes of deception and disguise, frequently connected to theatricality, which run throughout the novel. These themes are made apparent in the novel's representation of the Castello dei Fiori, the overbearing neo-Gothic manor which is home to Julian and Max. Great emphasis is placed on the Castello's gaudy artificiality, and it is described as 'pretentious', 'romantic', 'ghastly', and 'operatic' (3; 45; 7). The theatrical associations implied by describing it as 'operatic' are reinforced elsewhere in the novel by the repeated assertion that the Castello would 'make a marvellous background for a Gothic thriller', or 'a set for a musical version of *Dracula*' (80; 7). Indeed, the Castello possesses many characteristics often associated with the theatre; as previously mentioned, the rose garden, where Lucy first meets Julian, bears close resemblance to a stage set. This resemblance is apparent in the garden's seeming artificiality – Lucy states that it 'hardly seem[s] real' and that its 'general effect' is of invoking 'some fairy-tale' world – and by Lucy's abrupt discovery that the 'curtain of blossom' hangs 'down some kind of high, retaining wall' (71-72). That the blossom is described as a curtain holds obvious connotations of stage dressing, whilst the fact that the 'secret garden' is set against a hidden wall conjures the image of an artificial garden constructed onstage (71). The Castello's exterior is frequently shown to be superficial, and is often compared to, and reflective of, a theatrical set. The combination of these two things highlights the artificiality and therefore the impermanence of theatre, and in doing so gestures towards the artificiality and impermanence of the canon: it demonstrates that the canon is a constructed product of the dominant cultural imagination, which, like a theatrical performance, relies on its audience's shared suspension of disbelief in order to sustain its relevance.

Narrative action is divided between two key spaces in the Castello: the drawing room and the balcony adjacent to it, and 'below stairs' in the kitchens and wine cellars (189). The drawing room functions like a stage, as is implied by Lucy's first description of it, which details a number of 'stage effects' and concludes that 'the effect [is] stagey in the extreme' (172). This is further reinforced in the scene by the fact that Julian is 'reciting from *The Tempest*' (173). The idea of the drawing room as a stage is cemented by the fact that it is in this space that the Gales perform ignorance of the attempted murder of Spiro, and of Godfrey's spurious character (173). This contrasts with the kitchen – 'below stairs' – where Lucy learns of the artifice employed to sustain the illusion of Spiro's disappearance, and which is also the space where Spiro is hidden from the outside world, much like a player waits beneath the boards before making their dramatic entrance onto the stage. The distinction between these two spaces is emphasised by the fact that, in order to move from one to the other, Lucy must first pass through the Castello's hall, which bears distinct similarity to a backstage area. It is 'crammed full' of bizarre and disconnected objects, including 'enormous, over-stuffed furniture', 'Chinese screens', 'a coat-rack made of stag's antlers' and 'the severed foot of an elephant' (181). It also contains a significant number of musical instruments – 'a harmonium', 'a harp', and even 'a full sized organ' – implements of performance that one would expect to discover behind the scenes in a theatre.[48] This profusion of shabby artefacts recalls Lucy's description of her own home, which contains items 'picked up cheaply and licked into stage-worthiness for the current show': whilst Lucy lives in a 'perpetual welter of junk-shop props', the hall of the Castello is 'like a bargain basement'; and whilst Lucy compares her home to 'sets designed by Emmet and Ronald Searle', the hall of the Castello brings to her mind the work of 'Dali and Ronald Searle' (31; 181).[49] That Lucy's description of this space so clearly mirrors the description of her own, explicitly prop-infested home, lends the hall some of that same theatricality. Furthermore, by highlighting similarities between these two spaces, Lucy subconsciously acknowledges that she is more suited to occupy the same space as Julian than she might otherwise admit. Metaphorically, she also

[48] These allusions to a cluttered back-stage area lend further weight to the analogy of the canon as theatrical performance: just as a theatrical set is an example of outward-facing order constructed out of hidden disorder, so the canon is artificially devised to create a sense of an organised literary heritage, when in fact, taken as a whole, literature is frequently diverse, disorganised, and difficult to categorise.

[49] Stewart references two well-known artists here: Ronald Searle was the creator of comedic, often satirical cartoons, whilst Salvador Dali was one of the foremost members of the Surrealist movement. The juxtaposition of these two artists – equally surreal, though in markedly different ways – reinforces the confused and haphazard environ which is the Castello's hall.

admits that middlebrow woman writers are similarly fit to inhabit the same space as canonical male writers, such as Shakespeare.

The theatrical references in *This Rough Magic* draw upon practices in the twentieth as opposed to sixteenth century; what is significant is not Shakespeare in his proper historical context, but rather how he and his works have translated and transferred themselves throughout culture. The novel explores the assertion made by critics such as Bloom that Shakespeare constitutes a defining figure in the history and development of western literature. By equating *The Tempest* with the story of Saint Spiridion, the novel seems to reinforce such claims, as it elevates Shakespeare's play to the position of a national and religious mythology. The equation of *The Tempest* to the Corfiote legend is largely achieved by highlighting a number of similarities between the characters of Prospero and Spiridion: both, for example, are presented as benevolent rulers who wield control over events and conditions in their respective island homes. This characteristic in Prospero is one of the reasons that he is widely regarded as a vehicle for the voice of Shakespeare in *The Tempest*: the magical powers he exercises are compared to Shakespeare's powers of creation and imaginative control. In this light, the figure of Spiridion in *This Rough Magic* can be read as representing Shakespeare as much as he does Prospero. Thus Shakespeare is elevated to the position of sainthood, with the Palm Sunday parade functioning as an emphatic celebration of his cultural significance. However, the undercurrent of discomfort felt throughout that scene signals a more complex negotiation of Shakespeare's value-position. As Sanders argues, by referencing him in their work, female novelists of the twentieth century self-consciously measure their worth as writers in relation to Shakespeare. This occurs in *This Rough Magic*: the novel displays ambivalence towards Shakespeare, simultaneously acknowledging his cultural significance whilst questioning his continuing value, and asserting the significance of less canonical contemporary fiction. This is most clearly displayed through the relationship between Lucy and Julian: whilst Lucy is an out-of-work actress with a poor opinion of her own abilities, Julian is a celebrated thespian, who is frequently the subject of Lucy's self-deprecating admiration. However, Julian is a largely inactive character whose appearances in the novel are confined, until the final scene, at least, to just one room, whilst Lucy is instrumental in the progression of the plot. Furthermore, the novel's frequent theatrical undertones highlight her agency in the text: though she oscillates between the roles of passive audience member and actor, by the end of the novel, Lucy is situated firmly within the role of active performer. In this way,

This Rough Magic challenges the superior cultural capital with which Shakespeare, and by extension the canon as a whole, are commonly endowed, and in doing so asserts the importance of, as yet, less celebrated women writers.

'The Niminy-Piminy Ones': Woman Writers and the Historical Sense in *My Brother Michael*

My Brother Michael explores and challenges the parameters of twentieth-century woman writers' position within, and within the context of, the history of western literary culture. The novel's protagonist, Camilla, is frequently reminded of moments from Greek history, mythology, and literature as she travels across the country. These inferences are representative of what Eliot calls 'the historical sense' – an appreciation of literary and cultural history which is necessarily present in all 'traditional' writing – that is, writing which possesses 'a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal'; which is simultaneously new and without age.[50] *My Brother Michael* demonstrates how the western literary heritage that contributes to this historical sense is a masculine domain, and explores the subsequent difficulties this imposes on woman writers. These are symbolically reflected by the obstacles which Camilla faces throughout the novel, including her inability to speak the Greek language and the difficulties she experiences when driving in Greece. Her increasing ability to negotiate the landscape of Greece reflects her increasing autonomy, and her increasing ability to tell her own story. The novel places importance on individual authenticity in artistic creation: this is exemplified through the art of Nigel – a young painter with whom Camilla becomes acquainted – which shows how affected technique diminishes the impact of the final product. The descriptions of Nigel's contrasting artistic styles gesture towards a tension between highbrow modernism and middlebrow culture. In this way, *My Brother Michael* raises the question of which types of writing are valued within literary history.

My Brother Michael opens with Camilla, a young British Classics teacher who has recently ended an engagement, holidaying in Greece. A confusion of identity leads to her possessing a car hired by an unnamed young woman on behalf of a man known only as 'Simon', and destined for Delphi. She meets Simon Lester, who claims to know nothing about the car, and is in Greece to discover the details of the death of his brother, Michael Lester, a British soldier stationed near

[50] Eliot, p. 37.

Delphi during the German occupation of Greece in 1944. Camilla and Simon learn that Michael was murdered by a Greek man, Angelos, who was working as part of the Communist resistance, ELAS, within Greece, and has since disappeared. Simon believes that his brother had found a 'cache of guns and gold' held back by Angelos for later use, and that it was this discovery that supplied the motive for his murder (124). Simon takes Camilla to his lodgings, a large artists' studio near Delphi, where she meets Nigel Barrow, a struggling young artist, and Danielle Lascaux, a young French woman. It was Danielle who had hired the car in Camilla's possession. Camilla encounters Danielle with Dimitrios, Angelos's cousin. When they discover that Nigel has left the studio, Camilla and Simon assume that he has discovered Angelos's cache and is involved with Danielle and Dimitrios in an attempt to remove it. The following day, Camilla and Simon locate the hidden supply of guns and gold in a cave close to the site of Michael's murder. Further in the cave, they also discover an unknown classical statue of Apollo; the discovery made by Michael, and Nigel. Having witnessed him move some of the cache, Simon follows Dimitrios, leaving Camilla alone in the cave, where she stumbles upon Nigel's dead body, which shows signs of torture. Camilla witnesses Angelos murder Danielle during sex, and, once he has left, leaves the cave to take cover in the surrounding hillside. However, Angelos soon finds and attempts to harm her, until Simon appears. A dramatic fight between the three ensues, culminating with Simon killing Angelos with his bare hands.

In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1920), Eliot proposes a theory of the relation between individual writers and the wider tradition of western literature. He observes that, ordinarily, it is 'the poet's difference from his predecessors' which earns critical approval.[51] To paraphrase Ezra Pound, a contemporary of Eliot's and his fellow modernist, the onus is on making it new. However, Eliot proposes that 'not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously'.[52] He argues that all successful (in the sense that they produce work of literary value) poets – and, by extension, all successful writers – must possess an 'historical sense'; an appreciation and awareness of literary and cultural history, which is defined by 'a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'.[53] Eliot states that it is the presence of this historical

[51] Eliot, p. 36.
[52] Eliot, p. 37
[53] Eliot, p. 37.

sense that 'makes a writer traditional'; which aligns them with their canonical predecessors.[54] However, it is not enough for writers to simply imitate work that has gone before them; as Eliot states, 'to conform merely would be for the new work to not really conform at all'.[55] Rather, writers must convey a sense of their literary history whilst simultaneously asserting their own original individuality. I use this Eliotian model to explore the representation of woman writers in relation to western literary history in *My Brother Michael*.

The novel's exploration of western literary heritage is partly conducted through the character of Nigel. Although, according to Simon, he is talented, Nigel is dissatisfied with his artistic abilities, displays great disdain for his own work, and is attempting to reinvent his style. Camilla describes Nigel's artistic experiments as 'thick, dramatic, and over-emphatic', implying that he may be attempting to adopt a modernist style of painting (144). Modernist art, like modernist literature, prioritised expression of sensation over the accurate representation of physical appearance.[56] This often resulted in abstract, expressionistic artworks. The novel seems to exhibit disdain for this kind of artistic expression, as is exemplified though Nigel's sarcastic suggestion that he try '*Art trouvé*, or bits of rusty iron twisted any old way and called *Women in Love* or *Dog eat Dog*', as well as Simon's ironic advice that he 'must make [his] pictures out of sequins, or do all [his] painting underwater, or get [him]self into the popular press as the man who Always Paints to the Strains of Mozart' (137). Nigel and Simon draw attention to the apparently arbitrary nature of such work, a symptom of its supposed tendency to be unusual or provocative for the sake of publicity. What is being criticised here, however, is not modernism itself: rather, I argue, it is the mindless repetition of formulaic characteristics, without the injection of the artist or writers own originality. This is further evidenced when Camilla describes how Nigel's later work possesses 'a slickness, the clever blending of a few stock statements into a formula' (144). This style of working is represented as highly cynical (as is implied by the use of the phrase 'dog eat dog', a colloquial expression denoting competition), and characterised by a formulaic set of self-consciously used techniques. Although Nigel disdains this aping of modernist techniques, he nonetheless attempts to imitate them. In doing this, he reveals his limited historical sense: whilst he is able to demonstrate an awareness of his artistic

[54] Eliot, p. 37.
[55] Eliot, p. 37.
[56] For example, the works of Pablo Picasso, Wassily Kandinsky, and Henri Matisse. For more on this see: Paul Wood, ed., *Varieties of Modernism* (2004); Kirk Varnedone, *A Fine Disregard* (1990); Herschel B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (1968); Leah Dickerman, *Inventing Abstraction* (2012).

predecessors, he is unable to assimilate successfully this awareness in a way that does not counteract his own individuality and originality.

The novel's exploration of the 'historical sense' is apparent in the representations of Nigel and Niko, the grandson of the family with whom Michael stayed before his death. The novel frequently invites the comparison of these characters: they possess similar sounding names, and when Camilla first meets Nigel, she observes that 'there was something about his method of appearance that was very like Niko's' (129). Niko's movements are 'swift like those of a graceful but restless young cat' (95). In contrast, Nigel's movements are 'a parody of Niko's' – 'swift and abrupt' but also 'clumsy, and almost uncoordinated' (132). Whilst Niko is 'lean and brown and beautiful', Nigel has 'none of Niko's beauty or promise of strength' (95; 129). Whilst Niko is 'vivid' and 'excited', Nigel looks 'miserably embarrassed', and possesses an 'air of disconcerted fussiness' (95; 129; 131). This imbalance of elegance and surety between Niko and Nigel can be attributed to the characters' differing historical senses. Although Niko is not an artist, or a writer, his constitutes the best developed historical sense in the novel: whilst Nigel attempts to alter his artistic style in order to conform to what he perceives as the accepted version of 'good' art, in doing so displaying a lack of historical sense, Niko is shown to possess an innate appreciation and awareness of his cultural heritage, whilst simultaneously revelling in things which are unfamiliar. This leads Simon to describe him as 'a little of Athens superimposed on Arachova'; a combination of new and old (205).[57] Niko's penchant for novelty usually manifests in his fashion choices: his socks, for example, are 'luminous, and of a startling shade of pink', which he claims are 'the latest thing from New York' (184; 185). He also wears 'the loudest and most awful Teddy-boy shirt' (95). Despite these modern affectations, though, Camilla states that 'about Niko's racy intelligent beauty there was something essentially Greek – a quicksilver quality that is as evident today under the cheaply Americanised trappings of his kind as it was in the black and red of the classical vase-paintings' (112). Niko is the embodiment of the historical sense: his connection to Greece and its history shines through his own interest in modern, Americanised culture.

It is not modernism itself that *My Brother Michael* seeks to undermine, then, but rather the system which gives it greater value than other types of art and literature. The novel shows how the

[57] Arachova is Niko's home village in Greece.

elevation of modernism leads to a proliferation of poorly conceived imitations of its style, as writers and artists feel obliged to conform to the accepted mode of expression. Eliot states that 'following the ways' of previous generations with 'blind or timid adherence to its successes' in this way is ill-advised, arguing that the literary tradition is continued not by indiscriminate repetition, but rather by combining an awareness of the literary past with an innovative expression of individuality.[58] In *My Brother Michael* it is made clear that Nigel's later artistic attempts are less effective than his earlier works – as Simon says 'they are not his own, and that never works fully' (72). The novel places value on individually-led authenticity; on remaining true to oneself, and not being swayed by fashion or persuasion. The greatest praise Simon can afford Nigel's art, for example, is that 'they are 'Nigel Barrow'' (135). This is emphasised by the Shakespearean refrain – 'to thine own self be true' – that is repeated throughout the novel.[59] The other literary quotation which appears frequently is from John Donne: 'any man's death diminishes me,| because I am involved in mankind'.[60] These two literary quotations combine to form the novel's essential reading of the relationship of individual artists or writers to the tradition of culture. This is summed up by Simon, who states that:

> Your great man – your Socrates – doesn't drive along a straight path of his own cutting. He knows what the end is, yes, and he doesn't turn aside from it, but all the way there he's reckoning with whatever – and whoever – else is in his way. He sees the whole thing as a pattern, and his own place in it. (139-140)

This is reflective of Eliot's historical sense, which 'compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer [...] has a simultaneous existence': it is the 'whole [...] pattern' of western literary history in which the writer or artist must see 'his own place' (140).[61] Writers must possess an awareness of their cultural predecessors, and allow that wider context to come through in their work, whilst simultaneously contributing their own original perspective. However, as the novel illustrates, and as Eliot's insistent use of masculine pronouns betrays, this process is frequently made more difficult for woman writers.[62]

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[58] Eliot, p. 37.
[59] This is taken from Polonius's farewell speech to his son Laertes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603), I.3.78.
[60] This is taken from Donne's 'Meditation 17', in *Devotions upon Emergent* Occasions (1624).
[61] Eliot, p. 37.
[62] Of course, use of masculine pronouns by default was standard at the time of Eliot's writing, but still speaks to a latent misogyny within literature and criticism.

Nigel's early drawings are characterised as feminine: when she sees them Camilla describes them as 'delicate', 'clean and definite', with 'the minimum of fuss', and characterises their style as Nigel's 'flower technique' (143; 154). The gentle fragility afforded to Nigel's drawings conjures an image of stereotypical femininity, and it is this femininity for which he is criticised: Simon tells Camilla that Nigel's art has been condemned as 'emasculate' (72). Nigel, too, is extremely dismissive of these works, referring to them as 'the niminy-piminy ones', and repeatedly stating that they are 'useless' (135). Nigel's often quite violent self-effacement betrays his frustration at the lack of critical respect he receives for his work: 'the sweet little Ruskin-and-water ones. Can't you just hear the Sunday-paper critics?' (135). Nigel knows that his work is perceived as overly sentimental, and as such is not taken seriously by the cultural academy. In this way, his experience chimes with that of woman writers throughout history, who have frequently contended with accusations of 'sentimentality' and possessing a 'narrow view of the world'.[63] His 'thick, dramatic, and over-emphatic' attempts to reinvent his technique are therefore, in contrast, distinctly masculine in style (144). In order to earn the respect of the academy, Nigel is de-feminising his work: femininity, it is implied, does not belong within serious art. Indeed, even whilst praising the delicacy of Nigel's work, Camilla tacitly acknowledges the other-ness of such femininity: she suggests that they possess 'the faded elegance of a *French* flower-print', and use colour 'in faint washes of an almost *Chinese* subtlety' (143; my emphases). By associating the feminine traits of 'elegance' and 'subtlety' with foreign nationalities, Camilla implies the alien nature of such qualities: femininity is shown to be external to the known and accepted realm of art, and, by extension, literature.

Camilla's othering of Nigel's use of femininity in art begins to make sense of the fact that Camilla, a writer, does not value her own writing. That she is a writer is indicated by the fact that the novel's opening line, in which she bemoans the lack of excitement in her life, is a fragment from her own writing, and by the fact that she is writing when she is first approached about the car. Camilla's connection to writing is further displayed when she describes her time in Greece, 'go[ing] tamely from temple to temple, guide-book in hand, and spend[ing] the rather long evenings writing up notes for that wonderful book [she] was always going to write, and persuading [her]self [she's] enjoying the peace and quiet' (5). Here, the attempt to write is

[63] V.S. Naipaul, qtd. by Amy Fallon, 'V.S. Naipaul finds no woman writer his literary match – not even Jane Austen', *Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jun/02/vs-naipaul-jane-austen-women-writers> [accessed 12 November 2014].

presented as a distinctly private and unexciting process, with the actual act a seeming impossibility; rather than produce anything, Camilla is instead constantly 'making notes for that book that will never get written' (6). Camilla does not believe that she has what it takes to be a writer. That she is confined to her lonely hotel room symbolically reflects the comparatively tiny amount of space allotted to women writers compared to male writers. Her constant self-effacement in relation to her writing conveys an awareness of the fact that women's writing is less welcome than men's, as is further indicated when she first relates her experiences concerning the car she acquires to Simon. Camilla describes keeping 'to a bare recital of the facts [...] only the facts; nothing of the miserable tangle of motive, the fear and self-questioning and uneasy bravado' (39). Camilla does not tell a story; she merely recites the facts. She lacks the self-assurance to add her own subjective viewpoint to her narration, sticking only to an objective sequence of events. Indeed, she seems embarrassed by her tale, describing it as a 'silly story', and decrying it as 'nonsense. It's silly and it's trivial and it doesn't mean a thing' (40; 57). Camilla's apologetic insistence on her story's insignificance betrays a sense of inadequacy; she is conscious of taking up space that does not belong to her; she is conscious that her voice is not welcome.

Despite her constant assertion of her own inadequacy, Camilla does display an historical sense, as her perception of Greece as a landscape is constantly filtered through her knowledge of its past. This is demonstrated by the frequent allusions to the history and culture of ancient Greece that occur to her as she drives through the countryside:

> This was the Sacred Way: down this wide sea-bordered road the ancient pilgrims had gone with songs and torches to celebrate the Mysteries at Eleusis. This lake now lying to the right was the holy lake of Demeter. Across that bay on the left the island of Salamis lay like a drowned dragon, and there – *there* – Themistocles had smashed the Persian fleet. (19; emphasis in original)

Here, Camilla refers to ancient religious rites (the Mysteries at Eleusis), mythology (Demeter), and military history (Themistocles). Camilla's historical sense is also displayed in her reference to Greek literature when she notices 'the ghost of an ancient crossroads, where once a young man, coming from Delphi to Thebes, struck an old man down out of his chariot and killed him' (25-26). Here, Camilla alludes to an episode from *Oedipus Rex* (429 B.C.E.). Sophocles' play, which lends its name to Sigmund Freud's 'Oedipus Complex', is associated with theories of

literary influence, and as such its inclusion here speaks to the novel's preoccupation with that subject. However, the play's literary associations are with a masculine tradition: in *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom characterises the influence of the literary past on present-day writers as analogous to the father-son power struggles outlined in Freud's theory.[64] Despite the excitement, as betrayed by the emphasis placed on the repeated word 'there', which traces of the literary past inspire in Camilla, then, she is, as a woman, excluded from this tradition.

Eliot argues that the historical sense must be taken into consideration when assessing a poet's work, because 'you cannot value *him* alone: you must set *him* [...] among the dead'.[65] The implicit exclusion of woman writers here is symptomatic of a wider bias favouring masculine authority within the literary academy. This is reflected in the novel by a disconnect shown between Camilla and Greece's literary past. Although she is able to recognise how various landmarks coincide with episodes from Greek literature and history, Camilla is unable to reconcile the physical landscape of Greece with her own imagined picture of that country. As a result of this, a distinct sense of loss permeates her later descriptions of the scenery: she states that 'the myths and magic are all gone' and refers to 'mourn[ing] the passing of the legends' and 'the first sharp disillusion' upon realising the industrialised landscape does not fit with her own preconceived image of Greece (3; 23; 19).The perception of Greece as culturally barren is reinforced by Camilla's characterisation of its landscape as a dead wilderness: she describes it variously as 'waterless', 'dry', 'yellowish', 'burned', and 'dead', and the hills, corpse-like, are 'great ribs' (25). Camilla also describes how 'the Sacred Way now ran straight and wide [...] between the cement factories and the ironworks', how 'the holy lake [is] stilted up with weeds and slag', and how 'the wine-dark water reflect[s] the aluminium towers of the refinery' (19). Here, the description of the water as 'wine-dark' alludes to E.V. Rieu's 1946 translation of Homer's *Odyssey*. This indicates that, though distorted, the literary past retains a palpable presence in Greece on some level. However, although traces of Greece's cultural heritage are recognisable, the literary past remains remote from Camilla.

[64] In Sophocles' play, Oedipus unknowingly murders his father, Laius, and marries his mother, Jocasta. Freud reads this as an expression of the unconscious desire prevalent in all young men to have sex with or in some other way possess their mothers. This desire causes them to view their father as a rival and, as such, wish to eliminate him.
[65] Eliot, p. 37. My emphasis.

Despite Camilla's willingness to engage with Greece's cultural history, at the novel's outset it is shown to be, for the most part, inaccessible to her. This is reflected by the often violent and masculine way in which the landscape is represented. Trees, for example, are compared to phallic weaponry: whilst 'the young cypresses [stand] like spears' and 'like swords', the pine trees 'loom […] thick in the starlight, rank on rank' (79; 82; 113). The inaccessibility of Greece for Camilla is also partly explained by the fact that it is separated from her by the barrier of language: much is made of the fact that Camilla does not speak either modern or Ancient Greek. This fact plays a defining role in the novel: it is her inability to communicate which leads to the confusion resulting in her possession of the car. That Camilla is unable to speak Greek is crucial: I read her silence as symbolically representing the lack of a female voice within literary history. At the beginning of the novel, Camilla's description of Athens characterises the city as a tissue of voices: she relates how 'everyone is moving, talking, gesticulating – but particularly talking', and describes 'the sound of Athenian voices arguing, laughing, talk-talk-talking' (1-2). Camilla connects this talking to Greece's cultural history, recalling how Athenian voices 'once […] talked the world into shape in the busy colonnades of the Agora' (2). Greek voices, then, are the consistent feature of the country, linking its present to its past. However, this talkativeness is shown to be a masculine trait: whilst the women merely '[go] about their shopping', it is the voices of 'knots of men […] discuss[ing] whatever men do discuss' which culminate in a 'roar of talking' (2; 1). That Camilla's inability to speak Greek is positioned as a gendered characteristic is further made apparent when she reveals to Simon that, like him, she is a teacher:

> "Don't tell me you're a colleague. Another beggarly usher?"
>
> "Afraid so."
>
> "Classics?"
>
> "Yes. Only in a girls' school that just means Latin to my sorrow and shame."
>
> "You don't know Ancient Greek?"
>
> "A little. A very little" (56)

The study of Classics means something different for girls – only boys learn Ancient Greek. This distinction ties in with the novel's repeated assertion that Greece is 'a man's country' (33). Camilla's exclusion from Ancient Greek is again emphasised by Simon's explanation that he is a 'schoolmaster' (56). Rather than state he is a Classics teacher, or that he teaches Classics, Simon asserts that 'Classics is [his] subject' (56). This possessive statement feels exclusionary; 'Classics is *my* subject' – the implication being, not yours (56; my emphasis). The Greek language is

shown to be the medium through which Greek culture is translated from the past into the present. Camilla's exclusion from it symbolically reflects the exclusion of women's voices from the western literary tradition.

Camilla is used to being spoken for by men, rather than speaking for herself. At the beginning of *My Brother Michael*, this is shown by her presentation of herself as an inactive and unassertive individual. This is clear from the novel's opening line, which is written by Camilla in a letter to a friend in England. She states that 'nothing ever happens to me', a complaint which is revealing of her perceived lack of agency, implying, as it does, that it is in the nature of things to occur spontaneously of their own accord, acting their effect upon whomsoever happens to be standing passively by, rather than to be made to happen by people (1).Camilla's passivity is further highlighted by the comparisons she draws between herself and her ex-fiancé, Philip: she supposes that she 'surely [has] *some* talent for living, even if it looked feeble beside *his* overplus' (5; emphasis in original). Philip is portrayed as an active and autonomous individual, exerting a level control over himself which extends to Camilla. This is demonstrated when she describes how she 'just can't see Philip [...] letting me prowl' alone around Greece (4). The implication here that Camilla requires Philip's permission to 'prowl' underwrites her tractability in relation to his assertive personality. This acquiescence is further illustrated when Camilla first encounters Simon: she describes speaking to him by turns 'uncertainly', 'feebly', 'a little confusedly', and 'a little helplessly' as she allows him to relieve her of control of the situation with the rented car; Camilla states that 'it was over to him', as she acknowledges her submissive compliance (47-48; 40).

However, Camilla's decision to take on the apparently abandoned rental car marks her first step towards freeing herself from her attachment to Philip: she notes that he 'had never let [her] touch his car' (18). This transition is not without its problems. Camilla faces a number of 'sticky moments' as she attempts to drive the car to Delphi; she describes her inability to 'put the car into gear', as well as driving 'at a cautious ten miles per hour and hugging the left-hand side of the pavement' (17). Camilla's inexperience at driving is reflective of her inexperience as an autonomous individual; having only recently ended her attachment to Philip, she is used to being driven, rather than driving herself.[66] Camilla faces much hostility as she drives: she experiences

[66] Cars are used to symbolise women's individual agency elsewhere in Stewart's novels. As I discussed earlier, in

the full 'volume and fervour of [a taxi driver's] abuse', encounters 'two furious pedestrians', and one man who '[spits] on the bonnet' (17; 18). As I have mentioned, Greece is frequently referred to in the novel as 'a man's country', and, as such, much of this hostility is gendered (33). Most significant is the driver of the 'small, evil looking' 'service bus from Athens', who refuses to allow Camilla to pass him by driving 'complacently [in] the centre of the road', forcing her 'back once more into the choking dust train' (21). Camilla asserts that 'if Philip had been driving, it wouldn't have happened. Women drivers are fair game on the roads of Greece' (23). This description of the casual misogyny experienced by Camilla further emphasises the sense that, as a woman, she is somehow at odds with the landscape of Greece.

Camilla's difficulties in negotiating the Greek landscape can be read as a reflection of her difficulties as a woman writer negotiating the masculine landscape of the literary canon. However, whilst the novel tracks the problems faced by woman writers, it also indicates that it is possible for them to forge their way through. This is gestured towards at the novel's very outset: moments before Camilla is approached about the abandoned rental car, she writes: 'If only I could afford a car! Do you suppose that if I prayed to all the gods at once…' (6). Camilla writes it, and then it happens, as if she has written the car into life. As such her writing is shown to be powerful, in spite of her own self-effacement. Camilla's potential as a writer is also demonstrated by the fact that, as the novel progresses, the literary past which she was previously able to perceive but remained disconnected from increasingly encroaches onto her present. She states that 'the past is so living and the present so intense and the future so blooming imminent' (183). Camilla's observation indicates that her historical sense is improving: according to Eliot, historical sense is defined by an awareness of 'the timeless and the temporal together'.[67] That Camilla is able to perceive the past, present and future simultaneously indicates that she is some way to achieving this. The increasing presence of the past is most clearly symbolised in the novel by the discovery of the lost statue of Apollo:

> Apollo himself was here. He was standing not ten feet in front of me as I came out of the tunnel. He was naked, and in his hand was a bow. He stood looking over my head as he had stood for two thousand years (276).

Nine Coaches Waiting, Linda's changing relationship to the vehicles that transport her reflects her increasing independence. Meanwhile, in *Madam, Will You Talk?*, as I discuss in Chapter Two, Charity's involvement in a tense chase scene demonstrates her ability to hold her own in an otherwise masculine-dominated genre.

[67] Eliot, p. 37.

Eliot states that 'the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past'.[68] The statue's arrival serves as an example of this, as its appearance in the present changes the way the past is perceived. The insistent referral to the statue as 'he' rather than 'it' lends it a sense of living immediacy that connects this ancient artefact directly to the present day. The appearance of Apollo symbolises the accessibility of Greece's history to the newly autonomous Camilla.

My Brother Michael explores the position of woman writers in the twentieth century in relation to the western literary canon. As a Classicist and an aspiring writer, Camilla makes frequent allusions to Ancient Greek history and literature as she moves through the country. In doing so, she displays what Eliot terms a 'historical sense'; an awareness and appreciation of the continuing presence of the past in the present. However, Camilla is shown to be distanced from this literary past, as the landscape fails to match to her pre-conceived image of Greece. She also faces a number of other struggles, such as her inability to speak the language and her poor driving, as she negotiates her path through Greece. These barriers function in the novel as a physical representation of the historical, psychological, and sociological barriers which woman writers encounter in the face of the traditionally masculine culture of Western literature. The contrasting artistic styles practised by Nigel also reflect the cultural bias towards art and literature produced by men: Nigel's own style is condemned for appearing too feminine. As such, he attempts to reinvent himself by adopting a more masculine style of painting. However, these efforts are shown to be less effective, because, according to Simon, they are inauthentic, and do not reflect his true self. Indeed, great value is placed on the role of autonomous authenticity in the creation of art. In this way, the novel again speaks to Eliot's assertion that successful writing must simultaneously display an awareness of its historical literary heritage, demonstrating a sense of that heritage's continuing presence, whilst also conveying a sense of individual new-ness. *My Brother Michael* illustrates the conditions under which woman writers labour, and demonstrates how the masculine literary heritage, from which they were previously excluded, continues to hinder their progress. However, as the appearance of Apollo at the end of the novel indicates, they will not be hindered for long.

[68] Eliot, p. 37.

'The Same Old Material': Recycling and Repurposing Literature in *The Wind off the Small Isles*

The Wind off the Small Isles explores the tensions that accumulate around the categories of highbrow literature and popular fiction. The novella features two characters who are writers: Cora, a female author of popular children's fiction, and James, a celebrated male playwright.[69] Cora expresses displeasure at what she perceives to be her diminished literary status, and resentment towards the critical acclaim enjoyed by James. I argue that Cora's dissatisfaction speaks to her implicit understanding that her work is not valued in the same way as James' work: because it is popular, monetarily productive, and because it is created by a woman (and written for children), it is taken less seriously by critics. The text highlights the illogic of this imbalance by demonstrating that *all* texts are built from recycled literary traces and tropes, indiscriminate of gender or genre; that is, all texts are intertexts. Story-telling is intrinsically intertextual, as it constantly draws on past (hi)stories; it is in the marketplace and in the academy that gender operates as a qualification of significance. One way the text signals this is through the theme of recycling (using again) and repurposing (using again and, significantly, in doing so transforming) which runs throughout. An important aspect of the novella's exploration of literary repurposing is its use of Keats's poem 'The Eve of St. Agnes'. Each chapter contains an epigraph taken from the poem, and the events of the poem are echoed within the plot of the novella; that is, *The Wind off the Small Isles* metafictively repurposes this poem. This is crucial as, like the novella, Keats's poem speaks to a blurring of the distinction between highbrow and popular literatures. By including references to it, then, *The Wind off the Small Isles* simultaneously reiterates its own project to explore this blurring, and in doing so demonstrates the means by which it argues this blurring occurs, that is, through the recycling and repurposing of literary traces.

The novella opens with the elopement of a young heterosexual couple in Lanzarote in 1879. The passage is in the third person, but from the perspective of the young woman, who, while she waits at home for her lover, fiddles with her rosary and remembers their first meeting. A volcanic explosion takes place in the distance, causing ash and grit to rap against the windows, but despite this the girl successfully quits the house and meets her lover. The novella then

[69] No detail is given of what kind of play James writes, nor any details of the acclaim he receives other than Perdita's description of him as a 'leading playwright'.

switches to the present day and first-person narration from the perspective of Perdita West, secretary and personal assistant to Cora. Perdita and Cora are visiting Lanzarote, and stumble across a house that Cora wants to buy.[70] The house is owned by James, whose assistant, Michael Gresham, is Cora's son (an unlikely coincidence which Stewart ironically reflects on, as I discuss below). Cora and Perdita join James and Michael for a drink, during which James discloses that his latest work-in-progress is inspired by papers and logbooks found in the house – a former cochineal farm.[71] One record refers to the elopement of wealthy farmer's daughter Maria Dolores with the poor fisher-boy Miguel: it states that she took nothing but a silver rosary, which had beads shaped like cochineal pears. The next day Perdita goes diving in the surrounding waters. As she explores a cave in the coastline, an avalanche blocks its entrance. In the cave, she discovers what appears to be a statue depicting an embracing couple that has been concealed in a compacted wall of ash that now, as a result of the avalanche, is beginning to fall away. Michael appears in time to shield Perdita from the final, heavy fall of ash. Perdita picks up the broken off finger of the statue, and realises that it is in fact human bone. The pair embrace, and leave the cave via the cellar of James' house, to which, as Michael explains, it is connected. James believes that the figures in the 'statue' are in fact Pompeii-like casts of Dolores and Miguel, who had not, in fact, eloped, but had been caught in the ash cloud before leaving the island. This is confirmed when Perdita discovers a silver rosary, with beads in the shape of cochineal pears, amidst the ash in Michael's coat pocket.

The Wind off the Small Isles interrogates the distinction between the highbrow and the popular, and gestures towards the tension that frequently surrounds these categories. Both Cora and James are writers: Cora 'a writer of children's stories' and James 'one of our leading playwrights' (15; 39). James, then, is associated with the highbrow elite, as is emphasised when Perdita likens his appearance to that of a famous and respected composer of classical music: 'one's first impression of the famous playwright was that he looked very like Beethoven' (44). Meanwhile, Cora is associated with the popular and the commercial; we learn the fact that she is a 'woman of wealth' before her profession is revealed (15). Although they are ostensibly friends, Cora displays resentment towards James' higher literary status: she calls him 'George St Bernard

[70] That Cora is able to even consider making a purchase such as this on such a whim is indicative of her financial success (and thus popularity) as an author.

[71] Cochineals are insects used to produce red dye. They feed on prickly pear, which are what grow on cochineal farms – the insects are then harvested from the cacti.

Shakespeare', humorously combining the names of two highly regarded playwrights with a breed of dog, and in doing so undermining the respect with which these men (and James) are usually endowed (59). When James complains of writer's block she again undercuts what she ironically terms his 'rarefied agonies', stating that 'it was probably just the flu' (41; 45). This – as well as Cora's awareness of literature as a commercial product ('I can't afford to kill off my best-selling buccaneer' (41)) – is a further example of the common representation of writers within middlebrow fiction which Humble has outlined, and which I described in the Introduction: that highbrow, usually male, writers are understood as cerebral and unreliable, whilst middlebrow or popular, usually female, writers are positioned as eminently grounded and practical. Cora's attitude towards James is tempered by a sense of her insecurity regarding her position as an author of popular fictions: she states that Lanzarote 'might be the place to […] maybe write something worth while' implying that she thinks her work so far is not, and she is openly self-deprecating when she asserts that the story of Miguel and Dolores's elopement 'will come off rather better as the new James Blair than as the latest adventure of Sockeye the Salmon or the Teenage Pirates' (21; 47). While Cora's attitude towards James can be read as a defence mechanism, designed to mask her own insecurities, I argue that it is the other way around: Cora's supposed insecurities mask her resentment at her treatment as a writer of popular fiction.

Cora describes herself as 'the clown with the normal clown's urge to play Hamlet': she characterises her own work as silly and trivial, whilst the elite alternative (i.e. that of James) is to be taken more seriously by the literary establishment (21). The metaphor Cora uses here is based on the assumption that comedy is less valuable than tragedy, that to entertain is less important – and easier to achieve – than to elevate. Whether or not Cora really believes that this is the case is called into question when she and Perdita meet Michael and James: she exclaims that it 'is one of those coincidences that nobody would believe if [James] or [she] put it into print', adding that 'if [he] did they'd say it was a subtle denial of causality, and if [she] did they'd say it was romantic nonsense' (44). Here, Cora speaks to a double standard in the way literature is valued: whilst the elite highbrow writer is praised for his originality, the author of popular fiction, when she does the same thing, is shunned for adhering to lazy stereotypes. Cora's dissatisfaction is not so much concerned with the work she produces, then, as it is with how the work she produces is perceived. This is intrinsically connected to how she herself is perceived. In response to Cora's self-effacement, Perdita wishes that Cora would 'stop tormenting [her]self

because [she's] not Graham Greene or James Blair or Robert Bolt or someone' (22). The fictional James Blair aside, both Graham Greene (a famous author of both highbrow and popular fiction) and Robert Bolt (the screenwriter for *Lawrence of Arabia* [1962] and *Doctor Zhivago* [1965]) are writers whose work could be located within the category of the middlebrow.[72] They both produced a variety of works, many of which were extremely popular and commercially successful. In this sense, they are not so different from Cora, who produces 'anything from rip-roaring adventure to animal cartoons and space fiction' (15). Where they do differ is that they are all men, and they have all received critical recognition for their work.[73] Cora's problem, then, is not that she thinks her work is not valuable, but that she knows it is not valued in the same way it would be were she a man. By demonstrating the similarities between Cora and James' work, the novella highlights the gendering of this value distinction.

Cora draws attention to a gendered distinction in reading preferences when she states that her 'readers like love at first sight, however much cynics like [James] and [her] son may deny it ever happens' adding that 'it's the kind of thing young men do deny' (51). However, James contradicts this when he explains that his own story in fact 'is love at first sight, and it would probably suit Coralie Gray [Cora's *nom de plume*] down to the ground' (51). Here, James reveals his disdain for Cora's work: whilst acknowledging this similarity between their writing he simultaneously displays a reluctance to associate himself with 'so ordinary, so much the classic cliché of a love story', describing it as 'hardly a story at all' and stating that it 'hardly bears repeating' (48). In an apparent attempt to distance himself from the romance genre, he claims that he 'see[s] it as the father's story, rather than the lovers' (55). However, the romance aspect of his work is betrayed by the fact that it is 'weighted down by a rose-coloured shell': literally weighted down, as he is using the shell as a paperweight, and metaphorically weighted down by

[72] Greene felt some queasiness about associating himself with the realm of popular fiction, terming his spy novels 'entertainments' in an attempt to distance them from his more serious literary endeavours. His have-your-cake-and-eat-it attitude mirrors that of the Romantic poets towards the gothic, which I outline below.

[73] Greene was made part of the Order of the Companions of Honour in 1966, and was shortlisted for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1967. Bolt was awarded a CBE in 1972, and won two Best Adapted Screenplay Oscars: for *Doctor Zhivago* (based on Boris Pasternak's 1957 novel of the same name) in 1965, and for *A Man for All Seasons* (based on his own 1960 play of the same name) in 1966. In terms of *The Wind off the Small Isles*' exploration of intertextuality and the repurposing of texts, the choice of Bolt as a reference point is appropriate: it is significant that his Oscars are for *adapted* screenplays – i.e. they are works which are explicitly based on previous texts. *A Man for All the Seasons* is a particularly pertinent example, as its story was retold by Bolt in a number of different texts: it originally aired as a radio play in 1954, was adapted for television in 1957, for the stage in 1960, and finally for film in 1966. Furthermore, its plot, which is based on events in the life of Sir Thomas Moore, recycles events from history.

the femininity this image symbolises. Shells, which are defined by the fact that they contain life within themselves, are womb-like, and these feminine associations are heightened in this example by the colour pink (31). Indeed, while listening to James describe the plot of his new play, Perdita reflects on the essential similarity of all stories: 'the same old material, the same old line, the same old setting – all that counts is the mind that processes them' (48). Her next thought breaks off before its completion: 'and this was the man –' (48). It is unclear where Perdita's thought is leading, but its most significant part is still in evidence: that James is a man. 'All that counts' is that 'the same old material' will be repurposed by a mind that is male, and will receive greater respect as a result. It is for this reason, I argue, that when James says 'you know as well as I do, Cora, how it goes', Perdita sees 'her [Cora] smile, and kn[ows] why' (51). Both women understand that although Cora and James may be 'two of a kind', their sexual difference means their writing cannot be recognised as such (35).

By the novella's close, James has overcome his discomfort at being associated with the type of writing produced by Cora, as is demonstrated by his exclamation that 'denial of causality be damned' (91). I argue that this is as a result of the novella's demonstration that all stories are (re-)constructed from the same repurposed literary traces and tropes, indiscriminate of genre or gender; as Perdita says, 'the same old material' (48). The theme of repurposing appears throughout the text. The alterations to James' house are being made using the remnants of the old farm: 'as we demolish the goat-pens or whatever they are, we carry the stones along and use them for the retaining wall' (42). When Perdita sees a decaying ship moored in the bay near James' house, Michael tells her that it is intended for refurbishment, to be made into 'a night club or a floating restaurant' (56). The repurposing of the ship is continued on another level: when she first sees it, having just heard the story of Miguel and Dolores' elopement, Perdita describes it as 'the ghost of a ship' and exclaims that 'it can't be true' (55). This amazement is borne from the uncanny sense of a story made manifest in present-day reality: Perdita imaginatively repurposes the ship as Miguel's boat, moored ready to leave the island with Dolores.[74] Similarly, Cora plans to repurpose the ship as a setting for her pirate novel. A further example of repurposing is the novella's title: as Cora points out, the term 'small isles' is ordinarily used to describe the Hebrides. James explains that, during the translation of the farm's papers, ''the small isles' suggested itself because it was familiar' despite the massive

[74]An association which is apt, as the couple are indeed still on the island – a fact symbolically foreshadowed by the ghostly appearance of Miguel's boat.

disparity between the two locations, which 'might be on a different planet' (47). Thus, a phrase originally connected to an archipelago off the north-west coast of Scotland is repurposed to describe Lanzarote, off south-western Morocco. That translation is subsequently repurposed as the title of James' play, and, ultimately, as the title of the novella itself. Here the novella speaks repeatedly to the propensity of literature to repurpose old material, demonstrating the essential intertextuality of all stories, and that the construction of text is a democratic process, in which literary traces from all manner of sources are constantly reused and repurposed.

This is further demonstrated by the fact that Dolores and Miguel are mirrored by Perdita and Michael, as is made initially apparent by their names: Miguel is the Spanish form of Michael, and there is an affective connection between Dolores, which is Spanish for 'sorrow', and Perdita, which is from the Latin for 'lost'. Similarities between each couple's first encounter also signal their connection: both Michael and Miguel are 'bareheaded', and whilst Dolores remembers how 'the smile drove the deep crease down [Miguel's] cheek and lit the dark eyes', Perdita describes 'the attractive crease that [Michael's] sudden smile drove down his cheek' (14; 31; 11; 40). The episode that most clearly illustrates the connection between these two couples, however, occurs when Michael and Perdita are in the lava cave:

> I saw the rest of the grey stone-like figure show momentarily, like a ghost against darkness. It was not one figure but two. In the curve of that shielding arm some smaller body was huddled. I saw merely the double hump of two heads, one bent over the other, the curve of the protecting shoulder, the hand, grey and stony, ending in the delicate, brittle bones – then Mike had whirled with his back to the fall, and dragged me under him with my head pulled down against his chest, and his body arched over mine to keep off the falling ash. (82)

The 'grey stone-like figure' described here is the cast formed by the cement from the renovations on James' house and the imprint of Dolores and Miguel's remains in the compacted ash. That it is described as 'like a ghost' is vital because it represents a physical continuation of the dead within the living world. It is only through Michael's action in the present day that this remnant from the past can be made sense of. When Michael 'drag[s] [Perdita] under him […] [,] his body arched over [hers] to keep off the falling ash' the configuration of the cast's 'double hump of two heads, one bent over the other, [and] the curve of the protecting shoulder' becomes clear: Miguel is protecting Dolores from the falling ash, just as Michael protects Perdita

from that same ash almost a century later. Here, it is the actions of Perdita and Michael in the present which allow Dolores and Miguel's story to come to light. The story of Dolores and Miguel is thus not only repeated through Perdita and Michael's relationship: it is symbolically continued, and ultimately, resolved. This gestures towards the fact that, in referencing each other, texts not only repeat but are also able to change past texts.

The novella demonstrates this through its use of 'The Eve of St. Agnes'. Both texts contain stories of the elopement of a young couple – Dolores and Miguel in the novella, and Madeline and Porphyro in the poem. Whilst itself mirrored in Perdita and Michael's relationship, the elopement of Dolores and Miguel mirrors that of Madeline and Porphyro in Keats' poem. *The Wind off the Small Isles* opens with a description of Dolores waiting for Miguel: she decides to 'shut her eyes on that empty sea, and think about him, as if by thinking she might make his coming sure' (10-11). This mirrors the ritual performed by Madeline in 'The Eve of St. Agnes', which is designed to conjure the image of her future husband so that she might receive his 'soft adorings'.[75] Whilst Dolores waits, her 'rosary move[s] in her fingers' (10). This again echoes Keats's poem, the opening stanza of which relates that 'the Beadsman's fingers' are 'numb' 'while he [tells]/ His rosary'.[76] One of the most significant tropes from 'The Eve of St. Agnes' which appears in the novella, and which serves to solidify the connections between the three couples (Dolores and Miguel; Perdita and Michael; Madeline and Porphyro), is the statue. Statues, which are often recreated and reimagined physical manifestations of items or people that already exist, are inherently related to ideas of repetition. The final description of the statue-like cast of Dolores and Miguel's bodies repeats the earlier description of Michael protecting Perdita from the falling ash: both Michael and Miguel are described as 'covering' their lovers' 'like a bird covers its young' (84 & 96). Whist Dolores and Miguel are literally transformed into a kind of statue, in 'The Eve of St. Agnes' both Porphyro and Madeline are symbolically transformed into statues: Porphyro is so overcome by Madeline's presence that he falls 'upon his knees […] pale as smooth-sculptured stone'.[77] As part of the rituals she undertakes, meanwhile, Madeline attempts to become statue-like: she must lie naked – 'lily-

[75] John Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes', in *Complete Poems and Selected Letters of John Keats* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), pp. 224-35, line 48.
[76] Keats, line 5-6. The role of the Beadsman was to pray for the welfare of his benefactor, hence the fact that he is 'all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve' (line 27). The Beadsman takes on the sins of others and prays for their redemption rather than his own; that is, his prayers are repurposed.
[77] Keats, line 297.

white' – and unmoving – 'Nor look behind, nor sideways'.[78] 'The Eve of St. Agnes' is not only itself repurposed in *The Wind off the Small Isles*; it also speaks – through its use of the trope of statues – to the theme of recycling and repurposing representations in art. In using it as an example in its exploration of literary repurposing, the novella draws attention to this aspect of the poem; it shifts the way the poem is perceived.

'The Eve of St. Agnes' repurposes a number of literary works: Martha Hale Shackford pointed out the influence of Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) on the poem in 1921, and since then Rodney Stenning Edgecombe has acknowledged its debt to Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590/96) and *Epithalamion* (1594), Anne Williams has pointed out the 'obvious and familiar' similarities in plot to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) and both Williams and Jerrold Hogle have observed that as well as *Udolpho*, the poem 'has strong affinities with [Matthew Lewis's 1796 gothic novel] *The Monk*'.[79] These allusions are a blend of the canonised highbrow (Shakespeare, Spenser) and the popular (Radcliffe, Lewis); as Michael Gamer has shown, at the time of Keats's writing in the early nineteenth century, the gothic was 'characterised by unprecedented popular approval and critical aspersion'.[80] Gamer's interest lies in the 'moments of adjacency and overlapping' between 'low' gothic and 'high' romanticism, because 'within them the gothic perpetually haunts, as an aesthetic to be rejected, romanticism's construction of high literary culture'.[81] He explores instances where figures like Wordsworth and Coleridge borrow gothic elements in their works whilst denying or deflecting any association with the gothic (much like James attempts to distance himself from the romance plot of his work-in-progress in *The Wind of the Small Isles*). Hogle argues that 'The Eve of St. Agnes', in particular,

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[78] Keats, line 52-53. Perdita is also connected to the notion of people transforming into statues and vice versa: the name comes from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1623) in which a statue of Hermione (mother of Perdita in the play) comes to life.

[79] See: Martha Hale Shackford, 'The Eve of St. Agnes and the Mysteries of Udolpho', *PMLA,* 36 (1921); Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, 'Keats's The Eve of St. Agnes', *Explicator*, 52 (1994); Jerrold E. Hogle, 'The Gothic-Romantic Relationship: Underground Histories in 'The Eve of St. Agnes'', *European Romantic Review*, 14 (2003); Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 231, 227.

[80] Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 8. Radcliffe's and Lewis's novels are good examples of the shifting nature of popularity and literary value I discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Nowadays, these texts might well be taught in universities – are probably most often read for this reason – are marketed as 'classic literature', and correspondingly possess a high literary value. In the nineteenth century, however, they were extremely popular, and, in the case of *The Monk*, controversial, forms of entertainment which were often regarded as trashy and unintellectual.

[81] Gamer, p. 7.

'enacts this multiplicity with remarkable thoroughness'.[82] By referencing the poem, then, the novella draws attention to its own representation of the relationship between highbrow literature and popular fiction as less than clear-cut.

The Wind off the Small Isles explores the distinction between the highbrow and the popular, highlighting the often gendered tensions which exist between these two categories whilst simultaneously showing that the imbalance in how different texts are valued is, ultimately, irrelevant. It does this by showing that all texts are formed of repurposed and recycled literary traces, indiscriminate of gender or genre. One way this is demonstrated is through the novella's use of 'The Eve of St. Agnes'. Like *The Wind off the Small Isles*, Keats's poem blurs the distinction between highbrow and popular literatures. By including references to it, the novella re-emphasises its own reading of this distinction as blurred. It also repurposes elements from the poem. A further example of this occurs when Porphyro plays 'an ancient ditty' entitled 'La belle dame sans mercy' – Alain Chartier's 1424 poem of courtly love.[83] More famous than Chartier's work, though, is Keats' own 'La Belle Dame san Merci', which was composed in the same year as 'The Eve of St. Agnes'. In this light, Keats' work repeats itself within itself. Stewart playfully mimics this in *The Wind off the Small Isles* when she makes reference to a character from one of her own previous novels, *This Rough Magic*; Michael refers to 'the time [James] had flu and wanted to recoup so that he could finish *Tiger Tiger* for Julian Gale [the famous actor in *This Rough Magic*]' (38). That it intertextually refers to a character from its author's previous work serves to underline the novella's exploration of the repetitiveness of all text. That in doing so it explicitly nods to a similar moment in Keats's poem further emphasises this. As such, James' claim that the story behind his play 'belongs here [...] actually here' at his house, as well as Cora's assertion that if she 'had gotten [there] first [she] would have fallen heir' to it are shown to be ironic: stories are not rooted to specific places or people (46). Rather, they are repurposed, recycled and retold throughout literature.

'The Displacing of our Idols': Woman Writers and the Western Canon

The novels discussed in this chapter pose questions about how different types of texts are valued. *Nine Coaches Waiting* challenges Leavis's assertion that low- and middlebrow books are capable of

[82] Hogle, p. 210.
[83] Keats, line 210-11.

imbuing their readers with dangerous emotions and 'undesirable attitudes'.[84] The novel portrays two readers, of different types: Léon is shown to be a reader of highbrow literature, whilst Linda is shown to read a range of material, including highbrow poetry and drama as well as middlebrow fiction, and as such fits Humble's description of the typical middlebrow reader. Despite the fact that it is Linda who reads material that would be deemed by Leavis to be dangerous, it is Léon who exhibits 'undesirable attitudes', as he attempts to murder his young nephew.[85] In contrast, Linda uses information gleaned from her eclectic reading to her advantage: it is her knowledge of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1623), a highbrow text, which allows her to identify that Héloise is sleepwalking, and a technique learned from Buchan – a middlebrow author – which allows her to awaken Philippe without shocking him. In this way, the novel ironically undercuts Leavis's assertion that low- and middlebrow literature should be considered dangerous, and in doing so argues implicitly that literature of all brows should be considered of equal value. A similar argument is made in *My Brother Michael*, via the descriptions of Nigel's contrasting art works: because his original pieces are condemned by critics as effeminate and old-fashioned, Nigel attempts to reinvent himself by adopting a modernist style of painting, in adherence with what he understands is considered to be fashionable. However, these efforts are deemed by Camilla to be ineffective. The novel argues that the best art work is achieved when the artist, and by extension, writer, is true to their own authentic style, regardless of what is considered to be of higher value by critics.

Stewart's novels illustrate the gender inequality inherent in the literary academy. In *This Rough Magic*, this is achieved via an exploration of Shakespeare's elevated position in the canon: the novel symbolically equates the Corfiote patron saint, Spiridion, with Shakespeare. The reference to Spiridion's unnamed female companion, then, whose mummified remains lay forgotten in a local church whilst Spiridion's are paraded through the streets, reflects Woolf's imagined example of Shakespeare's sister – a female counterpart to the famous playwright who, by dint of her gender, is unable to achieve the commercial success of her brother and thus dies in poverty. The novel acknowledges the unequal attention paid to male and female authors. Similarly, *My Brother Michael* illustrates the difficulties faced by woman writers in the face of the masculine tradition of literature: in the novel, the physical landscape of Greece represents the symbolic landscape of western literary history. This landscape is shown to be distinctly masculinised, and

[84] Leavis, p. 172.
[85] Leavis, p. 172.

as such the novel's heroine, Camilla, an aspiring writer, struggles to negotiate its terrain. In *The Wind off the Small Isles*, Cora, a financially successful and popular writer of children's fiction, expresses the resentment she feels towards James, a highly celebrated play-wright, as a result of what she perceives to be her diminished literary status in comparison to his: because she is a woman writer of popular fiction, her work is less valued. However, whilst all three novels represent the difficulties faced by woman writers, they also offer alternative solutions: in *My Brother Michael*, Camilla's increasing independence corresponds with her increasing ability to engage with the Greek landscape which once excluded her. In *This Rough Magic* Lucy, who frequently compares herself unfavourably to Julian, can be read as a twentieth-century middlebrow woman writer struggling to match up to the standards of the masculine canon. However, Lucy is shown to be a far more active and significant character within the novel: contrary to her beliefs, her value (to the novel) is shown to equal, if not outstrip, that of Julian. Correspondingly, the value of woman writers in relation to Shakespeare is redefined. By highlighting text's propensity to recycle and repurpose itself, *The Wind off the Small Isles* reveals the ultimate absurdity of the notion that some texts are more valuable than others: texts are shown to be involved in a constant exchange of ideas, tropes and themes, indiscriminate of gender and genre, and as such, are all connected, and all equal.

All four of the novels discussed in this chapter consider notions of value within and around the literary canon. In doing so they respond to arguments made by critics, such as Leavis in the earlier twentieth century, which positioned middlebrow fiction as constituted of anodyne plotlines and outworn sentiments, and as pandering to its readers' desire to feel connected to the higher echelons of culture by inserting recognisable references to highbrow literature. On the contrary, Stewart's novels use references to high-, low- and middlebrow literature in order to deconstruct the assumptions implied by these categorisations: *Nine Coaches Waiting* ironically undercuts the assertion made by Leavis that fiction of the low- and middlebrows was potentially dangerous, whilst *This Rough Magic* explores the superior position of Shakespeare within the literary canon, *My Brother Michael* investigates the traditionally masculine nature of the highbrow, and the consequent confinement of women to the low- and middlebrows, and *The Wind off the Small Isles* explores the difference between the way popular female and highbrow male writers are treated. Whilst the novels may be dismissive towards highbrow attitudes, they thoroughly embrace highbrow literature: in *Nine Coaches Waiting*, Linda quotes from Shakespeare and Eliot as

well as Brontë and Buchan, and thinks that 'poetry [is] awfully good material for thinking with' (91). Similarly, in both *This Rough Magic* and *My Brother Michael* the protagonists serve to represent the problems faced by women writers in relation to the canon whilst simultaneously displaying genuine enjoyment of the highbrow literature they discuss. Rather than derisive attitudes towards the literature that is considered to fall under the categorisation of 'highbrow', the novels display a distrust of the very systems that legitimate these processes of hierarchical categorisation in the first place. As the works of a middlebrow woman writer, these novels self-consciously and metafictively examine their own position within the literary tradition they inhabit. In doing so, they ask important questions about how and by whom the boundaries between high-, low-, and middlebrow are decided, and the implications of this for twentieth-century woman writers.

CHAPTER TWO

'Tough Books': Gender, Genre, and Female Protagonists

Stewart asserts that 'there are only really two kinds of novels, badly written and well written. Beyond that you can't categorise'.[1] This unwillingness to be defined by generic characteristics occurs throughout her work, which employs traces and tropes from a wide and varying range of genres, including detective fiction, the gothic, folk and fairytales, spy fiction and fantasy fiction, as well as action, mystery, and romance. Elements from different genres frequently appear within the same novel, fused together in such a way that their interconnectedness becomes crucial to a full understanding of the plot. I argue that this aggregate approach allows Stewart to metafictively explore some of the criticisms and assumptions which are commonly associated with particular genres. In 'Teller of Tales', her 1970 article for *The Writer*, she states that when she began work on her first novel, *Madam, Will You Talk?*, she 'was tired of 'tough' books where the girl 'heroine' is regarded purely as a sexual object, and where her qualities of mind and heart (if any) are treated as irrelevant'.[2] As such, she began to write 'the kind of thing [she] would have liked reading'; 'the sort of John Buchan adventure', but – crucially – from the perspective of a woman.[3] Stewart's stated intention to produce work that she herself would enjoy suggests a typically middlebrow emphasis on reading as pleasurable. However, this does not exclude the possibility of metafictive self-reflection: I argue that Stewart reconsiders the position of 'girl 'heroine'[s]' throughout her work, and that her interaction with genre is crucial to this. With particular focus on *Madam, Will You Talk?*, *The Moonspinners*, *Airs Above the Ground*, and *Thunder on the Right*, this chapter shows how Stewart's work combines a range of generic conventions and in doing so metafictively critiques particular genres and the assumptions about gender which accompany them.

'Genre' is from the French for 'gender', and, indeed, genre and gender have long been associated: Light points out a supposed disparity between crime and romance, stating that the former 'stress[es] those apparently masculine qualities of reason and logic' and thus constitutes

[1] Mary Stewart, qtd. by Newquist, p. 564.
[2] Mary Stewart, 'Teller of Tales', *The Writer*, 83 (1970), 9-12 (p. 12).
[3] 'Off the Page'; John Buchan was a Scottish author of adventure fiction. He published a number of novels, notably *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), and later was Governor-General of Canada.

'the antithesis of romance's depth, substance and emotional involvement'.[4] Similarly, Regis states that 'the romance novel is primarily emotional in its appeal [and] the mystery story is primarily rational in its appeal'.[5] It is this gendering of genre which Tania Modleski claims accounts for the 'double critical standard' that exists in the academic study of genre fiction.[6] Modleski contrasts 'the aggrandised titles of certain classic studies of popular male genres [...] or the inflated claims made for, say, the detective novel' with the relative lack of studies concerned with romance and modern-gothic novels.[7] Although the field of romance studies has grown exponentially since Modleski made these comments in the early 1980s, it remains true that gender plays an important role in the way various genres are positioned and valued. In an attempt to challenge this, Light points out that the boundaries between the traditionally masculine genre of detective fiction and the feminine genre of romance are less distinct than they might at first appear. For a start, she notes, despite the fact that, in the mid-twentieth century, crime was perceived as a masculine genre, most of the crime writers associated with the 'Golden Age' of detective fiction – Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Margery Allingham – are female. Further to this, their work does not always strictly adhere to the expected conventions of detective fiction. Light points to, for example, Christie's propensity to include a romantic sub-plot in her crime novels, as well as the romance novels she published under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. Conversely, Heyer, who was famous as an author of Regency romances throughout the 1920s, published crime thrillers throughout the 1930s. By blurring supposedly masculine and feminine genres, female novelists undercut the notion that generic convention is gendered.

Romance novels are often considered reinforcements of patriarchy. Many feminist scholars have commented on this: Russ states that the heroine's 'connection with the action of the novel is always passive'.[8] Things happen to her, but she does not make things happen; she reacts to situations, but she does not create them. This passivity is accentuated by its contrast to the hero, who is frequently controlling and domineering. Indeed, the heroine's ultimate aim is to inhabit a perpetually passive role: Jeanne Dubino purports that 'romances continue to perpetuate [...] the relegation of women into the home and men to the workplace', focussing as they so often do on

[4] Light, p. 162.
[5] Regis, p. 144.
[6] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 11.
[7] Modleski, p. 11.
[8] Russ, p. 679.

the eventual marriage of an impoverished young woman to a wealthy older man.[9] The implication is that in order to achieve happiness and security, young women must necessarily attach themselves to a man who is able to provide for them. Whilst heroines are passive, active female characters, or as Mussell terms them, 'passionate women' are demonised: women who attempt to develop agency, who challenge the authority of male characters, and who engage in sexual activities before they are married, are eventually punished within the plot, usually by death – Mussell cites Danielle, who is strangled by her lover during sex in *My Brother Michael*, as an example of this.[10] However, I disagree with the notion that Stewart's novels adhere to these readings of the romance genre. Rather, I argue that through their manipulation of generic conventions, the novels metafictively reflect on the nature of romance as a genre, allowing for a critique both of the genre itself, and of the criticisms it frequently receives.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss how *Madam, Will You Talk?* successfully corrects some of the criticisms typically made of romance fiction. Its combination of action-adventure and romance genres is an important part of this: the novel features car chases, cases of mistaken identity, and an unsolved murder alongside its depiction of a developing romantic relationship between its heroine and protagonist, Charity Selborne, and its antagonist-cum-hero, Richard Byron. Whilst Watson claims that Stewart's novels 'reinforce patriarchy' and are populated by heroines who are willingly passive and ultimately reliant upon men, I show how Charity's power increases throughout *Madam, Will You Talk?*, culminating in her sexual domination of the villain, Paul Véry. Tropes from the action-adventure genre are crucial to this, as the domination takes place during one of the novel's many car chases. Indeed, it is Charity's prowess at driving and her knowledge of automobiles that serves to increase her power in the novel. Cars commonly feature in adventure novels, and driving is often portrayed as an explicitly masculine activity. *Madam Will You Talk?* therefore not only disrupts the notion of romance heroines as passive victims, but also undercuts the assumption made by adventure and thriller novels that driving is just for men. By combining two different genres, the novel speaks to criticism frequently levelled against each of them.

[9] Jeanne Dubino, 'The Cinderella Complex: Romance Fiction, Patriarchy and Capitalism', in *Journal of Popular Culture*, 27 (1993), 103-118 (p. 105).
[10] Mussell, 'Beautiful and Damned', p. 85.

I then move on to discuss how different romantic relationships are represented in *The Moonspinners*. The novel explores the potential result of the romance novel's conventional conclusion: marriage to a domineering man. In the novel Nicola Ferris is frequently annoyed by Mark Langley's autocratic attitude, and resents the fact that he excludes her from various confidences because of her sex; he believes that women should be shielded from anything which might cause distress. Despite this sexism and the frustration it causes her, by the end of the novel Nicola has seemingly entered into a romantic relationship with the domineering Mark. However, this does not constitute a condoning of the romantic convention that marriage to this kind of man brings happiness and security. Rather, the novel works to critique Nicola's decision. Mark and Nicola's relationship is mirrored in the novel by the marriage of Josef and Sofia; the similarities between the two men are made clear when Nicola mistakes Mark for Josef. Josef and Sofia's marriage is shown to be an unhappy one, and Sofia is depicted as extremely downtrodden, serving as a warning to Nicola of what might befall her if she marries Mark. The novel does offer alternatives to Nicola in the figures of Tony, a gay man who abandons domestic drudgery, and Frances Scorby, an unmarried woman with a successful career in botany. The motifs of flowers and knives which appear throughout the novel also symbolically offer alternative representations of gender roles, and the tropes of the titular moonspinners and of birds convey the notion of a community of women which supports itself without the help of men.

Next I examine the representation of marriage in *Airs Above the Ground*. The novel contains tropes from both spy fiction and the gothic. Whilst in Stewart's other works, genres are merged and blurred into each other, in *Airs Above the Ground*, they are pitted against each other, seemingly competing for dominance. I argue that this struggle mirrors the struggle of the novel's heroine – Vanessa March – to come to terms with her new identity as a married woman. This is made clear in her reactions to other female characters in the novel: Vanessa frequently judges and assesses the women she meets, attempting to determine what kind of wife they might be, and whether they constitute a threat to her own marriage. The most pertinent example of this is Carmel Lacy, a middle-aged divorcée and childhood friend of Vanessa's mother. Carmel's only concern is her children, of whom she is protective to the point of suffocation. Vanessa is ostensibly dismissive of this, but I argue that her disdain conceals her fear of living a life similar to Carmel's. Vanessa's anxieties about marriage are also made apparent through the figure of

Sandor Balog, the novel's villain, who functions as the displaced embodiment of her husband's violent potential. *Airs Above the Ground* explores the gothic's conventional representation of marriage as threatening, whilst simultaneously working through the anxieties induced by this threat.

Finally, I examine the role of the fairytale in *Thunder on the Right*. The novel follows the progress of Jennifer Silver, a young woman who has travelled to an abbey in the French Alps to visit her cousin, Gillian Lamartine, only to discover that she has died. As she investigates her cousin's death, Jennifer grows in confidence and independence. The novel contains allusions to a variety of fairytales, but the one occuring most frequently is 'Sleeping Beauty'. At the novel's outset, Jennifer inhabits the role of Sleeping Beauty: she is described as having spent her childhood in relative seclusion, and is frequently compared to the fairytale figure, both by the novel's omniscient narrator, and by other characters. As the novel progresses, Jennifer shifts from passive fairytale heroine into active hero: having discovered that Gillian is still alive she adopts the typically masculinised role of rescuer, and strives to save her cousin from murder at the hands of the novel's villainess, Doña Francisca. In this way, *Thunder on the Right* uses elements from traditional western fairytale to explore its representation of female development and the roles to which women are assigned. By redeploying tropes of the fairytale, the novel metafictively examines the inherently insecure nature of the genre: it shows fairytales to be in flux, anarchic and un-hierarchical, with each re-telling as new and authentic as the last.

Stephen Benson describes genre fiction as a ''social contract' [...] where the bond between writer and reader centres on the repetition of already known expectations and fulfilments'.[11] He explains that 'it is out of such orthodoxies that normative roles and rules are produced, suggesting certain story patterns – life stories – are natural'.[12] According to Benson's theory, genre fiction has the power to influence the way gender roles develop and are perceived. The unaltered repetition of certain character types and plot lines leads to the assumption that these are somehow the 'default' way of being; that these are true reflections of how people do and should behave and relate to each other. This is how some romance novels contribute to the

[11] Stephen Benson, 'Stories of Love and Death: Reading and Writing the Fairy Tale Romance', in *Image and Power: Women in Fiction on the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham (London and New York: Longman, 1996), pp. 103-113, (p. 104).
[12] Benson, p. 111.

maintenance of a patriarchal status quo: by perpetuating representations of women who willingly submit themselves to powerful men, they imply that passivity is woman's natural state. I argue that by offering alternative representations of female characters, Stewart's novels disrupt these implications. Furthermore, by using a range of generic conventions to do this, they explode the constructedness of the generic stereotypes they seek to overturn. As Benson states, 'it is through an awareness of the intertextuality of genre that these [representations which are read as 'natural'] can be critiqued as merely constructions, readings that can be re-written'.[13] Drawing attention to the constructedness of genre simultaneously draws attention to the constructedness of the representations contained therein, and also gestures towards the fact that these can therefore be re-constructed, opening up the possibility for alternative ways of being. By self-consciously combining tropes and traces from multiple genres, and by drawing attention to their doing so, Stewart's novels metafictively acknowledge such tropes as the building-blocks of their own construction, which can be used in a varied range of combinations to produce multiple meanings.

'Defeat by a Woman': Reimagining the Romance Heroine in *Madam, Will You Talk?*

Stewart's work is characterised by a fragmented approach to genre: it merges and manipulates a diverse variety of generic conventions in order to construct a type of novel which, as a result, simultaneously conforms to and interrogates the prescribed formulae. *Madam, Will You Talk?*, her début novel, is no exception. Stewart describes the novel as adopting 'the form of the picaresque and episodic tale [...] the archetypal one of the chase', and compares it with Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915).[14] Indeed, with its car chases and mistaken identities the novel certainly fits the category of thriller, spy, or adventure story. However, a number of conventions from romance fiction are also incorporated into the narrative: the novel features a burgeoning courtship between its female narrator and a domineering older man. Romance novels are regularly considered by feminist critics as reinforcing patriarchal values, portraying women as passive ciphers whose value to society is entirely dependent on their relation to men.[15] The protagonist in *Madam, Will You Talk?*, Charity, can be read in this way: she

[13] Benson, pp. 111-12.
[14] Stewart, 'Teller of Tales', p. 10.
[15] For example, see: Rachel Anderson, *The Purple Heart Throbs* (1974); Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982); Watson, *Their Own Worst Enemies* (1995); Russ, 'Somebody's Trying to Kill me and I Think It's My Husband', in

frequently refers to 'obeying' Richard, and there is a distinct sadomasochistic undertone to their relationship, in which Richard seems to draw pleasure from inflicting violence on Charity. However, I argue that Charity is in fact an active and independent heroine, whose agency – which is directly linked to her femininity – increases as the novel progresses. This increasing agency culminates in her symbolic sexual domination of Paul during the novel's *dénouement*. That this is manifested by her taking over the wheel of the car he is driving is significant: as I discuss below, cars are a common trope of adventure fiction, and are ordinarily associated with masculinity. The novel therefore not only undercuts the assumption that all romance heroines are passive victims, it also disrupts the notion associated with adventure novels that driving is for boys.

Widowed Charity visits the city of Avignon where she meets an English boy, introducing himself as David Shelley, staying at her hotel with his attractive French step-mother, Loraine Bristol. Charity soon learns that the boy's name is David Byron, and his father, Richard, is a suspected murderer. Charity takes pity on David, so asks him to accompany her on a day-trip to nearby Nîmes. There, Charity encounters David's father, who attempts to intimidate her with violence into revealing the whereabouts of his son. Having escaped Richard, Charity escorts David safely back to the hotel, and decides to spend a night alone in the medieval town of Les Baux. However, Richard follows her there and almost succeeds in taking her prisoner. The two engage in a dramatic car chase across the French landscape, ending in Marseilles. It transpires that Richard is not guilty of the murder: Loraine attempted to frame him with her husband 'Jean'. They are employed by Max Kramer, an ex-Nazi who Richard witnessed commit murder when he was a prisoner of war in Germany. Having professed their love for one another, Charity and Richard attempt to devise a way of rescuing David. However, the murderers trap Richard, and Charity overhears them discuss staging his suicide. Charity bumps into Paul, another guest from the Avignon hotel, who agrees to drive her to rescue Richard. Charity realises midway through the drive that Paul is in fact Jean-Paul – Loraine's husband. The novel culminates in a struggle between Paul and Charity for control of the vehicle, which Charity ultimately wins. When she reaches Richard, she finds that he has been helped by John Marsden, who turns out to be an undercover police officer from Scotland Yard. Once Charity has abandoned the car, Paul

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Journal of Popular Culture (1975); Mussell, 'Beautiful and Damned' in *Journal of Popular Culture* (1973).

attempts to regain control of it but instead crashes it over the edge of the cliff. David and Richard survive unscathed, and the epilogue has Charity and Richard on their honeymoon.

At its outset, the novel seems to comply with the generic expectations associated with the novel of adventure, which portrays, as John Cawelti puts it, a 'hero' 'passing through the most frightening perils', 'overcoming obstacles and dangers', usually the result of the 'machinations of a villain', and ultimately 'accomplishing some important and moral mission'.[16] This description might well apply to Charity's journey throughout the novel, populated as it is by car chases, near escapes and murderous war criminals, aside from the fact, of course, that she is heroine rather than hero. As Cawelti points out, the expectation of adventure novels is that the lead character will be male, with female protagonists more ordinarily featuring in romance novels. *Madam, Will You Talk?* also contains a number of tropes from the romance genre, the most obvious evidence of this being the romantic connection which develops between Charity and Richard. The development of this relationship progresses through all of the stages outlined by Regis as typical of courtship within romance novels: there is a 'point of ritual death'; an incident of 'death or its simulacrum' which 'marks the moment in the narrative when the union between heroine and hero [...] seems absolutely impossible'.[17] In the case of *Madam, Will You Talk?* this occurs in Les Baux, when Charity, having heard Richard's false confession of murder, faints. It appears that Richard has been confirmed as the novel's villain, and as such his union with its heroine is rendered untenable. Happily for Charity, the novel also features a 'resolution' – when she realises that Richard is not a murderer – and ends in a 'betrothal' (indeed, in a marriage), the characteristic that Regis describes as the 'universal feature of the romance novel'.[18] Cawelti does allow that 'adventure stories, more often than not, contain a love story' and that, correspondingly, 'romances often contain elements of adventure', but that these elements are secondary to each genre's more pressing concerns.[19] So, in romance fiction, for example, the 'organising action' is the love relationship, with any 'dangers function[ing] as a

[16] John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 39-40.
[17] Regis, p.15; p. 35. The point of ritual death is the sixth stage Regis describes, though she admits that their order often varies. The other stages she outlines are the definition of society in which the courtship will take place, the meeting of the lovers, an explanation of the barrier(s) preventing their union, the attraction between the lovers, their declaration of love for one another, 'the recognition', in which the barrier(s) is overcome, and the betrothal.
[18] Regis, p. 9.
[19] Cawelti, p. 41.

means of challenging and then cementing' that connection.[20] Meanwhile, in adventure fiction, the 'favours of one or more attractive young ladies' is merely a 'side benefit' to 'the hero's triumph over dangers and obstacles'.[21] However, I argue that *Madam, Will You Talk?* is neither predominately romance or predominately adventure, but rather, a hybrid of both: the 'barrier' to Richard and Charity's relationship, the thing that stops them from being together, which, as Regis has explained, is what defines and drives the romance genre, is, in *Madam, Will You Talk?*, the adventure plot itself. In the novel, then, the two genres are inextricably linked: one cannot exist without the other.

As I discuss in the introduction to this chapter, the romance genre has regularly been understood by feminist critics as symptomatic and emblematic of a patriarchal culture in which women are encouraged to passively submit to the notion that their happiness is reliant upon their ability to attract a powerful and protective man. This is how Watson reads Stewart's oeuvre, asserting that her 'novels reinforce patriarchy', and that her heroines are passive and willingly reliant upon men.[22] Watson argues that Charity's relationship with Richard is characterised by sadomasochistic violence and 'the enjoyment of pain inflicted by the beloved'.[23] Whilst I agree with Watson's argument that the romance plot in *Madam, Will You Talk?* contains sadomasochistic undertones, I disagree that this constitutes a fortification of patriarchal structure. Rather, I argue that Charity's power increases throughout the novel, ultimately culminating in her sexual domination of Paul. It is true that Richard's initial behaviour towards Charity – when he believes that she is working with Loraine – is extremely violent. He calls her a 'god-damned little bitch' and a 'stupid little fool', and Charity describes him as 'a man who had hurt [her] and cursed [her], and looked as if he would like to kill [her]' (90; 93; 63). Richard is presented as a threatening figure: his voice is 'sharp' and 'edged with bad temper', whilst his 'angry grey eyes' are 'hard' and are frequently 'narrowing' and 'frowning' (51; 59; 60; 54). His domineering nature is reflected physically in the novel, as he is constantly 'looming', 'scowling *down*', 'standing *over*', 'towering *over*' 'look[ing] *down*', and generally positioned 'above' Charity, implying that he possesses the power in their relationship (89; 59; 55; 92; 61; 89; my emphases). Weight is added to Watson's argument by the fact that many of Richard's insults are

[20] Cawelti, p. 41.
[21] Cawelti, pp. 40-41.
[22] Watson, p. 25.
[23] Watson, p. 32.

accompanied by sexual undertones: according to him, Charity is a '*beautiful* little bitch' whose '*lovely* neck' he'd like to 'wring', and whom he intends to 'stick to […] like a leech, *my dear*, like a *lover*' (63; 92; 95, my emphases). The erotic strain of Richard's violent behaviour is further highlighted when he compels Charity to act as if they are a couple: in Nîmes 'he pull[s] [Charity's] arm through his own' and at the hotel in Les Baux he forces her to masquerade as his wife (62). He also seems to experience pleasure when he inflicts pain on Charity: 'his grip tightened and I must have made a sound, because his mouth twisted with satisfaction before he slackened his hold' (61). Once Richard realises that Charity is not, in fact, his enemy, the dynamic of their relationship shifts, but their developing romance still retains violent undertones. Their first kiss, for example, is explicitly related to violence:

> He shifted his grip, and his eyes fell on my bruised wrist. For a second or two he stood with his head bent, staring at the ugly dark mark, then his mouth suddenly twisted, and he pulled me into his arms and kissed me. (147)

Here, the evidence of the violence Richard has inflicted against Charity appears to be the direct cause of their kiss, with these actions functioning as an aphrodisiac for him. The kiss itself also feels violent in nature, as the description of Richard's mouth as 'twisted' is hardly amorous. Richard, then, is, as Watson suggests, presented as a domineering and controlling figure who experiences pleasure when he inflicts pain on Charity.

Correspondingly, Charity is shown to behave passively, describing herself as feeling 'helpless', responding 'weakly', standing 'dumb' and obeying his orders 'as if [she] were a wax doll' (59; 61). However, once his true identity is revealed, Charity is content with Richard's 'dictatorial' nature. When Charity and Richard meet in Marseilles they eat dinner together, an event which happens exactly half-way through the novel and which marks a change in their relationship: they move from being enemies to lovers. In this scene, Charity appears quite happy to give up all control to Richard:

> I obeyed him, and lay back against the deep cushions with my eyes closed, letting my body relax utterly to the creeping warmth of the drink and the smell of food and wine and flowers. My bones seemed to have melted, and I was queerly content to lie back against the yielding velvet, with the soft lights against my eyelids, and do nothing, think of nothing. I was quiet and utterly passive. (139-40)

Charity describes herself as 'utterly passive' and speaks of obeying Richard – something she does throughout the second half of the novel. Indeed, there is a strong sense here of Charity almost deleting herself – her eyes are closed, her 'bones [seem] to have melted' and she is 'do[ing] nothing, think[ing] nothing'. It is as if Richard's assumed authority over Charity has superseded her agency to the point where she ceases to exist. However, there is also something extremely sensual about this scene: there is the feeling of 'creeping warmth', the 'smell of food and wine', as well as the 'soft lights' and the 'yielding velvet'. Charity appears to experience sexual pleasure whilst under Richard's control. Watson's account of the unbalanced power relations and violent undertones within Richard and Charity's relationship, then, is not unfounded. However, I argue that simultaneously Charity garners increasing agency in the novel, culminating in her symbolic sexual domination of Paul. As such the novel demonstrates that female sexuality is not solely dependent on submissiveness to men.

Charity's agency increases throughout the novel as she gains in confidence and moves away from defining herself in terms of her past experience. Her femininity is key in enabling this transition. For example, she makes frequent mention of make-up as a source of courage, referring to the 'brave coral paint' of her lipstick, and describing how once she has 'smoothed the rouge faintly over [her] cheek-bones […] then dusted over with powder' the 'face that look[s] back' at her is 'an altogether braver affair' (103; 73; 74). The apparatus of performed femininity allow Charity increased power. Similarly, it is a 'nail file' which she uses to temporarily disable Richard's car, allowing her a crucial head-start in their chase to Marseilles. Again, cosmetic equipment helps Charity gain the upper hand. Further to this, Charity uses feminine stereotypes to her advantage on a number of occasions. For example, in Les Baux, where Richard manages to temporarily take her as a prisoner (under the guise that she is his wife), she attempts to make him believe that she is 'too rocky to make any violent escape': she deliberately manipulates the perception of women as weak and frail in order to lull Richard into a false sense of security, and escape him (103). Charity uses similar tactics when she convinces the owner of a bistro to help mend her car and conceal her from Richard: she adopts a 'quiver in [her] voice' and allows the owner to believe that she is fleeing from a violent husband (119). Charity is able to use and perform her femininity, and to draw strength from it. Femininity is thus shown to be a vital resource in the development of Charity's agency.

Although it is borne from her femininity, Charity's increasing agency frequently manifests in her relation to a subject traditionally viewed as masculine – cars and driving. Cars feature heavily in the plot of *Madam, Will You Talk?*, and frequently serve as a catalyst for various plot developments. It is Richard's 'big grey car', for example, which, for the first half of the novel, alerts Charity to his presence (67). Similarly, it is the fact that Charity stops for petrol which allows Richard to find her and follow her to Les Baux. On the novel's opening page we learn that Charity is travelling 'on a *car* trip to Provence' (1; my emphasis), and the *dénouement* – the battle for control of the Mercedes between Paul and Charity – also takes place in a car. Cars, and transport in general, feature prominently in the traditionally masculine genres of action-adventure and spy fiction. For example, in Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, the protagonist Richard Hannay travels by car and train, as well as on foot, and is pursued by an aeroplane. Meanwhile, Fleming's secret-agent hero Bond repeatedly displays a deep affinity to his automobiles: in *Thunderball* (1961) he 'love[s] [his car] more than all the women at present in his life rolled, if that were feasible, into one' – which, for infamous philanderer Bond, is saying something.[24] In these novels, driving is seen as a specifically male domain. For example, again in *Thunderball*, Bond believes that 'women are often meticulous and safe drivers' but 'very seldom first-class'.[25] Indeed, he 'regard[s] them as a mild hazard'.[26] Charity, however, is portrayed as a confident and competent driver, who enjoys 'the feel of that lovely car under [her] hands' (242). She also possesses a good knowledge of car mechanics (albeit knowledge learned from her dead husband Jonny), as is shown when she disables Richard's Bentley by 'whipp[ing] off the distributor-cap, g[iving] one of the screws a turn and a half with the end of [her] nail file, to break the electric contact, put[ting] back the cap, clos[ing] the bonnet, and rac[ing] back to the Riley, all in less time than it takes to tell' (105). Charity's speed, as well as her naming of specific car parts ('distributor cap', 'bonnet') and her knowledge that 'break[ing] the electric contact' would serve her purpose, conveys a comfortable familiarity with cars and their internal workings. As such, assertions such as the one made by Bond that the 'driving mirror' is 'an accessory rarely used by women except for making up their faces', are debunked.[27] Not only does Charity display a knowledge of car accessories, but she implements this knowledge, as I

[24] Ian Fleming, *Thunderball* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2004), p. 67. Although *Thunderball* was published some six years after *Madam, Will You Talk?*, two other Bond novels – *Casino Royale* (1953) and *Live and Let Die* (1954) – appeared before Stewart's novel was published in 1955.
[25] Fleming, p. 115.
[26] Fleming, p. 115.
[27] Fleming, p. 115.

have already pointed out, using a feminine beauty appliance: her nail file. Whilst the proficiency of the woman driver in *Thunderball* is shown to be explicitly separate from her femininity, then – she 'dr[ives] like a *man*' and takes 'a *man's* pleasure' in doing so – Charity's driving ability is shown to exist alongside her femininity, without contradiction.[28] In this way, *Madam, Will You Talk?* revises the generic convention of masculine spy and adventure stories that driving is a male domain.

Charity's increasing agency culminates in a scene in which she and Paul are driving after the car that contains the unconscious David and Richard. Whilst driving, Charity realises that Paul is in fact working for Max, and that as such she is in danger. She uses her feminine sexuality to gain some control of the situation: 'Delilah-wise', she allows Paul to believe that she is attracted to him, calling him 'handsome', sighing 'tremulously' at his touch, and even allowing him to kiss her (235; 238; 236). Again, Charity uses the accoutrements of femininity to her aid, dropping her handbag from the car and requesting that Paul pick it up for her, allowing her to take over control of the vehicle. From her new position of power, Charity is able to exert full control over the situation, rendering Paul helpless; 'defeat – defeat by a woman – [knocks] the props from under him' (245). Charity describes driving her 'lovely shining sword slashing through the night' (243). This phallic image, which depicts the car as a sword, might imply that Charity has simply adopted a masculine form of power. However, I argue that her possession of the car represents the height of Charity's feminine power. The car is always described as a female: Charity asserts that it has 'power written along every gleaming line of *her*' and describes 'all *her* power and splendour' (219; 242; my emphasis). Whilst driving the car, Charity remains unfazed by Paul's possession of a gun; she repeatedly refers to herself laughing, and 'contemptuously' tells him to 'put the thing away' (243). The gun is portrayed as a masculine form of power, as is made apparent when Charity first becomes aware of its presence: Paul 'move[s] up to her until [she] can feel something hard pressing against [her] body through [her coat]. It [is] shaking a little' (243). Here, Paul's 'hard', 'shaking' gun 'pressing' against Charity through her clothes could be mistaken for an erect penis. By laughing in the face of Paul's gun, then, Charity symbolically laughs in the face of his manhood. This is underlined when she explicitly insults his sexual prowess, stating that 'as a lover, [he'd] hardly pass the first test' (244). By refusing to

[28] Fleming, p. 115.

acknowledge the power of Paul's masculinity, Charity undercuts it completely and the power is transferred to her.

Madam, Will You Talk? contains elements from both adventure stories and from romance fiction. These two genres are intimately and intricately connected in the novel: it is the adventure plot – the framing of Richard for murder by Max Kramer – which defines the romance plot, as it is this which constitutes the 'barrier' preventing Charity and Richard from pursuing their relationship. By combining the genres in this way, the novel addresses criticisms commonly launched against each of them. Romance novels are frequently accused of perpetuating patriarchal society through their portrayal of passive heroines who are wholly dependent on men for their satisfaction. It is true that, in terms of her relationship with Richard, Charity can be read as a passive heroine; indeed, I show that their courtship is characterised by sadomasochistic violence. However, I argue that, in spite of this, Charity is an independent and active heroine, and that her agency grows and develops throughout the novel. I show that this developing agency is directly connected with her femininity: she frequently draws strength from the superficial signifiers of femininity, including make-up and fashion. Crucially, she self-consciously mimics the behaviour of a weak and passive female in order to meet her own agenda. The novel's use of tropes of the action-adventure genre is also crucial to Charity's developing agency, as one of the key ways it is demonstrated is through her driving. Driving and cars frequently feature in spy and adventure fiction, where they are characterised as masculine pursuits. Charity's knowledge of cars, however, is shown to be explicitly feminine. As such, *Madam, Will You Talk?* reimagines the misogyny which often lurks in these novels. The development of her agency culminates in her symbolic sexual domination of Paul in the novel's *dénouement*: she fools Paul into believing she is sexually interested in him, takes control of the car he is driving, then insults his prowess as a lover and refuses to be intimidated when he threatens her with a gun. That the culmination of Charity's journey into agency coincides with, indeed, is signalled by, her out-performing a man at driving constitutes a double under-cutting by the novel of assumptions commonly associated with both the romance and adventure genres: Charity is shown to be an active heroine, and a great driver to boot.

'If I Had Been a Man…':
Alternatives to Romance in *The Moonspinners*

Of all Stewart's works, *The Moonspinners* travels furthest from the usual conventions of the romance novel. Nicola and Mark, who inhabit the roles of romantic leads, make no explicit declaration of love to each other and do not kiss. At the novel's close it is only tentatively hinted that any romantic relationship will ensue. Indeed, the novel's 'happy ending' is very ambiguous: one of the antagonists is allowed to escape without punishment, and Nicola is left wondering whether her own side has acted for the best by killing the main antagonist, Josef. I argue that this unresolved ending is symptomatic of the novel's project to nuance the traditional romance novel and to explore the potential dangers involved with the romance novel's inevitable conclusion: heterosexual marriage. The novel contains accounts of different types of relationship, and how masculinity and femininity discursively operate within these. Mark, for example, is shown to be domineering, autocratic, and misogynistic. Nicola rails against this, attempting to assert her own independence, and resenting the patronising treatment she receives from Mark. However, by the end of the novel she has willingly submitted to his authority. Mark and Nicola's relationship is mirrored by the unhappy marriage of Josef and Sofia, which I argue serves as a warning of the potential misery inherent in marriage when it occurs between a dominant man and a submissive woman. The text does offer alternatives to heterosexual marriage in the figures of Tony and Frances, and the images of flowers and plants – as well as knives – that appear throughout the novel function as symbols which demonstrate alternative approaches to traditional gender roles. Similarly, the birds featured throughout the novel, as well as the titular moonspinners, represent the notion of a community of women that cares for itself without the help of men. *The Moonspinners*, then, seeks to explore the implications of the conventional romantic resolution of marriage, and to investigate possible alternatives.

In *The Moonspinners* Nicola travels from her job in Athens to Agios Georgios – a small village on the southern coast of Crete – to meet her cousin-cum-surrogate-mother, Frances. On her way, she encounters a Greek man, Lambis, wielding a knife who turns out to be guarding a young, injured Englishman. Nicola tends to Mark's gunshot wound, and Lambis explains that he brought Mark and his teenage brother, Colin, to Crete on his boat, so that they could visit an old church near Agios Georgios. The brothers accidentally witnessed a murder, and Mark was shot. The murderers – three men, one of whom was English and one of whom wore traditional

Cretan dress, and one woman – have taken Colin. Lambis found Mark, who had been left for dead. Nicola and Mark spend the night together whilst Lambis collects supplies, and the next morning they see a man in traditional Cretan dress with a gun. When she arrives at her hotel, Nicola quickly realises that Tony – the English hotelier – must be the English murderer. She deduces that his partner, Stratos Alexiakis, Stratos's sister Sofia, and Sofia's husband, Josef, are the other three murderers. She and Frances, who has since arrived, search for Colin, and Nicola eventually finds him. Whilst searching for Mark and Lambis, Nicola finds a corpse which she identifies as Mark because of its clothes. When they see Lambis talking to a man in Cretan dress, they believe that he has murdered Mark, so Nicola confronts Lambis and confiscates his knife. It turns out that Mark is the man in Cretan dress, and the dead body is Josef, who has been killed in self-defence by Lambis. Nicola arranges for Mark, Colin and Lambis to pick her and Frances up in their boat from the bay in Agios Georgios that night. However, in the bay, Nicola meets Stratos, who thinks that she has been trying to steal his 'loot'. The novel culminates in a fight during which Tony escapes with the 'loot' (stolen jewels from London). Stratos is remanded by the village elders, Lambis is not charged with Josef's murder, and Nicola and Mark (it is implied) begin a romantic relationship.

Despite his protestations that she 'keep out of it', when Nicola first meets Mark she assumes the dominant role in their relationship. Nicola forces Lambis to explain the situation, and with him concocts a plan to collect supplies 'without [Mark] knowing' (28; 54). In doing so she actively defies Mark's orders, and takes control of the situation. However, the control she asserts is explicitly gendered feminine, as she assumes the role of mother. This is frequently made clear throughout her first encounter with Mark, who at this stage is 'like an obedient child': she takes charge of feeding him, breaking food into bite-size pieces and 'shred[ding] the meat up' as one might for a child (61; 32). She also washes Mark and puts him to bed, making her voice 'soft and monotonous' and speaking 'soothingly' as she tells him to 'be quiet now and try to sleep' (66; 62). Nicola lies down to sleep with Mark, him 'curl[ing] his back into the curve of her body' (63). The positioning of their bodies again demonstrates Nicola's protective dominance over Mark: it is she who 'puts [*her*] arms round *him*, and [holds] *him* closely' (63; my emphasis). Furthermore, Nicola's act of 'kiss[ing] his hair very lightly' demonstrates a maternal rather than erotic tenderness (67). Nicola asserts that 'Lambis is making a rotten job of looking after [Mark]' – the implication being that men are less able than women to undertake a caring role (22). This

is made most apparent when Nicola replaces Lambis's 'battered windcheater jacket', which is Mark's 'only bed-covering', with her own woollen cardigan (23). The clothes of Lambis and Nicola are gendered in their descriptions: the 'rough jacket' contrasted against the 'soft, warm folds' of the cardigan; whilst the man, like his jacket, is tough and strong, the woman, like her cardigan, is soft and domesticated (32). While Nicola is able to assert her dominance, then, it is only within the bounds of stereotypical gender roles.

Although their relationship begins with Nicola in an active role, the power quickly shifts. When they spot Josef on the mountainside, Mark assumes control and Nicola is – literally – side-lined, as he orders her to hide in the cave: 'just get in there out of sight, for pity's sake! […] Will you please, for once, *just do as you're told?*' (83; emphasis in original). His autocratic attitude ranges from the aggressively domineering when he tells Nicola to 'get in [the cave] and shut up' and calls her a 'dimwit', to the patronizing, as when he calls her a 'good girl' (83; 33). Most noticeable, however, is his insistence that Nicola be shielded from events: she recognises the 'familiar, excluding look' between Mark and Lambis, and describes 'feeling more than ever an intruder' when they refuse to confide their situation to her. Nicola recognises this exclusion as sexist:

> He had wanted me safely out of it, and had made this abundantly clear, even to the point of rudeness; and I – who had taken my own responsibilities for long enough – had resented bitterly a rejection that had seemed to imply a sexual superiority. If I had been a man, would Mark have acted in the same way? I thought not. (124)

Here, Nicola draws attention to the unfairness of this treatment, acknowledging the importance of her own actions in ensuring Mark's survival this far, and explicitly suggesting that her exclusion from events is a response to her gender. Yet Mark's is not the only sexism Nicola encounters. At the beginning of the novel, Mr Studebaker – an American tourist who drives her to Agios Georgios – says he '[doesn't] like leaving [her] […] alone' (3). Colin takes a similarly patronising attitude: he expresses concern that 'it mightn't be safe' for Nicola to walk without him (despite the fact that she has travelled successfully unaccompanied thus far), and insists on going in front of her and taking her bag, because he 'oughtn't be letting [her] carry it' (216; 218). He also explains that whilst 'naturally one swears at school, […] at home, in front of the girls, it's different' (229). To this she remarks 'dryly' that if Charlotte (Colin and Mark's sister) is at RADA 'she'd have caught up with you [swearing wise] by now' (229). Nicola's frustration

culminates when she 'furiously' reprimands Mark for excluding her, and he admits that 'if [she] hadn't come along when [she] did, [they'd] have been sunk' (252; 253). This exchange puts an end to any antagonism between Mark and Nicola, and ushers in a period of mutual appreciation of each other's independence: for example, when Nicola trips up Stratos, ensuring his capture, Mark says 'one more to you' (334). However, I read the resolution of Mark and Nicola's relationship as inflected with an undercurrent of uncertainty, which is manifested in the marriage of Josef and Sofia.

Nicola and Mark's relationship is mirrored by Sofia and Josef's marriage. The two women exhibit similarly caring behaviour when they tend to the wounds of Mark and Colin; Sofia feeds Colin, ensures he is safe, and ultimately releases him from captivity. However, it is the interchangeability of Mark and Josef which is most clearly signalled in the novel: when Nicola and Colin find Josef's body, they believe that he is Mark, and when they later see Mark speaking with Lambis, they believe the former is Josef. This confusion, which is derived from the fact that Mark is wearing Josef's clothes, reflects the men's similarly domineering personalities. There are a number of references to Josef as an overbearing and controlling husband, who 'pushes [Sofia] around', does not allow her to go to church, and displays violent tendencies (120). As I have discussed, Mark is also a 'stubborn and autocratic' presence in the text (72). By the novel's close, Nicola readily acknowledges Mark's authority over her, and her previously independently-minded determination to act – which helped her to tend Mark's wounds and to locate the missing Colin – is replaced by a passive acceptance that she is unable to contribute: 'I opened my mouth to say 'Can I do anything?' then shut it again. Common sense suggested that the question was a purely rhetorical gesture, and therefore better unasked' (327). Here, Nicola has internalised Mark's disregard of her, and has begun to self-censor. Furthermore, she begins to take pleasure from his assertions of dominance. She notes, for example, that Mark's 'cool assumption of responsibility' no longer enrages her, but rather results in 'a treacherous glow, somewhere in the region of [her] stomach' (268). Similarly, when Mark calls her 'good girl' – a patronising platitude which previously annoyed her – it now makes her 'glow all through' (329). There is little information about how Sofia's marriage to Josef came about, but it is stated that the match was widely disapproved of by her family and by the local community – as Tony explains, Josef is viewed as an outsider, a 'Turkish foreigner from Chania' (120). This implies that theirs was a love-match and that, as with Nicola, there must have been a time when Sofia

either disregarded or failed to recognise Josef's domineering nature. Their relationship therefore acts as a foreshadowing of the potential outcome of Nicola's continued acceptance of Mark's dominance.

I argue that Sofia's unhappiness in her union with Josef serves as a warning of the inherent risks involved for a woman in sacrificing her independence by getting married. The severity of this warning is increased by the descriptions of Sofia's physical appearance, which position her as a disturbing, gothic presence in the novel. Although she is young, she moves 'stiffly' and 'as if her body hurt[s] her', causing Nicola to initially believe that she is a much older woman (126; 128). This disjuncture between Sofia's age and her outward appearance is uncanny; her aged appearance seems unnatural and disturbing. Sofia is physically diminished: Nicola notes, for example, that she 'should have been broadly built, but she was shockingly thin, and her body seemed flattened and angular' (126). Similarly, her face is 'meant to be full and round', but is, in fact, thin and sunken, and her mouth is 'thinned almost to liplessness' (126; 127). These examples convey a sense of Sofia's body reducing in size – a symbolic reflection of her reduced power within her marriage. Her 'liplessness' implies that she is unable to speak, reinforcing this lack of power. There are also many references to Sofia as a skeleton: her hands, for example, are 'mere bones held together by sinews and thick, blue veins', and 'you [can] see the skull under the skin – the temporal bone jutting above deep eye-sockets' (127; 126). Nicola describes Sofia's face as looking 'like yellowed wax smeared thinly over a skull' (282). Here, the gothic image of the skull is combined with wax, which brings to mind candles, a common classical gothic trope, whilst the colour yellow conveys a sense of sickness, and the uncomfortable onomatopoeia of 'smeared' cements the unpleasantness of the description. As with Bertha in *Jane Eyre*, the gothic spectre of Sofia's physical being symbolically represents the psychological and emotional damage her unequal marriage has done her, as much as it literally represents the physical damage. She embodies the potential danger of marriage to a controlling male. As such, her presence in the novel constitutes a challenge to the traditional romance narrative in which passive women achieve safety and happiness through marriage to dominant men.

As well as providing a warning about the possible outcome of marriage in the figure of Sofia, the novel also provides examples of alternatives to heterosexual marriage in the figures of Tony and Frances. Although Tony's queerness is never openly acknowledged in the novel, it is alluded to

at several points: Frances, for example, wonders whether 'the *beaux yeaux* of the owner' of the hotel, Stratos, is the reason for Tony's continual presence in Agios Georgios, whilst Mark asserts that Scotland Yard will not struggle to identify 'a couple of Soho Greeks and a – well, Tony' (156; 263). Mark is clearly about to say 'homosexual' (or possibly a more offensive term) but cuts himself off; presumably as a result of his misguided belief that such things should not be discussed in front of women (in this case, Nicola). Tony's queerness is also signalled throughout the text in a number of often quite stereotypical ways. Much is made of his 'light affected voice', for example, as well as his 'impeccably brushed' hair and general good-grooming, and his movements are frequently compared to those of a ballerina: he moves 'with the kind of tough grace that one associates with ballet', runs 'as light[ly] as something out of the chorus of *The Sleeping Beauty*' and jumps 'so lightly that one almost expected Weber's long harp glissandos to pour spectrally from the wings' (333; 114; 114; 151; 332). The fact that he is from Soho – an area of London famed for its acceptance of sexual difference – and reads *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – a novel which, in 1962 when *The Moonspinners* was published, had only been available in its post-obscenity trial unexpurgated version for one year, cements Tony as a character whose sexual preferences divert from what was perceived to be conventional.[29] Although the exact nature of his relationship with Stratos is never explicitly revealed, they are at the very least partners in business, with Tony seemingly inhabiting the submissive, domestic role: he is in charge of all food preparation at the hotel, and also refers to supervising its decor, whilst Stratos is 'one of those big, full-blooded toughies' – a '*pallikaráthes*' or 'man's man', who, like Mark, likes to take control, and, like Josef, has an explosive temper (262) As such, in this relationship Tony fulfils a similarly submissive role to Sofia and Nicola. However, whereas Nicola – in spite of the warning embodied by Sofia – chooses to stay with Mark, Tony choses to leave Stratos – and he takes Stratos's share of the loot as well. Allowing a criminal to escape capture in this way radically subverts the ordinary genre conventions of the crime or thriller novel; that the criminal in question is a gay man (which was still illegal in 1962) serves to increase the subversiveness of Tony's escape. In allowing Tony to escape, I argue, the text celebrates the rejection of traditional romance narrative that his departure represents.

[29] For more on the history of Soho, see: Alan Collins, 'Sexual Dissidence, Enterprise and Assimilation', *Urban Studies*, 41 (2004); Christopher Breward, 'Fashion's Front and Back', *The London Journal*, 31 (2006).

Like Tony, Frances also represents an alternative to heterosexual marriage in the novel. If Tony, by the end of the novel, has decided not to subscribe to the generic romance narrative by staying with his domineering partner, Frances has already made this decision at the novel's outset. It is possible to read Frances queerly, and, as with Tony, the signals provided in the text are somewhat stereotypical: Frances is an unmarried woman 'something over forty', and the language Nicola uses to describe her – 'tall, dark, and rather angular' with 'a decisive sort of voice and manner' – might more ordinarily apply to a man (153). The same applies to some of her named attributes: she is 'as strong as a horse' and 'an excellent business woman', again, characteristics more readily associated with masculinity (153). Indeed, Frances explicitly rejects conventional femininity: for example, she renounces the notion of herself as maternal, as is demonstrated when she 'put[s] a stop' to Nicola calling her 'Aunt Frances' (153). Similarly, her role as 'part-owner of a rather famous rock plant nursery' who also 'writes and lectures on plants' symbolically subverts traditional perceptions of femininity as it constitutes the professionalization of a hobby – gardening or flower arranging – often associated with female leisure (5; 6). This subversion extends to her fashion sense; 'she dresses well', in apparent accordance with traditional feminine stereotypes, but undercuts this by doing so 'severely' (153). Nicola states that Frances possesses 'a charm which she despises, and rarely troubles to use' (153). Frances, then, both consciously and explicitly rejects the notion of herself as a stereotypical female, and in doing so rejects and subverts the traditional romance narrative of submissive woman and dominant male. Her presence in the novel constitutes an example of a lifestyle which exists beyond the confines of such a dynamic.

Whilst Tony and Frances represent alternative routes to that offered by conventional romance fiction, the motifs of knives and flowers, which appear frequently throughout the novel, work to symbolically demonstrate alternative gender roles. Knives are phallic objects, and this is demonstrated in *The Moonspinners* when 'the wooden hilt' of Lambis's knife 'st[icks] piratically up from the leather sheath in his trouserbelt' (36). The particular location of the knife in relation to Lambis's body, here, heightens its likeness to an erect penis. As weapons, knives are inherently connected to ideas of violence. The combination of this and their phallic shape seems to represent the stereotypical portrayal of men as aggressive and potentially threatening. Flowers, meanwhile, are an oft-used literary symbol of femininity.[30] Frequently the use of

[30] See, for example, du Maurier's *Rebecca* in which Maxim's attitude towards women is reflected in his opinions

flower imagery serves to highlight the idea of women – like flowers – as attractive and ornamental, but without any useful application. This kind of attitude is demonstrated by Mark in *The Moonspinners* when he exclaims 'What do you take me for a bloody daffodil?' (325). However, this is undercut by the purple flowered plant that appears throughout the novel and is dismissed by Nicola as a weed, until it is finally revealed – by Frances – to be a rare and highly effective cure-all herb. Correspondingly, Lambis's knife is shown to be capable of creation as well as destruction when he 'whittl[es] at a curly piece of wood, carving it to a shape' (260). Masculine and feminine identities are shown, through the motifs of knives and flowers, to be more complex than the 'dominant male' and 'passive female' dichotomy espoused by romance fiction: men can be nurturing as well as domineering, whilst women can be resourceful, as well as attractive.

The final alternative to the heteronormative union of domineering man and passive woman offered in the novel occurs through its representation of a community of women who help, protect, and care for each other's interests. This is to some extent literally represented by the empathy and compassion Nicola feels towards Sofia, in spite of the fact that she is, ostensibly, the enemy. However, it is most pertinently conveyed figuratively through the novel's trope of birds, and the references to the titular moonspinners. Birds appear throughout, and they frequently aid Nicola. Their significance is emphasised by the fact that the novel's opening line refers to a bird, stating that 'it was the egret, flying out of the lemon grove, that started it' (1). Nicola follows the egret off the marked path, and it is this that leads her to Mark and Lambis. The lammergeiers, or bearded vultures, signal Josef's death as soon as it has occurred – Nicola notes 'the movement of wings on the gorge' – but it is not until she sees them again, with Colin, that they lead her to the body (104). When Stratos catches Nicola investigating Sofia's outbuildings during the night, it is 'the piercingly sweet and loud […] nightingale's song' which provides her excuse for being there; it protects her (174). Similarly, when Nicola and Mark are hiding from Josef, it is 'the fearless approach' of a kestrel which 'convince[s] him that there [is] nothing on that section of the cliff' (87). Birds have long been associated with representations of

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about what flowers should be displayed in Manderley: the narrator reports that 'no wild flowers came in the house'. Rather, 'he had special, cultivated flowers, grown for the house alone. A rose was one of the few flowers, he said, that looked better picked than growing [….] There was something rather blowsy about roses in full bloom, something shallow and raucous, like women with untidy hair. In the house they became mysterious and subtle' (London: Virago, 2003), p. 33.

women.[31] This is emphasised in *The Moonspinners* when Lambis states that 'women all have tongues like magpies', as well as by the fact that the kestrel which protects Nicola and Mark from Josef is a mother, seen earlier by Nicola 'sailing in to feed its young' (28; 44). That the birds so frequently provide Nicola with help and guidance speaks to the idea of a network of females that take care of each other. The references to the Greek legend of the moonspinners lends strength to this reading: the moonspinners are, as Nicola explains, 'three ladies who spin the moon away every month, to bring a good dark night at the end of it' (278). They do this in order to provide protection for 'hunted things… like Josef's rock partridges' (278). The reference to partridges here reinforces the idea that, as with the birds, the moonspinners represent female protectiveness of other females. Indeed, the darkness they provide also helps Nicola in the novel, when she and Frances attempt to leave the hotel unnoticed. The moonspinners and the birds, then, represent an alternative to the romance novel's prescribed formula: they suggest that rather than submitting themselves to the protection of a domineering man, women are able, as a community, to protect themselves and each other.

A range of alternatives to heterosexual marriage are presented in *The Moonspinners*: Tony abandons his domineering business, and possibly sexual/emotional, partner, and Frances is shown to lead a happy and successful life as an unmarried business woman. The birds which feature throughout, together with the myth of the moonspinners which gives the novel its title, also demonstrate an alternative to marriage: representing the notion of a community of women which supports and cares for its own members, they show that protection does not necessarily have to come from a man. Meanwhile, the motifs of flowers and knives which also recur throughout the novel work to show that masculine and feminine characteristics are not restricted to 'domineering male' and 'passive female'; they are complex and fluid, with men shown to be nurturing and creative, and women shown to be resourceful and active. Indeed, Nicola is an active figure throughout the novel: she cares for the wounded Mark, finds the missing Colin, and facilitates the capture of Stratos. In spite of this, she is frequently side-lined by the autocratic Mark. I argue that Mark's domineering nature is mirrored in the novel by that of Josef, and that, subsequently, Josef and Sofia's unhappy marriage functions as a warning to Nicola of the potential dangers of tying herself to a controlling and dominant man. Nicola does

[31] Mary Wollstonecraft uses the image of a caged bird to represent the position of women in society in her 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792), and Jane Eyre uses a similar image when she rejects Mr Rochester's marriage proposal.

not heed this warning and, at the end of the novel, seems to have entered into a romantic relationship with Mark. There is, however, a sense of ambiguity when Nicola expresses her concern for Sofia in the light of Josef's murder: 'if only it were true that she had hated him… But could one ever really, honestly, hate a man with whom one had shared a bed, and to whom one had borne a child? I thought not, but then, one thinks like that at twenty-two…' (283). Nicola struggles to comprehend that feelings between young lovers might change throughout the course of a marriage, but she displays a self-awareness that – as a young lover – she is prone to this kind of thinking. The ellipsis conveys an unsaid acknowledgement that feelings do, in fact, change, as if Nicola the narrator, who is reporting the novel in the past tense and who may well now be older than twenty-two, has learned to regret her attachment to the autocratic Mark.

'The Case of the Vanishing Husband': Uncanny Marriage in *Airs Above the Ground*

The concept of marriage is inherently uncanny: two individuals promise to spend the rest of their lives bound together, willingly consenting to the diminishment of their own agency in favour of combining with their partner to form a matrimonial unit. The boundaries of identity are blurred; they are neither two distinct individuals, nor one complete whole. However, whilst (in the heterosexual model of marriage) this diminishment is, for men, merely symbolic, for women throughout history, giving up their names, their possessions, their jobs, and effectively becoming the legal property of their husbands, it was all too literal.[32] Women also endured the implicit threat of physical violence in marriage; in the UK, victims of domestic violence could not obtain civil protection orders until the passing of the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act in 1976, rape was not legally defined as an offence until the Sexual Offences Act of 1956, and marital rape was not recognised in law until 1991. Explorations of the anxiety about violence and loss of agency in marriage that arise from these circumstances are common in gothic fiction, with husbands routinely presented as secretive, mysterious, and potentially villainous and adulterous. In *Airs Above the Ground*, Vanessa struggles to come to terms with her identity as a married woman. This is most clearly visible in her reactions to other female

[32] The 1860 'Law of Coverture' stated that a husband was legally responsible for any acts committed by his wife or children: women were not viewed as active individuals, but were seen as merely an extension of their husbands. Until the 1870 Women's Property Act, all of a woman's property and possessions acquired before her marriage became her husband's. Until 1923, women could be divorced on the grounds of adultery, but wives were required to provide evidence of additional faults in order to divorce their adulterous husbands. Until the 1937 Matrimonial Causes Act, women could not divorce husbands solely on the grounds of cruelty or abandonment.

characters, most notably Carmel – a middle-aged divorcee who, I argue, embodies Vanessa's fears regarding the diminishment of her individuality in marriage – and through the villain, Sandor, who functions as the displaced embodiment of her husband's threatening potential. However, *Airs Above the Ground* is not a wholly gothic novel: like *Madam, Will You Talk?*, it features conventions from two genres, but unlike *Madam, Will You Talk?*, in which romance and action-adventure are merged, in *Airs Above the Ground* different genres – namely, the gothic and the international spy thriller – compete for dominance. The first part of the novel takes the form of a spy or detective thriller, but is heavily inflected with gothic elements.[33] These then dominate in the novel's middle section, but by the end it is the spy thriller that prevails. The uncertainty of the novel's generic identity mirrors, I argue, the uncertainty of Vanessa's relationship with her husband. Her anxieties therefore do not only constitute a gothic theme in the novel, but are symbolically represented in the structure of the novel by the presence of gothic tropes. The novel's use of genre can be read as a map of Vanessa's unconscious, with the gothic representing her uncertainty and anxiety, and the spy thriller her attempt to manage these. Thus, the displacement of gothic by spy thriller at the end of the novel, and the fact that Vanessa is shown to dominate in the spy thriller by rescuing Tim, represents the resolution of her unease. In this way the novel metafictively makes explicit the psychological usefulness of the gothic as a genre: it functions as means for women to work through anxieties connected with marriage.

Vanessa March believes her husband Lewis is in Sweden. They fought before he left, because his work called him away unexpectedly. Carmel sees him – with an attractive young woman – in a newsreel about a circus on fire in Oberhausen, Austria, so Vanessa and Tim Lacy (the teenage son of Carmel) travel to Oberhausen where they meet circus performer Annalisa Wagner, who is the young woman from the newsreel, and Sandor, an acrobat. Two men died in the fire – Annalisa's Uncle Franzl, and a man called Paul Denver. Annalisa introduces Vanessa and Tim to her friend Lee Eliot, who arrived in Oberhausen soon after the fire took place, and looks exactly like Lewis. He is Lewis, who is disguised because he is a spy; Denver was his protégé. Lewis does not know what Denver was investigating, but assumes it is centred upon the circus. He arranges to meet Vanessa and Tim at a hotel near Zechstein, the circus's next destination.

[33] By the 'first part', I mean from the beginning of the novel until the episode when Lewis sneaks into Vanessa's hotel room (124). The 'middle section' is from this point until Lewis arrives at the hotel in Zechstein (254). The final section is from this point onwards.

Vanessa – a trained veterinarian – operates on an old piebald horse which had belonged to Franzl, and discovers it is a Lipizzaner stallion, stolen from the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Vanessa agrees to return it to Vienna herself and, as a thank-you, Annalisa selects an imitation sapphire from the stallion's saddle – which is decorated with fake jewels – for her to wear. Tim and Vanessa take the stallion and his saddle to the stables at their Zechstein hotel, a converted castle in the mountains. That night, Sandor breaks into Vanessa's room, sexually threatens her, and demands the saddle. After a dramatic chase across the hotel's roof, Vanessa escapes Sandor, but he takes the saddle. Lewis arrives, and he, Vanessa, and Tim follow Sandor in Lewis's car. Sandor has been selling drugs and is going to meet his fellow dealer. There is a brawl, and Lewis reprimands the drug dealers; Vanessa engages in physical combat with one of their wives. Vanessa and Tim go to find the police, but Tim gets his foot stuck in a train track. Vanessa leaves him to get help, but realises the first train will pass earlier than they thought, meaning Tim's life is in danger. She races back, and is able to stop the train before it reaches Tim.

There are frequent allusions to spy fiction in the first section of the novel: Vanessa remarks that their appointment to meet Tim's father at 'eleven o'clock in the Blue Bar [...] sounds like something out of Ian Fleming', whilst Tim admits that he 'always fancied [him]self in the James Bond line' (39; 65).[34] The pair self-consciously compare their search for Lewis to the plot of a spy or mystery novel: Vanessa dubs it 'The Case of the Vanishing Husband', and Tim 'shadow[s]' Annalisa, whom they repeatedly refer to as 'the subject' (46; 66). There is also, however, a distinct, underlying vein of gothic influence: the representation of husbands as mysterious and potentially villainous is a common theme in gothic fiction and in this section the references to Lewis work to portray him as threatening and unknowable.[35] Vanessa states that they 'hardly seem to have seen each other since [they] were married', and undercuts her assertion that she 'know[s] all the ways he has' with the addendum that she 'at least, [...] thought [she] did' (25; 13). Whilst Vanessa has given up her job as a vet, Lewis is constantly working away from home. The sense of disconnection between Vanessa and Lewis is demonstrated when his first appearance in the novel is mediated through film: he appears in a

[34] Mary Stewart, *Airs Above the Ground* (London: Hodder, 2011), pp. 39, 65. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text. By the publication date of 1965, Bond was well-established in popular culture, with twelve Bond novels and three films already in circulation.

[35] This is true of most female gothic fiction (for example, Rochester in *Jane Eyre* or Maxim in *Rebecca*) but is particularly notable in 'modern gothics', as I discussed in the Introduction (for example, see the work of Victoria Holt and Phyllis Witney).

'flickering brief scene' in a 'dark cinema' which, as Vanessa reflects, has the effect of making him seem 'like a dream, something distant, unreal' (65-66). This distance is re-emphasised by the fact that during their first encounter in the novel Vanessa is forced to pretend she does not know him, and an aura of threat surrounding Lewis is created by Vanessa's observation that, in the newsreel, he is 'angry [,] [q]uite plainly and simply angry' and that she is 'all too recently familiar with that anger' (15). This portrayal of Lewis as secretive and potentially violent speaks to what I have identified as an underlying sense of gothic anxiety in the first section of the novel. When Lewis reveals to Vanessa that he is working as a spy for the British government, her anxieties about their marriage are seemingly quashed. However, it is at this point in the novel that the gothic begins to overtake the spy thriller, symbolically demonstrating that, on an unconscious level, Vanessa's anxieties about her marriage remain unresolved.

An important signal of this gothic anxiety in the novel is the figure of Sandor, who is the most explicitly gothic character in the novel. He is frequently likened to non-humans, for example 'a creature', 'a puppet', and 'a wild animal' and 'a horse' (109; 225; 118). These comparisons convey a sense of the uncanny – of the known-yet-not-known – around Sandor: there is a sense he is not quite human, is not quite knowable, and therefore cannot be trusted. As with Lewis and the cinema screen, these descriptions create a sense of unreality around Sandor. Vanessa describes his 'dark […] slicked back' hair, his 'winged' brows, his 'almost black' eyes, and his swirling black cloak, in which he look[s] rather splendid and satanic' (104; 202). Sandor has all the vampiric characteristics of the traditional gothic villain, including 'quite a strong animal attraction': there is a sexual edge to the threat he poses (120). As the novel's gothic core, Sandor represents the locus of Vanessa's anxieties. I argue that he embodies Vanessa's anxieties about her marriage – specifically, anxieties surrounding sex and the possibility of rape. It is made clear in the novel that Vanessa's marriage to Lewis has been consummated; they have sex when Lewis visits her hotel room in Oberhausen. However, this is instigated by Lewis and is contextualised by him – albeit humorously – as the fulfilment of his 'rights' (124). Sandor also makes a night-time visit to Vanessa's hotel room, this time at Zechstein. She initially mistakes him for her husband, 'sleepily' calling him 'darling' and 'Lewis', strengthening the association between the two characters (221). This visit – which constitutes the height of the novel's gothic expression – functions as a symbolic working through of the sexual violence Vanessa unconsciously fears from Lewis.

When he visits her hotel room in Oberhausen, Lewis jokingly tells Vanessa that he 'shall do [her] a violence' if she questions his fidelity (131), hinting at the potential for male violence in marriage. When Sandor visits Vanessa's hotel room in Zechstein, this is darkly realised. Sandor is extremely violent towards Vanessa: she describes his 'violent and cruel' grip and his 'brutal hand' with which 'he hit[s] [her] hard […] across the mouth' (222; 223). The fact that this attack takes place in Vanessa's bed – she recalls being 'flung […] back bodily against the pillows' – lends a sexual edge to the violence (222). This can also be felt when Vanessa 'feel[s] his eyes all over [her]' and when Sandor states that he 'could not have come… like this… if [Vanessa's husband] had been here' (229; 225). The ellipses here feel decidedly ominous and imply a kind of vulnerability in Vanessa that is particular to her being a woman. They also imply breathlessness, which, combined with the double-entendre of 'come', again contributes to the scene's sexual undertone. Sandor's power in this scene is connected to his sexuality, which he deliberately uses to intimidate Vanessa. This is clear when he asks her if she 'welcome[s] all comers to [her] room?' whilst 'loung[ing] against the foot of the bed, holding the pistol carelessly, his look at once contemptuous and appraising' (224). Here, as Sandor leers at the partially dressed Vanessa, the pistol, combined again with the 'comer' double-entendre acts as a phallic substitute as it provides the focus of his sexually threatening behaviour. I read Sandor as a shadow-version of Lewis, with this scene of sexual intimidation – which corresponds with the earlier scene in which Lewis and Vanessa actually have sex, and in which Lewis jokes about behaving violently towards her – serving as a symbolic working-through of Vanessa's unconscious anxieties: she experiences a simulation of the sexual violence she fears, and is able to outwit her attacker. The connection between Lewis and Sandor is reaffirmed shortly after this scene, when Vanessa again confuses their identities, this time mistaking Lewis for Sandor: 'it could easily have been Sandor returning […] but it was Lewis, looking for one fantastic second not like Lewis at all, but like something as dangerous as Sandor himself, and straight from Sandor's world' (this again speaks to the notion of Sandor as uncanny and other-worldly) (263). When Lewis punishes Sandor for his behaviour towards Vanessa by burning his hand, then, he demonstrates his rejection of the part of himself which might potentially harm his wife. It is this which relieves Vanessa's anxieties: she remarks that she 'ha[s] a fairly primitive reaction […] to [her] husband's eye-for-an-eye violence' (313). In other words, she has ceased to be intimidated

by her husband's potential for violence, and now, when it is administered on her behalf, finds it sexually arousing.

Violence at the hands of her husband is not the only fear Vanessa contends with in the novel. She also works through the uncertainty, verging on fear, she feels about her own identity, which has been destabilised as a result of her marriage. She displays a preoccupation with the question of how she should be as a wife throughout the novel:

> I was so disappointed [when Lewis cancelled their holiday] that I went all feminine and unreasonable and threw a scene, one of those classic scenes, 'you think more of your rotten job than of me', and that sort of thing. And I've always *despised* women who did that. A man's job is his life, and you've got to take it as it comes and try to be as loyal to it as he is… But I wasn't. (43; emphasis in original)

Vanessa has clearly internalised a certain amount of misogyny here, as she uses the word 'feminine' as if it is inherently negative, and seems to accept unquestioningly the fundamental inequality of this sentiment, given that she herself has given up her job as a vet. It is clear, though, that Vanessa is conflicted about this: after all, she did actually throw the 'classic scene' and exhibit the sort of behaviour she 'despises'. Furthermore, Vanessa is keen, throughout the novel, to assert her identity as a vet, despite the fact that, following her marriage, she has ostensibly left the profession. When Tim refers to her as 'practically a vet', she quickly corrects him, stating that she *is* a vet, and explaining that she now volunteers for the PDSA (24). It is clear that, unconsciously, Vanessa feels restricted by the rigidly self-sacrificing version of wifeliness to which, on the surface, she seems to aspire. This is hinted at when she observes a pair of paintings in her hotel room: 'one show[s] an unidentifiable saint in a blue robe killing a dragon; the other a very similar saint in a red robe, watering some flowers' (68). Vanessa reflects that 'in Austria there [is] a pleasantly wide choice of saintly qualities' (68). I read this observation as an expression of Vanessa's own yearning for a wider choice of wifely qualities.

Vanessa is preoccupied with the different ways of being a wife. This manifests in her close appraisal of every woman she encounters during the course of the novel: Christl, for example, is 'plump and pretty, and look[s] as if she would be more at home in the kitchen putting together an omelette for Graham [her fiancé, Tim's father], than sitting in the Blue Bar in Sacher's' (52). Vanessa swiftly assesses that Christl is domesticated, as opposed to glamorous. She makes the

opposite assumption about Annalisa, whom she immediately identifies as a threat to her relationship with Lewis when she sees that she is 'blonde, young and rather more than pretty' looking 'fragile and small and lovely' whilst maintaining a 'kinky look' with her black raincoat and 'dishevelled hair' (15; 64). Here, Vanessa demonstrates her internalisation of the Madonna/whore dichotomy: women are either sexual or they are domesticated – they cannot be both. That it is the sexualised Annalisa who threatens her, then, is significant: Vanessa realises that, as a newly married woman, she now (according to this framework) inhabits the role of domesticated Madonna, and thus fears that Lewis will look elsewhere to find sexuality. The woman who most seems to preoccupy Vanessa, however, is Carmel. Obsessed with her family, Carmel sits firmly within the 'Madonna' category, and her husband – as Vanessa fears Lewis will – has indeed left her. Ostensibly, Vanessa is extremely dismissive of Carmel; indeed, the novel opens with the assertion that 'Carmel Lacy is the silliest woman [she] know[s]' (1). There is also a distinct note of disdain in Vanessa's comments that Carmel had 'married 'successfully', that is, she acquired a wealthy London banker' (although he ultimately divorces her) (3). I argue that, for Vanessa, Carmel represents a disturbing vision of a potential future, and it is for this reason that she treats her with such scorn. Carmel has adhered fully to Vanessa's supposed philosophy that wives should prioritise their husbands over all else. As such, she has no independent interests; her husband and children are her only concern. She displays 'a possessiveness so clinging that it threaten[s] to drown her family like warm treacle' (3). Here, the potential danger of this obsessive focus on family is revealed: Carmel's lack of a life which is purely her own is shown to be potentially damaging to her husband and children. Vanessa's distaste for Carmel is demonstrated again when she describes her as 'impervious to criticism simply because [she] can never admit a fault' in herself (7). I argue that this is a further example of the negative effects of Carmel's full relinquishment of herself in marriage: she has so internalised her own lack of agency that she is unable to conceive of the notion of impacting at all on people or events external to herself. Unconsciously, Vanessa realises that Carmel's way of being constitutes the logical conclusion to her own current theory of wifedom. Her disdain for Carmel is therefore born as much from her fear of their similarities as it is her perception of their difference.

One thing that signals Carmel's function as a manifestation of Vanessa's anxieties about being a wife is her 'beautiful sapphire and diamond brooch' (8). This prefigures the mock-sapphire brooch from the Lipizzaner's saddle that Vanessa wears later in the novel, thus strengthening the

connection between the two women. Carmel's brooch is a 'guilt offering' from her ex-husband, and during her conversation with Vanessa, she pricks her finger on it (8). The brooch is therefore associated with pain – both physical and emotional – brought about by her (ex)husband. Similarly, it is the fact that Vanessa is wearing the mock-sapphire brooch that leads Sandor to violently invade her hotel room.[36] If Sandor functions as a shadow-version of Vanessa's husband, then both brooches are associated with pain caused by husbands. The brooch also functions as a signifier of the gothic in the novel: when Count Zechstein (the owner of the castle-hotel) recognises Vanessa's brooch, he shows her a picture of his ancestor wearing one that looks identical. He explains that it is a well-known family heirloom, currently kept at a museum in Munich, and that 'there are romantic stories about it which are almost certainly not true', but that 'romance persists, and the jewel has been much copied' (211). When Sandor attacks her, Vanessa assumes that it is because the brooch is, in fact, the original heirloom, and that Sandor is a jewel thief. Were *Airs Above the Ground* a pure gothic novel, this is undoubtedly how the plot would unravel. However, it is not a (wholly) gothic novel, and the brooch, as Lewis puts it, is a 'red herring'; Sandor is actually dealing in cocaine (279). The brooch is a conventional gothic trope, the legitimacy of which is undercut by the novel at the last minute. The hotel at Zechstein also functions like this. The hotel is a converted castle, and one which is 'like something straight out of the fairy books [...], a place of pinnacles and turrets and curtain walls, of narrow windows and battlements and coloured shields painted on stone' (176). The castle seems like it may fit the gothic role of intimidating, potentially haunted castle. However, despite its 'rugged approach' it is 'not in the least bit forbidding' (177). This undercutting of the hotel's gothic potential occurs more than once: for example, when Vanessa wants to call for room service she wonders whether she ought to 'blow a peal or a slughorn, or beat on [a] shield with [a] sword', or whether there is 'a long embroidered tassel, and if you pull it you'll hear a bell clanging hollowly in some dark corridor', before Tim points out that 'there's a telephone by the bed' (179). Similarly, when Vanessa is running from Sandor during the rooftop chase, and the novel's gothic influence is at its height, her escape is facilitated by the sudden interruption of the prosaic and every day; the arrival of the lift. By gesturing so closely towards these classic gothic tropes before undercutting them, the novel explicitly draws attention to its self-conscious manipulation of genre.

[36] He recognises the brooch from the saddle, which contains his drugs. This reveals to him that Vanessa has taken the saddle to her hotel.

Vanessa's anxieties about her individuality diminishing in marriage are embodied by the figure of Carmel. I read Frau Becker – the wife of the drug dealer, whom Vanessa fights at the end of the novel – as a caricatured version of her. Whilst 'plumpness suits Carmel', and she is described by Lewis as a 'fair fat female', Frau Becker is 'one of the most enormous women [Vanessa has] ever seen', with 'arm[s] the size of York ham[s]' (2; 125; 304; 305). Carmel's narrow-sited concentration on her family is translated comedically into Frau Becker's obsessive concern for her crockery, which she desperately tries to prevent from being smashed in the brawl. The absurdity of her concern serves to emphasise the unnecessary intensity of Carmel's for her family. During the brawl, Frau Becker is 'like Hurricane Chloe, unhesitating and unafraid'; she is shown to be oblivious to any danger other than that which might befall her crockery (304).[37] The point is, she is missing the point: the implications of her husband's violent fight with Lewis are clearly far more significant than the broken crockery. Again, this highlights Carmel's corresponding inability to properly understand the needs of her family: whilst she thinks she is protecting and caring for them by keeping them in 'the nest', her suffocating 'fences' in fact selfishly ignore what it is that they really need (6; 8). By fighting and ultimately defeating Frau Becker, then, Vanessa symbolically rejects the notion that, like Carmel, she should dedicate herself to her husband to the detriment of her own happiness and individuality. That the fight takes place within the context of 'spy thriller', adds to this symbolic rejection: Vanessa has overcome her gothic anxieties about marriage.

Airs Above the Ground uses tropes from both the gothic and spy fiction to explore the anxieties of its heroine and protagonist in the wake of her new identity as a married woman. Vanessa's anxieties are made most apparent through her interactions with Sandor and Carmel. I argue that Sandor constitutes the embodiment of Vanessa's husband's threatening potential in the novel. There is an established connection between Sandor and Lewis, as Vanessa confuses them for each other on more than one occasion. The scene in which Sandor breaks into Vanessa's hotel room mirrors an earlier visit by Lewis; indeed, Vanessa initially mistakes Sandor for Lewis. I argue that this scene represents a symbolic working through for Vanessa of her fears about Lewis: Sandor behaves violently towards her, and there is a distinct sexual undertone to his threats, which are accentuated by the fact that part of the attack takes place in her bed. When Lewis punishes Sandor for this attack, he symbolically rejects the part of himself which might

[37] This is a strange anachronism: Hurricane Chloe in fact occurred in 1967, two years *after* the publication of *Airs Above the Ground* in 1965.

potentially harm Vanessa. As well as fearing violence from her husband, Vanessa also experiences anxiety about her changing identity and diminished autonomy as a married woman. I argue that Carmel functions as the physical manifestation of what Vanessa fears she may become: Carmel has sacrificed all of her own interests to dedicate herself entirely to her husband and children. When Vanessa fights Frau Becker, she symbolically overcomes this vision of her potential future. The novel's use of genre also reflects Vanessa's struggle with her anxieties: tropes from both the gothic and spy fiction appear throughout the novel, seemingly competing for dominance. The articulation of women's fear of rape and violence in marriage is a common theme in the gothic, and Vanessa's experience of these fears is represented in *Airs Above the Ground* by the gothic tropes: the gothic conventions begin to outnumber the spy fiction references when Vanessa's anxieties are at their height. Thus the novel metafictively draws attention to its use of generic conventions, whilst highlighting the symbolic meaning of those conventions, and simultaneously incorporating that meaning into its own plot. In doing so, it acts as a demonstration of the gothic's usefulness to its woman readers: just as the gothic allows women to work through their anxieties by reading a novel, the gothic tropes in *Airs Above the Ground* reflect Vanessa's working through her anxieties within the novel.

'An Enchanted Fortress to be Stormed': Mothers, Daughters, Heroes and Fairytales in *Thunder on the Right*

Thunder on the Right explores the progression of its heroine and protagonist, Jennifer, from sheltered adolescence to experienced adulthood. The nature of this *bildungsroman* is two-fold: firstly, the novel re-casts the tropes of the traditional western fairytale to explore the representation of female coming-of-age therein; secondly, it explores the inherently evolutionary nature of fairytales themselves – by which I mean their propensity to adapt their form, content, and meaning to fit their frequently shifting contexts. At the beginning of the novel Jennifer inhabits the role of Sleeping Beauty, as is evidenced by her mother 'hurriedly re-plant[ing] the briars round her sleeping princess'.[38] This implies that Jennifer's mother is deliberately keeping her daughter from entering adult life and alludes to an antagonistic matriarchal presence; a common fairytale theme, and one which is further explored within the novel, as the relationship between Jennifer and her mother is paralleled by the relationship

[38] Mary Stewart, *Thunder on the Right* (London: Hodder, 2011), p. 4. All subsequent references to this edition will appear within the text.

between the novel's villainess, Doña Francisca, and her orphaned protégé, Celeste. As well as examining the relationships between female characters as represented in fairytales, the novel also explores the notion of the fairytale hero. Jennifer's romantic interest, Stephen Masefield, explicitly draws attention to his incompatibility with, and ambivalence towards, the role of traditional fairytale hero. In contrast, as the novel progresses, Jennifer herself adopts the role of hero, as she strives to rescue her cousin Gillian Lamartine from murder at the hands of Doña Francisca. Jennifer's self-driven involvement in this task both constitutes and symbolises her breaking away from her mother's protection.

Jennifer visits Gavarnie in the French Pyrenees to meet her cousin Gillian who is recuperating in the convent Notre-Dame-des-Orages after a lengthy illness. Jennifer has travelled from Oxford, where her father is a Professor of Music, and where her mother has ensured she experienced a privileged and sheltered upbringing. In Gavarnie, Jennifer meets Stephen: an old student of her father's, with whom she was previously romantically involved. At Notre-Dame-des-Orages Jennifer meets the domineering Doña Francisca, bursar to the convent, and Celeste, a young orphan girl who is Doña Francisca's protégé. Jennifer is told that Gillian is dead. However, Jennifer quickly grows suspicious of this when she learns that her colour-blind cousin allegedly stated she loved the colour of gentians. Jennifer's suspicions are confirmed when she overhears a conversation between Doña Francisca and local criminal Jean Bussac: two women were involved in the accident, one of whom is on Bussac's farm. This woman is Gillian, and the woman killed in the car accident was Lally Dupré, a wanted criminal who was paying Bussac to help her escape over the French-Spanish border. However, when Jennifer and Stephen attempt to rescue Gillian, she does not recognise them, as she is suffering from retrograde amnesia. Bussac realises that Doña Francisca intends to kill Gillian, and as such plans to take her over the border. Jennifer tries to stop him, and he knocks out and imprisons her. However, before Bussac can leave to meet Gillian, Doña Francisca arrives at the farm and stabs him, though she does not see Jennifer. Once Doña Francisca has left in pursuit of Gillian, Bussac frees Jennifer, who bandages his wounds. The pair go out onto the mountains in the hope that they will reach Gillian before Doña Francisca does, but Bussac's injuries soon render him unable to go on, so Jennifer continues after Gillian alone. She soon discovers Bussac's bridge into Spain, a path of boulders across a quickly rising river, which Gillian has already crossed. The novel culminates in a fight

between Doña Francisca and Stephen atop these boulders, which results in the former falling to her death. Stephen then carries Jennifer and Gillian across the rocks to safety.

Fairytales have long been associated with coming-of-age. Bruno Bettelheim, for example, argues that they have 'unequalled value' in their ability to help children 'master the psychological problems of growing up'.[39] Many fairytales have been interpreted as coming-of-age narratives: Bettelheim reads Sleeping Beauty's lengthy slumber as representative of the transformative state of adolescence – 'nothing but a time of quiet growth and preparation, from which the person will awake mature, ready for sexual union'.[40] That this is preceded in the tale by the pricking of Sleeping Beauty's finger is symbolic of the beginning of puberty – the blood from the finger representing the blood of menstruation. Menstruation appears in other tales, too. It is reflected, for example, in the specific colour of Little Red's headgear (riding hood or cap). Menstruation is a clear female sign of encroaching adulthood, a period of change commonly explored in fairytales, including its effect on mother-daughter relationships. Frequently, the effect is jealousy: in 'Snow White' the eponymous heroine's mother (the Grimms only made her a step-mother in their second edition[41]) is so consumed by jealousy of her growing daughter's good looks that she attempts to have her killed. Meanwhile, in 'Rapunzel', the wicked witch – who functions as a surrogate mother to the title character in the tale – jealously keeps her charge locked in a high tower once she has reached puberty. Such antagonistic mother-daughter relationships constitute an important aspect of fairytales' coming-of-age narratives: they ordinarily occur once the daughter has reached puberty, and it is their resolution (usually as the result of an intervention by a handsome prince) that marks the girl's full inauguration into adulthood. This fairytale trope of difficult relationships between controlling mothers and their growing daughters is explored in *Thunder on the Right*.

The first mother-daughter relationship which the novel explores is between Jennifer and her mother, Mrs. Silver. Although Mrs. Silver never appears in the novel in person, an early scene describing Jennifer's past is delivered from her perspective, and depicts a woman whose eagerness to protect her daughter veers towards the oppressive: like Sleeping Beauty's parents, who protect their daughter by rendering her inactive and inert, Mrs. Silver is keen for Jennifer

[39] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (London: Peregrine Books, 1978), pp. 6-7.
[40] Bettelheim, p. 232.
[41] Philip Pullman, *Grimm Tales for Young and Old* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 205.

to remain in 'the guarded bower of Cherry Close' (156). That the house is referred to as a 'guarded bower' reiterates the association with 'Sleeping Beauty', as does the fact that it is characterised as a fairytale palace, with its 'high walled garden' not 'long unstormed', around which Mrs. Silver 'hurriedly' and metaphorically 're-plant[s] the briars' once she has successfully intercepted Stephen's attempts to woo her daughter (3; 4; 6). 'Sleeping Beauty' can be read as a tale of parents' attempting to control their daughter's sexuality: if the death threatened against Sleeping Beauty is understood not in a literal sense but in a symbolic, euphemistic sense, that is, as orgasm – *la petite mort* – then the hundred years of slumber inflicted on the heroine represent an attempt to prolong her childhood, rather than (as originally advertised) her life.[42] A similar sense of sexual restriction exists in *Thunder on the Right*. The name of the family residence is itself suggestive of Mrs. Silver's intentions for her daughter: 'cherry' has been established as a colloquial term for virginity since the late nineteenth century.[43] The notion that it should be kept 'close', or even closed, is indicative of Mrs. Silver's vested interest in her daughter's sexual development (or lack thereof). This is further illustrated by Mrs. Silver's attitude towards potential suitors for her daughter: she 'gird[s] herself for battle against the impecunious and ineligible hordes' and is described as a 'mother-dragon' (5; 10). This combative imagery conveys the fervour with which Mrs. Silver guards her daughter's virginity.

The second mother-daughter relationship represented in the novel is between Doña Francisca and Celeste. Though not actually related, Doña Francisca has singled out the orphaned Celeste as a surrogate daughter. Jennifer's reaction to this relationship is visceral and extreme: she describes feeling a 'wave of acute distaste', 'revulsion and – yes, hatred' (137; 204). This might be explained by the distinct sexual undertones which accompany Doña Francisca's 'fierce and yearning tenderness': she is described with 'her eyes [...] fixed on the down-bent head of [Celeste]' whilst polishing a candlestick, 'her long fingers loving each curve, as they caressed, rather than rubbed it, into brightness' (137). The alliteration here – long/loving, curve/caressed, rather/rubbed – serves to emphasise the use of language more ordinarily associated with love-making. Furthermore, the fact that Doña Francisca is polishing a phallic

[42] Stewart's *Touch Not the Cat* also references the tale of 'Sleeping Beauty' in terms of the protagonist's development. In both novels, the waking of the Sleeping Beauty metaphorically represents a change in the protagonists (see Chapter Three for a further discussion of this).

[43] 'Definition 5.c. Virginity, esp. in phr. to lose one's cherry; similarly, to take (etc.) a cherry. Also, the hymen; a virgin (also as adj.). *slang* (orig. *U.S.*). [1889] A. Barrère & C.G. Leland *Dict. Slang* I. 241/1 *Cherry* (thieves), a young girl.]': 'Cherry', *Oxford English Dictionary Online* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31341?rskey=AFz82A&result=1#eid> [accessed 20 August 2014].

object with her hands conjures the image of phallic masturbation. Not only does Doña Francisca display sexual possessiveness over a young girl, she herself adopts a masculinised sexual persona. This could explain the 'revulsion' that the conservative, middle-class, sexually uninitiated Jennifer experiences. However, I argue that Jennifer's strong response to this relationship stems from the fact that it constitutes a reflection of her own relationship with her mother. Like Mrs. Silver, Doña Francisca attempts to exert control over Celeste's sexual development by confining her to a particular space: she wishes for her protégé to take orders at the convent and live the celibate life of a nun. Like Jennifer, Celeste desires otherwise, but is too afraid to disobey her mother-figure. In light of these similarities, Jennifer's interference in this relationship is a cathartic experience for her, as it reflects her distancing of herself from her own mother's control.

The association between Jennifer's relationship with her mother and her relationship with Doña Francisca is indicated by a similarity between the spaces in which each relationship is negotiated. Both Cherry Close and the Convent of Notre-Dames-des-Orages are characterised by the sound of bells: Cherry Close is situated 'right under the bells of Christ Church' and is described as 'bell-haunted' (2; 6). Meanwhile, it is the 'silver sound of a bell' that provokes Jennifer's first sight of the convent, and her viewing-point is described as a 'high haunt of bells' (19; 20). The repeated use of the word 'haunt' links the bells of Cherry Close to the bells of the convent. However, whilst in the first example 'haunt' is used as a verb, conjuring connotations of ghosts or spectres, in the second it is used as noun, as a synonym for 'place'. The word's meaning progresses from the abstract to the physical; from the figurative to the actual. This transition mirrors Jennifer's symbolic re-enactment of her relationship with her mother: what was previously confined to unconscious awareness is transferred into actuality through her relationship with Doña Francisca, as Jennifer begins to cultivate an autonomous ownership of her own development. This development is also reflected by the recurring bells, which, as they are frequently sounded by clocks as a measure of hours, bear obvious associations with the passing of time, and as such with the process of ageing – an association further cemented by their use at wedding and funeral services. The presence of bells in the novel gestures towards Jennifer's personal development as she grows into independent adulthood. This is further conveyed by her sexualised reaction to the bells at the convent: she feels 'a new sensation, part pleasure and part fear' which renders 'her whole being pierced [...] [and] tingling with keen

delight' (20; 19). This sensation, which bears close resemblance to orgasm (linking back to the notion of *petite mort*, against which Sleeping Beauty's parents wished to defend their daughter), suggests that the sexual repression encouraged by her mother is beginning to lift (20; 19).

When Jennifer overcomes Doña Francisca's authority by rescuing Gillian she therefore symbolically overcomes her mother's authority. Indeed, that Jennifer's actions are contrary to what her mother would wish is frequently referred to throughout the novel: when Jennifer speaks sharply to Celeste, we learn that 'Mrs. Silver would have had to look twice to recognise her gentle daughter', whilst the lies she tells Doña Francisca in an effort to conceal her plan culminate in 'a performance that would have [...] shaken Mrs. Silver to the roots of her being' (80; 135). That the relationship between Jennifer and Mrs. Silver is mirrored by the relationship between Doña Francisca and Celeste is reflected in similarities between Mrs. Silver and Doña Francisca: whilst the former is 'voluble and highly strung', the latter has a 'powerful personality' (4; 202). As such, the relationship between Doña Francisca and Jennifer constitutes a further symbolic mother-daughter relationship within the novel. Characterised by distrust, repulsion, and hatred, this is the relationship that adheres most closely to the familiar fairytale mother-daughter narrative (in which the mother is usually disguised as a 'Wicked Step Mother') seen in tales such as 'Snow White' and 'Cinderella'. In those tales the heroine is only able to overcome her mother with the help of a handsome prince. It is true that in *Thunder on the Right*, Stephen helps Jennifer when he fights Doña Francisca. However, compared to Jennifer's, Stephen's input is minimal: it is she who first identifies something suspicious about Gillian's death, she who follows Doña Francisca to discover Gillian is still alive, and she who confronts Bussac and travels with him to the border to find Gillian. Furthermore, Stephen's encounter with Doña Francisca is forced upon him, whereas Jennifer actively seeks out ways to defeat her enemy. As such, I argue that Jennifer is responsible for her own emancipation.

As she undertakes to discover Gillian's fate, Jennifer conceptualises herself as a fairytale hero, prepared to storm any fortress in order to save her cousin:

> She found herself staring up at the distant convent walls as if they were a prison, an enchanted fortress to be stormed – the Dark Tower itself, circled by its watching hills. And she had come *alone* to storm it. (20; my emphasis)

It is Jennifer – not Stephen – who adopts the heroic role and 'storm[s]' the 'enchanted fortress', ultimately saving Gillian from imprisonment and threatened murder. Indeed, Gillian takes her place as traditional fairytale heroine in the novel; as an orphan she is well-suited to the role, and, owing to her amnesia, she is present in the novel only as a body, an empty vessel; a criticism often launched against traditional fairytale heroines.[44] By adopting the role of hero, Jennifer undermines such criticism, as she performs the roles of heroine and hero simultaneously, disproving the assumption that fairytale heroines must passively wait to be rescued. Rather, Jennifer rescues Gillian, and, in doing so, herself: by breaking out of the passive-heroine mould, she frees herself from her mother's control. The exploration of the notion of the heroic continues with the contrasting representations of Bussac and Stephen. If Gillian represents the traditional fairytale heroine – a passive and personality-less Sleeping Beauty – then Bussac is simultaneously her delivering Prince Charming and her wicked captor: he rescues her from the car crash, but sustains the lie that she is married to him, and keeps her confined to his farm. The distortion of the traditional hero narrative which Bussac's role encapsulates is microcosmically represented by the scene in which he 'kisse[s] [Jennifer] full on the mouth' – without her permission – rendering her temporarily unconscious. When she wakes she finds she is 'lying, bound and gagged, on the bed' (240).[45] Jennifer is kissed, falls unconscious, and is confined to a bed – reordering the events in the original fairytale. This might be read as corresponding to a similar distortion of the usual Prince Charming persona in Bussac, whose manner does little to convey the elegance and eloquence expected of that character. However, whilst Bussac's behaviour seems to constitute a departure from fairytale convention, I argue that it in fact exposes a level of meaning ordinarily concealed within fairytales. In their study of the Brothers Grimm's 'Little Snow White', Gilbert and Gubar purport that, when she is awoken by the prince, Snow White simply 'exchange[s] one glass coffin for another': she moves from being immobilised by death, to being immobilised by marriage.[46] For Gilbert and Gubar, marriage is simply another form of imprisonment for women within a patriarchal society, in which Snow

[44] In *Fairy Tales and the Female Imagination* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1982), for example, Jennifer Waelti-Walters states that 'in every really famous tale the heroine is [...] a totally powerless prisoner, in turn the victim of circumstance, of an older woman, and of men of all ages' (p. 1).

[45] This speaks to the possibility of rape in the 'Sleeping Beauty' tale: indeed, in early versions of the tale, the title character is not woken by love's first kiss, but by giving birth to a child, conceived during rape. See: Jack Zipes, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (2000).

[46] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd edn. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 42.

White functions as 'an 'it', as a possession' which the prince wants to own.[47] Like Snow White's prince, Bussac views Gillian as a possession: he admits to Jennifer that he took Gillian to his home because he 'wanted her [...] Just – like – that. [...] *[He] wanted her*' (235; emphasis in original). Bussac views Gillian simply as an object which, if he so desires, he can possess, regardless of her feelings on the matter. By positioning Gillian's 'marriage' to Bussac as the imprisonment from which Jennifer must rescue her, then, the novel collapses the notion that union with the traditional fairytale hero is a 'happy ending', leaving Jennifer free to forge a new path.

In positioning Bussac simultaneously as hero and villain, the novel disrupts common assumptions about the fairytale. Indeed, 'Sleeping Beauty' is not the only fairytale it features: Bussac frequently addresses Jennifer as 'Snow Queen', a reference to Hans Christian Anderson's 1845 literary fairytale of the same name (268). *Thunder on the Right* borrows a number of features from Anderson's tale: 'The Snow Queen' follows a female protagonist, Gerda, who attempts to rescue her friend, 'little Kai', from the eponymous Snow Queen, much as Jennifer attempts to rescue Gillian.[48] Like Jennifer, Gerda is initially told that her friend is dead, but refuses to believe this, and perseveres in staging a rescue attempt. The two encounter similar experiences: both meet an old woman in a garden (Jennifer meets Sister Louisa in the convent's grounds, whilst Gerda visits 'the flower garden of the woman who knew magic'[49]), and both are helped by criminals (Jennifer by Bussac, and Gerda by 'the little robber girl'[50]). There are also similarities between Kai's and Gillian's situations, as both experience a loss of memory, lending their respective kidnappings the illusion of acquiescence, resulting in a kind of Stockholm syndrome: having been kissed by the Snow Queen, Kai 'forg[ets] all about little Gerda and Grandmother and everyone else', and so agrees to go with her, whilst Gillian suffers from amnesia after her car accident, and has no choice but to believe Bussac's assertion that she is his wife.[51] Both Kai and Gillian are afflicted by eye-related difficulties which are instrumental in their release from imprisonment: Kai has 'a speck of the horrid glass that made everything great and good that was reflected in it become small and hideous' stuck in his eye, as well in his heart,

[47] Gilbert and Guber, p. 41.
[48] Hans Christian Anderson, *Fairy Tales*, trans. by Tiina Nunnally, ed. by Jackie Wullschlager (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 183.
[49] Anderson, p. 181.
[50] Anderson, p. 194.
[51] Anderson, p. 181.

which it 'turn[s] into a lump of ice'.[52] In order for him to escape the Snow Queen, the ice in his heart must be melted by Gerda's 'hot tears', allowing him to 'we[ep] so hard that the speck of mirror roll[s] out of his eye' to leave the Snow Queen's palace.[53] Meanwhile, Gillian suffers from 'Tritanopia' – a rare form of colour-blindness that erases blue and yellow (54). It is Gillian's inability to correctly describe the 'blue folds' of her skirt that allows Jennifer to finally identify her cousin (226). The most significant similarity between the two texts, though, is their 'coming-of-age' form. 'The Snow Queen', like 'Sleeping Beauty', is a tale depicting a young girl's coming-of-age, as does *Thunder on the Right*. The novel not only depicts Jennifer's evolution into adulthood, however, but also explores the nature of the fairytale's place in history, and its inclusion of 'The Snow Queen' is crucial to this.

Angela Carter describes fairytales as 'perennially refreshed entertainment', 'stories without known originators that can be remade again and again by every person who tells them'.[54] She refers to fairytales within their historical context of orality: innately impermanent, the oral tale is as much owned by all as it is owned by no one at all. It is infinitely fluid and resolutely un-sacred, with each fresh telling as authentic as the last. However, the lives of these tales have not ended with oral culture, and are not even confined to literary cultures: 'Sleeping Beauty' was retold in print by Charles Perrault and by the Brothers Grimm, but also in music by Tchaikovsky, in film by Walt Disney, and in paint by Edward Burne-Jones.[55] Anne Rice has retold the tale in a trilogy of erotic novels, whist Adèle Geras has reinvented the story for young adult readers.[56] With each retelling, the teller imbibes the tale with new meaning: whilst Rice explores themes of female sexual empowerment, for example, Geras deals with issues surrounding rape and post-traumatic stress disorder. Alongside these are the literary fairytales of Anderson, Oscar Wilde, and, indeed, Carter herself – original stories – literary, rather than oral – which adopt the style and tone of fairytale. This process of telling and retelling, which is at the heart of the very nature of the fairytale, is explored in *Thunder on the Right*. Fairytales evolve: they adapt and develop to better suit their changing contexts, and to incorporate new meanings.

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[52] Anderson, p. 178.
[53] Anderson, p. 202.
[54] Angela Carter, 'Introduction', in *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, ed. by Angela Carter (London: Vintage, 2001), pp. ix-xxii, (p. ix).
[55] Charles Perrault, 'La Belle au bois dormant', *Histoires ou contes du temp passé* (1697); Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Dornröschen', *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812); Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *The Sleeping Beauty*, Opus 66 [ballet], (1890); Edward Burne-Jones, *The Legend of Briar Rose* [series of paintings], (1885-1890).
[56] Anne Rice, *The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty* (1983), *Beauty's Punishment* (1984), and *Beauty's Release* (1985); Adèle Geras, *Watching the Roses* (1991).

This is reflected in *Thunder on the Right* by the particular tales which the novel references: whilst 'Sleeping Beauty' is a traditional oral tale, recorded by both Perrault and the Brothers Grimm (amongst others), and of unknown origin, 'The Snow Queen' is a literary fairytale, composed by Anderson in the nineteenth century. These two tales represent different stages in the development of the fairytale, a development gestured toward by their inclusion in the novel. I argue that, as a result of their inclusion, the novel positions itself as one of many re-tellings of fairytales, a re-telling that metafictively examines its own history.

As well as by references to 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'The Snow Queen', this self-reflective examination of the form's history is demonstrated by the moments of metafictive digression which punctuate the narrative:

> And so for the third time in the story Stephen looked up and saw her running towards him with outstretched arms. And, as is the way of all stories, the third time is the right time, luck's time, winner-take-all time… (284)

Here, the narration ironically refers to the stock conventions of fairytale, and in doing so self-consciously places itself within and alongside that tradition. The novel's attempt to adopt the tone of a fairytale is further demonstrated by the application of certain narrative styles typical of that form. *Thunder on the Right* is the only one of Stewart's romantic thrillers to be written in the third as opposed to the first person. Narration in the first person lends itself to an intimate, confessional tone, a tone that is anathema to the fairytale. Rather, they are characterised by what Christina Bacchilega describes as 'an external or impersonal narrator whose straight-forward statements carry no explicit mark of human perspective'.[57] *Thunder on the Right* adopts a similar narrative voice, as is evidenced by its opening passage, which describes the novel's setting of Gavarnie in the present tense: it details how the Hôtel du Pimené 'lies' in the shadow of the Pyrenees, how the River Gave-de-Pau 'roars and tumbles' behind the hotel, and how the road from Lourdes 'runs' past it (1). This lends a sense of timelessness to the setting of Gavarnie, as if it existed before the events in the novel took place, and continues to exist afterwards. By combining this with its use of a third person narrative voice throughout, the novel apes the anonymous, omniscient tone typical of fairytales.

[57] Christina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), p. 34.

Thunder on the Right self-consciously adopts fairytale features, and re-tells the tales of 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'The Snow Queen'. In doing so, the novel partakes in and comments on the evolutionary tradition of fairytales; stories which are inherently impermanent, which are told, retold, and adapt to accommodate various and ever-changing meanings. As Elizabeth Wanning Harries states, 'we have no access to any original versions. Rather, all we have are versions of versions, narratives spun and respun for hundreds of years'.[58] When she encounters an artwork which she believes may be an original El Greco, Jennifer ponders this notion, asking herself whether 'a copy or an imitation [could] rouse in the onlooker that queer breathless mixture of exaltation and humility with which we find ourselves studying the best things men have made with their hands' (73). In other words, do re-told fairytales, updated fairytales, retain the same power as their original counterparts? Jennifer quickly answers her own question: 'a good copy would doubtless speak as loudly of beauty as the master's own handiwork' (73). Here, the novel metafictively takes part in a debate concerning the authenticity of retold tales: Harries asserts that the perception of fairytales as innately and authentically connected to a collective past is bogus, arguing instead that they are 'distressed' cultural products – that is, that they are constructed in such a way as to 'suggest simultaneously their great age and their agelessness', and that in fact they are '*imitations* of what various literary cultures have posited as the traditional, the authentic, or the nonliterary'.[59] The next question to pose, then, is this: if there are no original fairytales and all iterations are equal in their essential inauthenticity, then are they in fact equally authentic? Is Disney's Sleeping Beauty as legitimate as Perrault's?

Thunder on the Right follows Jennifer as she develops from naïve adolescent into experienced adult. In doing so, the novel simultaneously explores the representation of female coming-of-age in Western fairytales. A number of tales are referenced, but those most frequently referred to are 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'The Snow Queen'. At the novel's outset, it is references to the former which dominate: Jennifer is characterised as a Sleeping Beauty figure, whose mother wishes to keep her safe within 'the guarded bower' of her family home (156). During the course of the novel Jennifer breaks free of this maternal bond, a process performed symbolically via her interactions with the domineering Doña Francisca. As Jennifer grows in independence, comparisons between her and the passive Sleeping Beauty decrease in favour of comparisons to

[58] Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 4.
[59] Harries, p. 4. Emphasis in original.

the active Snow Queen. However, as well as indicating Jennifer's increasing autonomy, the inclusion of these two tales also represents a development in the history of the fairytale: whilst 'Sleeping Beauty' is an oral tale with no known original, 'The Snow Queen' is an original literary tale. In including different types of tales, the novel gestures towards the notion of fairytale as an ever-changing genre. Fairytales are shown to be anarchic and unhierarchical, each re-telling as authentic as its predecessor. It is an awareness of this which solidifies Jennifer's new-found autonomy: she realises that although he is 'no story-book hero', 'it [is] the men like Stephen, the thinking men – no more than *moyen sensuel* – who [are] the true constant' (174). Stephen's incompatibility with the role of traditional fairytale hero does not mean he is incompatible as Jennifer's hero: she has the power to redefine the conventions of fairytale in any way she chooses. It is once she has realised this, and stopped believing that 'the story must have the right ending' that Jennifer finally overrules her mother and admits her feelings for Stephen (174).

'A Force and Dynamic Denied Most pre-1950s Heroines': Stewart's Leading Ladies

'For a thorough and unquestioning reworking of both the Gothic/Romantic novel and the fairy-tale' says Watson, 'the reader should turn to Mary Stewart who adheres faithfully to the requirements of the genre, offering no subversion of expectations'.[60] However, Watson's reading of Stewart's novels ignores the self-conscious awareness of genre they display. Watson states that 'as readers we are forced to become aware of the reading process only if the writer draws our attention to it' whereas 'the appeal of the popular novel is that it draws us into its world'.[61] According to Watson, 'popular novels', such as those by Stewart, by their very definition are in no way self-reflective, and do not draw attention to their status as works of fiction. However, I argue that by combining a range of genres, novels such as *Madam, Will You Talk?* and *Airs Above the Ground* do just that: in the process of combining, the genres are necessarily interrogated and adapted, and readers are forced to re-examine the expectations they associate with those particular literary forms. In *Madam, Will You Talk?*, for example, the combination of romance and action adventure enables the novel to undercut expectations which are commonly associated with each. Meanwhile, *The Moonspinners* and *Airs Above the Ground*

[60] Watson, p. 26.
[61] Watson, p. 12.

explore the potential aftermath of heterosexual marriage to a dominant male (as is key to the heterosexual romance novel) whilst *Thunder on the Right* metafictively reflects on the fluid and ever changing nature of fairytales. Each of the four novels discussed in this chapter use genre conventions in a way which reflects upon and challenges their implications in terms of gender.

Mussell argues that modern gothics, a category in which she includes Stewart's work, 'represent and reinforce a world in which traditional values about men, women, sexuality and marriage still hold true'.[62] According to Mussell, such novels reinforce patriarchal values, purporting that women should be passive, unsexual, and should look to men for their protection. Watson's view is similar: she states that 'what [popular] women's fiction also does [...] is to confirm the reader in her view of herself as society would like her to be; in the end, all that matters is the love of a good man'.[63] However, I have shown that the particular use of genre in Stewart's work results in a representation of women which is far more complex than this. In *Madam, Will You Talk?*, for example, the criticism frequently launched against romance novels – that their female protagonists are passive, sexless, ineffectual – is undercut by Charity's increasing agency throughout, which culminates in her sexual domination of Paul, and, through the figures of Tony and Frances, *The Moonspinners* offers examples of alternatives to heterosexual marriage. As Cadogan states, Stewart's leading ladies are 'active in their own interests, with a force and dynamic denied most pre-1950s heroines'.[64] Many – for example, Charity in *Madam, Will You Talk?* in this chapter, and figures such as Christy in *The Gabriel Hounds*, Gianetta in *Wildfire at Midnight* and Annabel in *The Ivy Tree* which I will discuss in the next chapter – are not virgins – and, of those examples I have given, only half have been married. Furthermore, in two novels – *Wildfire at Midnight* and *Nine Coaches Waiting* – the heroines eschew romantic attachments in favour of pursuing what they perceive to be their civic and moral duty. Many of the protagonists have their own interests and career ambitions, quite separate from finding a husband: in *Airs Above the Ground*, Vanessa is a qualified vet; in *The Moonspinners*, Nicola works for the British Embassy; in *Wildfire at Midnight*, Gianetta is a fashion model; and in *This Rough Magic*, Lucy is an actress. Meanwhile, the focus of *Thunder on the Right*, for example, is on female relationships: the novel explores the relationship between its protagonist, Jennifer, and her mother – a relationship which is metaphorically negotiated via Jennifer's interactions with Doña Francisca.

[62] Mussell, 'Beautiful and Damned', p. 84.
[63] Watson, p. 13.
[64] Cadogan, p. 25.

The romantic relationship, between Jennifer and Stephen, is comparatively side-lined. By exploring different generic tropes, then, Stewart's novels work to un-do some of the assumptions made about gender and genre.

To confine Stewart's romantic thrillers to just one generic category is misleading. They are, in part, as I have discussed, romance novels. But they are also gothic tales, detective fiction, spy stories, fairytales, and action-adventure thrillers. Furthermore, they contain allusions to modernist poetry, to Renaissance drama, to middlebrow spy fiction, and to Romantic verse. It is a mistake, then, to regard Stewart as a genre writer. Rather, her works should be read as novels which engage in a serious – though not un-playful – exploration of their own status as works of fiction. They are actively interested in the connectedness of literature, and demonstrate the different ways genres relate to each other by placing different generic conventions side by side. By invoking features from a range of genres, they expose their own status, and the status of the genres, as works of fiction. Stewart's novels are metafictive and self-reflective: by merging a variety of generic tropes, and frequently adapting them to fit unusual purpose, they encourage a re-examination of the boundaries between genres, and between genders, and an ongoing exploration into the art of story-telling.

CHAPTER THREE

'Unroll a New Memory': History, Identity, and the Nature of (Inter)Text

Stewart's novels are recognizable for their detailed formulation of a range of European locations. She explains that these are largely based on places she has visited. Of *Madam, Will You Talk?*'s setting in Provence, for example, she states that she 'wanted to recreate for [her]self, to walk about in [her] mind, a place [she]'d loved'.[1] The process of writing is figured as a means of imaginative transportation into Stewart's personal history. Stewart goes on to describe how 'as [she] was writing [...] things that [she'd] quite forgotten would come back. Some little thing that [she] was writing about would unroll a new memory'.[2] Here, Stewart explicitly connects writing with the uncovering of memory: the act of writing – the creation of text – allows her to access memories she had previously forgotten. Thus text provides a gateway into memory, and into the past. Stewart's novels variously present text as transportive, transformative, and with the power to influence the way people, places and events are perceived. In doing so they are metafictive, as they self-consciously reflect upon their own form. With a focus on *The Ivy Tree*, *Wildfire at Midnight*, *The Gabriel Hounds*, and *Touch Not the Cat*, this chapter examines how Stewart presents text as an outward-facing phenomenon, and how the use of intertextuality in these novels unpacks issues surrounding the formation of identity, the formation of history, and the experience of time.

Julia Kristeva states that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another'.[3] She terms this 'intertextuality', the process by which the meaning of a text is influenced by another text, variously manifesting (for example) in allusion, parody, and direct quotation. For Kristeva, intertextuality is inevitable, owing to the nature and heteroglossia of language itself. Meaning is not fixed: it is not passed directly from writer to reader, but rather is interceded by linguistic 'codes' which are defined and repeatedly re-defined by the texts which breed them. Roland Barthes similarly states that 'text is a tissue of quotations', and goes on to describe text as 'a multidimensional space in which a variety of

[1] 'Off the Page'.
[2] 'Off the Page'.
[3] Julie Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 37.

writings, none of them original, blend and clash'.[4] Originality is impossible: all text is descended and developed from other text. For Barthes, the writer's 'only power is to mix writings'; text will always look out to other text.[5] Kristeva and Barthes both characterise intertextuality as a near unconscious process, which unavoidably and intrinsically occurs in text(s) of all kinds. The emphasis for both is on text as outward facing. I argue that, through their self-conscious use of intertextuality, and metafictive investigation into the nature of (inter)text, Stewart's novels similarly present text as an outward facing phenomenon, one which perpetually seeks to redefine itself within its own ever changing terms.

One aspect of their textuality which I argue Stewart's novels explore is its relationship to history. According to Beverley Southgate, 'historians have long prided themselves on producing works that specifically *contrast* with fiction – that are 'historical' works precisely by virtue of *not* being fictional, that are verifiably 'true' in a way that fiction does not aspire to be'.[6] History is definitively opposed to fiction because it's project is to provide a factual account of the past. It seeks to produce an objective report of events, untainted by human error, emotional bias, or political agenda. However, as these accounts of the past are communicated via text, they are inherently literary, and therefore are inherently unreliable. As Southgate states, 'life has no inherent narrative form': there is no organising structure which unites all of human experience in an overarching and meaningful story.[7] These, as Southgate points out, 'are imposed upon it only retrospectively'.[8] The project of recording history, meanwhile, invariably constitutes an attempt to impose a coherent narrative onto past events. This is unavoidable: in order to explain and comprehend past events, historians necessarily shape and define them if only to the extent that they select certain words in describing them. Stewart's novels illustrate text's ability to distort the communication of events; how it can shape the way that people, places, and historical moments are remembered and understood. In doing so, her works demonstrate the fallibility of history: because it is manifest in text, it is controlled by its authors, and should be contextualised as such.

[4] Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 146.
[5] Barthes, p. 146.
[6] Beverley Southgate, *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow: Pearson, 2009), p. 1. Emphasis in original.
[7] Southgate, p. 14.
[8] Southgate, p. 14.

In the first part of this chapter I examine how *The Ivy Tree* explores the palimpsestuous nature of text and connects this to notions of identity and memory. Intertextuality is the imperfect repetition of old text within new: texts repeat and overwrite each other simultaneously in a process which constructs new meaning despite traces of old meaning retaining a presence. In *The Ivy Tree* this process is demonstrated by references to Josephine Tey's *Brat Farrar* (1949) and allusions to *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*: fragments from these help to create new meaning in *The Ivy Tree*, but that meaning is reliant on readers' familiarity with the original texts. This notion of intertextuality is reflected in the novel's conception of identity: when Connor Winslow convinces Mary Grey – the novel's heroine and narrator – to pose as Annabel Winslow, his missing cousin and current heir to the Winslow fortune, he fears that despite her uncanny physical resemblance to Annabel, Mary's mannerisms will give away her true identity. When it is revealed that Mary in fact *is* Annabel, the novel demonstrates the constantly shifting nature of identity: like text, it can be manipulated and performed, just as Annabel performs a version of herself. Like text, it is shown to be palimpsestuous: it overwrites itself whilst simultaneously retaining traces of its previous manifestations in the form of memory.

I then investigate how *Wildfire at Midnight* demonstrates text's ability to distort the communication of history. The novel is concerned with the problem of moving away from the past without losing sight of its significance to the present. This is illustrated at a domestic level, as Gianetta Drury, the protagonist, attempts to reconcile differences with her estranged ex-serviceman husband, and is symbolically extended to a national level by the fact that the events in the novel take place over the weekend of Elizabeth II's coronation. The novel's setting on the Isle of Skye symbolically functions as the site of time's disruptiveness, as it simultaneously forms the backdrop to re-enactments of ancient and recent history – of ancient sacrificial ritual, and wartime battlefield experience. Throughout the novel Gianetta negotiates the effect of her family history on her present self, and the continuing presence of her family history is represented by text. However, the most significant text featured in the novel is Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819). The presence of Scott's work forms part of the novel's exploration of the role played by text in the presentation of historical events: in his introduction to *The Bride of Lammermoor* Scott lists various retellings of the story told within his novel which significantly differ in their details. *Wildfire at Midnight* draws on this, and in doing so demonstrates the repetitive nature of history, whilst acknowledging its propensity to mislead.

Next I explore the representation of story-telling in *The Gabriel Hounds*. The novel follows Christabel Mansel and her cousin Charles as they travel in and around Lebanon and uncover an illegal drug-trading network which is using their deceased great-aunt Harriet's house, Dar Ibrahim, as its base. The novel features a number of gothic characteristics: it is concerned with false identities and domestic mysteries, and Harriet's house, which is large, intimidating, and in disrepair, conforms to the stereotypical notion of a gothic haunted house. Perhaps the most prominent gothic feature in the novel is the theme of vampirism. This is signalled by the inclusion of other vampire texts – including Samuel Coleridge's unfinished poem 'Christabel' (1816) and Allingham's detective novel *The Tiger in the Smoke* (1952). For Stewart, who, like Allingham, does not directly refer to vampirism, but rather evokes its symptoms as a metaphor for the parasitic nature of crime, the vampire motif draws together the novel's other themes of drug use and story-telling – both of which are shown to possess intoxicating qualities. Perhaps the most pertinent example of stories as intoxicating is in the life of Harriet, whose reputation as a local legend dominates her existence to the point that reality is fully obscured by story. In this way, the novel explores the intersection of story and reality, and in doing so investigates the power stories hold over our experience of the world.

Finally, I explore the representation of text as an uncanny space in *Touch Not the Cat*. In the novel, text is shown to be uncanny, in that it transgresses boundaries, and functions in the otherwise uninhabitable and inaccessible liminal space between life and death: text is shown to function as a vehicle allowing the dead to sustain contact with the living. This association illustrates the novel's emphasis on text as an outward facing phenomenon. A number of texts are referenced, namely 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Theseus and the Minotaur' and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597). Each of these are explicitly referred to in the novel and also inform the plot, as demonstrated, for example, by the characterisation of Bryony Ashley as Sleeping Beauty. These references and allusions constitute the first level of a complicated and nuanced portrayal of the relationship between texts in *Touch Not the Cat*. The three texts I have previously mentioned are also linked to each other, as they each variously use the motif of sleep, a motif also used in *Touch Not the Cat*. By accentuating the connections between the texts that it connects to, the novel gestures towards the interrelatedness of all text. This is emphasised further by the inclusion of physical books in the novel: Arthur Brooke's *Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), and

William Ashley's *From a New Romeo to his Juliet*, a (fictional) collection of verse. As is apparent from their titles, both of these are connected to *Romeo and Juliet*, the latter inspired by it, the former – allegedly – the inspiration behind it. By including these, the novel again draws attention to the outward-facing nature of all texts.

The four novels discussed in this chapter explore the relationship between text and history (whether personal, family, or national), and how different texts relate to and interact with each other in the communication of history. They reveal text to be the site in which the perception of past people, places, and events is shaped. As such, they acknowledge the extraordinary power of text, and gesture towards the power of those who produce it. In revealing this, they provide a metafictive reminder that all text, and all history, is written and therefore created, and as such can be re-written and re-created. Hutcheon argues that 'the reader [of historiographic metafiction] is forced to acknowledge not only the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also both the value and the limitation of that inescapably discursive form of knowledge'.[9] In demonstrating the textuality of history, Stewart's novels recognise the limitations of it in terms of communicating an absolute truth, but they also work to demonstrate the value of this kind of communication: it is through text that a range of voices from the past – individual, family, and national – are enabled to make their presence known in the present. Ultimately, history is not defined by an over-arching, absolute narrative: rather, it is constructed from a cacophony of individual, contradictory, voices, each with their own agenda and their own story, all making themselves known through the power of text.

'Uncomfortably Like Magic': Self as (Inter)Text in *The Ivy Tree*

Intertextuality is characterised by the reappearance of old text in new: it is text repeated. However, this repetition is imperfect: rather than a continual sequence of imitations allowing texts to define themselves in relation to their predecessors, intertextuality is the mode through which texts engage in dialogue with each other, challenge each other, and critique each other. In this sense, intertext is palimpsest: texts simultaneously repeat and overwrite each other in a process that is both destructive and constructive. *The Ivy Tree* explores this notion of

[9] Linda Hutcheon, 'Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History', in *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. by Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 3-32, (p. 8).

intertextuality and connects it to notions of identity and memory to show that the self is textual: it is constructed from memories which are layered over each other, revised, and revisited, and as such is also susceptible to reinvention – to rewriting. Connor Winslow and his sister Lisa assume that identity is merely the performance of personal history; the repetition of a rehearsed role. They believe that in order for 'Mary Grey' to adopt the identity of Annabel Winslow – Connor's long-lost cousin who is assumed to be dead – she must learn all about her past. When 'Mary' appears to deviate from Annabel's established personality – for example, by frequently quoting from literature – they claim that her behaviour 'isn't in character'.[10] When it is revealed that 'Mary' in fact *is* Annabel, the novel demonstrates the unfixity of identity: it is subject to change. Self is text: it can be altered, manipulated and performed, just as Annabel attempts to perform an out-of-date version of herself for Con and Lisa. Like text, it is shown to be palimpsestuous, continually evolving and overwriting itself, whilst retaining traces of its previous manifestations in the form of memory.

The Ivy Tree opens with 'Mary', on a day trip to the Northumberland countryside, encountering Connor, a local farmer from the nearby Whitescar estate. Connor, or 'Con', as he is not insignificantly known, initially assumes that she is Annabel, his cousin and proper heir to the Whitescar estate, who mysteriously disappeared eight years ago. Though she has been neither seen nor heard from during that time, Matthew Winslow, Annabel's grandfather and Con's great-uncle, remains hopeful that she is still alive, and as such has not removed her from his will. Con, however, is keen to secure the estate for himself, so he convinces 'Mary' to pose as Annabel and, once she has received her inheritance, transfer it to him. After some persuasion, 'Mary' agrees to undertake this task: she goes to Whitescar as Annabel, and reunites with Matthew, as well as Julie Winslow, Annabel's cousin, and meets Julie's new boyfriend, archaeologist Donald Seton. Once at Whitescar, 'Mary' uncovers the fact that Annabel was embroiled in a secret love affair with married local land-owner, Adam Forrest. Adam's wife has since died in a fire, and as such he is keen to reignite his relationship with Annabel. When he attempts to do this, 'Mary' tells him that she is merely posing as Annabel, and he begrudgingly agrees to keep her secret. 'Mary' eventually reveals to Adam that she is, in fact, the real Annabel Winslow, but has been concealing her identity from Con in order to protect herself from his murderous tendencies. The novel reaches its climax when Matthew dies during a dramatic

[10] Mary Stewart, *The Ivy Tree* (London: Hodder, 2009), p.134. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.

storm, leaving Annabel so moved that her real identity becomes obvious to Con. However, his interrogation of her is forestalled by the arrival of Julie, who brings news that Adam and Donald are trapped in the ruins of Forrest Lodge, which has been struck by a fallen tree (the eponymous ivy tree). Once Adam and Donald have been rescued, Con confronts Annabel in Whitescar's stables, and attempts to kill her, but instead is himself killed from a kick to the head by an unruly colt. Annabel is thus free to live openly with Adam at Whitescar.

The novel makes a number of intertextual connections: Tey's *Brat Farrar* is explicitly referred to, but it also draws on Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and du Maurier's *Rebecca*, two novels which are themselves intertextually linked – the latter being widely acknowledged as a reinterpretation of the former.[11] Allusions to Brontë's novel abound: Annabel's union with Adam is prevented, initially, by the presence of his wife Crystal, causing Annabel to leave Whitescar just as Jane is compelled to leave Thornfield when she discovers Rochester's marriage to Bertha. Like Bertha, the 'mad woman in the attic', Crystal has mental health problems, and, like Bertha, she burns down her husband's house. Like Rochester, Adam attempts to save his wife, and his hands are left burnt and disfigured. The presence of du Maurier's work in the novel, meanwhile, is most readily apparent in the scene in which Annabel first visits Forrest Lodge, which bears close resemblance to the famous opening scene of *Rebecca*, in which the nameless girl narrator dreams she 'went to Manderley again'.[12] Both passages constitute a first-person account of a night-time visit to a ruined house. In *Rebecca*, the narrator states that 'nature [has] come into her own again', and describes its 'stealthy, insidious' invasion of the house and grounds: the woods are 'crowded, dark and uncontrolled', the nettles 'choke[…] the terrace' and lean 'vulgar and lanky against the very windows of the house', whilst the 'malevolent ivy' 'cre[eps] across the lawns, and soon [will] encroach upon the house itself'.[13] Nature has similarly overrun Forest Lodge: Annabel describes 'a young ash sapling [thrusting] its way up between broken floor boards', and 'ferns [hanging] in cracks of the wall', whilst bushes 'riot' and flowers grow 'in a wild tangle' (187-188). Annabel also describes 'rhododendrons […] run[ning] wild up the bank' (185). In *Rebecca*, Manderley's 'slaughterous red' rhododendrons function as a threatening presence

[11] For more on this see: Simons; Patsy Stoneman, *Brontë Transformations* (1996); Verena-Susanna Nungesser, 'From Thornfield Hall to Manderley and Beyond', in *A Breath of Fresh Eyre*, ed. by Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann (2007).
[12] du Maurier, p. 1.
[13] du Maurier, pp. 1-3.

throughout the novel, often invoking the presence of the dead Rebecca.[14] This is symbolised within the novel's opening scene, which features the 'fifty feet high' rhododendrons 'enter[ing] into alien marriage with a host of nameless shrubs' – just as Rebecca conducts illicit affairs with a host of nameless men.[15] Accordingly, the rhododendrons at Forest Lodge are characterised as sinister and potentially dangerous: they are 'engulfing', have 'sharp leaves' are 'stiff as leather' and smell 'bitter and narcotic' (186-187). Both passages contain hints of the house's life prior to its defeat by the destructive forces of nature: Annabel describes how 'remains of formal planting could be seen', whilst in *Rebecca*, the narrator 'recognise[s] shrubs that would have been landmarks in [her] time, things of culture and grace' (187).[16] Both novels present a palimpsest here: despite erasure and decay, traces of the past persist in these houses. In *The Ivy Tree* this is extended to a kind of meta-palimpsest, as the trace remnants of Forrest Hall's past are revealed in a passage which itself constitutes a trace remnant of *Rebecca*. The fact that *Rebecca* is a reimagining of *Jane Eyre* adds a further layer to this palimpsestuous manifestation of intertextuality: the novel is inflected with the trace remnants of other novels, conveying that the reach of a text's meaning is not confined to its own pages.

In alluding to both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* the novel draws attention to the similarities between itself and the two, but more importantly it sheds light on the differences between all three texts. What the two earlier novels have in common, and where they differ, is in their preoccupation with the complexity and unfixity of female identity. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha, whom Gilbert and Gubar describe as 'Jane's truest and darkest double', can be read as the physical embodiment of the protagonist's repressed anger; the description of her 'snatch[ing] and growl[ing] like some strange, wild animal' is reminiscent of Jane's 'mad cat' behaviour as a child in the red room.[17] Rebecca corresponds with Bertha's position in *Jane Eyre*: like Bertha, she is emblematic of a husband's secrets, and, like Bertha, she haunts the text. As with Jane and Bertha, there is a connection between Rebecca and the novel's narrator. However, the identification between the girl and Rebecca is made far more explicit in du Maurier's novel than the relationship between their counterparts in *Jane Eyre*. For example, when the girl imagines her predecessor at dinner she 'so identifie[s] [her]self with Rebecca that [her] own dull self [does] not exist'.[18] Though

[14] du Maurier, p. 72.
[15] du Maurier, p. 2.
[16] du Maurier, p. 2.
[17] Gilbert and Gubar, p. 360; Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 29; p. 14.
[18] du Maurier, pp. 224-225.

more explicitly articulated in *Rebecca*, the implication in both texts is that the contrasting female characters represent different aspects of the same personality: they are opposites, but they also complete each other. In *The Ivy Tree* this is taken yet another step further: 'Mary' appears to fill the role of Jane and the girl narrator, taking up the place of an absent character, Annabel, whose presence seems to haunt her, and whom she appears to identify with – she describes a feeling of déjà vu upon her arrival at Whitescar, stating that 'in another life [she] had stood here, facing this door' (129). However, whilst the characters in the earlier two novels merely seem to reflect each other, it is revealed that 'Mary' actually *is* Annabel; the supposedly contradictory characteristics of femininity are finally represented in a single character. These repetitive representations of female identity re-write the same plot in order to represent different things: Gilbert and Gubar argue convincingly that Bertha represents Jane's repressed anger at her lack of creative agency in a patriarchal society, whilst in du Maurier's novel, the relationship between the narrator and Rebecca is clearly associated with sexuality; whilst the girl is virginal and submissive, it is implied that Rebecca is extremely sexual. The duality in Annabel's personality is not associated with anger or with sexuality, but with time: it illustrates the transformative effect of time on individual identity. It is apt that Annabel returns home under the guise of another woman because she is not, in many ways, the same person she was when she left. Identity is shown to be palimpsestuous: at the hands of time, it is constantly altered by new experiences and memories layered over each other. However, the earlier manifestations of identity do not disappear; though hidden under the new layers, traces of them surface periodically. The traces of *Jane Eyre* and to *Rebecca* reflect how traces of past experience are still found within the present self. However, by acknowledging the dissimilarities between these three texts, the novel emphasises the importance of difference within intertextual representation: it is by demonstrating the differences between itself and its predecessors that a text secures its individual identity.

The text to which *The Ivy Tree* most frequently refers is Tey's *Brat Farrar*, but its intertextual engagement with this work is different to its engagement with *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*: whilst allusions to the latter texts are revealed upon close reading of the novel, *Brat Farrar* is referred to explicitly, and on a number of occasions. For example, when discussing literary representations of identity fraud, Annabel describes it as 'the best of them all' and as 'wonderfully convincing' (50). As with *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, the differences between the novel and *Brat Farrar* are

significant: the attention drawn to Tey's novel is a vital part of *The Ivy Tree*'s successful implementation of its final plot twist – the revelation that 'Mary Grey' is, in fact, Annabel Winslow. In *Brat Farrar*, the title character, a young man recently returned to England from America, poses as Patrick Ashby, heir to Latchetts – the Ashby family estate – and presumed to be dead. There are a number of similarities between this novel and *The Ivy Tree*: for example, the plots in which Brat and 'Mary' become embroiled are both concerned with inheritance fraud, and both instigated by a third party. Both Brat and 'Mary' have recently arrived in England – Brat from America, and 'Mary' from Canada (although the frequency with which 'Mary' corrects the assumption that she has come from America only serves to strengthen this tie with *Brat Farrar*). Both Patrick and Annabel, the people who Brat and 'Mary' are persuaded to pose as, are presumed dead. In Patrick's case, this turns out to be true, as Brat eventually uncovers that Simon, Patrick's twin, is guilty of fratricide. In *The Ivy Tree*, it is strongly implied that this may be another similarity between the novels, as Con's violent temperament and the uncertainty surrounding Annabel's disappearance apparently cause 'Mary' to admit that she has 'grasped the fact that [Con] once tried to murder Annabel' (in reality, this statement reflects her increasing understanding of past events in her own life) (182). *The Ivy Tree* trades on these similarities, and on their implication that the novel will conclude in a similar vein to *Brat Farrar*; namely, that the protagonist will discover the true cause of their doppelgänger's disappearance, will thwart the instigators of the plan with which they were involved, and will continue to nurture the newly formed bond with the family they once tried to deceive. With this context so firmly bought to the fore in *The Ivy Tree*, the revelation of the narrator's true identity is rendered all the more surprising. As such the novel demonstrates that intertextuality is not simply an organic process via which traces of old texts can be found in new, but is self-consciously engaged in by texts actively seeking to define themselves. This self-consciousness means it can be manipulated by texts to shift their readers' expectations: the references to *Brat Farrar* are a decoy, serving only to lead the reader in the wrong direction. Thus it is *The Ivy Tree*, rather than its protagonist, which truly commits identity fraud.

Another similarity between *The Ivy Tree* and *Brat Farrar* is their shared theme of horses. In Tey's novel, Latchetts is a riding school, where horses are also bred and sold. Brat himself loves horses, but was injured in America and can no longer ride. In *The Ivy Tree*, Annabel is known to have been an excellent rider, and is described by Con as 'a wizard, a witch [...] with horses'

who can 'whisper them' (15). 'Mary' tells Con and Lisa that she is afraid of horses, and as such the three concoct a story that Annabel, like Brat, was injured in Canada, and can no longer ride. Of course, as 'Mary' really is Annabel, she is in fact extremely comfortable and competent around horses, and it is this which eventually reveals her true identity to Adam, the reader, and finally to Con. The subtle distinction between Brat and Annabel's relationship with horses is significant because it further demonstrates the importance of difference within intertextuality: whilst Brat really is injured, Annabel is merely pretending to be, just as she is merely pretending to be 'Mary'. This difference foreshadows the eventual diversion of *The Ivy Tree*'s plot from that of *Brat Farrar*. Horses, then, function to signify where contradictory narratives meet in the novel; they are the locus of diversion. This is re-emphasised by a conversation about one of the horses between Julie and Annabel:

> 'He's lovely, isn't he?' [Julie] said dreamily. 'Like something in a book. And the field smells like heaven. Pegasus, in the Elysian Fields. He ought to have a manger of chalcedony and a bridle of pearl.' (219)

Here, Julie associates the horse Rowan with the textual: she likens him to a creature from ancient mythology, and asserts that he should be accessorised as such. Julie goes on to admit that she hasn't 'the faintest idea what chalcedony is', but assumes it is 'like marble shot with fire and gold' (219). That Julie conjures the image of chalcedony despite her ignorance of its appearance is significant: she assumes its appropriateness, because it is a word (presumably) familiar to her from her reading of Greek mythology. However, the reality of chalcedony becomes clear when Annabel unflatteringly describes it as 'something looking a bit like soap, the healthy kind' (219). There is a disjuncture between Julie's perception of chalcedony and its reality; the horse symbolically functions as the site of this disjuncture, and of other disjunctures between perception and reality in the novel.

The horse Rowan functions as the site where the opposing layers of Annabel's past selfhood converge: he is present at key moments in the novel when traces of her real identity risk revealing themselves. For example, Con assumes that Annabel's distressed reaction to the mention of Adam is caused by her proximity to the horse. Furthermore, it is her ability to control Rowan that causes both Adam and Con to realise her secret. The episode in which Annabel's identity is revealed to the reader also involves Rowan; indeed, as with Adam and Con, it is the ease with which Annabel so matter-of-factly describes handling and riding Rowan

which gives the game away. Annabel's description is extremely sexualised, and she seems to experience an erotic pleasure during her encounter with Rowan: she describes his 'puffing sweet breath at [her] legs, [her] waist, [her] neck', how he 'put[s] his head down and rub[s] it violently up [her] body' and how 'the feel of his bare back warm and shifting with muscle between [her] thighs was exciting' (358; 359; 360). The emphasis on body parts and physical sensation here conveys the sensuality of this encounter, which, combined with the affectionate terms Annabel uses to address Rowan – 'you beauty, you love', 'sweetheart' – creates a strong sense of intimacy (359; 361). There is a dual sense of Annabel experiencing pleasure which is distinctly unfettered – she repeatedly describes herself going 'mad all at once', being 'mad now as morning' and experiencing 'mad delight' – whilst retaining total control of the horse, who is 'hardly broken' and is known to be difficult to handle (360; 361; 358). I read this duality as a demonstration of the malleability of identity: by posing as 'Mary', Annabel is able to manipulate, control, and enjoy her identity, just as she controls and enjoys Rowan. This is made more apparent by a further association between Rowan and text – Annabel likens him to 'a creature out of the pages of poetry' (358). The horse Rowan, then, is instrumental in the novel's depiction of the self as textual: he symbolically represents the self as a potentially unruly, independent entity, which is always moving forward, but which can be guided, manipulated, and performed.

Intertextuality in *The Ivy Tree* extends beyond allusions to other literary works. The novel centres itself around a case of identity fraud, as Con and Lisa conspire to coach 'Mary' for the role of Annabel, so that Con can intercept Annabel's inheritance. I argue that this plot in itself constitutes an intertextual endeavour within the novel. When the plan is first suggested, it is explained and referred to within the context of literary works: 'Mary' characterises the act of supplanting a person with a look-a-like as 'an old favourite [in literature] from the *Comedy of Errors* on', which 'belongs in stories' (49). She also refers to *The Prisoner of Zenda*[19] and *The Great Impersonation*,[20] and asserts that the proposed scheme is 'a crazy idea straight out of nineteenth-century romance' (60). As well as these, 'Mary' draws on historical cases of identity fraud: she refers to the Tichborne claimant and the case of Perkin Warbeck as instances of failed identity fraud. These are both examples taken from history, rather than literature: the case of the Tichborne claimant, which saw Australian butcher Thomas Castro claim to be Roger Tichborne,

[19] Anthony Hope's 1897 novel was adapted for film no less than six times between 1913 and 1979.
[20] E. Phillips Oppenheim's 1920 novel, adapted for film in 1921, 1935, and 1942.

the missing heir to the Tichborne baronetcy, garnered significant public interest in 1860s and 1870s Britain, whilst Perkin Warbeck was a famous pretender to the English throne during the reign of Henry VII; he claimed to be the younger son of Edward IV, one of the princes supposedly murdered in the tower of London.[21] Later, having agreed to take part in the plot, she describes how '*Brat Farrar* had become, for [Lisa], the textbook of [their] enterprise' (70). Thus the hoax is not only contextualised but conceptualised within a framework of literary representation: the 'story-book conspirators' design their scheme against a backdrop of literary precedence. The identity fraud is the result of a drawing-together of literary instances and examples, and as such can be understood as an intertextual act. Here, identity itself is shown to be intertextual.

Identity is constantly overwritten, yet traces of its previous manifestations, in the form of memories, remain. This is illustrated through an association between text and memory: individuals' histories and their personal memories are frequently represented in terms of the textual. For example, when he first sees Annabel (who convinces him she is 'Mary') at the beginning of the novel, Con describes the experience as 'like seeing the pages of a book turned back, or a film flashing back to where it was eight years ago' (15). Here, Con's explanation of the act of memory is explicitly linked to the textual. Moreover, when Julie describes her memory of Annabel's clandestine love-affair with Adam she says:

> Oh, it wasn't all tragedy to me at that age. It was sad, yes, but beautiful too, like a fairy tale. I used to try and make up happy endings to myself in bed, but they could never really work, because they meant that she – his wife, I mean – would have to die. And even if she was awful, it's always cheating, in a story, to kill off the person who prevents the happy ending. And I suppose I did see it more as a story, in those days, than as something that was really happening to people I knew. (223)

Despite Julie's description of Annabel's romantic history as a 'fairy tale' and a 'story', this passage in fact draws attention to the ways in which the affair does not fall into such categories. Julie indicates that stories have rules which must be adhered to: they must have 'happy endings', which should be achieved in a certain way – in this case, not by the death of Crystal Forrest. Julie's refusal to 'kill off the person who stands in the way of the happy ending' is ironic on Stewart's part, as she self-consciously draws attention here to her own 'cheating': it is already

[21] For more on the Tichborne claimant, see Rohan McWilliam, *The Tichborne Claimant: A Victorian Sensation* (2007). For more on Perkin Warbeck, see Ann Wroe, *Perkin: A Story of Deception* (2004).

known that Crystal *is* dead, and as such no longer stands between Annabel and Adam (223). Furthermore, Con, a further obstacle to the couple's happiness, is also 'kill[ed] off'. Indeed, by the end of *The Ivy Tree*, everyone that might have stood between Annabel and Adam is conveniently deceased. The result of this moment of soft metafiction is that Julie's theory of rules within story-telling is de-bunked: anything, we learn, can happen in a story. Text is shown to be misleading, and complex. Here, then, Julie illustrates the incompatibility between a textualised perception of events and what is 'really happening', whilst gesturing towards the notion that the representation of historical events is addled, rather than aided, by memory (223). This is further represented by Annabel's assertion that, having 'lived so long on a memory of Whitescar', her 'imagined picture' of the place 'has become almost more real than the thing itself' (143-144). Like Julie's recollection of Annabel's love affair, this displays the unreliability of memory, as Annabel self-consciously acknowledges the disruptive effect of memory on her perception of reality.

The palimpsestuous nature of identity is written into the landscape of *The Ivy Tree*: Julie's boyfriend Donald is engaged in the excavation of a Roman fort some miles from Whitescar, but also chances upon some ancient remains in a quarry closer to the house. Donald's discovery renders the land itself a palimpsest; the remains constitute the trace of a former settlement which has, literally, been built over.[22] His attempt to uncover these remains corresponds – as is hinted at by the fact that the quarry is the first place she visits upon her return to Whitescar – with Annabel's attempt to uncover the past she had previously kept hidden. The two attempts are united in the episode that constitutes the novel's *dénouement*, which sees Donald injured in the cellar of the ruined Forrest Lodge, where he has been searching for further evidence of a Roman settlement. Adam is trapped in the cellar with him, tending to his wounds, whilst Annabel and Julie, with the help of Con, attempt to orchestrate their release. This episode functions as a cathartic excavation of past self-hood for Annabel and Adam, as the process of rescuing Donald constitutes a disruption of their own repeating past: the fact that Annabel is paired with Julie while Adam is paired with Donald in this scene is significant, as throughout the novel, the present circumstances of the latter couple mirror the past circumstances of the

[22] The notion of the land as palimpsest is also represented by the 'old lines of ridge-and-furrow, and the still older ghosts of Roman road and Wall' as well as by the fact that Whitescar is 'not the original farmhouse' but was 'built about a hundred and fifty years ago, on the site of the old house that was pulled down' (2; 127).

former: Julie is the same age as Annabel was when she left Whitescar, is similar in appearance, and at one point, like Annabel, runs away from Whitescar following a disagreement with Con. Other similarities between the two couples include the significant age difference, the fact that, in both cases, Con attempts to insert himself as an alternative partner, and the fact that both relationships are subject to some obstacle preventing their full development; by Adam's marriage to Crystal, and by Donald's 'marriage' to his work. Of course, as Crystal has since died, she is no longer an obstacle to Annabel and Adam's relationship: rather, their union is prevented by the weight of their shared past. By helping their counterparts in this scene, then, Annabel and Adam intercept a repetition of their own story. This symbolically breaks the cycle of their past, stopping Julie from repeating the cycle, and allowing them to finally move forward with their lives, and their relationship.

The Ivy Tree explores the relationship between repetition, intertextuality, memory, and identity. The self is text, as is implied when Annabel describes Adam 'staring at [her] as if [she] were some barely decipherable manuscript he was trying to read' (362). Like texts, which are alluded to in the novel in such a way as to emphasise the significance of their differences as well as their similarities, highlighting their propensity to overwrite each other, the self is shown to be palimpsestuous: it is always changing, yet retains a constant trace of its former state. The image of the eponymous ivy tree provides a visual representation of this. The tree is described as a 'giant oak', which has 'bent and finally broken the wall' beside which it stands (95). However, as Annabel notes 'the power of the oak [will] be its undoing' as ivy has 'crept up it, engulfed it' and eventually will 'kill it' (95). The ivy has literally overwritten the tree, to the extent that its name has been altered; the novel is not, after all, called 'the giant oak'. Indeed, the tree functions as a significant symbol of the past throughout the novel: it is in this tree that Annabel and Adam leave secret letters to each other in the early days of their courtship. When it splits in two during the storm, it signals that the secret romance will be bought into the open.[23] Most importantly, though, the felling of the ivy tree constitutes the interception of the repeating trace of their past which disrupts Annabel and Adam's current relationship.

'The Times Were Out of Joint': History and (Inter)Text in *Wildfire at Midnight*

[23] The splitting of the tree is also a further reference to *Jane Eyre*, in which Jane considers an ancient tree felled by lightning as a bad omen; an episode which precedes the revelation of Rochester's marriage to Bertha.

Published a decade after the end of the Second World War, *Wildfire at Midnight* explores the relationship between time, text, and history. Throughout the novel Gianetta Drury negotiates the effect of her family history on her present self, and the continuing presence of this history is represented by text; by the portrait of her 'disreputable (and famous) great-grandmother' and namesake, nineteenth-century artist's model Gianetta Fox.[24] The relationship between past and present is further illustrated at a domestic level, as Gianetta attempts to reconcile differences with her estranged husband, who is also a guest at the hotel, and is extended to a national level by the fact that the events in the novel take place over the weekend of Elizabeth II's coronation, an event which at the time was considered a turning point in twentieth-century Britain's recovery from the war. The Isle of Skye, a rural, mountainous landscape, symbolically functions as the site of time's disruptiveness, as it simultaneously forms the backdrop to re-enactments of ancient and recent history; of ancient sacrificial ritual, and World War Two battlefield experience. It functions as a liminal space in which the boundaries of history can be explored. The novel is intertextually linked to Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*, which Gianetta reads. Gianetta bears resemblance to Scott's tragic heroine, Lucy Ashton, and there are notable similarities in plot and setting: both novels are set in Scotland, and both are concerned with lost love: like Lucy, Gianetta is separated from the man to whom she was previously attached. Whilst Lucy's lover Edgar Ravenswood dies in quicksand, Gianetta's attachment to her estranged husband Nicholas seemingly ends forever when they are both wading through 'the quaking bog', as Gianetta believes that he is a murderer (219). The compositional background of Scott's novel lends a further dimension to *Wildfire at Midnight*'s exploration of history, as *The Bride of Lammermoor*, according to Scott's own introduction, is based on real historical events, although these have been variously distorted. Its inclusion in *Wildfire at Midnight*, and the fact that the events it details are to some extent echoed therein, represents a disruption of time within history (as historical events are shown to be repetitive and ever-present) as well as shedding light on the editorial role of text in the presentation of history: text has the power to change the way that historical events, people and places are remembered.

In the novel, fashion model Gianetta Drury (née Brooke) visits the Isle of Skye over the weekend of Elizabeth II's coronation. Upon arrival, she discovers that her ex-husband, novelist Nicholas

[24] Mary Stewart, *Wildfire at Midnight* (London: Hodder, 2011), p. 2. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.

Drury, is staying in her hotel. She also learns that, prior to her arrival on the island, a young local girl named Heather Macrae was murdered – as part of what appears to be a sacrificial ritual. Gianetta becomes increasingly entwined in the murder investigation as she befriends her fellow guests, all of whom are potential suspects. These include (amongst others) a famous rock climber, Ronald Beagle, a pair of school teachers and amateur climbers, Roberta Symes and Marion Bradford, and Roderick Grant, another climber. As she becomes increasingly close to Roderick, Gianetta attempts to avoid Nicholas, whom she suspects of committing the murder. Meanwhile, more deaths take place: Marion and Roland are killed, and Roberta goes missing (though she is eventually found). The novel reaches its climax when Gianetta and Dougal Macrae, Heather's father, are fishing. Dougal is attacked, and, at his behest, Gianetta flees into the encroaching mist. There she hears Nicholas whispering her name, apparently confirming her belief that he is the murderer. Having managed to escape Nicholas, and emerging from the mist onto a sunny mountainside, Gianetta meets Roderick, and believes she is safe. However, it quickly transpires that Roderick is, in fact, the murderer. Roderick worships the mountains as a deity, and believes that they communicate their desires to him. He thinks that the mountains 'wanted' him to kill Heather for their 'yearly sacrifice of life', and that Marion, Ronald and Roberta deserved to die for their 'sacrilegious' attitude towards the mountains (229; 230; 232).[25] Now that she knows his secret, Roderick attempts to kill Gianetta. However, an armed Nicholas, accompanied by the police, soon appears. Roderick is captured, and Gianetta and Nicholas are reunited in their marriage.

In his introduction to *The Bride of Lammermoor* Scott describes a number of other versions of his tale, which include an oral folk tradition comprised of 'various reports [...] many of them very inaccurate, though they could hardly be said to be exaggerated', and a satirical poem, with margin notes added by another author.[26] Here, Scott draws attention to the incompatibility of different accounts, implicitly gesturing towards the subsequent unreliability of all historical record. As Fiona Robertson argues, this 'adds to the reader's sense that the story must remain open and incomplete'.[27] There is an emphasis on retelling and repetition, of the haunting of text

[25] Roderick states that to Ronald, for example, '*they* were just so many peaks to be climbed, so many names to be recorded', and of Roberta he says 'you heard her talking sacrilege, you heard how she chattered of conquering – *conquering* – these' (230; 232; emphases in original).
[26] Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (London: Dent, 1979), p. 5.
[27] Fiona Robertson, 'Introduction', in Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. vii-xxix (p. xvi)

by other texts, which is as apparent in what is left out as it is in what is left in. As Robertson goes on to note, 'everything works to remind the reader that the story told in the novel is itself a culmination of many others'.[28] This sense of stories wrapped within and inspired by other – sometimes conflicting – stories is heightened by the fact that Scott's reasoning for providing his introduction is that he 'finds an account of the circumstances given' by Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, and as such 'feels himself now at liberty to tell the tale as he had it from connexions (sic) of his own'.[29] Scott's explanation of his novel's construction is that it is a direct result of other people's stories; he appears to be competing with Sharpe's account, implying that it gives false information which he must correct, and as such self-consciously contributes to a pre-existing set of conflicting tales. According to Kathryn Sutherland, this sense of narrative multiplicity and instability not only extends to the stories surrounding the writing of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, but 'is driven deep into the novel itself'.[30] For example, a frame narrative describes how the narrator, Peter Pattieson, heard the story of the Ashton family from his friend, artist Dick Tinto, who in turn heard it from an 'aged goodwife' in the Lammermoor district.[31] The novel's concern with differing historical accounts is emphasised when Pattieson and Tinto quarrel over the best form of representation for the story: whilst Tinto favours the 'instant and vivid flash of conviction' afforded by painting, Pattieson prefers the 'creeping twilight details' associated with novelising.[32] *The Bride of Lammermoor* is thus inherently concerned with the communication of history, how this varies, and the impact such variations have on the present. Its intertextual inclusion in *Wildfire at Midnight* adds a further dimension to this, and emphasises the latter novel's shared preoccupation with those themes.

Scott explains that the character on whom Lucy Ashton is based is in fact named Janet Dalrymple. The change of name which occurs as historical figure is transferred into text seems to function as a tacit acknowledgement of the unreliability of story-telling: the woman depicted in Scott's novel is not the same person as the real historical figure; 'Lucy' and 'Janet' are different people and are named as such. However, as is emphasised by Scott's introduction, the supposedly historical figure of Janet is already rooted in and surrounded by text. As I have

[28] Robertson, p. xv.
[29] Scott, p. 1.
[30] Kathryn Sutherland, 'Introduction', in Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. xiii-xxxv (p. xv.)
[31] Scott, p. 26.
[32] Scott, p. 25.

already mentioned, Scott details a range of versions of Janet's story in his introduction. These textual accounts, the only remaining proof of Janet's existence, vary: poet Andrew Symson, 'treats the mournful occasion of the bride's death with mysterious solemnity', whilst Sir William Hamilton of Whitelaw produces 'highly scurrilous and abusive verses' which accuse Janet of consorting with demons.[33] The disparity between these accounts is to some extent explained by the fact that Symson is alleged to have been an intimate acquaintance of the Dalrymple family, whilst Hamilton had a 'bitter and personal quarrel' with Janet's father.[34] In these instances, then, Janet's story is simply a cipher for the authors' own agendas: Symson wishes to celebrate his friend, whilst Hamilton wishes to malign his enemy. The truth of Janet's history is irrelevant, and moreover, indiscernible: she exists only as text, and as such is open to manipulation. Scott emphasises the notion of Janet as textual and therefore malleable when he describes her in terms of art – she is characterised as a sculpture; 'mute, pale, and motionless as a statue', with hands 'as cold and damp as marble'.[35] *The Bride of Lammermoor*, then, demonstrates the relationship between text and history, and how this yields numerous potential realities. In *Wildfire at Midnight* these concerns are brought to the fore via the character of Gianetta: whilst her story mirrors that of Lucy, and she reads *The Bride of Lammermoor*, she is frequently referred to as 'Janet', or sometimes 'Jeanette', by other characters, connecting her to the 'historical' version of the Janet/Lucy figure.[36] By invoking both the novelised and historical texts of Janet, and combining them in the figure of Gianetta, *Wildfire at Midnight* draws attention to the symbiotic relationship between text and history: it is through text that history impacts the present, and through text that the present understands – or perhaps misunderstands – history.

The configuration of the characters of Lucy Ashton, Janet Dalrymple, and Gianetta Drury serves to illustrate the often fraught and frequently unstable (particularly for women) relationship between text and history. This is further reflected in the relationship between Gianetta and her great-grandmother, the continuing presence of whom, physically represented by her portrait, wields a detrimental effect on Gianetta's present. The novel opens with Gianetta's claim that 'in the first place [...] it was [her] parents' fault for giving [her] a silly name like Gianetta' (1). She

[33] Scott, pp. 7, 5.
[34] Scott, p. 5.
[35] Scott, pp. 3-4. Hamilton asserts that the death of the bridegroom is at the hands of a 'foul fiend', whom Janet had pledged must remove any suitor other than Lord Rutherford (on whom Edgar Ravenswood is based).
[36] For example: 'Have another drink, Jeanette, darling' (26); 'Janet Drury, as I live!', (31); 'You don't need to worry about such urban horrors here, Janet' (71).

appears to attribute blame for her current situation to her name – as is re-emphasised when she states that her 'nice, vague, artistic mother [...] called [her] after [her] disreputable (and famous) great-grandmother, without a thought about the possible consequences to [her]' (2).[37] Here, Gianetta acknowledges that her name is inherited from her great-grandmother – that it is a relic from her family history. By apportioning blame for the situation to her name, then, Gianetta also apportions blame to her family's past, signalling its continuing influence over her present. That Gianetta begins her narration in *Wildfire at Midnight* with an explanation of her great-grandmother's backstory rather than her own also represents the dominance this historical narrative continues to wield over her. Indeed, the story of Gianetta Fox is inextricably interwoven with the story of Gianetta Drury, for, were it not for Fox, Brooke would never have become Drury at all: when she first meets Nicholas, Gianetta is dressed in imitation of one of her great-grandmother's portraits – a 'Zollner canvas called *My Lady Greensleeves*' – and as such is foregrounded by her family history (3). Here, Gianetta Fox retains a haunting presence in her great-granddaughter's life through text: like Janet, she is fixed in place via the medium of art. The reputation of Gianetta Fox, as depicted in the text of her portrait, extends to effect Gianetta in the present: Gianetta describes herself as 'a pale copy of that arrogant worldling behind me in Zollner's canvas' (4). Her self-esteem is shaped by the memory of her dead ancestor. This is made further apparent when Gianetta states that 'what [Nicholas] had meant to marry was a modern Gianetta Fox, a composed young sophisticate [...] [but] what he'd actually got was only Gianetta Brooke, not long out of school' (4). Gianetta attributes the end of her marriage to a mutual misreading of the space between history and present-day reality: for Gianetta, she and Nicholas's relationship is defined by their incompatible perceptions of her family history, and the relation of that to her present self.

[37] Names, too, are a kind of text: they function as textual traces of history which recur throughout time. Nicholas admits to Gianetta that the 'biggest shock to [his] egoism' during their separation 'was when [he] found [she'd] even discarded [his] name' (258). For Nicholas, Gianetta's use of his name represents the enduring presence of their shared history. When she ceases to use it, she symbolically denies that history its continuing influence on her present, causing Nicholas to believe that any hope of a reconciliation is now lost. For Gianetta, too, Nicholas's name serves as a reminder of her past relationship. Indeed, when she reports her first encounter with it in the hotel's register, Gianetta's description of Nicholas's 'arrogant black signature' implies that it conjures an impression of his personality, as well simply communicating his name. It is as if, through his handwriting – through the text of his name – the past Nicholas is transported in Gianetta's present (30). A similar relationship between handwriting and the past occurs in du Maurier's *Rebecca*, in which the continual reappearance of scraps of Rebecca's handwriting cause the narrator to feel the enduring presence of her husband's deceased wife. For more on this, see Horner and Zlosnik, *Daphne du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination* (1998).

Gianetta implies that the deterioration of her relationship with Nicholas occurs because of a mutual misunderstanding of the relationship between history – specifically, Gianetta's family history – and present-day reality. Further evidence for this notion occurs when Gianetta's marriage to Nicholas is shown to have ended owing to the impact of past events. She describes how:

> The times were out of joint for us, the gap too wide – not the ten years' gap between our ages, rather the thousand-year-long stretch of a world war that to me was only an adolescent memory hardly denting the surface of my life, but to Nicholas was a still-recurring nightmare agony leaving scars on the mind which were only precariously skinning over. (5)

Here, time is shown to be subjective, occurring differently for individuals depending on their past experience. This subjectivity results in a representation of time as a physical process: it is 'out of joint', and contains a 'gap'. Gianetta describes the past experience of war as retaining a 'still-recurring' effect in the present. This effect is also described in terms of the physical and bodily, 'leaving scars' on Nicholas, whilst 'hardly denting' Gianetta. Time, then, is subject to change at the hands of history. For Gianetta and Nicholas, this yields negative results: the continuing impact of Nicholas's personal history on his present renders a physical shift in his experience of time, resulting in a distance – a 'gap' – between his and his wife's perception of their present. It is only once Gianetta undergoes a symbolic re-enactment of the warfare experienced by Nicholas that they are able to move forward with their relationship.

When Gianetta flees through the mist and bog to escape the murderer the scene uses the imagery of trench warfare, with the bog characterised as the space between the trenches. Gianetta describes 'flatten[ing] [her]self in the long heather' – just as soldiers would remain low on the ground to avoid being seen by enemy snipers – whilst the 'birds *rocket* […] over [her] head' (212; 214, my emphasis). The use of firearm imagery to describe the birds' flight brings to mind a rush of bullets and missiles through the air. Gianetta's description of the sounds she hears strengthens this association with trench experience. She details the bog's 'small lippings [and] suckings', and goes on to describe its 'uneasy breaths' (217). The sounds of the bog are depicted as human noises: indeed, this onomatopoeic description of airy exhaustions echo the dying breaths of the fallen soldiers in no-mans-land as much as they do to the bubbling bog. The image of dead soldiers is continued when Gianetta describes how when 'a ghostly skeleton-shape

floated out of the mist beside [her], [her] whole body jerked like a marionette's with fear', but that 'it was only the pale ghost of a young birch, a bone-bare branch that lay rotting in the bog' (218). Here, the image of the 'young birch', fallen before its time, and left 'rotting' and forgotten, which is associated with a human skeleton, mirrors the loss of life war entails, the results of which were all too apparent in the fields of no-man's-land. It is significant that the war imagery in this passage bears closer resemblance to the trench warfare which took place during the First World War as opposed to the more technologically advanced methods used in the Second: this demonstrates the extent to which the First World War influences representations of warfare in British culture – an effect which is largely the result of the proliferation of textual traces it left.[38] Furthermore, it constitutes a further layer of history's repetition in this scene. By pairing allusions to ancient history with the imagery of modern warfare(s), this passage represents the landscape of Skye as a place where time is disjointed, and where history continually repeats simultaneously within itself.

Gianetta's journey through the trench-like swamp allows her to experience something close to what Nicholas went through during the war. When she emerges, they are able to reunite; there is a sense of renewal. In this way, the novel represents the notion of repetition as a means of moving forward: the trauma Nicholas experienced at war is repeated for Gianetta, and this allows them to reconcile. The idea that repetition is connected with moving forward is also demonstrated through the references to Elizabeth II's coronation. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the coronation was positioned as a turning point in Britain's progression as a country. As Ruth P. Feingold states, it 'signal[ed] the end of the nation's wartime privations', and symbolised the country 'coming of age as a modern nation: seeking a sense of national character in a post-imperial world'.[39] Feingold also argues that 'Elizabeth – and the nation that she represents – undoubtedly inhabit a liminal period' throughout the coronation, and that the ritual is 'transformative' and 'irreversible'.[40] However, whilst the coronation represents a period of renewal, it simultaneously, as Norman Sykes asserted at the time, is 'a rite of undoubted antiquity', an 'epitome and expression of the continuity of our national history'.[41] It

[38] Through, for example, the cultural afterlife of the work of Vera Brittain, Wilfred Owen, Jessie Pope, and Siegfried Sassoon.
[39] Ruth P. Feingold, 'Every Little Girl Can Grow Up to Be Queen: The Coronation and *The Virgin in the Garden*', in *Literature and History*, 22 (2013), 73-90 (pp. 75, 74).
[40] Feingold, p. 75.
[41] Norman Sykes, 'The Meaning of the Coronation', *Spectator*, 15 May1953, p.11-12 (p. 11).

is an event which has been repeated throughout history, and as such represents the continuity of that history. The idea of the coronation as a repetitive act is demonstrated in the novel by the parallels drawn between it and the trope of human sacrifice. The murdered body of Heather Macrae is reported to have been discovered 'with the remains of charred driftwood and birch and heather blackened and scattered', burned by 'a great blaze of fire half-way up Blaven' (one of the mountains) in imitation of an old sacrificial ritual (56). Meanwhile, the 'local Coronation celebration' on the island is 'a bonfire' (60). The similarities between this and the 'leaping column of fire' which killed Heather are emphasised by the fact that the coronation celebration fire is encountered by Gianetta immediately after she has learned of Heather's death (55). Indeed, the association between the two fires is stressed even further when Gianetta mistakes the coronation fire for an attempt on her own life, a moment which foreshadows Ronald's eventual death by burning on the same fire. Ronald's death exacerbates all the more the connection between the coronation fire and the sacrifice of Heather. By connecting the coronation with ancient ritual in this way, the novel reveals it to be part of a ritualistic cycle of practice that repeats and re-permeates itself perpetually throughout history. As such, the ideas of repetition and renewal are linked: it is through the re-enactment of history that the nation is able to move forward and create new narratives.

The episode in which Gianetta battles through the 'hideous shivering bog' to escape the murderer, who at this stage she believes to be Nicholas, calls to mind Edgar Ravenswood's death by quicksand in *The Bride of Lammermoor* (217). This is reinforced by the frequent references to death which punctuate the passage: one bird emits 'the screech of a damned soul', and the mist is described as 'streaming from its wings [...] like grey grass under the scythe' (214). Gianetta describes 'the mist that shroud[s] the moor' as a deleting force, which is 'blinding' and renders all noise 'muted' (210; 214). This is not dissimilar to the eliminating effect of the 'tenacious depths' of the quicksand on Edgar, which leave 'no trace whatever' of him.[42] Gianetta's descriptions of the mist permeate the passage, and are somewhat contradictory. The mist is an 'intangible barrier': it cannot be felt or perceived, and yet its physical effect is profound (214). It is 'nothingness', 'a grey haze of nothing', and yet appears to have a significant, physical impact (211; 208). The mist behaves like a living being, 'clawing and fingering' at Gianetta (210). Furthermore, though 'nothing', it is simultaneously 'blinding', 'bewildering, sense-blotting' and

[42] Scott, pp. 333, 332.

'dizzying' (210; 211; 214). It is as if the mist imposes its own 'blankness' onto Gianetta, nullifying her senses, so that she can see nothing but a 'blank wall' and hear nothing but 'muffled silence' (211; 214). The mist is dangerous – 'a hasty step could result in a broken ankle' – and yet protective, even 'lovely' – it is 'the friend of the hunted more than the hunter' (210; 213; 212). The representation of the mist is reflective of the novel's representation of the relationship between text and history more widely: whilst text is the means through which history is repeated and remembered, it is also the means through which events can be distorted, or even omitted entirely. The mist symbolically represents text: Gianetta experiences first-hand its ability to conceal and mislead.

The danger of misreading the past is most pertinently illustrated in the novel by Roderick, who is eventually revealed as the murderer. Roderick kills Heather in an attempt to resurrect an ancient ceremony from 'long ago [when] men paid [the mountains] worship, lit fires for them, gave them the yearly sacrifice of life' (230). In his bid to re-enact this, Roderick demonstrates an obsession with the past that yields obvious negative results on the present (the deaths of Heather, Marion, and Ronald). It transpires that Roderick's interest in such ritual stems from his upbringing in the Scottish Highlands. His childhood home is located 'four miles even from the village, up beside the ruins of an old church and its primitive graveyard': removed from contemporary society, Roderick is literally brought up surrounded by the past (247). This is exacerbated by his father, who appears to share Roderick's 'madman's brain': 'the history of the long-dead bones in that long-dead graveyard' are 'more real to him than the real life round him' (248). Both Roderick's and his father's obsessive preoccupations are rooted in the textual: Roderick's confused beliefs are constructed from 'a jumble of facts from books and from his father's researches', whilst his father's instability initially manifests as 'a passionate absorption in his studies of the past' (248; 247). Furthermore, the elder Mr. Grant is described as 'the stern unbending, austere kind of godly Presbyterian that used to be *common in fiction*' (247, my emphasis). So deep is his absorption in the past that he begins to resemble the medium which connects him to it: he is transformed into text. An obsessive concern with the past, then, is associated with the textual. Text is shown to be what links the past with the present: it is the vehicle which allows history its continuing impact.

Wildfire at Midnight explores the relationship between text and history – including histories of families, and of nations. The Isle of Skye, on which the novel is set, represents a liminal space in which the boundaries of history can be explored. However, I propose that history's boundaries do not only occur within time, between past and present, but also exist between fact and fiction: history is therefore unreliable, and is subject to manipulation at the hands of those who tell it. Gianetta Fox's enduring presence in Gianetta's life is represented by text; specifically, by her portrait. Similarly, in his Magnum introduction, Scott describes Janet in terms of art, specifically, sculpture. Art, then, a form of text, is what characterises the continuation of history in the present. However, this is complicated by additional aspects of the novel: *Wildfire at Midnight* is preceded by a note from the author, which begins by denying the existence of the novel's main setting, stating 'there is no hotel at Camasunary'. Stewart also draws attention to the 'few liberties' she has taken 'with the geography of the place', as well as her 'tampering with the weather'. Here, then, Stewart self-consciously draws attention to the artificiality of her novel; indeed, of novels in general. She acknowledges that art does not always offer an accurate reflection of that which it depicts. This calls into question the validity of Gianetta Fox's portrait as a signal of her presence. After all, for all we know, Zollner's *My Lady Greensleeves* is the Lucy Ashton to Gianetta Fox's Janet Dalrymple. *Wildfire at Midnight*, then, displays the function of text as a vehicle for the communication of the past, but also shows its power to distort that past, so that fact and fiction become indistinguishable.

'Distance Lends Enchantment': Intoxicating Stories in *The Gabriel Hounds*

The Gabriel Hounds is concerned with the telling of stories. In the novel, stories are represented in a number of ways, and are shown to possess a range of influence: they are by turns misleading and revealing, reassuring and discomfiting. They are always, however, like the contraband substances which feature in this novel, intoxicating. *The Gabriel Hounds* centres on Christabel Mansel and her cousin Charles as they inadvertently become involved in a drug-running scheme located in the palatial yet dilapidated home of their great-aunt Harriet. The seductive, intoxicating, and addictive nature of drug use is reflected in the text through the theme of vampirism which runs throughout, as is made apparent by the inclusion of references to such vampire texts as Coleridge's 'Christabel' and Allingham's *The Tiger in the Smoke*. I read the combined themes of vampirism and drugs as playing a significant role in the novel's interest in

the intoxicating potential of stories and their ability to skew the transmission of reality. This interest is most clearly articulated in the novel through the figure of Harriet, whose status as a local legend has eclipsed her reality (the reality being that she is dead). In this way, the novel explores the spaces in which story and reality intersect. This intersection is also represented by the repeated juxtaposition of beauty and hideousness throughout the novel. This juxtaposition is characteristic of the gothic, in which evil characters are frequently portrayed as possessing extreme physical beauty that serves as a disguise for their internal ugliness. In *The Gabriel Hounds,* stories are shown to play a vital role in this relationship: what, in reality, is hideous, unpleasant, and impalatable, becomes, when transformed into story, beautiful and picturesque. *The Gabriel Hounds* thus explores the darker side of stories: they are associated with deception and with transformation, and are shown to possess the power to eclipse real life, meaning they can be used as a means of controlling how things, people, places and events are perceived and remembered.

Christabel 'Christy' Mansel is visiting Damascus when by chance she encounters her paternal cousin, Charles. The pair agree to visit Dar Ibrahim, the home of their eccentric great-aunt Harriet, who has eschewed her family and Western society in favour of living as a recluse in the Lebanese mountains. However, Christy then decides to call on her great-aunt without her cousin. She is met by a young Englishman named John Lethman who, as Christy's driver later points out, has clearly been smoking marijuana. John introduces himself as Harriet's doctor, and explains that she is prone to some unusual behaviours, including dressing as an Arab male, keeping exclusively nocturnal hours, and refusing to receive most visitors. Later, Christy is introduced to an odd figure who looks like 'some fantastically robed Eastern male' and speaks with 'a strained, asthmatic breathiness'.[43] However, she recognises her relative by the 'cabochon-cut Burma ruby' she wears (99). Christy informs her great-aunt that Charles also intends to visit her. To Christy's surprise, Harriet refuses to allow this. Charles and Christy suspect that something is amiss at Dar Ibrahim, and plan a return visit. However, before this can take place, Christy is offered a lift by a gentleman calling himself Mr. Lovell. During the drive, Christy fantastically recognises this man as her great-aunt Harriet. It transpires that he is Henry Lovell Grafton, Harriet's doctor: Harriet is dead – the person Christy spoke to was Grafton in disguise. Grafton and John are drug dealers, using Harriet's home to store vast quantities of

[43] Mary Stewart, *The Gabriel Hounds* (London: Hodder, 2011), pp. 98, 99. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.

their stock. The novel ends with Dar Ibrahim burning to the ground, the death of Grafton, the escape of John, and Christy and Charles safe and engaged to be married.

The novel's drug trade plot is complemented by the trope of vampirism, which is most explicitly signalled by intertextual references to other vampire literature. As I discuss, there are aspects of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), but the most clearly signalled is Coleridge's 'Christabel', extracts from which are used as chapter epigraphs throughout the novel, and the title character of which lends her name to Christy. The poem depicts the seduction of the eponymous Christabel by Geraldine, a mysterious woman who is connected to the supernatural, who has been read as a vampire.[44] The other text which features in the novel is Allingham's post-war detective novel *The Tiger in the Smoke*, a copy of which Christy finds at Dar Ibrahim, and reads whilst waiting to be introduced to her aunt. I read *The Tiger in the Smoke*'s villain and protagonist, Jack Havoc, as a vampire. In the novel, ex-soldier and knife-artist Havoc has escaped from prison and is roaming London in search for treasure hidden during the war, murdering many who stand in his path. As the novel unfolds, it transpires that he is not Jack Havoc (or Jack Hackett, his name in the army) but Johnny Cash, who was pronounced dead as a child and apparently buried.[45] When Jack's true identity is revealed, there is a sense that he has risen from the grave – a condition traditionally associated with vampire mythology – which is heightened by the fact that he frequently hides underground (for example, in the basement headquarters of the gang formed by his fellow ex-servicemen and at one point in a crypt), and operates primarily during the night. The fact that he is, despite his previous killing spree, physically unable to kill Canon Avril – a man of the church – speaks further to his vampirism. The notion of Jack as undead continues at the novel's conclusion, when he is pursued by police at a cliff-edge by the sea: he looks to a pool and thinks that 'a man could creep in there and sleep soft and long'.[46] Jack refers to sleep as opposed to death and, as the novel's closing statement reports, his 'body [is] never found'; the sense remains that he might still be out there – that he is undead.[47] By including such references, *The Gabriel Hounds* draws attention to its own subtle invocation of vampire mythology.

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[44] Arthur Hobart Nethercot, *The Road to Tryermaine: A Study of the History, Background, and Purposes of Coleridge's 'Christabel'* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1939).
[45] It transpires that his mother blackmailed the local vicar's wife to falsely identify his body.
[46] Margery Allingham, *The Tiger in the Smoke* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 224.
[47] Allingham, p. 224.

While not explicitly referenced, *Dracula* does echo through the novel: the descriptions of John have a close resemblance to the descriptions of Lucy Westenra's declining health in Stoker's text. When Christy first meets John, he is intoxicated after smoking marijuana. In Stoker's novel, Lucy's illness is as a result of her being frequently attacked by the eponymous vampire Count Dracula. Dracula visits Lucy at night, and as a result her sleep is increasingly disturbed. For this reason, she is frequently 'half dreamy', 'in a swoon', 'languid and tired'.[48] Similarly, the intoxicated John is described as possessing 'the slightly confused air of someone startled awake from sleep' and as looking 'as if he didn't get enough sleep' (62; 69). As the blood is drained from Lucy's body, she is increasingly 'pale and wan looking' with 'a drawn, haggard look under her eyes' (80; 81). Similarly, John's eyes are 'blurred and unfocused. They [are] grey, with wide myopic-looking pupils' and 'the whites [are] bloodshot' (63; 69). John also exhibits other vampiric symptoms: whilst Dracula cannot go into the sun, and as such lives an exclusively 'nocturnal existence', John 'wince[s] as if [the sun's] fierce light worrie[s] him' (62).[49] Throughout *Dracula*, Lucy becomes increasingly enthralled to the Count, and is ultimately controlled by him utterly. By likening the symptoms of John's drug use to those of vampirism, then, the novel draws attention to the parasitic nature of drugs, but also to their potential as a means of influencing and controlling others.

John is not the only character in *The Gabriel Hounds* who is associated with vampires: Christy's childhood memories of her Aunt Harriet are inf(l)ected with vampirism. Her 'impression is that she was tall and dark and had piercing black eyes and wore black, things that flew around her like the White Queen's shawl' (73). Here, Harriet with her 'piercing black eyes' and black clothes which fly around her – like bats – is reminiscent of the traditional European idea of a vampire, or of a witch in a fairytale. The association between Harriet and vampirism speaks to the other comparison made to vampirism (and to drug use) in the novel: storytelling. Harriet's eccentric lifestyle at Dar Ibrahim constitutes a conscious effort to transform herself into story: she is purposefully imitating the existence of Lady Hester Stanhope, a woman whose real life has successfully translated into story. This is indicated by the fact that her life-story frequently features in the novel as a physical book – her legend continues to exist in the physical world in the form of text despite her corporeal absence – as well as by the fact that she, a genuine

[48] Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2000), pp. 79, 106, 80.
[49] Stoker, p. 30.

historical figure, appears in *The Gabriel Hounds*, a work of fiction.[50] In the novel's version of her legend, Lady Hester created a house which was 'a deliberate re-creation of an Arabian Night's wonderland with all the fantastic properties of Eastern fairy-tale solidly at hand' (26). Similarly, Dar Ibrahim is endowed with fairytale characteristics: Christy mentions its 'story-book paraphernalia' and describes her time there as like being 'in a story-book world' (135; 222). Harriet's lengthy inhabitance of this place reportedly causes her to believe that she 'has a kind of right to the legend' of Lady Hester. Indeed, Christy accuses her (although of course she is in fact speaking to Grafton) of 'hedging [her]self up with legends' and states that she is 'one of the local legends' (104; 105). Harriet herself, then, has transformed into story: indeed, Christy describes how she has 'dropped [...] out of family reality into family legend' (25). The word 'legend' is repeatedly used in association with Harriet throughout the novel. As well as highlighting her transformation into story, I argue that the use of this particular term highlights the misleading potential of that storification. The OED defines a legend as 'a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but not authorised' and 'a story or rumour typically of recent origin, which is widely known and believed by people, but is in fact unverified'.[51] Legends exist somewhere between reality and pure fiction; they are characterised by uncertainty, and as such are emblematic of the blurred line between truth and fiction, and how stories can be used as a way of controlling the way people, places, and events are perceived and remembered.

Harriet's transition into story leaves her open to Grafton's manipulation. Indeed, Grafton wields control over both John and Harriet in the novel. In both cases, the control he possesses is as a result of his access to drugs: as Harriet's doctor, he prescribed and administered the medicines which literally controlled her life; as a dealer of marijuana, he controls John's access to the substance to which he is addicted, and as such is able to bend him to his will. Both Harriet and John's lack of autonomy is expressed in the novel through the metaphor of writing, or rather, of failing to write: when Christy meets John, he tells her that he came to Lebanon 'to do some research for a paper [he] wanted to write' (64). However, Hamid, Christy's driver and guide, comments afterwards that 'if he stays here and smokes *marjoun* he will never write it. He will think for years that he has only to start tomorrow, and it will be the best book ever written...

[50] For more on Stanhope see: Joan Haslip, *Lady Hester Stanhope* (1945); Ian Bruce, *The Nun of Lebanon* (1951); Lorna Gibb, *Lady Hester: Queen of the East* (2005); Kirsten Ellis, *Star of the Morning* (2008).
[51] 'Legend', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/107040?rskey=1IWQrL&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid [accessed 21 June 2016].

but he will never start' because 'this is what the *marjoun* does; it gives you visions and takes away the will to translate them' (75; emphasis in original). Similarly, Christy remarks that whilst Harriet originally bought Dar Ibrahim as a place 'to write a book', 'whether she had in fact written anything at all during her fifteen years' exile nobody had any idea' (27). This is ironic because, whilst she may not have written a book, she has constructed a story around herself. However, whilst a written story is to some extent standardised by virtue of its physical textuality, orally transmitted legend is inherently changeable, inevitably varying with each retelling. Thus Harriet is no longer the author of her story: once she is dead, her story is under Grafton's command. That Grafton controls Harriet's story constitutes a further reference to Stanhope: Grafton compares himself to Dr Meryon, who was 'part of the Stanhope legend' (291). Whilst Grafton metaphorically controls Harriet's story, Meryon literally controlled Stanhope's, as it was he who wrote and published her memoirs after her death.[52] Grafton's presence as villain in *The Gabriel Hounds* draws attention to Stanhope's lack of control in this process. Grafton's role as controlling storyteller is again signalled by the theme of vampirism: when Christy first visits Dar Ibrahim, she is informed that her aunt will only see her at night, because, just as Dracula 'sleeps when others wake', she keeps nocturnal hours.[53] Christy is taken aback by her aunt's physical appearance: like Lucy Westenra, 'her skin [has] a sallow pallor and her lips [are] bloodless and sunken' (98) and, like Dracula, whose 'eyebrows [are] very massive', her 'well-marked brows [give] life to [her] fullish oval face' (98).[54] Of course, these descriptions are not of Harriet, but of Grafton. Harriet, then, is shown, to have been consumed by stories: the reality of her physical presence has ceased, but the storified version of her lives on to be revised and retold by Grafton.

The malleability of stories is figured through the frequent juxtaposition of the hideousness and the beautiful. This is a common trope of gothic fiction, in which beautiful exteriors frequently conceal hideous interiors. In Lewis's *The Monk* the villainous Matilda – a demon disguised as a woman – is portrayed as extremely beautiful and attractive. Similarly, in *Rebecca* the title character's widely acknowledged beauty, grace, and charm, which extend to the upkeep of the house Manderley, serve to conceal her supposedly 'rotten' nature. Coleridge's *Christabel* also

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[52] Meryon published three volumes of *Memoirs of the Lady Hester Stanhope as related by herself in Conversations with her Physician* in 1846 and three volumes of *Travels of Lady Hester Stanhope, forming the Completion of her Memoirs narrated by her Physician* in 1847.
[53] Stoker, p. 40.
[54] Stoker, p. 17.

contains an example of beauty and hideousness positioned in the same body: Geraldine is described as 'beautiful exceedingly', but also conceals an apparently indescribably terrifying 'sight to dream of, not to tell' beneath her 'silken robe'.[55] Geraldine's surface beauty conceals a hidden hideousness, which signifies her evil nature. In *The Gabriel Hounds* Christy frequently states that her surroundings are beautiful only to undercut herself by noticing a flaw, and *vice versa*. For example, in Damascus a 'quite hideous inlaid table' is contrasted with a 'beautiful blue rug', whilst her quarters at Dar Ibrahim contain a 'hideous chest of drawers' which hold 'a rather beautiful lacquered looking-glass' (13; 90). Beauty and hideousness can also exist within a single object: Christy is attracted one evening to 'an Aladdin lamp of some silvery metal' despite simultaneously acknowledging that it is 'probably in daylight hideous' (29). Unlike the examples from other texts given above, the juxtaposition of the hideous and the beautiful in *The Gabriel Hounds* extends to the environment. As such, the novel acknowledges the potential duality of all objects – and by extension places, people, and events – and as such their potential for change and transformation. It is story that shapes this transformation: how an object (or place, person, or event) is described in words defines how it is understood.

Dar Ibrahim itself is also at once attractive and dilapidated and when Christy first sees it up close she is made aware of this. She states that 'the main gate – double leaves of studded bronze under an elaborately curved arch – [is] at first sight vastly impressive' but that 'as one approach[es] it it [can] be seen that the heavy knocker [has] vanished from its hinge and that the carving [has] been fretted almost to nothing by the wind' (53). At close range the burning of Dar Ibrahim is terrifying and indeed life threatening; it is 'the real thing', with smoke that is 'acrid and heavy' and renders Christy 'hot and choking and blind' (353; 354). From a distance, though, the scene is 'like something from a coloured film of epic proportions'; what is ugly and unbearable in reality is transformed into the realm of story (by distance) and thus becomes spectacular. Similarly, John, who both took part in Christy's imprisonment and is a drug addict, is transformed into a romanticised stock figure from Eastern fairytale when he disappears 'with a crash and a sparkle of hoofs' as he escapes into the middle-distant darkness (363) at the end of the novel. As Christy states when seeing his escape, 'the legend [is] on its way' (369). In these examples, the factors which serve as catalyst to the transition from beauty to hideousness are connected with ideas of perception: distance and light. In turn, both of these are connected to

[55] *Christabel*, in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by John Beer (London: Everyman, 1996) pp. 57-76, lines 68, 253, 250.

story-telling – a practice which commonly places events in the (distance of the) past tense, rendering them at a remove from present experience, and which traditionally takes place under the darkness of night. Christy says of Dar Ibrahim that 'distance lends enchantment' (144). Here, she succinctly articulates the notion that storytelling – gestured towards here by the fairytale implications of the term 'enchantment' – which automatically necessitates a distancing between the telling of an event and the experience of an event, possesses the power to transform that which is hideous into something beautiful.

The proliferation of things that are simultaneously beautiful and hideous underscores the novel's demonstration of the power of stories to control how things are perceived. The strongest example of this in the novel is its central romance. Despite Christy's frequent assertions that she '[doesn't] think relations are obliged to be fond of one another', and that she and Charles share 'a refusal to be claimed' and are fiercely (although not financially) independent of their respective parents, their journey throughout the novel represents their turning back to family, culminating in the commencement of their romantic relationship (78; 16). This is an incestuous relationship: not only are Christy and Charles first cousins, their fathers are identical twins, making them – biologically – half-brother and sister.[56] At the end of the novel, a man who is either Christy or Charles' father appears to take the couple back to England. It is never revealed whose father he is, and both Christy and Charles claim him as their own. Symbolically, then, they inhabit the roles of brother and sister. I argue that this scene with the ambiguous father demonstrates again the duality of the hideous/beautiful juxtaposition for the reader: the scene is ostensibly intended to be light-hearted, occurring, as it does, after the threat of danger has been eliminated, and containing that conventional romantic resolution, the marriage proposal; yet, the incestuousness of Christy and Charles' relationship is explicitly and deliberately highlighted in this scene and throughout the novel. This creates, alongside the conventional 'happy ending' mood of resolution, a distinct sense of unease and distaste. When Christy refers to Charles she frequently says 'my cousin' rather than his name, drawing attention to their familial relationship (8; 9; 11; 15; 17; 18; 20 &c) and, indeed, she states more than once that as children they were 'always taken for twins' and more than once actually describes him as her twin (13; 111; 219;

[56] In the North American edition of *The Gabriel Hounds*, this relationship is altered, presumably owing to incest laws in the US – first cousin marriage is illegal (or only legal if one party is infertile) in 30 of the 52 US states, whereas it remains legal in the UK. In the North American edition, Christy and Charles are 'not first, but second cousins, with nothing nearer than a great-grandfather in common' (New York: William Morrow, 1967), p. 9.

245). Other characters comment on the similarity in their physical appearances; Grafton describes them as 'very like' each other, and Hamid states that he 'should have thought [them] brother and sister' (303; 219). Christy acknowledges that any romantic relationship between her and Charles would be 'practically incest' (16). Almost immediately following their first embrace and declaration of love for one another, Charles again reasserts their familial connection and their shared childhood, stating that 'if anyone had told me when I had to share the bath with you twenty years ago…' (352-53). By inflecting its central romance plot with incest in this way the novel draws attention to the power of story to influence the way people and events are perceived: an incestuous union which might ordinarily incite only disturbance and distaste is imbued, by virtue of its context within a romance novel, with respectability (though not so much as to disguise the fact that this is happening).

The Gabriel Hounds demonstrates the transformative and potentially destructive power of stories and storytelling. This is most clearly demonstrated by Harriet, whose obsession with the story of Lady Hester Stanhope, as well as her concern for her own status as a local legend, eventually eclipses her real life. As is emphasised by the novel's motifs of drug use and vampirism, stories are presented as potentially dangerous: they are life-taking as well as life-giving, and possess an addictive, intoxicating quality which has the ability to overpower those who encounter them. Furthermore, they are malleable, and can be used to shape perceptions of people, places and events. The novel draws attention to this by highlighting the potential of all things to be viewed in a variety of different, often completely contrasting ways: the juxtaposition of beauty and hideousness existing in the same space and place, which occurs throughout the novel, creates the sense that everything is waiting in limbo, awaiting the spinning of the story which will define them either way. The commencement of the relationship between Christy and Charles which takes place at the end of the novel functions as an example of this, as it is simultaneously conventional romantic conclusion, and disturbing incestuous union. In this way the novel highlights the multiple interpretive possibilities inherent in all things.

'Frail Parchment Ghosts': The Uncanny Text in *Touch Not the Cat*

Touch Not the Cat, Stewart's sixteenth romantic thriller novel, explores the notion of text as uncanny. Sigmund Freud describes the uncanny as 'undoubtedly related to what is frightening –

to what arouses dread and horror', whilst retaining a 'special conceptual' particularity.[57] He goes on to outline a number of its characteristics, including repetition, automatism, and the concept of 'the double'. Freud's argument is that uncanniness constitutes a symbolic representation of that which is repressed, an idea which Hélène Cixous complicates through the figure of the Ghost, or the *Revenant*. She explains that the Ghost's capacity to incite dread is borne not so much of its association with death as of it 'eras[ing] the limit which exists between two states'; the Ghost is 'neither alive nor dead', and it is precisely this eradication of boundaries, this blurring of two states which were once distinct, that lies at the heart of Cixous's understanding of the uncanny.[58] This is explored in *Touch Not the Cat*, which contains a number of uncanny elements: Bryony's disembodied lover can be read as 'something secretly familiar', *pace* Freud, whilst the indistinguishably identical twins foster the unsettling sensations associated with 'the double'.[59] I here focus on the novel's presentation of text as a site of the uncanny: the novel is driven by an exploration of the space between life and death, and, like Cixous's Ghost, text operates in and moves through this liminal space.

In the novel, Bryony Ashley returns home to Ashley Court, a large country estate that, despite its apparent grandeur, is falling into disrepair. Once there, she attempts to decipher the significance of her recently deceased father's last words to her, and to uncover the identity of her unknown lover, with whom she has shared a telepathic connection since childhood, but whose identity remains a mystery to her. Telepathy is regarded as a characteristic trait of the Ashley line, and as such Bryony assumes that her lover must be one of her three male cousins: twins Emory and James Ashley, and their younger brother Francis. The novel is interspersed with short vignettes portraying the last hours of Bryony's seventeenth-century ancestor Nicholas Ashley, and his secret marriage to Ellen Makepeace, a local village girl. As the novel unfolds it transpires that responsibility for the death of Bryony's father lies with Emory and James, who are suffering financial difficulties they hope to alleviate through the sale of Ashley Court; a sale which Bryony's father would not allow. Moreover, Bryony's lover is revealed to be Rob Granger, the estate's grounds-keeper and Bryony's childhood friend, who is (unknown to the Ashley family) descended from Nick and Ellen's union. When a letter detailing the marriage of

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[57] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), XVVI, 219.
[58] Hélène Cixous, 'Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's *Das Unheimliche*', *New Literary History*, 7 (1976), pp. 525-548, (p. 543).
[59] Freud, p. 235.

Nick and Ellen is discovered, Rob becomes the legitimate heir to the Ashley estate. James and Emory attempt to kill Rob and Bryony by flooding Ashley Court. However, Bryony and Rob successfully undermine the twins' plan, and the estate is saved from flooding.

Ghosts are defined by the fact that they have returned from the dead; as Cixous states, 'it is his coming back which makes the ghost what he is'.[60] This notion of return is vital to my reading of *Touch Not the Cat*. The novel itself constitutes Bryony's account of her own return home after a lengthy absence, and one which is intrinsically connected to the idea of death: Bryony has returned to Ashley court so that she can settle her dead father's affairs, and scatter his remains. Indeed, the first place she visits once at Ashley is the church and its graveyard. Her understanding that such a return is an integral component of death is made apparent when she wonders whether she 'shall [...] be brought back here one day, to become, however insubstantially, part of this garden and this glimmering air'.[61] Here, Bryony articulates the notion of the dead returning home by becoming part of the landscape in which they once lived. The idea of the return, then, is intrinsically linked to the idea of death. Ghosts inhabit a liminal space, 'the *between* that is tainted with strangeness', and it is their 'insidious movement' through and beyond this space, the movement without which their return would be impossible, which characterises their uncanniness.[62] I argue that in *Touch Not the Cat* text functions in the same way as Cixous's Ghost. Serving as the medium 'through which opposites communicate', it is text which enables the dead to return to the living.[63] Text transcends the confines of life and death, and as such functions as a site of the uncanny.

Text appears within the novel in a number of guises: indeed, the novel's central mystery is instigated and propelled by an act of interpretive reading, as Bryony strives to understand the significance of her father's last words to her, which have been recorded in writing from his bedside. This understanding is gained in turn by subsequent acts of reading: in her attempts to decode her father's ambiguous message, Bryony turns to a number of texts, including her ancestor William Ashley's poetry, Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet* (1562), and, ultimately, the textual confession of Charles Ashley, which details the marriage of Nick Ashley to Ellen

[60] Cixous, p. 543.
[61] Mary Stewart, *Touch Not the Cat*, (London: Hodder, 2011), p. 89. All subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text.
[62] Cixous, p. 543. Emphasis in original.
[63] Cixous, p. 543.

Makepeace. In all of these examples, an awareness of the text's creator and the context of its creation is crucial to Bryony's interpretive process: as much emphasis is placed on writing as it is on reading. It is significant, then, that Emory and James' culpability in the death of Bryony's father is revealed by a writing implement: 'a silver ball-point pen', engraved with James' initials, is found at the scene of the accident (18). Further to this, the novel itself constitutes a written record of events composed by Bryony, forming part of a long-standing tradition of writing throughout the Ashley family history: in addition to William's poetry, there are the diaries of Emma Ashley, as well as the written family 'records [...] of unusual mental powers' (196). By emphasising that it is written as well as read, the novel metafictively gestures towards the conception of text as a two-way communicative tool.

This emphasis on text as a two-way process is reinforced by the references to telepathy in the novel. Telepathy is used by Rob and Bryony as a form of communication, but it is also frequently associated with the textual. Bryony repeatedly explains the phenomenon in terms of reading: she compares the process of learning to interpret Rob's 'thought patterns' with the process of learning to read, supposing that 'when [they] were children [they] must both have stumbled and made mistakes, as normal children do with reading' (5). She also describes the sensation of telepathy using the image of a printing press, stating that 'sudden blocks of intelligence' are 'slotted and locked' into her mind, 'the way a printer locks the lines into place', and how 'the whole *page* comes through at once' (4; my emphasis). Telepathy's textual associations are underlined by the fact that both Bryony and Rob use the verb 'read' when describing their secret communications; for example, Rob asks 'can you read me, Bryony?' (13). Through its association with telepathy, text is shown to be communicative: it is flexible and adaptable, and flows in multiple directions to convey information between various parties. When Bryony confides in the vicar about her anxiety regarding the relationship with her lover (before she has learned his identity), she explains the situation using reading as an analogy, comparing the (at this stage) exclusively telepathic nature of the romance with 'people who spend all their time reading stories about ideal lovers and ideal relationships, so that a real, ordinary man or woman never can measure up' (204). This comparison with reading is apt, as Bryony later states that Rob's telepathic love-making is 'easy [...] like poetry [that runs] from mind to mind', as opposed to physical love-making, which is 'the one thing [she and Rob] don't seem to know about each other' (186; 307). In these last two examples, Bryony draws an important distinction between

telepathy and physicality, in which the textual is associated with the latter. This again underlines text's association with the liminal: it is not physical, yet inhabits the physical world. It is not quite 'real, ordinary' life, yet it influences reality (204).

The theme of telepathy in *Touch Not the Cat* serves to underline the presentation of text as a mode of communication that extends to the liminal. Freud acknowledges telepathy as a characteristic component of the uncanny, describing it as a relationship in which 'the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other', resulting in the 'doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self'.[64] The emphasis here is on the blurring of boundaries; the uncanniness being borne from an inability to decipher what was once distinct. Text operates in a similarly uncanny manner in the novel: it functions as a medium through which the dead Ashleys influence the circumstances of the living Ashleys. The revelation of Nick and Ellen's secret marriage is instigated by the discovery of Charles Ashley's written confession, the textual nature of which is emphasised by the fact that it is discovered hidden within another text; the volume of Brooke's verse. The idea of the dead connecting with the living is rebuffed by James when he asserts that 'the day [is] gone when the dead [can] help the living to watch over the property they [have] amassed', hinting at antagonistic relations between the living and dead (183). However, contrary to James' belief, the influence of the dead on current events can be felt throughout the novel. This is most clearly manifested by the Ashley Trust, which dictates the conditions of sale for Ashley Court, has been in effect since 1850, and which Bryony describes having 'practically been brought up with' (35). The Trust is text: it is written legislation, and, significantly, can only be revoked via the intervention of text, as 'the consent *in writing* of all adult Ashley descendants' is required before the sale of the estate or any part of it can take place (36; my emphasis). That the Trust still wields influence over the present Ashleys is indicative of its creator, James Ashley, retaining power over his ancestors from beyond the grave. Text affords the dead Ashleys control over the living Ashleys' economic situation. It is therefore uncanny: like Freud's description of telepathy, it blurs the boundaries of things which were previously distinct – in this case, the living and the dead. Text is what enables the dead to access the living world.

Text's facilitation of the dead's return is emphasised by the novel's representation of intertextuality. The physical books that feature most significantly are variously related to *Romeo*

[64] Freud, p. 234.

and Juliet: Brooke's *Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* and *From a New Romeo to His Juliet*, the (fictional) collection of poetry composed by William Ashley. Ashley's poetry collection is directly inspired by the play, and contains many references to it. Meanwhile, Brooke's poem is widely regarded as Shakespeare's source text during its composition: according to Stephen Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare's direct source is Arthur Brooke's *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), a long, leaden English poem based on a French prose version by Pierre Boisatuau (1559), who was in turn adapting an Italian version by Bandello (1554), who in turn based his narrative on Luigi da Porto's version (1525) of a tale by Masuccio Salernitano (1476)'.[65] *Touch Not the Cat* condenses this lineage, simply acknowledging that Brooke's poem was 'Shakespeare's source for his play, or something like that' (225). In doing so, it begins to unpack the created-ness of *Romeo and Juliet* (and implicitly of other works), showing that the significance of a text extends beyond its interior meaning. These instances of intertextuality further illustrate the relationship between text and the uncanny, with intertext positioned as text 'returned'. It is what ensures the continuation of the textual links between living and dead, past and present.

The interplay of past and present is emphasised by the vignettes depicting the final hours of Nick Ashley. The scenes described take place at night in the pavilion at the centre of the Court's maze, and their presence constitutes another element of the novel's exploration of text as an uncanny space. A distinct sense of anxiety permeates these scenes: Nick takes great pains to emphasise the privacy of the pavilion, repeatedly describing it as 'outside the world' and ensuring that he 'shut[s] the window [...] pull[s] the shutters close, and fasten[s] them, and [draws] the heavy curtains across' (209; 33). Here, Nick places a number of physical barriers between the private interior of the pavilion and the world outside. Nick's actions, coupled with his emphatic insistence that 'nothing can touch' him and Ellen within the pavilion, betray a sense of restless unease (209). This is illustrated further by his reaction to 'his father's books and papers' which he 'slap[s] shut' and 'stuff[s] book and papers together in the table draw, and shut[s] it' with a 'sharp, final' bang (46; 63). The swift decisiveness of Nick's actions here reflects his disquietude at discovering these items, serving as they do as reminders of his recently deceased father. It is the responsibility he has inherited, now that 'his father [is] dead, and he [is] Ashley', that Nick wishes to avoid (328). However, his father's papers bring that responsibility directly into the pavilion. The pavilion belonged to Nick's parents: it was built by his father,

[65] Greenblatt, p. 865.

William, in honour of his mother, Julia, and, following Julia's death, was used by William as a writing room, in which he composed poetry in memory of his late wife. The pavilion, then, represents a space in which life and death are reconnected through text: William attempts to sustain his dead wife's presence through the composition of his poetry. When he dies, it is that same poetry that conjures William's presence to his son. In these scenes, then, text is a haunting presence, and functions as a vehicle through which the past can encroach onto Nick's present.

The scenes depicting Nick's last hours provide additional evidence of the relationship between text and the dead. A further dimension is added to this when we consider that, though they are narrated in the third person, these scenes are Bryony's imaginings, part of her project to 'write down the full story of the strange things that happened at Ashley Court', which is what constitutes the novel (8). In composing her imagined history of Nick, Bryony exercises control over her dead ancestor; she resurrects him through text. Indeed, text controls the way that many of the deceased Ashleys are perceived: the intimate portrait of Nick depicted by Bryony provides stark contrast to characterisation of him elsewhere in the novel. Whilst the vignettes show Nick passionately, and monogamously, in love, other references to him focus heavily on his reputation as a sexually voracious cad, known for 'indulging himself with nightly orgies of illicit love' (101). Most of what is known of Nick's life and the circumstances of his death has been gleaned from 'the journal of his successor's wife', Emma Ashley, who spent much of her life 'trying to expiate poor Wicked Nick's sins' (101; 39). Through her writing, Emma controls the way Nick's legend is translated into future generations – she is also known to have 'burned a few' of Nick's own books (136). A further example of Nick's misrepresentation is the description of him by the tour-guide at Ashley Court: 'he grew up wild, and he got wilder. I suppose it all sounds very corny and over-dramatic now, because it's been overdone as a story-line, but of course this story's true, and it did have a really dramatic ending' (101). The tour-guide explains Nick's tale within the context of 'story-lines', as if he is a fictional character, rather than a historical figure (101). Text of all kinds – fiction, biography, memoir – affords the dead an influence over events in the living world, but is also the mode through which the living attempt, and sometimes succeed, to change the way historical events are remembered. This is indicative, again, of an antagonistic relationship between the living and the dead, in which text functions as mediatory arena.

The association between text and death is further represented by the theme of sleep that runs throughout the novel. Sleep, a state in which the subject appears to be lifeless and yet lives, functions as a symbolic representation of the liminal space between life and death. Maria Tatar notes 'how closely being alone in the dark is affiliated with death'.[66] In *Touch Not the Cat*, the connection of sleep to death is reinforced by the inclusion of references to other texts in which sleep is a central theme: the Greek myth 'Theseus and the Minotaur', the fairytale 'Sleeping Beauty', and Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*. In these texts, sleep possesses an enchanted, unnatural quality, and is closely associated with death. In 'Theseus and the Minotaur', Theseus is forced to abandon Ariadne while she sleeps on the shores of Crete, which leads to the suicide of his father, Aegeus.[67] In 'Sleeping Beauty', the hundred years of sleep experienced by the princess is the result of a spell cast by the good fairy in an effort to counter-act another spell, cast by the bad fairy, which dictates that she will prick her finger on a spindle and die: sleep functions as a direct stand-in for death. A similar instance occurs in *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Juliet undertakes a lengthy, self-medicated sleep in order to fake her own death. Bryony too experiences a significant sleeping episode associated with death: she is sleeping when she learns that her father has been killed. Via this scene, and via its inclusion of these texts, the novel illustrates the close proximity of sleeping to dying: sleep, like text, constitutes a hinterland between life and death.

The significance of sleep in the novel is further illustrated in the episode in which Rob's identity as Bryony's secret lover is finally revealed. Bryony describes waking up during the night 'with the feeling that [she has] just come out of a lovely and familiar dream' of 'a long, long shore of golden sand which stretched [...] ninety miles long' (277). She soon learns that Rob, too, is 'thinking about New Zealand [...], about the Ninety Mile Beach' as he stands below her bedroom window (281). It is this correlation between Rob's thoughts and Bryony's dreams which reveals the lover's identity, to both Bryony and the reader. The episode contains textual undertones, as it references the famous 'balcony scene' (Act II scene 2) from *Romeo and Juliet*: Bryony sees Rob from her window, just as Juliet sees Romeo from her balcony, and she quotes from the play: 'Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear/ That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops' (278). She is referring to the 'old pear tree' under which Rob stands, and its dreamlike appearance in the

[66] Maria Tatar, *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood* (New York and London: Norton, 2009), p. 95.
[67] Because Theseus is dejected after the loss of Ariadne, he forgets to replace the black sails, intended to signal his death, with white sails, intended to signal his survival. When he sees the black sails approaching, Aegeus believes his son has been killed, and takes his own life.

'moonwhite' (278). It is significant that when Bryony falls asleep prior to this episode she does so with 'the Brooke [...] under [her] pillow', and upon waking the next morning she finds a package containing 'books about New Zealand' left by her front door (277; 286).[68] This episode, in which sleep plays an integral part, is literally book-ended by books, illustrating the association between sleep and text in the novel. If sleep is understood as a symbolic representation of the liminal space between life and death, then text is shown to transcend this space: the only physical evidence of Bryony's encounter with Rob is the package of books which appears the following morning.

The fact that Bryony is clearly associated with the character of Sleeping Beauty throughout the novel reiterates the theme of sleep. This association is made initially apparent by her name, which bears close phonetic resemblance to the Brothers Grimm's rendition of that character, Briar Rose. The novel opens and closes with scenes which clearly place Bryony in the position of Sleeping Beauty: at the beginning of the novel, she describes her bedroom as surrounded by vegetation; 'a dreamer's mixture of cloudy blossom where every season's flowers flourish (it seems) all year' (3). That this is 'dreamer's' foliage has obvious connotations of Sleeping Beauty, whilst the fact that each season's plants grow simultaneously is reminiscent of time's stand-still – during the hundred years of castle-wide slumber – in that fairytale. These connotations are accentuated by the fact that the breeze 'tossed the shadows of the roses over wall and ceiling again and again, each time the same and yet each time different' (3). The roses have fully encroached on Bryony's personal space, rendering her bedchamber more of a Sleeping Beauty's grotto than a conventional living environment. It is no coincidence that what rouses Bryony from her slumber in this scene is a communication from her lover. However, this re-enactment of Sleeping Beauty's awakening is not fully realised until the end of the novel, when Rob 'slic[es] his way straight through' the 'ancient stems' of the maze, in which Bryony is 'penned [...] at the centre, as inaccessible as any Sleeping Beauty' (361; 360). This implies that Bryony has in some sense been asleep until this point in the narrative. Her waking corresponds with the uncovering of family secrets, the result of an investigative process carried out in the main body of the novel, when Bryony is symbolically asleep. Rob's 'slicing' through the 'ancient stems' of maze symbolically represents a rejection of this past – the information which has been uncovered can subsequently be laid aside to make way for a new future. The family secrets in question are

[68] Aware that Emory wishes to sell the rare and valuable edition of Brooke's poem, Bryony 'bolt[s] the back door' and sleeps with the book under her pillow.

communicated by the dead through text. Both sleep and text, then, are associated with the process of corresponding with the dead; they allow the living Bryony to transcend the liminal space separating her from her ancestors.

The novel's *dénouement*, in which Rob rescues Bryony, takes place in a maze, a reference to 'Theseus and the Minotaur' as well as 'Sleeping Beauty', as the Minotaur resides within a labyrinth, which is a type of maze. The Ashley maze also houses a ferocious beast, if only in pictorial form: 'the head of a leopard, snarling, with one paw upraised' (366). Here, Bryony is describing a Roman mosaic that she and Rob discover under the floorboards of the pavilion once the flood has subsided. I consider the appearance of this mosaic to be the most explicit representation of a Ghostly 'return' in the novel. The leopard Bryony describes constitutes one of the forgotten family secrets to which the textual traces left by the dead Ashleys allude: it is the subtext of William Ashley's poetry, which describes 'the unknowing tread/ across the spotted catamountains head' (270). Upon finding the mosaic, Bryony instantly identifies it as 'something which could save Ashley [...] from the bulldozers of the contractors' (368).[69] In this light, its discovery could be considered as another example of the dead Ashleys 'help[ing] the living to watch over the property they [have] amassed' (183). However, I read the mosaic as a text, representing the uncanny return of Bryony's Roman ancestry, and showing that even the ancient dead can transcend the boundaries of life and death via text. The appearance of the big cat has been foreshadowed throughout the novel, through its title (which is also the Ashley family motto), through the 'black cat [...] sitting, waiting' which Bryony meets just before her return to Ashley, and through the character of Cathy 'Cat' Underhill, one of the tenants at Ashley Court, as well as through William's poetry. Nonetheless, its appearance in the text feels sudden and unexpected. This is reflected in Bryony's description of the picture, which conveys the leopard's threatening appearance, with its 'claws out and ready' and its 'teeth gleam[ing] white and sharp' (366). The hostile appearance of the leopard feels somewhat contradictory given that this is what will save Ashley Court and the current Ashleys; another indicator, perhaps, of the discreetly antagonistic relationship between the past and the present in the novel. As well as reflecting its aggressive image, Bryony's description also portrays the leopard as remarkably present: this is partly achieved by the focus placed on its eyes, which are 'huge and brilliant, done in some lustrous shell-like stone which [catches] and [throws] back the light'

[69] With the discovery of the Roman mosaic, Bryony knows that the National Trust will contribute to the upkeep of the estate.

(366). This sense is heightened by the fact that the 'yellow fur with black spots [...] [shines] as brightly as on the day the mosaic was laid' and that the leopard is 'vivid and alive' (366). The leopard is assigned actions as if he were a living being; he 'flex[es] his claws and his eyes glimm[er]' (368). He has a visceral presence which is disruptive in the novel: having so far focused on a back-and-forth exchange between the present and a very particular point in the past (the seventeenth century), the apparition of the leopard sheds sudden light on the vastness of the dead's realm compared to that of the living, rendering the intensity of present-day struggles obsolete. It is for this reason, I argue, that Bryony is certain Rob will give up the Court, regardless of his right to own it (376)

In *Touch Not the Cat*, text is presented as a site of the uncanny. Like Cixous' Ghost, it operates in the liminal space between the boundaries of life and death: it is text that facilitates the dead's return to the realm of the living, and in doing so causes these boundaries to be blurred and broken. This is illustrated in the novel through the theme of sleep, a state of semi-consciousness which symbolically represents the liminal space between life and death. References to texts reinforce this, including 'Sleeping Beauty' and *Romeo and Juliet*, resulting in a number of intertextual instances in the novel. This intertextuality functions as a further illustration of text's relation to the uncanny: as Worton states, intertextuality functions as a form of resurrection, as it breathes new life and meaning into old texts. Correspondingly, references to ghosts and the dead abound in the novel: Bryony states that she 'kn[ows] every tombstone, and its name, as well as [she knows] the books in the schoolroom shelves', whilst the estate's library is 'a sad ghost of a room' which 'seem[s] haunted, probably only by the frail parchment ghosts of the books that had vanished from the shelves' (66; 99; 210). Bryony describes the books as 'the brain of the room' and feels their loss (210). As is reinforced by their capability to leave 'frail parchment ghosts', the equation of books and brain, a living organ, affords the books a life of their own (99). The image of living books aptly illustrates my reading of the representation of text in *Touch Not the Cat*: a fluid and uncanny system of communication, which transcends the boundaries of life and death.

'Hedging Yourself Up With Legends': The Power of Text

The novels I have discussed in this chapter each convey complex representations of the relationships between memory, identity, and history, and explore how (inter)texts interact with

and can be used to understand each of these. In *The Ivy Tree*, memory is shown to be textual, as is demonstrated, for example, when Con first encounters 'Mary' and remarks that the experience is 'like seeing the pages of a book turned back' (15). Correspondingly, memory is a crucial component in the success of intertextuality as a literary device, as reference to other texts will only carry meaning if the reader is able to recall the work mentioned: the allusions to Brat Farrar are crucial to the implementation of *The Ivy Tree*'s plot twist (that Annabel was not killed and is, in fact, Mary Grey) but this only works if readers remember Brat Farrar's revelation that the man he is posing as was murdered by his twin brother. Memory is closely linked to identity: it is memory of past events or experiences that shapes a person's identity in the present. Like memory, identity is also shown to be associated with the textual: in *The Gabriel Hounds*, for example, Harriet's identity is entirely defined by the legends and stories which circulate about her character, and which she herself has actively cultivated. In *Wildfire at Midnight*, Gianetta believes that her husband's perception of her identity is shaped by her family history, which has a physical presence in the novel in the form of her great-grandmother's portrait. Indeed, family history – like memory – is another important factor that contributes to the formation of identity, and is also frequently associated with text. In *Touch Not the Cat*, Bryony's family history regularly asserts its presence through text: the text of her ancestor William Ashley's poetry, Emma Ashley's diaries, and 'The Ashley Trust' imposed by John Ashley. Text allows Bryony's dead family members to sustain a presence in her present. In this way, text is shown to be the medium that crosses the boundaries of memory and identity, life and death, history and reality.

Aside from *The Gabriel Hounds*, the novels in this chapter are unusual in Stewart's oeuvre because they take place on the British Isles. Furthermore, both *The Ivy Tree* and *Touch Not the Cat* take place in their heroines' homes, and *The Gabriel Hounds* is largely set in the home of a member of its protagonist's family. That the novels in which I have noted a particular interest in identity and memory feature settings which are more familiar to their protagonists than is usual for Stewart is not surprising: a sense of place is crucial to their conception of text as the uniting feature of memory, history, and identity. Frequently, landscape functions as the physical surface onto which histories – personal and national – are writ, and as such is intrinsically connected to the identities of those who inhabit it. In *The Ivy Tree*, for example, the importance of the Northumberland landscape to the identity of the Winslow family is demonstrated by the fact that their home, Whitescar, is named after the nearby sandstone quarry, which Donald discovers

was begun by ancient Romans. The quarry's 'several sections' and layers function like a signature on the landscape of the many generations who have lived there, and used the quarry. Setting is also crucial to the construction of Bryony's identity in *Touch Not the Cat*, as it is Ashley Court which functions as the one constant presence throughout the Ashley family history, and for which Bryony fights to maintain possession. In *Wildfire at Midnight*, landscape is connected to national rather than family history, as the mountains of Skye function as the site of Gianetta's experience of trench warfare, whilst in *The Gabriel Hounds*, landscape is linked with myth and legend, as is demonstrated by the Adonis Falls nearby to Dar Ibrahim. Landscape and setting, then, are crucial components in the novels' investigation of identity, memory, and history.

In all four of these novels, text is the mode through which history is transmitted, and which allows the dead to retain a presence in the living world. In this sense, then, text has the power to transcend time; it inhabits a space which functions beyond the boundaries of temporal existence. It is perhaps for this reason that in novels like *The Ivy Tree, Wildfire at Midnight, The Gabriel Hounds* and *Touch Not the Cat*, text functions to allow characters to move forward in time; to break free from the cycle of past experience repeated in the present. Intertextuality echoes this cycle, characterised as it is by the reappearance of old text in new. Rather than a relentless and unchanging repetition of text throughout literary history, the process of intertextuality demonstrates the inevitability of change: each time an old text is repeated in new, its meaning is altered – it is 're-written', just as the characters in these novels, by repeating and re-examining their pasts, are able to rewrite their futures.

CONCLUSION

I argue that Stewart's romantic thrillers are characterised by metafictive elements; by moments of metafictive self-reflexivity in which they reveal and reflect upon their status as fiction. These variously manifest as representations of readers and writers, as intertextual reference – both to other middlebrow texts and to highbrow and canonical texts, as the self-conscious use of different generic conventions, and as an exposition on the role of text as a means of communication across history. Whilst other scholars have noted the middlebrow's propensity for self-reflexivity, I am the first to describe this quality as metafictive. I build on Cazzato's term 'soft metafiction', which itself builds on Fludernik's explanation of metafictions varying in their directness, to describe this: the term refers to fiction which is involved in a discreet and understated exploration of its status as text, as opposed to hard metafiction which emphatically and unambiguously displays its self-awareness. I characterise soft metafiction as combining elements from both feminist and historiographic metafiction: like feminist metafiction, it strives to reassert the significance of woman writers in relation to the (male) canon. Like historiographic metafiction, it engages with notions of history as textual. I argue that developing this terminology in relation to the middlebrow is important for two reasons: firstly, by naming these self-reflective occurrences, we draw attention to them as a trend within middlebrow fiction, allowing for a fuller critical understanding of that category. Secondly, exploring the metafictive in the middlebrow contributes to a wider critical project which seeks to demonstrate that metafiction is not confined to the masculine postmodern, but, as Peters has argued, has played an important part in the novel's development from its conception. I argue that it is of particular importance in the development of a female literary tradition, and that Stewart's novels provide a strong example of this soft metafiction.

In her first study of metafiction, *Narcissistic Narratives* (1980), Hutcheon has a number of caveats to accompany her choices of terminology: she assures readers that the term 'narcissistic' is 'not intended as derogatory' and that 'other potentially pejorative terms, such as introspective, introverted, and self-conscious, are likewise meant to be critically neutral'.[1] My use of 'soft' is similarly intended to be 'critically neutral'. However, it is important to consider the negative

[1] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narratives: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), p. 1.

and often gendered associations that are implicit in the term. Softness is frequently associated with the feminine: in Chapter Two's discussion of *The Moonspinners*, for example, I argued that the contrast of Nicola's '*soft*, warm' cardigan against Lambis's 'rough jacket' underlined a similar contrast between her nurturing femininity and his masculinity (32). That I am engaging this feminine word in my definition of a set of novels written and read primarily by women, then, cannot be viewed simply as a coincidence. A concept which can help to shed light on this problem is Joseph Nye's notion of 'soft power', which theorises how political and economic authority can be gained by subtle persuasion as well as by brute force (or 'hard' power). Nye describes soft power as 'getting others to want the outcomes that you want'; it 'co-opts people rather than coerces them' and 'rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others'. [2] This concept speaks to the clichéd advice often given to wives that, in order to get their husbands to do what they want, they must 'make him think it is his idea'. Indeed, like soft metafiction, soft power is often associated with the feminine: when Radio 4's 'Woman's Hour' announced their inaugural 'Power List' (which sought to define Britain's one hundred most powerful women) in 2013, the term was frequently employed to describe the particular power of many of the women in question. A number of the women who were included on the list expressed discomfort at describing themselves as 'powerful'. Their preference for the term 'soft power' speaks to the notion of women's wariness to draw attention to themselves, of their reluctance to take up space in the masculinised public domain. In this light, the notion of 'soft' is problematic, implying an almost apologetic quality, which is specifically connected to gendered embodiment. However, I argue that the power of soft metafiction lies precisely in its contrast to hard metafiction: it is by delineating its position in relation to the masculine canon in a way which is distinct from the masculine that the soft-metafictive middlebrow is able to establish its position within a tradition of writing which is distinctly female.

Nye states that 'soft power is attractive power'. [3] Again, this claim immediately becomes problematic if read alongside the assumption that 'soft' is gendered feminine; the implication being that, whilst hard power is wielded through the direct actions of the hard powerful, those who possess soft power are passive in the process of its exercise. Attraction can be defined as the implication or assumption of future pleasure. Thus soft power is that which gives, or which promises to give, pleasure. In this way it is connected to soft metafiction: Cazzato describes hard

[2] Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Perseus, 2004), p. 5.
[3] Nye, p. 6.

metafiction as 'fiction in which the reader's horizon of expectation is constantly bound to be upset because he or she is asked to be alert and not relaxed, to detect fiction rather than identify with it'.[4] What he is expressing is an absence of pleasure that results directly from the presence of hard metafiction: he describes the presence of hard metafiction in text as disruptive to readerly pleasure, as it forces a readers into a state of alertness as opposed to leisurely relaxation. In Cazzato's explanation of hard metafiction, the relationship between it and pleasure appears to be mutually exclusive, with one unable to exist alongside the other. In contrast to this, soft metafiction does not exist at the expense of readerly pleasure: it is fiction which successfully combines self-reflective introspection with entertainment. This brings us back to Stewart's notion, which I discussed in Chapter One, of readers 'preening' themselves when they recognise quotations and literary references. For these readers, and for Stewart, who describes selecting her literary epigraphs as 'just for fun', being alert to such moments of intertextuality does not exclude the possibility of pleasure: indeed, pleasure depends precisely (in part) upon these metafictive moments.[5]

In this thesis, I have mapped the soft-metafictive in Stewart's romantic thrillers, from *Madam, Will You Talk?* to *Touch Not the Cat*. I have shown this to manifest in a number of ways. The representation of woman writers – whether their writing is literal, such as Camilla in *My Brother Michael* and Cora in *The Wind off the Small Isles*, or metaphorical, such as Lucy in *This Rough Magic* – serves to highlight their unfair treatment in comparison to their male counterparts, and to challenge the privileging of masculine voices within the western literary canon. Parodic intertextuality also enables Stewart to explore this issue of male dominance in the canon: the use of Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* in *Wildfire at Midnight*, for example, raises questions about the nature of the difference between these two texts (one a canonical classic, and one a middlebrow novel). In this way, Stewart's works self-consciously interact with, and respond to, their wider context within the literary marketplace, and the hierarchal and value implications that accompany this. Indeed, an awareness of genre, apparent throughout Stewart's work, frequently demonstrates this interest: in novels such as *Madam, Will You Talk?*, *Airs Above the Ground*, and *The Moonspinners*, different generic conventions are combined, resulting in a challenge to the gender assumptions by which they are commonly accompanied. As well as raising questions about canon formation, intertextuality also functions in the novels to illustrate the interconnectedness of all

[4] Cazzato, p. 20-21.
[5] 'Off the Page'.

literature: *The Wind off the Small Isles*, for example, uses Keats' poem to demonstrate that all literature is constructed out of repurposed and recycled tropes from other texts, whilst *The Ivy Tree* illustrates the similarities (and moments of departure) between itself, *Brat Farrar*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Rebecca*, gesturing towards a tradition of woman's novels which is united by intertextual reference. In *Touch Not the Cat*, *The Ivy Tree* and *Wildfire at Midnight*, a conceptualisation of text as a powerful communicative tool is presented as possessing the ability to transcend the boundaries of time and place, and of life and death, as well as showing its potential to influence the way events, people, and places are remembered and perceived. In this way, Stewart's novels persistently display an awareness of their status as fiction(s), of their position within and around hierarchies of literature in the twentieth century, and in the nature and workings of text.

I have demonstrated the significance of the soft metafictive in Stewart's work, and have suggested that she is just one example of a middlebrow novelist whose work exhibits these self-reflective characteristics. I argue that soft metafiction occurs throughout the middlebrow, as is evident, for example, in the many representations of writers which occur. Highbrow (usually male) writers are frequently mocked: Mr Meyerburg in *Cold Comfort Farm* is made to seem ridiculous when he suggests, in a caricatured representation of misogyny in literary criticism, that Branwell Brontë wrote all of his sisters' novels. Similarly, the celebrated poetess Zenobia in Elizabeth Jenkins' *The Tortoise and the Hare* (1954) is mocked for her Bloomsbury-esque pretensions. Meanwhile, middlebrow woman writers are shown to be humble and self-effacing: in Josephine Tey's *Miss Pym Disposes* (1946), for example, Lucy Pym feels at odds with the acclaim she has received for her best-selling work on human psychology. She attempts to distance herself from her work, frequently referring to 'The Book', as if it is an independent entity responsible for its own success.[6] This is undercut by the novel's plot, however, which shows her using her knowledge of psychology to correctly determine the culprit in a murder investigation, confirming her agency and authority as a writer. Both a highbrow male and a middlebrow female writer feature in Dodie Smith's *I Capture the Castle* (1949): previously successful modernist novelist Mortmain suffers from seemingly incurable writer's block whilst his wife Topaz and daughters Cassandra and Rose battle impending bankruptcy. However, whilst Mortmain fails to write, Cassandra produces reams of detailed, descriptive and engaging diary entries, which constitute the narrative body of the novel. The economic potential of this is gestured towards by

[6] Josephine Tey, *Miss Pym Disposes* (London: Arrow, 2011), p. 3.

the titles of the three parts into which the novel is divided: 'The Sixpenny Book', 'The Shilling Book' and 'The Two-Guinea Book'.[7] The unuttered suggestion in *I Capture the Castle* for relieving the Mortmains' financial worries, then, is not that Rose marry, or that Topaz models, but that Cassandra publishes a middlebrow novel. As well as these representations of writers in middlebrow novels, there are also many representations of readers: often these are characters who are surprised to encounter experiences which differ from those they have read about, but are able to adapt. In *Rebecca*, the nameless narrator is disappointed when Maxim's proposal does not live up to the romantic scenes about which she has read, but ultimately (arguably) succeeds as his wife. Conversely, in Smith's *The New Moon with the Old* (1963), Clare Carrington, convinced of her own prosaicness, is delighted to find romance which seems to be straight from the pages of Alexander Dumas. As I have shown, moments of soft metafiction – in which novels reflect on the conditions that define their creation, including the way their consumers and creators are perceived – occur across the middlebrow; indeed, they constitute one of its defining characteristics.

As well as arguing that soft metafiction occurs throughout the mid-twentieth-century middlebrow, I have also suggested that it acts as a precursor to the explosion of feminist metafictive women's writing – exemplified by the work of Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Margaret Foster, A. S. Byatt, and Doris Lessing – which occurred from the late 1960s onwards, and which Greene has argued constitutes its own artistic movement, akin to, yet distinct from, postmodernism.[8] As I discussed in the Introduction, such writers self-consciously employed metafictive techniques to explore the position of women within literary and cultural histories, and to expose the artificiality (and therefore malleability) of the structures which work to confine women to particular spaces (literal and metaphorical) within society. I have stated that the soft metafiction I describe is specific to the mid-twentieth century middlebrow. It is true that feminist metafiction is distinct from women's middlebrow writing, just as each are distinct from contemporary women's literary fiction, which I discuss below. Soft metafiction is not the same as feminist metafiction: it is not rooted in the ideology of second wave feminism, and its interest in books as a commodity, and in representing text as a fluid, communicative vehicle, extend beyond feminist metafiction's explicit focus on women and women writing. However, I argue that these categories are linked. By highlighting the prevalence of the metafictive in the

[7] Dodie Smith, *I Capture the Castle* (London: Virago, 2003).
[8] Gayle Greene, *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

middlebrow, we can observe the similarities between these categories, and in doing so begin to map a genealogy of women's writing in which metafiction provides the connecting link. Soft metafiction forms a vital part of this genealogy. I would also suggest, then, that, in the wake of the feminist fiction of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, a form of soft metafiction re-appears throughout contemporary Anglo-American women's writing in the twenty-first century. It occurs in contemporary woman's literary fiction, for example in Maggie O'Farrell's *My Lover's Lover* (2002), which, like Stewart's *The Ivy Tree*, engages with both *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* to explore issues surrounding feminine identity, and to establish this as a uniting theme throughout the history of women's writing, and in Karen Joy Fowler's *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2004) which depicts a group of women (and one man) in twentieth-century America reading and discussing the complete works of Jane Austen.[9] Most explicitly and ubiquitously, however, metafiction appears repeatedly within the category which, I argue, most resembles in the present day the middlebrow novel of the mid-twentieth century: the inadequately named 'chick lit.'

Like 'middlebrow', 'chick lit.' was originally used as a derogatory term, but has to some extent been reclaimed by those who participate within the field.[10] Like the mid-twentieth-century middlebrow novel, chick lit. novels are predominantly written and read by women, and are concerned with women's lives. This, combined with their commerciality and economic success, renders them often scorned by highbrow reviewers and academics, as with the twentieth-century middlebrow.[11] Chick lit. regularly exhibits soft-metafictive elements. Frequently the novels are parodically intertextual, mirroring plots from other women's writing – particularly works by Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë. This is exemplified, of course, by Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* (1996), which borrows its plot from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). The fact that this novel, which is commonly regarded as the ur-chick lit. text, uses intertextuality so explicitly, speaks to the prominence of this feature within the category. More recently,

[9] 'Literary fiction', like middlebrow, is not a genre, but a term applied to a particular group of books in an attempt to affix their literary value. In this context, 'literary' is not a neutral term, but one intended to connote highbrow associations. This terminology is firmly rooted in the commercial, and serves to illustrate the prominence of the homogenous as opposed to autonomous principle of hierarchisation (see Chapter One) in the contemporary literary marketplace. The term speaks to the power of highbrow associations as a selling point.

[10] See, for example, *This is Chick Lit* (2005), an edited collection of essays by chick lit. authors. Editor Lauren Baratz-Logsted describes the collection as 'born out of anger' in response to the negative assumptions associated with chick lit. (1).

[11] There is, however, a small community of academics (largely female) who work on chick lit. See for example: Stephanie Harzewski, *Chick Lit. and Postfeminism* (2011); Caroline J. Smith, *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit.* (2008); Diane Negra, *What a GirlWants? Fantasising the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (2009).

Marianne Kavanagh's *Don't Get Me Wrong* (2015) has also used *Pride and Prejudice* to inform its plot, whilst Abigail Bosanko's *Lazy Ways to Make a Living* (2002) and Jennifer Vandever's *The Brontë Project* (2005) are inspired by *Jane Eyre*. Within many chick lit. novels, writing is shown to be a process which empowers protagonists, as in Sarra Manning's *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me* (2010) and Mhairi McFarlane's *Its Not Me Its You* (2014) and *Who's That Girl?* (2015). One trope which is particularly prevalent is that of young women in the present day uncovering the past lives of historical women, usually through reading their personal writings: this occurs to varying extents in *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, Manning's *After the Last Dance* (2015), Hester Browne's *The Vintage Girl* (2012), Kathleen Tessaro's *The Debutante* (2010), McFarlane's *Here's Looking At You* (2012), and Sophie Kinsella's *Twenties Girl* (2009). This common chick lit. theme reflects on the significance of women's writing as a means of communicating women's lives to other women throughout history.

I argue that metafictive techniques have been purposefully used by woman writers as a means of carving out a space for themselves within the context of Western literary history. Frequently, this means using intertextual reference to locate themselves in relation to the overwhelmingly masculine canon of literature. In this thesis, I have shown how Stewart's novels, through their challenge to the position of Shakespeare as the ultimate canonical figure, through their representation of woman writers in relation to a masculine literary tradition, and through their demonstration that literature is always constructed from repurposed tropes, have worked to achieve this. However, it is important to recognise that, alongside this use of the metafictive by women's writing to measure itself against the masculine tradition, women's writing has also used intertextuality and other metafictive techniques to establish its own, female western literary tradition. This can be seen, for example, in the intertextual reimagining of *Jane Eyre* which occurs in *Rebecca*, and in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1939), and which is continued in texts such as *My Lover's Lover*, *The Ivy Tree*, Victoria Holt's *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960), and any number of romance and modern gothic novels. By referring to other texts produced by women, these novels work to establish a tradition of writing by women, in which texts interact with each other within themselves, are self-reflective, and self-promoting. Ultimately, then, the metafictive provides a connecting link between women's writing – high, low, and middlebrow – throughout history. The soft metafictive is an important component of this. Opening it up as

an area of study therefore forms part of a vital project to recognise the contextualization of habitually undervalued writing by women within a wider literary landscape.

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