

**'SHOUT IT SO THE WOMEN'S SIDE CAN HEAR':
CLEMENCE DANE'S INTER-WAR FICTION AND
FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS**

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CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: CLEMENCE DANE AND THE INTER-WAR POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT	18
CHAPTER 2: IMPERILLED IDENTITIES, SUBMERGED SEXUALITIES: EDWARDIAN REPRESSIONS IN <i>REGIMENT OF WOMEN</i>, <i>LEGEND AND FIRST THE BLADE</i>	71
CHAPTER 3: FANTASTICAL FICTION AND FEMALE VISIONARY EXPERIENCE	128
CHAPTER 4: FROM DOMESTICATION TO PROFESSIONALISM: FAMILY CHRONICLES AND THE THEATRE CONTEXT	175
CHAPTER 5: RE-WORKING A POPULAR GENRE: DANE'S FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIONS OF DETECTIVE FICTION	229
CONCLUSION	284
Notes	293
Works Cited	305

ABSTRACT

'SHOUT IT SO THE WOMEN'S SIDE CAN HEAR': CLEMENCE DANE'S INTER-WAR FICTION AND FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

by Louise McDonald:

The object of this study of the writings of novelist and playwright, Clemence Dane (1888-1965), is to contribute to the growing body of research into the relationship of women's 1920s and 1930s middlebrow fiction to the ideology and cultural hegemony of the inter-war period. The main purpose is to investigate Dane's treatment of gender politics, using a broad feminist approach which defines feminist values as necessarily encompassing egalitarian principles. The research also considers Dane's work in its cultural and historical context. Her work is interpreted with reference to the recently-defined paradigms of conservative modernism, New Woman writing and domestic modernism. The investigation focusses on close critical readings of her novels, short stories and journalistic writings and examines points of connection between her literary form, genres, methods, strategies and perspectives and those of her more well-known female middlebrow writer-contemporaries.

In the course of the enquiry, it has been found that Dane's work is compromised by the normative expectations of publishers and the middlebrow market, and her gender philosophies are consistent with the somewhat fragmented and multifarious feminism which emerged following the First World War. Her writing maps the cultural transition from traditional conceptions of gender values to more modern feminist positions. The study's interpretations of her texts point to sympathetic representations of marginalised groups and an evolving feminist perspective. This is evidenced in increasingly confident representations of modern womanhood and configurations of models of female essentialist supremacy defined by resilience, imagination and visionary experience. A discourse of alternative domesticity has been uncovered; Dane's narratives come to promote fulfilment by means of creative and professional endeavour, in place of the traditional rewards of marriage and motherhood. The research concludes that notwithstanding certain ideological anomalies or capitulations to conservative positions, Dane's fiction is informed by a modern feminist consciousness.

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INTRODUCTION

Clemence Dane (1888-1965) was born Winifred Ashton but adopted an androgynous pseudonym in the manner of many of her female contemporaries. She is chiefly remembered as an 'experimental West End playwright [...] a very successful but [...] largely forgotten woman of the theatre' (Bratton 198). According to Clive Barker, most 'playwrights well-established in the 1920s disappeared in the 1930s or were driven from the stage by poor response, to be replaced by another generation. Only three major playwrights crossed the dividing line, Shaw, Coward and Clemence Dane' (32). She also achieved notable success beyond the world of the stage. She tried her hand at teaching and acting before becoming a playwright, an accomplished painter and sculptor, as well as a 'radical female scriptwriter' (Harper 12), constructing a number of successful screen plays for British and Hollywood studios and winning an Oscar for her original story for Alex Korda's 1946 film, *Perfect Strangers*. Many of her own plays were adapted for the cinema and she was also a prolific and best-selling novelist, as well as the producer of pageants, a poet, the editor of collections of plays and stories, and

a literary critic and biographer. She worked as a journalist, producing articles for *Time and Tide* between 1921 and 1923 and *Good Housekeeping* magazine between 1922 and 1933. She was *Good Housekeeping's* book editor between 1923 and 1933 and life president of the Society of Women Journalists between 1939 and 1959. From the 1940s, she wrote and broadcast for the radio, replacing J.B. Priestley when he was taken 'off air because of his controversial stance on the war' (Gale, 'The Many Masks' 52), and in the 1950s and 1960s she created dramas for the new medium of television.

Her work has received little critical attention and the literary criticism that does exist tends to focus on her drama, in Maggie B. Gale's work on the history of women in the theatre, for instance. I intend to extend Gale's discussion with a detailed study of Dane's neglected novels and short stories. Middlebrow Studies has recently embraced many forgotten women writers and the relationship between the female middlebrow and social concerns of the inter-war period has been investigated in the important work of, for example, Alison Light, Nicola Humble, Faye Hammill, Maroula Joannou, and Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei. As a result, women writers of the 1920s and 1930s whose work was collected together with Dane's, such as E.M. Delafield, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Dorothy L. Sayers, Daphne du Maurier, Dodie Smith and Agatha Christie have enjoyed a critical re-evaluation. Given Dane's significance to the inter-war middlebrow in terms of her contribution to literary history and to the story of common experience, a re-visitation of her fiction is now timely.

Dane's career was marked by a series of self-configurations which ranged from rebellious Edwardian feminist to mildly eccentric and ebullient

figure of the literary and media establishment. Given her early reputation for feminist, liberal thinking and her ambiguous sexuality – she never married and lived with two successive women partners whom she referred to as her secretaries – it is perhaps surprising that she was such a respectable middlebrow icon in the 1930s and beyond. This can be attributed to the success with which she kept her private life from the public, fashioned herself as the voice of common sense in her journalism, and adapted her self-image to correspond with changes in normative ideology so that she was accepted as a bohemian character with a paradoxically old-fashioned social manner. As her friend, Katherine Cornell observed, 'she is not the ultra-modern, strongly opinionated unconventional person you might believe. In fact she's rather, dare I say it, Victorian' (qtd. in Barrow 37). Her written style in particular is certainly dated when compared to that of some of her contemporaries, but her Victorian mores did not indicate an approval of traditional gender roles.

Tenacious, determined and versatile, she described herself as a 'business woman' (Dane, qtd. in Barrow 68), demanded creative control over her work, and was actively involved with the Society of Authors, an 'authors' pressure group' (Baldick 20) which bargained hard with publishers' associations to secure deals related to copyright and royalties. As the actress Fabia Drake commented, 'Winifred had a very masculine mind - masculine in that she always took the lead; she championed her own causes' (qtd. in Barrow 32-33). She had modern feminist values, was accepting of changing class identities and demonstrated a counter-cultural tolerance of racial difference and homosexuality. Her modern attitudes were influenced in the 1920s and 1930s

by her friendships with Ginette Spanier, a half-French, half-English Jewish shop girl, later to become a Parisian fashion house director (Barrow 57) and members of her theatre coterie, which, indicative of the 'cultural bond between 1920s gay men and lesbians' (Castle, *Noel Coward* 25)¹, included the 'lesbian-identified' actresses, Katherine Cornell and Mary Martin (Castle, *Noel Coward* 24), and illustrious homosexuals: the actor and songwriter Ivor Novello, theatre producer Binkie Beaumont, composer Richard Addinsell and playwright Noel Coward.

Dane was Coward's 'lesbian muse' (Coward 101). His account of his life, *An Autobiography: Future Indefinite*, is dedicated to Dane 'in memory of the war years' (*An Autobiography* Frontspiece), and expresses his admiration of much of her work. During the Second World War, in order to combat pre-performance nerves before embarking on a tour to entertain troops in the Middle East, he apparently 'strode out on to the edge of the cliffs and recited Clemence Dane's [poem] "Trafalgar Day" defiantly to the sea gulls' (Coward 244). He also finished a week of concerts for the Navy in Plymouth with a recitation of another of Dane's war-poems, 'Plymouth', written to honour the bravery of the people of that town who danced every night on the Hoe during the most intensive period of air raid attacks. Both of these poems would be published in 1965. Another famous homosexual actor, Kenneth Williams, was similarly inspired by Dane's patriotic poetry. In his biography of Hattie Jacques, who was also one of Dane's friends, Andy Merriman describes how following Jacques' death, Williams chose to read another of Dane's war-poems, 'The Welcoming Land', at the memorial service. One of his 'greatly loved'

possessions was a vinyl recording of Noel Coward reading the poem, and he had been especially touched when Hattie had 'scoured half the gramophone exchange and mart shops in London' to find him a new copy after his own had become lost (Williams qtd. in Merriman vii). That Dane's work struck a particular chord with both Coward and Williams is significant for an understanding of the complex relationship with dominant ideology which the three shared. 'The Welcoming Land' is 'about the hunted people who fled from persecution to this wise island' (Williams qtd. in Merriman vii) and contains the lines:-

Then came exiles who fled from death
 Hunted Huguenots, Jews from Spain
 To the wise island, drew sobbing breath,
 The easy air and smelled the May,
 Sweet as a kiss on a summer's day
 ('The Welcoming Land' 38)

Dane's poetic focus on the plight of the refugee indicates a pride in what she regarded as a quintessentially English liberal tolerance which was the antithesis of Nazi ideology. She promoted this national image through her wartime poems, radio plays and broadcasts, establishing herself as a spokesperson for the prevailing patriotic hegemony while simultaneously fashioning the public mood in line with her liberal way of thinking. One of her broadcasts comprised a tribute to Spanier; proudly identifying her as 'my

friend, half French and half English, and a Jewess' (qtd. in Barrow 113), she read out on air one of Spanier's last letters from Paris, written before she 'spent the war being pursued all over France by the Nazis' (qtd. in Barrow 114). 'The Welcoming Land' reflects Dane's liberal ideology, and her gratitude to a country where, in spite of her own divergence – from hetero-normative womanly behaviour – her career had flourished and she was able to enjoy a bohemian life. The poem's perspective was perhaps encouraging for the prosperous but ex-centric homosexual theatre community to which Coward and Williams belonged.

Many of Dane's middlebrow novelist friends, most of whom she met following the First World War and in the early 1920s before her theatrical connections became established, were also homosexual. These included Hugh Walpole, Radcliffe Hall, and Violet Trefusis to whom Dane was a 'major confidante and a considerable support' (Hamer 86) during the time of her affair with another of Dane's friends, Vita Sackville-West. Others among her literary acquaintance were less sexually controversial but firmly feminist, like the Jewish writer, G.B. Stern, committed political liberal, Helen Simpson, and Marie Belloc Lowndes, one of many writers who looked to her for advice on their work-in-progress and through whom she was to meet Enid Bagnold and Rebecca West. Her acquaintance with Coward, Walpole and the pro-feminist and socialist playwright, George Bernard Shaw,² also connected her to the previous generation of literary outsiders.

Some of the more recent feminist studies of popular women's inter-war writing have focussed on literary sub-structures within the broad framework of

the female middlebrow. Laurel Young identifies second generation New Woman writing as one of these, describing it as a form conceived by 'the educational bourgeois women who came to political and creative maturity in the 1910s and 1920s [and] had grown up in a uniquely androgynous world' (Smith-Rosenberg, qtd. in Young 45). As a spinster, born in the nineteenth century but reaching adolescence at its close, valuing some of the outmoded Victorian codes of behaviour which moderns and flappers discarded but rejecting nineteenth-century patriarchal values in favour of the ideals of an evolving feminist zeitgeist and its passion for women's rights and opportunities, Dane can be usefully defined as a second generation New Woman author. Her work can also be situated within the middlebrow category of domestic modernism, a term coined by Christopher Reed and adopted by Briganti and Mezei as a framework for their discussion of female authored inter-war novels. Domestic modernism refers to non-conservative domestic novels which, exploring domesticity in the modern context, construct a 'discourse of opposition' (Briganti and Mezei 33), wherein 'the domestic [is] perpetually invoked in order to be denied' (Reed, qtd. in Briganti and Mezei 33). These more rebellious texts challenge the stifling patriarchal elements of the traditional home and radicalise women's living arrangements. According to Bridget Fowler, women writers who had the most 'trouble with patriarchy', including those who had formed 'lesbian attachments' (Fowler, qtd. in Briganti and Mezei 8), were especially likely to explore 'alternative domesticities' and celebrate 'independent living or celibacy or the renunciation of domestic comfort' (Briganti and Mezei 8). Dane's life and work identify her as a domestic

modernist. Despite her respectable middlebrow career, she did little to cultivate 'the achievements of the Bourgeois age' which John Luckacs defines as 'domesticity, privacy, comfort, the concept of home and of the family' (qtd. in Briganti and Mezei 23). Her time as an actress was spent predominantly in 'fit-ups and touring companies, landlady's lodgings and down-at-heels' (Dane, qtd. in Barrow 95) and from the 1920s onwards, she and Bowen Davies divided their time between a basic gypsy caravan in Sussex and a rented flat. With no private entrance, this was situated above a flower shop in the middle of the dirty and noisy fruit market-cum-theatrical community of Covent Garden, which at the time was not a desirable residential area. Within these walls, which were regularly splattered with paint and clay, she established a salon culture, her alternative family of 'sexually controversial celebrities' (Gale, 'Many Masks' 52): thespians, artists and writers who amused themselves drinking cocktails, playing the piano and reciting poetry. She was also one of a small group of women who comprised Coward's alternative 'family heart' of 'like-minded souls' (Castle, *Noel Coward* 101). Her generosity to these friends was such that she accrued few possessions or savings and left only a modest estate upon her death. Her lively and alternative world reflected the radical spirit of domestic modernism and was a far cry from the steady existence of protagonists featured in most domestic novels, who employed 'housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, decorating [...] to create artistic order out of the disorder of living' (Briganti and Mezei 6). Dane's novels evade traditional representations of domesticity and are informed by her own personal bohemian living arrangements.

Dane's work evidently contains some autobiographical elements. Playwright Kenneth Barrow, who adapted Dane's first novel, *Regiment of Women* (1917) into a TV play that was never made, wrote an unpublished biography, *Winifred: the Life of Clemence Dane* (1988), which has been a useful source. It is not totally reliable however, coloured as it is by Barrow's personal admiration of Dane, and by the fact that most of the material is generated from interviews with her surviving partner, Olwynne Bowen-Davies, who, as Barrow notes, was guarded and protective about the details of Dane's life. There is also a discrepancy between Barrow's assertion that all of Dane's diaries and letters were destroyed after her death and his extensive quotations from what appear to be her own reflections on her experiences. Given the general unreliability and paucity of autobiographical material, I have also looked to the attitudes revealed through the personal voice of Dane's essays and mapped these onto her novels and short stories. The level of her investment in a cluster of principal concerns, sometimes derived from her own experiences, can be clearly traced in her fiction, where they are frequently raised. As Ann Doody contends, a writer's work comprises 'the meeting of three histories: the life of the individual, the cultural life of the surrounding society, and the tradition of the chosen art' (qtd. in Horner and Zlosnik 2). In line with this model, I will also adopt a broad historicist approach, relating Dane's novels and stories to the early-twentieth-century cultural context, while also considering her use of narrative form and the extent to which she issued modernist challenges to traditional modes of writing or adapted them to suit her purposes. I will read Dane's feminist plots in relation to Jane Eldridge

Miller's theory that Edwardian women's literature was inclined towards rebellious confrontations with the novel form, purposefully disappointing the reader's expectation of a romantic ending in order to show the discrepancies between traditional narratives and the actual lives of modern women. I will argue that Dane's texts resemble other Edwardian New Woman texts which Eldridge Miller calls 'narratives of rebellion', which initiated patterns of literary defiance by depicting 'women outside the traditional narratives of courtship and marriage [...] adolescent girls, young career women, spinsters, widows, and other women whose lives didn't fit neatly into the social patterns privileged by the nineteenth-century novel' (Eldridge Miller 86). In addition to Miller's and Doody's hypotheses, my analysis will identify patterns of liberal feminism in Dane's New Woman and domestic modernism texts, using an approach foregrounded by Elizabeth Maslen who contends that 'each fictional construct must be scrutinized for the politics within its writing' (23). It will also be governed throughout by a definition of feminism proposed by Joannou, which asserts that feminist consciousness in writing necessarily goes hand in hand with a commitment to social justice.

My first chapter will establish Dane's relationship with her cultural context. Following an assessment of the contemporary critical reception of her work, I will demonstrate how her non-fictional writings reveal her identification with the middlebrow, her consciousness of the role, values and expectations of her middlebrow readership, her internationalist and anti-war standpoint, her complex relationship with the somewhat splintered inter-war feminism which emerged following the First World War, and her liberal perspective on other

contemporary social issues. I will also include a brief discussion of two of her more openly counter-cultural texts: her 1928 play, *Adam's Opera* and a 1920s short story, 'The Valiant Little Tailor'.

The succeeding chapters will engage in a series of close critical readings of Dane's early and inter-war novels together with some of her short fiction, to unearth their feminist messages and in places, fairly radical social agendas. My reading of Dane's work will challenge Light's somewhat problematic definition of the inter-war female middlebrow writer, as a paradoxical mixture of modern anti-Victorianism and Toryism with a conservative inclination to defend the status quo and resist social reform. By pointing to the ways in which Dane's nuanced texts illustrate an emerging feminist confidence and make liberal representations of wider social and political issues of her times, my interpretations will contribute to the current reconsideration of the politics of middlebrow fiction. Her gentle public identity translates into a benevolent narrative voice with a liberal and tolerant perspective, and I will argue that her work brings othered subjects from the periphery to the centre of the text, creating main protagonists from marginalised categories: itinerant actors, impoverished actresses, painters, androgynous women, spinsters, divorcees, gypsies, and psychics. I will examine how she makes textual affirmations of social and racial difference by constructing relationships between strong but alienated women and social outsiders, including working-class figures, gypsies, Jews, 'witches', Euro-Asians, 'mad' women, and homosexuals. These relationships regularly enrich the lives of both parties and are afforded dignified narrative treatments.

As Salman Rushdie asserts however, 'novels [...] quarrel with themselves' (qtd. in Light 2), and as I will argue in chapter two, in Dane's pre-1920s work, *Regiment of Women* and *Legend* (1919) in particular, her modernist-inflected pessimistic and feminist social criticisms are contradicted by narrative affirmations of patriarchal romance and marriage and explicit condemnations of career women who remain single by choice. Struggling to maintain a rebellious standpoint, they reveal an anguished compulsion to sanction womanliness, affiliate themselves with received codes of moral decency, and satisfy publisher and reader opinion. They constitute interesting examples of the kind of New Woman fiction which 'chronicles an only slightly fictionalised version of the author's struggle to negotiate fixed ideas about gender' (Young 41). Fraught with anxiety and even self-recrimination perhaps, it is possible – although not easily proven given the inadequacy of the autobiographical material available – that they mirror Dane's own personal tensions, and her attempts to conceal a lesbian sexuality and give her feminism an acceptable face. Despite their assertion of normative values however, these early novels contain challenges in the form of parallel narratives and sub-texts which refuse to be submerged. These buried and subsidiary plots demonstrate an overriding concern for the fulfilment of women, contradicting the perspective of the main narrative by invoking sympathy for teachers and writers who are unmarried or even lesbian. Dane's other pre-war novel, *First the Blade* (1918), is the first text which overtly breaks with conformity, to dramatise the successful rebellion by a female protagonist against patriarchal domestic expectations. Her heroine is

constructed in the spirit of domestic modernism, involved with a 'search for and creation of the self' in defiance of the tyrannies of home (Briganti and Mezei 1). Within a modern exploration of female psychology, she is empowered by a psychic regression into what would later be known by post second wave feminists as the semiotic and the novel prefigures Dane's intensified focus on this subject in her subsequent post First World War fiction.

In 1924, Dane wrote *Wandering Stars*, a novella featuring a struggling young actress who is exploited by but ultimately triumphs over oppressive male theatre managers and playwrights. According to Barrow, this story 'crafted together elements of her own experience as an actress and as a dramatist' (128) and is the last of her autobiographical works set solely in contemporary environments; henceforth, as well as writing detective fiction, she 'looked to history and to fantasy for her plots' (ibid.). Dane indeed adapted her writing to the changing demands of the market – for different middlebrow genres. She experimented with the realist bildungsroman, historical novel, science fiction text and fairy tale, focussed on gothic and ghost stories when they became fashionable in the 1920s, and family chronicles (or sagas) and detective fiction when these genres gained in popularity in the 1930s. By examining points of connection between themes and concerns expressed in Dane's genre writing and the preoccupations manifested in texts by other genre writers of the period, I will argue that Dane's feminist and social perspectives are generally more radical than theirs. As Humble notes, the 'flexible generic boundaries' of the middlebrow 'allowed it to explore new gender and sexual identities which were otherwise perceived as dangerously

disruptive of social values' (Humble 5). New Woman writers in particular 'deliberately used popular modes of writing to reach a broad spectrum of readers' (Heilmann, qtd. in Young 41). In chapters three and four, I will argue that the specific narrative structures associated with gothic and ghost narratives and the family saga opened up feminist possibilities for Dane's writing, which she exploits to the same or a greater degree than comparable middlebrow writers: Daphne Du Maurier, May Sinclair, Sylvia Townsend Warner and G.B Stern. As I will contend in chapter five, the more rigid generic restrictions of the detective genre force her into a compliance with romantic resolutions which ironically recall her earliest writings. I will argue that in spite of these limitations of the genre however, she creates heroines in her detective fiction who constitute the dominant partners in their marriages and are confident career women to boot, in sharp contrast to their more womanly Edwardian precursors. As I will demonstrate, the ideologies in Dane's crime writing are also significantly more liberal than the more limited feminist beliefs and conservative social standpoints evident in the novels of Dorothy Sayers.

I will contend that while Dane's early novels are principally preoccupied with negotiations of sexual identity, her later texts focus more positively on the real possibility of creative fulfilment for women. All narrative desire to shift protagonists from the margins towards a traditional womanly role is abandoned, and what Light calls 'the pre-war language of romance' (Light 67), which privileges heteronormative relationships, marriage and motherhood is discarded. Romantic plotting, oblique feminist representations and a sense of cultural anxiety gradually give way in her works to fully confident assertions of

modern womanhood, albeit undermined in some measure by occasional anomalous and contradictory throw backs to earlier conservative positions. In contrast to the reductive world of her protagonists in the Edwardian texts, her inter-war narrative contexts provide new avenues and possibilities for women, registering an almost palpable sense of relief that these are now more culturally valid, if not always easily accomplished, given the anomalous nature of the gender-political context of the modern period. Dane's heroines are no longer victims, but defenders and protectors of other women and marginalised characters, asserting their right and the entitlement of others to deviate from the norm. I will demonstrate that they escape from the repressions of the house to forge fulfilling lives outside of the traditional home, controlling alternative spheres of living which are increasingly only loosely domestic, and which lack the full accompaniments of husband and children.

I will suggest that the environs of the house, which are regularly significant in the domestic novel, operate as markers of independence for Dane's marginalised protagonists: the garden and grounds, rural landscapes, and the land on the periphery of patriarchal country estates, provide sanctuary. Open spaces are sometimes infused with pagan or pantheistic elements, associated in the texts with a specifically female realm in opposition to the patriarchal interior world and the normative ideology which defines it. The women that inhabit these outside places are intuitive, often telepathic even, and receptive to the paranormal and spiritual world. Dane reconfigures feminine intuition which, according to patriarchal ideology is an illogical and

unscientific marker of inferior womanliness, in line with her feminist philosophy.

As this philosophy develops, Dane counters traditional gender ideology, reassessing the importance of marriage and motherhood in relation to creative and professional freedom. While in many Edwardian and inter-war narratives of rebellion, the central protagonists lived 'more or less in the traditional female realm of the personal and the domestic' (Eldridge Miller 86), Dane's heroines inhabit working as well as domestic environments. In her earliest novels, they are perilously divided between the domains of school, painter's studio, writer's study and patriarchal home. By the 1930s, her novels become even more centrally preoccupied with female negotiations of the public sphere and the professionalization of women. Reconfiguring unmarried women as successful professionals, her protagonists most resemble 'the truly "modern" women' (Ardis 33) in *Dreder's Daughter* (1911), a novel written by one of Dane's contemporaries, Netta Syrett, who pour scorn on what they call 'the theory of love as a woman's whole existence' (Syrett, qtd. in Ardis 33) and 'work to achieve artistic and economic autocracy' (Ardis 133). Dane's later modern women are less likely to forge a feminine self in pastoral places and more inclined to discard domesticity by constructing working identities instead in the urban metropolitan context of the arts and mass media, as publishers, journalists, actors and actor-managers. As a source of employment, the theatre is particularly, perhaps even unrealistically, celebrated for the possibilities which it offers women to unite creativity and professionalism. This was the kind of working context which Dane herself enjoyed, and in this

respect is a fitting literary model for women's independence. It was the place from which she began on her journey to establish for herself a comfortable identity as a bohemian but respected writer, who avoided causing offence while asserting a markedly liberal and feminist agenda.

In re-establishing the literary and cultural importance of Dane's work, it is important to determine why a modern writer who was once a household name has disappeared so completely from literary discourse. To this end, my study will begin with a discussion of twentieth-century literary canonisation, which resisted the inclusion of non-modernist (middlebrow) texts, and caused the work of middlebrow writers such as Dane to be so utterly neglected by literary scholars.

CHAPTER 1: CLEMENCE DANE AND THE INTER-WAR POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

Modernism, the Middlebrow, and the First World War

Clemence Dane belonged to the social class and engaged in the kind of writing activities often associated with the middlebrow writer. Daughter of a commission agent, brought up in an expensive London suburb and privately educated, she lacked personal wealth and took to writing to make her living. She worked on newspapers and magazines with a principally middle-class audience: *Good Housekeeping Magazine* had an 'affluent middle-class' readership (Beddoe 14) and *Worlds Work*, the Heinemann magazine to which

she contributed, 'would have appealed to a high-minded middle-class and lower middle-class readership [...] less sophisticated and quite different from that of the literary journals' (St John 150). She was also a key writer for the middlebrow book industry. Along with those other staple middlebrows, J.B. Priestley, Francis Brett Young and Somerset Maugham, she was published by Heinemann Books. Heinemann's output 'centred on a broad core of readable middle-class, middle-brow fiction' (St John 181), largely distributed to the public via the Boots Booklovers libraries, which aimed at a 'lower middle-class' readership (Baldick 22). The company's foremost reader in the 1920s and 1930s, Charles Evans, was particularly committed to finding 'potentially successful "broad brow" fiction', reflecting 'his personal taste as well as that of a large middle-class public' (St John 206). Evans was responsible for the publication of Dane's prolific output, for which she was to 'merit inclusion' in Heinemann employee John St John's history of the company (St. John 219). Writing about *Regiment of Women*, one reviewer notes: 'Mr Heinemann tells me that it is far and away the most successful "first book" that he has published since the war began', intimating Dane's widespread middlebrow appeal (*Weekly Dispatch. Scrapbook*). Indeed, in an industry in which 'the average life of a novel is ninety days' (Maugham, qtd. in St John 219), many of her works were reprinted, and her 1931 novel *Broome Stages* in particular, 'continued to sell for many years' (St John 225). She was also important to Heinemann as a playwright, one of 'the two most important contributors to the theatrical list', the other being Noel Coward (St John 224).

An inter-war division emerged between exponents of what at the time was called the 'modern movement' (Baldick 5), with its experimental avant-garde branch of highbrow literature – the aesthetic which we now call modernism, and defenders of the more traditional middlebrow. The highbrow was privileged by the literary establishment as the only valid voice of a war-traumatised generation of writers. While highbrows were congratulated for transcending traditional realism to create new literary forms believed better to reflect the fragmented nature of human consciousness, middlebrow writers were conversely regarded by modernists such as Virginia Woolf as the non-progressive and reactionary guardians of an outmoded nineteenth-century canon. Woolf accused the middlebrow of seducing readers with reassuring ideological doctrines, using cause and effect plot structures and conclusive, unambiguous narrative closures which falsified reality. In her opinion, middlebrow novels were unchallenging, devoid of integrity, and written by authors of 'middlebrow intelligence', whose objectives were connected, 'rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige' (Woolf, 'Middlebrow' 55). Her sentiments were echoed by Q.D Leavis, who famously condemned middlebrow texts for providing readers with 'the agreeable sensation of having improved themselves without incurring fatigue' (37). This attitude still prevails in the work of some contemporary critics such as Rosa Bracco, who dismisses middlebrow authors as a 'mediocre literary group, distinguished only by big sales figures' (10).

Despite her middlebrow credentials, it would be unfair to apply these scathing indictments to Dane's work. She was a very well-educated and widely-

read writer, one of her stories was included alongside a Louis MacNeice poem in *The Venture*, published by Cambridge students in the 1920s (Stansky and Abrahams 62-63), and Heinemann felt it perfectly appropriate to market and include her stories in collections alongside esteemed authors, Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Charles Dickens, Daniel Defoe, Edgar Allan Poe, Henrik Ibsen, Oscar Wilde, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Stephen Crane, Ezra Pound and Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Wandering Stars* was even published by the very reputable Macmillan and during the 1920s, when 'working-class readers [...] bought sixpenny reprints [...] and lower middle-class readers [...] found novels for 2s. or more' (Baldick 22), some of Dane's novels and plays retailed for a very respectable six shillings. Charles Evans commended her second play, *Will Shakespeare* (1922), as the 'flower of your poetic genius', destined to survive 'as a piece of literature long after I- and future generations - have gone' (St John 224) and although in retrospect this assessment appears a trifle optimistic, his good opinion of her work was not inconsistent with that of most reviewers of the time. *Regiment of Woman* was described by the *Times Literary Supplement* as 'remarkable', ('New Novels: *Regiment*' *Scrapbook*), and by other reviewers as 'brilliant' (*London Opinion. Scrapbook*), 'extraordinarily well written' ('*Regiment*' *Literary World. Scrapbook*), as well as excellent, wise, insightful, penetrating, and powerful.³ Her following novel, *First the Blade* (1918), received similar accolades.⁴ According to *The Times*, her third novel, *Legend* (1919) was 'acclaimed a distinguished and promising piece of work' ('Miss Clemence Dane' 14), and cited as an example of quality literature by one of Dane's contemporaries, Michael Arlen, in his 1924 novel, *The Green Hat*.

One of the protagonists, a vacuous reader of low-brow literature, who fails to understand Lawrence or appreciate Joyce, describes *Legend* as 'common' (Arlen 24). The principal character, also the narrator and 'a fictional version of the author' designed to impress the reader with Arlen's own 'knowledge of literature [to] vindicate his reputation as a serious writer' (Melman 73), responds by defending *Legend* as 'an achievement in literature' (Arlen 24).

As well as having a reputation for quality, Dane's early work was also acclaimed as innovative, and even modernist. Reviewing *Regiment of Women* and *First the Blade*, fellow writer St. John Adcock described Dane as 'intensely modern', one of the promising new novelists who have 'cut loose from tradition and broken the rules of convention' and are more 'concerned with the psychology of their dramatis personae than with anything in the way of plot' ('Novelists Who' *Scrapbook*). Although the terms modernist and modernism were not widely used in their current senses until after 1940, *Punch* wrote of *First the Blade*: 'I have never seen a more complete vindication of the modernist preference for analysis and characterisation displayed through trivial incident' (*Scrapbook*). The *Times Literary Supplement's* description of *Legend* as 'a really original book' ('*Legend*' 649), caused even the young Virginia Woolf to feel a degree of professional jealousy. Confessing that the success of other writers exacerbated her tendency to self-doubt, she wrote in her diary, 'I'm pained to read praise of *Legend*, a book by Clemence Dane' (Woolf, Diary 315). That she saw *Legend* as a serious competitor suggests that she might even have judged the novel to have highbrow qualities. Dane's early novels were favourably compared to authors who were generally held in high regard,

including many now esteemed as modernists. *The Saturday Westminster Gazette* classified *Regiment of Women* with Joseph Conrad's novels ('The Tendency' *Scrapbook*), and The *Daily Chronicle* grouped it with James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ('Being Read' *Scrapbook*). Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) named her as one of the women who had 'assumed a large share of the responsibility for carrying forward the arts' while men were away fighting in the First World War, associating her methods of writing with those pioneered by Henry James, and locating her work within the same literary tradition as Woolf, Joyce and Conrad (Hueffer 65). *The Mercury* made similar classifications, calling Conrad, H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett 'the three finest novelists still writing', followed by Dane and Rose Macaulay in whose work, it claimed, 'good things were to be found' (qtd. in Graves and Hodge 55).

Dane's work has enjoyed only a transient place in cultural history however; although her literary reputation was solid during the inter war years, it has suffered since. Just as Woolf, Crane, Conrad, Wells, Bennett and Macaulay were not later to be considered writers of equal merit, Dane has fallen victim to shifting critical perspectives. Were it not for the socio-cultural resonance of her 1921 play, *A Bill of Divorcement* and the relevance of *Regiment of Women* to lesbian feminist criticism (it was re-issued in 1995 as part of the Virago 'Lesbian Landmarks' series), Dane would have suffered the fate of many of her other contemporaries whose work appeared with hers in collections of plays and short stories in the 1920s and 1930s, and pretty well dropped out of literary consciousness altogether.⁵

The changeable nature of literary opinion and categorisations demonstrates just how problematic assessments of quality in writing was, and indeed still is. In fact, there is now a literary critical project intent on countering modernism's claim to literary supremacy. Some critics now object to reductive binary oppositions between realism and a truer aesthetic, and consider non-modernist texts to be equally valid in their representation of the modern world, and just as important to literary history, as canonised modernist works. Ann Ardis is one of these critics. Reinterpreting the modernist movement as nothing more than the aggressive politically-driven victor in a competition for the 'art [that] will go forward' into canonicity' (115), she views modernism as just one of the many types of modern literary form which aimed to make it new and represent post First World War culture and sensibilities. Ruth Robbins also considers middlebrow writers equally capable of representing the modern human psychological condition as the modernists who have claimed the subject as their own. She believes that non-modernist texts have only been relegated on account of a literary establishment-driven early-twentieth-century antipathy to narrative clarity, and preference for aesthetic obscurity (55).

In her discussion of early-twentieth-century theatre, Maria DiCenzo usefully differentiates between 'modern', an inter-war term 'to imply the socially, politically, and culturally changing present', and 'modernist', which constitutes 'a retrospective critical term to signal a specific field of aesthetic production, characterized by formal experimentation and linked to a literary avant garde' (36). She contends that while many inter-war feminist writers

were not interested in the formal literary experiments of the modernists, they were nevertheless modern in their ideas and attitudes. Other critical paradigms question the validity of existing methods of categorisation and collapse the distinction between middlebrow and modernist. Ignoring the modernist referent completely, Baldick groups texts usually classed as modernist with those which are widely regarded as middlebrow. In his account of modern writers, he includes 'realist novelists' (4) Bennett, Wells, Maugham, John Galsworthy, and Hugh Walpole, all of whom were, at their time of writing, scorned by Woolf in her condemnation of materialist fiction in her 1925 essay, 'Modern Fiction'. He points out that while academic commentators have divided literature 'cleanly' (5) into either experimental artistry or traditional realism, the 'modern movement' actually constituted a 'broad church that embraced a variety of forms, techniques, styles, and attitudes, all of which were in some way innovative and in some way representative of new twentieth-century modes of awareness' (ibid). As Ardis notes, other critics such as Lynne Hapgood and Nancy Paxton read realism and modernism not as conflicting literary movements, but as different literary techniques, which often coexisted within the same text to speak to and of the modern social context (116). This approach illuminates the ways in which the inter-war novel adopted a variety of literary methods, often adapting those modernist techniques which 'represented the activities of the mind [...] to enhance the psychological dimensions of realist novels or even of genre fiction' (Baldick 211). Re-evaluations of modernism and the modern are useful and pertinent to any reading of Dane's work. Not always traditional in form and content, many of

her texts incorporate modern values and techniques of introspection. Although their form is largely determined by the various middlebrow genres in which they were written, all are reflective of modern consciousness and the modern age. Studying Dane's work suggests that the more challenging work of some middlebrow writers has perhaps not been recognised.

As the battle of the brows raged, Dane sided against both lowbrow authors and modernists or highbrows as they were called at the time, and she commented extensively on the quality and flexibility of middlebrow writing, anticipating the recent positive re-evaluations of this category of modern literature. In *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* (1929), her non-fictional text which focuses on literary style and form in the early twentieth century, and conceptualises her vision for the future of literature in detail, she registers her preference for the modernist end of the middlebrow continuum, viewing the style of Victorian-Edwardian 'elders [...] Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy', as old fashioned (*Tradition* 63). Her antipathy to Galsworthy, who is now almost infamous for having 'wanted to believe that history was coherent and continuous, that the past persisted, that the war had changed nothing essential in English life' (Hynes 415), is visible in *Broome Stages*, her feminist modernisation of the family chronicle genre made famous by the overtly patriarchal *The Forsyte Saga*. She reserved her praise for Conrad and E.M. Forster and particularly commended *A Passage to India* (1924), now often regarded as a modernist text, as a model of compromise, suited to 'satisfy the most fastidious of moderns, so depressed, so detached is it in its attitude to the Anglo-Saxon universe' while retaining its Victorian values through the

moral nature of its plot ('Best Sellers' 94). She describes the premature death of Conrad, a writer whose work was able to 'resist the comparative comforts of Victorian clarity and look forward to the positions taken up by the writers of the Modernist canon' (Robbins 18-19), as 'the heaviest disaster that English literature has sustained since the death of Meredith' ('The Sea' 177).

In *Tradition and Hugh Walpole*, she refers extensively to Hugh Walpole, the middlebrow writer whom she most admired. Possibly to extricate herself from the traditionalist camp, she coined the term 'traditive' to describe the formal qualities which her own work had in common with Walpole's. 'Based on tradition, but not dependent on tradition' (*Tradition* 14), she defined traditive fiction as a combination of 'the old fashioned tale with the innovation in idea which modernises it' (63), working to make new within a traditional framework. She begins and ends the text with quotations by Walpole which point to his literary philosophy of compromise. The closing quotation reads: 'a nation that is bounded by its tradition is dead [...] a nation that despises its tradition is damned; but a nation that uses its traditions and adds to its traditions has, in life as in literature, the future of the world in the hand' (qtd. in *Tradition* 263). Walpole is not now regarded as progressive and even at the time, Stella Gibbons described him as 'not only an over-rated writer with an unduly high opinion of himself, but the representative of a smug self-congratulatory literary establishment' (qtd. in Hammill, 2001, p.838). Gibbons' assessment indicates that Dane's literary and cultural preferences were not always in step with the modern thinking of her contemporaries. However, her esteem for Walpole on the grounds that he had 'enriched the novel [...] in

practically the whole range of his work, by the use of symbolism' (*Tradition* 64), supports his approval of some innovation in literature, particularly the use of symbolism.

Dane's idea of innovation however, was not in tune with the post-1910 enthusiasm for the 'indiscriminate smashing of Victorian icons' (Baldick 9). Her idealised method of writing encompassed the cultural values of the nineteenth century as well as its literary conventions. According to Hynes, this was a period in which the older generation conceived 'the past [and the war as part of the past] with nostalgic regret for lost values and lost security', regarding 'art as a vessel in which what has been lost in society can be preserved'. Young writers, on the other hand, 'were less likely to be reverent and nostalgic about the past, and more likely to confront the ruins of history in the spirit of a wrecking crew at a bomb-site, levelling in order to build something new' (Hynes 394-5). Indeed, Dane most admired Walpole for defying modernist devastation, for producing novels which worked as a 'most valuable counter-irritant to the work of the Disintegrators' (*Tradition* 73).

Dane's attitude to modern culture underpins her respect for traditional form. She rebuked 'moderns' for sneering at people who valued 'exclusiveness, which is after all, a preference for being with people of one's own caste and creed', objecting to what she calls that 'modern snobbery' bent on rejecting tradition which 'bullies' people into being 'afraid to say that they warm to the lions in Trafalgar Square' ('What Kind of Snob' 29). She internalised the prevailing inter-war middle-class hegemonic enthusiasm for English bourgeois identity, a curious combination of 'protestant individualism cultivated to the

point of eccentricity, and [...] stifling conventions of emotional repression and “good form” ‘ by which the English were defined as ‘both restricted and free, glacial and impassioned, utilitarian and poetical’ (Baldick 316). Proud of what she considered to be the reserve, sensitivity, decorum and reticence of ‘we English, with our terror of logic, our poetic horror of plain speech’ (‘Fools’ 54), derived from ‘the far-off drop of Roman blood in us that insists that a public display of personal emotion is not quite decent’ (‘Mother Night’ 15), she also believed that Englishness inferred a paradoxical ‘passion for individuality and independence’ (*Women’s* 40).

In some ways, Dane fits the profile of the inter-war middlebrow writer defined by a paradoxical ‘conservative modernity’ (Light 10), who endorsed certain features of the modern world but valued the status quo. Her outlook was more liberal than Alison Light’s assessment of conservative modernism suggests, however. Subscribing to a belief in racial types and English distinctiveness for instance, was not at the time indicative of any kind of narrow nationalism. In Rose Allatini’s 1918 novel, *Despised and Rejected*, for instance, the radical pacifist hero, Dennis Blackwood, formulates his conception of the internationalist, ‘the man who, seeing beyond hedges and frontiers and class-distinctions, claims the whole world as his “country” and claims kinship with all people who walk upon the face of it’ (Allatini 200), with reference to his unashamed sense of his appreciation of racial difference. He makes a claim for ‘the steadfastness of the English and the indomitable fire of the French; the depth and the innate good-heartedness of the German people; and the easy tears and laughter of the Austrians; the Italians’ hot-blooded rhetorical love of

their country, and the incurable melancholy of the Irish, the Russians and the Poles' (ibid).

Indeed, although some of her attitudes to social class can sometimes appear somewhat reactionary, and her perspective characteristic of an anxious inter-war middle-class reluctance to come to terms with the modernisation of England – she complains about 'petty tyrannies' (*Women's* 34): that 'a mistress must provide her servant with a piano' (42) for instance and having to 'cringe to my new cook!' (43), her tone is never very serious. Aside from these isolated throwaway remarks related to the vagaries of servants, most probably intended to establish a sense of commonality with her reader, her work demonstrates little interest in, and even less anxiety regarding, the servant question, and her modern heroines tend to 'do' for themselves. Her antipathy towards moderns in fact, (and not young people as a whole, in whom, according to theatre critic Alexander Woolcott's assessment of her work, she believed 'lies all our hope for a better world' (qtd. in Barrow 29), was not necessarily conservative by the standards of other liberal-minded women writers who also complained about servants and moderns. In *Women are Like That*, for instance, a 1929 collection of short stories by E.M. Delafield, one story, 'History Again Repeats Itself' critiques modern values as emotionally empty. The heroine, who 'knew nothing about the Great War, except that middle-aged people could be very boring about it' (146), tries hard to become a brittle, non-sentimental, psychologically aware modern, but is knocked off balance by a very old-fashioned broken heart. Her happiness is only restored

when she re-embraces traditional values, represented by her parents' love, the local community, Christmas rituals and the kindly village vicar.

Like Netta Syrett, whose novels also take issue with 'modernist mis-characterisations of Edwardian and Victorian traditionalism' (Ardis 135), Dane often upholds the cultural past as more progressive than her own politically apathetic times. She argued that those 'grandfathers of ours whose era has become a by-name for all that to-day despises, at least had stuff in them [...] the stuff of the men who made one revolution in England and another in America for principle's sake' ('Best Sellers' 92). She denounces eminent modernists, 'James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Wyndham Lewis' precisely because they 'have let themselves be moulded solely by the ideas and aims in force during the war and after the war' (*Tradition* 57). These ideas and aims, she believes, have caused the complete abandonment of that 'discipline' which 'trains the free and strong to be freer and stronger than they were before' (65). Here, she regards pre-war values as more conducive than modern cynicism to the kind of independence, courage and integrity necessary to rebuild the world according to egalitarian principles. Opposing 'the vicious caste instinct' and wary of nationalist sentiments 'easily enough degraded into a tyranny' ('Some Translations' 188), she contends that the anti-imperialist questions which Forster's *A Passage to India* raises: 'what are we doing in India? Why are we doing it? Ought we to be doing it? If not, why not?', were shaped by a valid late-Victorian colonial angst. While 'all the nineteenth-century in Mr Forster has gone to the posing of these problems' she writes, the more politically unresponsive 'twentieth-century in him characteristically

refuses to solve them for us' ('Best Sellers' 94). It may be unfashionable now, and was not radical then, to defend Victorianism, but Dane was not alone amongst those who believed the nineteenth century to be more principled than the inter-war period. Twenty-first-century critics regularly dismiss anti-modern sentiments as conservative. This is perhaps misguided, as many who felt these sentiments, Syrratt, Delafield and Dane included, were not objecting to progression, but to the 1920s fashion among the young for a what George Orwell called a 'passive, non-political attitude' (qtd. in Melman 146).

As an internationalist and one-time president of PEN, Dane was especially disappointed with a national reluctance to assume responsibility for the post-war privations experienced in Europe. An outspoken critic of the war, which she described as 'the war that nobody wanted, that nobody willed [...] that spelt ruin to all the little lives' ('Tomorrow's' 142), like Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby, she was a member of the League of Nations Union, 'the most influential antiwar group in Britain', whose 'political innovations and idealism [...] promised a new dawn of international collaboration' (Berry and Bostridge 155). Against Noel Coward's somewhat narrow outlook, she argued vehemently 'in defence of the Germans, saying something of the miseries I had seen in Germany as a result of the Versailles treaty' (qtd. in Barrow 101). She particularly admired Woodrow Wilson's idealistic aspiration: to achieve future peace with social justice through the instigation of allied leniency towards defeated powers. Wilson's death in 1924 was received by many with liberal inclinations, including H.G. Wells,⁶ as the tragedy of 'a visionary victimized by the personal animosities and political ambitions of his critics' (Hogan 375) and

Dane was certainly of this conviction. By 1926, national war-trauma had receded enough to enable an outpouring of literature which sharply condemned the Great War (Hynes 418), and there was a subsequent 'prominence of satirical prose works presenting the War as essentially a futile waste of life inflicted upon the young by the obtuse or malevolent Old Men' (Baldick 342). Dane contributed to the protest against reactionary elements of society with *Adam's Opera* (1928), her 'social satire in the form of a fairytale' (*Daily Telegraph*, qtd. in Barrow 57). According to the preface of the published version of the play, it aimed to register the 'pure tragedy' of Wilson's death (xiv), the ensuing loss of League momentum, and the disastrous consequences of ignoring his vision of peace:

The tragedy lay in the fact that five years had elapsed since [his] words were spoken, and that within that short time almost every prophesy that the speaker had made had been falsified, every aspiration nullified, every item of his confession of faith contradicted by the object of his service and his worship. His country had, in every particular, gone counter to the assertions made on her behalf. (ibid)

In the play, Wilson is represented in Adam, the archetypal saviour-deliverer and tragic hero, and Dane fuses 'Sleeping Beauty' with elements of modern culture in a strange satirical combination of spectacle, farce, musical and tragedy. For Dane, like other writers, 'the world of war and the world after

had become mirrors of each other' (Hynes 343), and *Adam's Opera* concurs with this negative perspective, conflating the war with the 'emotionally exhausted, self-centred, unfeeling' twenties context (293).

The play condemns the post-war modern world as shaped by its reactionary failure to embrace Wilson's new spirit of internationalism. A progressive critique, it shares the nihilistic outlook of modernist literature, that 'the world after the war was a ruined place, where dishonourable forces had triumphed, and the war's good men had been defeated and ignored' (Hynes 352). Adam arrives at the palace hoping to bring a lengthy war to a close and achieve a permanent peace. He dreams of a world without frontiers and tariffs, but this can only be achieved by raising the public's consciousness of the values of truth and beauty, represented by the resident princess. It is imperative that he wake her and then keep her from going back to sleep, as without her conscious presence to remind them of what is important, the populace will lapse back into a state of pre-Versailles apathy and ignorance. Tragically, like all of post-war Europe and America, the princess falls into a deep slumber. As a consequence, the citizens of the palace reject Adam's vision and, determined to keep foreigners out of their land, take an isolationist approach, betray their deliverer, and stone him to death. Dramatising the transformation of public consciousness into unconsciousness by powerful institutions who manipulate the people to sleep their way, like the princess, through life, Dane's perspective resembles the overtly politically committed stance adopted by poets of the 1930s. They also developed metaphors of sleeping and dreaming to warn readers of the terrible

consequences of hiding from responsibility, which in their case was related to the threat of Nazism.⁷

Some of Dane's other fiction is equally harrowing in its representation of the post-war world. One piece in particular, 'The Valiant Little Tailor', which appears in a collection of Dane's short stories entitled *Fate Cries Out* (1935), invites a Foucauldian reading of the regulatory institutional practices which maintain class control. Dane translates the true account of an eighteenth-century tailor whose 'pathetic history, reduced to three lines, can be read in a history of St. Clement Danes parish' (*Fate Cries Out*. Preface ix), into the short story of a hardworking tailor who ends up at the gallows. Working eighteen hours a day to keep his family, he refuses food brought home from the market by his nine children if it is not 'the reward of odd jobs or errands honestly run' ('Valiant' 22). Never in receipt of a pay rise, his only chance of avoiding a fall into undeserved poverty, is a gift from his master of an unwanted remnant of material which he fashions into clothes to sell. The tailor is subsequently arrested and sentenced to death when this employer later claims that he stole the fabric. He passes the days which lead up to the execution consoling his cell mate, a fifteen year old boy whose only crime is borrowing 'his uncle's repeater [watch] because he slept heavy and got beaten if he was late' (36-37), and busily stitching mourning clothes for his family from black cloth donated by sympathetic neighbours. Moments before he is hanged, finding comfort in the sight of his family 'all dressed in the mourning suits that he himself had made' (45), he is strangely cheered that, 'nobody could say that Charlie Knuckney had not left his family respectable, even to their shoes, even to handkerchiefs'

(45-46). Appropriating the title of a Grimm fairy tale marks the ironic shift from the original story of empowerment to a grim piece of political realism which resonates with the real sentence of death pronounced on millions of First World War combatants. In many cases, a hegemonic faith in the validity of social rank and expected social behaviour similarly precluded resistance and shaped false consolations. The tale is informed by a class consciousness to match Wells' left-wing novel *The History of Mr Polly* (1910), with its 'quietly expressed outrage about [...] wasted lives; and [...] will to argue that these lives are as valuable as anyone else's' (Robbins 55). Compared with Wells' preference for 'fantasy-endings over grimly realistic ones' and inclination to 'write a qualified optimism for a better world' (ibid.), Dane's realist context appears the more pessimistic and so the more modern.

The story also reflects Dane's other liberal anxieties. Because capital punishment was still in place in 1930s Britain, the horrible tale cannot be dismissed as a safe historical narrative, telling of a harsh but obsolete regime. Dane was a vehement opponent of the death penalty. In *The Women's Side*, her 1926 collection of polemical essays, she retorts rhetorically, 'can anyone consider those last hours of a murderer's life without feeling sick?' (46). She praises E.M. Delafield's *Messalina of the Suburbs* for its sympathetic dramatisation of the sad story of Edith Thompson, wrongly found guilty and hanged for conspiracy to murder her husband.⁸ Describing this 1924 novel, which probably influenced 'The Valiant Little Tailor', as 'a book to read and study when the newspapers are next filled with the hysterical and morbid headlines that so easily destroy decency and compassion alike' ('Family' 152-

3), her sentiments echo those of suffragist and feminist, Cicely Hamilton, who was also appalled by 'the unhealthy morbid excitement which is created amongst a section of the public' by the death penalty (qtd. in Bland 646).

Adam's Opera and 'The Valiant Little Tailor' problematize the reductive categorisation process which has labelled middlebrow texts as conservative. Along with *Regiment of Women*, these texts meet Ezra Pound's modernist criterion: to challenge the normative tendencies of traditionalist writing 'to mention absolutely nothing unpleasant' (qtd. in Ardis 115). Indeed, Adcock counted *Regiment of Women* among those modern novels which demonstrated a '“broadminded” and “gritty” absence of mawkishness', characteristic, in his view, of 'honest' modern writers, who 'refuse to blind themselves to the truth' and, 'searching for beauty', finding 'ugliness [...] they must needs write down the impression it makes on them' ('Novelists Who' *Scrapbook*). Dane was clearly prepared to ignore Michael Joseph's well-known recommendation made in *Writing for Profit* (1924), that aspiring writers should pen 'nothing heavy, morbid or neurotic' (qtd. in Leavis 28), and to rebel against Heinemann's specification for novels which were 'copious, pleasant, and very British' (St John 210). She cannot be easily classified as one of the vacuous middlebrow authors whom Leavis condemns as characterised by 'certain limited appeals and a certain restricted outlook' which had 'spoilt the public for fiction [...] of a more serious nature' (32), writers of novels which 'deal [...] in soothing and not disturbing sentiments' (37). Dane objected to fiction which ignored the unpleasant aspects of life every bit as much as the modernists, as many of her narrative events, such as the hanging of the tailor in 'The Valiant Little Tailor',

the suicide of a young schoolgirl in *Regiment of Women*, and the mob-lynching in *Adams Opera* demonstrate.

Leavis considered middlebrow readers to be malleable creatures, but Dane understood that they were powers to be reckoned with. Although determined to bring them round to her way of thinking through 'story-telling, [which] she concluded, was the only means at her disposal of challenging public opinion' (Barrow 98), she was certainly aware, like writers of 'the modern movement' as a whole, of 'readers' adult powers of inference and autonomous judgment' (Baldick 167). In an essay 'The Writer's Partner', which opens *Recapture*, a 1932 omnibus of her selected writings, she describes an adaptation of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728), which substitutes the hanging of Macheath with a happy ending, as a 'savage insolence' (13). She regarded the alteration as a denial of the fundamental rights of the audience, tantamount to taunting them with, 'you couldn't stand as big a dose of truth as that, could you?' (ibid.). In her own work, she aimed to reflect the perspective of her reader, whom she regarded as a collaborative partner in the production of the text, who 'does actually have his creative share in the work done' (17), and 'must be visualized and realized, so that he may be consulted' (18). According to Susan Suleiman, contemporary literary critics now acknowledge that 'the writer's knowledge of what he or she believed to be the expectations of the reading public at the time is an inescapable aspect of the composition of the text' (qtd. in Joannou 20), and Dane understood the importance of gaining this knowledge 'if the end be not a starvation for the writer' (*Writer's* 13). In the habit of 'canvassing among readers and friends' for opinions on popular

reading habits ('Short Stories' 20), she understood that the mood of her times demanded scepticism: for authors to speak in 'these strained after-years [to the] apathy [of] the returned soldier and the war haunted civilian alike' ('Books to Buy' 24). Given her own strong antipathy to sentiment in literature, she was likely to have felt encouraged by the inter-war reader's tolerance of pessimism to write texts like 'The Valiant Little Tailor' and *Adam's Opera*.

Yet she was also aware that her readers were not radical, and in the preface to *Adam's Opera* she apologises for its political content, thus softening the effect of its biting satire to satisfy the underlying conservatism of the middlebrow audience. This is typical of her journalism; as her career progressed, she balanced her more controversial remarks with hegemonic responses to 'the media's requests for her opinions on a variety of social and domestic issues of the day', which 'erased the memory of her earlier notoriety' (Gale, 'Many Masks' 58). In her preface to *Adam's Opera*, she insists that it is 'the situation that interests me' and not 'the rights and wrongs of the case' which she claims she is 'not attempting to discuss' (xiv). She aims for the common touch, claiming to 'know no more than the average man or woman knows of politics and policies, of stagecraft and finance', because her 'opinion, like the opinion of most busy men and women concerned in their own affairs, is valueless because it is uninstructed' (xii). This method of creating a rapport with the 'average' reader pervades her writing. Comments such as 'a genius can write about a genius, but it takes one of ourselves to write about us ordinary folk' ('Trollope' 166), suggest the kind of feigned commonality which

is still employed by journalists working on mainstream publications and in television.

Dane's concept of audience is consistent with Bracco's theory that 'middlebrow writers concentrated their attention on ordinary human beings' (23). Walpole shared this perspective, defining this specimen as 'the man in the street, plus a little culture' (qtd. in *Tradition* 13). Dane encapsulates this same idea in her phrase, the 'middle of humanity' (*Writer's* 25) – a term borrowed from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*⁹ – which denotes a middlebrow audience, without using the middlebrow label. Confident that the middlebrow was the place to register a common phenomenal world of shared modern experience, she conceived her reader's ordinariness as responsive to her own broad-based bourgeois imagination and tastes, her suspicion of moderns, and her pride in middle-class English culture and sensibilities. She also assumed a kind of open mindedness, 'the power to read easily, a certain "instinct" that warns him against insincerity, a sense of humour, a fair ear, a willing soul, a hungry imagination, and curiosity' (*Tradition* 13). Despite her prescriptive impulses, she resembled her anti-elitist middlebrow peers who 'regarded their work as a reflection of the concerns and aspirations of a wide public', and similarly condemned 'the work of the highbrows [...] because of their detachment from the experience of most readers' (Bracco 124). Working hard at all times to keep her work accessible, she warned fellow authors that the reading public who 'knows what he wants' would desert any writer who gives him 'Chinese birds' nests' [high modernist novels] when he asks for a 'nourishing' staple, the 'bread' of traditional fiction (*Writer's* 24). If the

middlebrow 'partner becomes too remote' for the reader, she feared, 'then he will join up with those young vulgarians, the modern shocker-writer and the modern film-writer, who are as anxious to please him' (25). Her desire to write challenging, if not overtly political texts, for a mature, imaginative and discerning middle of humanity reader, problematizes Bracco, Woolf, and Leavis' dismissal of middlebrow writings as mere light, conformist antidotes to the nihilism and alienation of modernist works. In order to convey Dane's internationalist spirit, *Adam's Opera* in particular engages in the kind of de-familiarisation more generally associated with modernist texts.

Dane's Feminist Consciousness

Maroula Joannou believes that 'a text cannot be considered a fully feminist text if its treatment of any of the key factors of gender, nation, sexuality, sexual orientation, race and class, is seriously open to question' (27). Just as Dane's narrative resistance to the war was typical of the distinctively female-authored and predominantly feminist inter-war response to the conflict, her liberal engagement with broad issues of social justice, and her commitment to gender equality provide a challenge to Light's assessment that female middlebrow writers were deeply conservative. Dane was a vocal advocate for social change. According to feminist paper, *Time and Tide*, she abhorred 'political and social apathy' and was 'ardently convinced that a cure must be found for

the public and private ills which afflict humanity' ('Personalities' 56). She was, as Maggie Gale points out, 'a political creature' ('From Fame' 135), with strong progressive opinions on a number of issues. In 1929 she wrote *Gooseberry Fool*, a 'message' play about class – the trivial behaviour of the upper classes at play and the commonsense of the working man' (Barrow 61). She was not of the elitist opinion that culture was the business of the upper-middle classes. Joining forces with her middlebrow peers, including Walpole and Galsworthy, she tried to establish The Workers' Library Society, lending her voice to a fundraising appeal made in *The Times*, to introduce books in the 'factory, workshop, and place where workers congregate' ('The Workers' Library Society' 12). The article's assertion that 'if the world owes a greater debt to literature than to any other of life's activities, literature in turn has an obligation to fulfil' (ibid.), is perhaps a somewhat naive and grandiose claim for the role and function of literature, and this kind of optimistic liberal agenda for cultural improvement is justifiably exposed as exceedingly bourgeois and effete by Marxist literary critics. However, by recognising that 'lending libraries are for those who can afford the subscription and the time to go to them: free libraries are not often easily accessible to the worker after his daily task' (ibid.), The Workers' Library Society demonstrated an understanding of the reality of working life, and the venture can be applauded for its economic hopes: to raise the standard of living of the working classes by creating, through literacy 'greater chances of employment' (ibid.). She also argued for the rehabilitation of offenders, writing, 'I will not endure the thought that a vote of mine is cutting off the chance of reformation from a fellow-creature,

whatever his crime' (*Women's* 51). She was personally committed too, to raising standards of living amongst the poor, and women in need particularly. From 1929, she worked in support of the Cecil Houses, homes or hostels for stranded women, run by women, and she was also involved in running an orphanage.

She was passionately committed to improving the lives of women and children. Beginning her career as an outspoken feminist, she wrote for *Women's Leader*, the paper for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and like those other better-known feminists, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain, she published articles in *Time and Tide*, a 'feminist' paper which 'projected an image of the career woman and the adventurous woman as positive and desirable' (Beddoe 16). She was a committee member of Rhonnda's Six Point Group, the direct descendent of the pre-war suffragist Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). *Time and Tide* urged its readership to join the group 'to bring effective political pressure to bear upon the government to induce it to do justice to women and children and to set an example to the nation to do likewise' ('Six Point Group' 29), and during the lead-up to the 1922 general election, blacklists were drawn up of male MPs who had spoken against women's interests. Much of the group's agenda – to campaign for rights for children, government allowances for unmarried and widowed mothers, the end to inequalities in relation to rights of guardianship exercised by married parents, equal levels of pay among male and female teachers and equal opportunities for men and women in the Civil Service – was closely aligned to wider feminist activity of the time.¹⁰ In her role with the

group, Dane was actively involved, along with former suffragettes, with these feminist initiatives to improve conditions for women and children: she produced a pamphlet entitled *Facts: Child Assault*, and wrote vehemently against the male abusers of children. Indeed, according to *Time and Tide*, 'child-welfare to her [was] more than a phrase. It [was] a religion' ('Personalities' 56). Her feminist politics infiltrated her literary output. According to Barrow, 'the injustice of the divorce law appalled her' (7) and her first play, *A Bill of Divorcement* (1921), was written in strong support of a current parliamentary bill which hoped to amend The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 by introducing a clause permitting women to divorce insane, drunk, or jailed husbands. It dramatises the untimely and unfortunate return of an unstable man who has spent years in a mental hospital to a wife who is in the process of planning her next marriage.

Dane quickly gained a reputation with the press as 'one of the most notorious feminists of her generation' (Gale, 'Many Masks' 49), principally on account of *A Bill of Divorcement* and her friendships with 'sexually controversial individuals such as Violet Trefusis and Vita Sackville-West' (50). One reviewer painted her as 'a dangerously inflammatory playwright, who might convert uneducated classes of women to a new radical politics' (qtd. in Gale, 'Many Masks' 50). This reputation survived the furore instigated by *A Bill of Divorcement*. Her 1924 play, *The Way Things Happen*, was noted for its 'definite anti-man tendency' (Griffith, qtd. in Oliver 99) and many contemporary critics continue to claim Dane's writings as important to feminist literary history, and theatre history in particular. Janice Oliver argues that as

'few women attempted at this time to write for an English stage that was not receptive to their efforts' (97), Dane is fully deserving of 'scholarly attention as the only female of the first half of the twentieth century to produce so prolific and varied a canon of drama' (102). Maggie B. Gale locates *Bill of Divorcement* within an 'emerging tradition of polemical plays by women playwrights' in this period ('Many Masks' 51). Identifying feminist inter-war theatre productions as those which 'sustained' the 'woman question' in 'centre stage position' ('Women Playwrights' 27), in a 1920s and 1930s context in which the meaning of 'woman' itself was constantly being negotiated through 'larger female casts, plots centred round female heroines, [and] woman as subject rather than object' (24), Gale cites Dane as one of the key exponents of these kind of plays (26). Early critics of Dane's work also noted her prioritisation of the woman question in her novels written in the 1910s. Reviewing *Regiment of Women* and *First the Blade*, R. Ellis Roberts claimed that Dane was 'of all the modern woman novelists most definitely feminist', dramatizing woman as 'the obvious superior of man [...] the head of the family, the preserver of life' (81).

Dane's challenge to the widespread hegemonic 'notion that man was innately superior to woman' (Joannou 4) is articulated in her extended critique of patriarchal society made in *The Women's Side*, whose ten chapters focus on different current social and political issues as they relate to women. Topics include the widening of suffrage, woman's role, the death penalty, educational reform, acting in schools, religion in the twentieth century, the marriage laws, spinsterhood and sex demarcations in the capacity for genius. It is significant that each chapter was first published as an article in *Good Housekeeping*, the

magazine which also ran pieces by feminists Vera Brittain, Storm Jameson, E.M. Delafield, Virginia Woolf and Rose Macaulay, and was among the new popular publications which 'became a channel for awareness, independence and self-reliance among women' (Carey, qtd. in Briganti and Mezzei 6). *The Women's Side* is described by Emily Hamer as Dane's 'practical demonstration of her commitment to women' (85), and its title, taken from a quotation – 'shout it so the woman's side can hear!' – from Kipling's 1910 poem, 'Song of the Men's Side', reflects the aspirations of *Time and Tide*, 'to teach women to view issues from a woman's point of view' (H. Smith 50). In *The Women's Side*, Dane applauds the 1925 amendment to the Matrimonial Causes Act, earlier championed in *A Bill of Divorcement*, because it 'concedes for the first time [a woman's] absolute right as a human being to the same law and the same justice that a man enjoys' (107). She also records her disappointment with the political apathy of the newly franchised woman, possessed of 'the vote that she has not yet bothered to use' (Foreword n.p.). This was a common complaint made by inter-war feminists, who remembered the strength of the suffrage movement before the war. They were frustrated by the inability or even refusal of young women, the moderns, who, as Eleanor Rathbone pointed out, 'had never known the harsher forms of inequality' which existed prior to the First World War (qtd. in H. Smith 62), to acknowledge and appreciate the hard path trodden by older women to secure the better conditions of the present (H. Smith 62). Feeling the cultural anxieties of the pre-war New Woman living in an unstable inter-war world and fearing a repeat of the past, Dane admonished the politically apathetic moderns who chose to

stay at home, 'with the windows shut: forgetting that if they will not take their share of national housekeeping they run the risk of having their private housekeeping threatened by forces - laws, wars, strikes and revolutions – outside their control' (*Women's*, Foreword n.p.). Her traditional conservative middle-class fear of class revolt is radicalised here by a modern belief that women should assume the responsibilities of citizenship.

To encourage women's participation in the public sphere, Dane aims to redress the normative conviction that the heroes of history were all men. Providing numerous examples of famous women in political and literary history as role models for contemporary women to emulate, she recounts the heroic feats of an

amazing list of history makers [...] Cleopatra, Semiramis, Agrippina, Boadicea, Judith, Deborah, Kriemhild, the Medici women, the Tudor women, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Christina of Sweden, Joan of Arc, St. Catherine, St Theresa, St. Clare, Russian Catherine, Florence Nightingale, the Empress Dowager of China, Theodora the Dancer, Queen Victoria, Madame Curie. (135)

Her enormous pride in women is also reflected in her work for the first edition of *The Guiding Book*, published in 1923. This prescriptive conduct text aimed to inspire the reconstruction of a new and more confident national identity damaged by post-war grief and demoralisation. Among contributions from imperialists Kipling and Baden Powell, who flag up a series of courageous

war deeds, sits Dane's 'And Women' (38). This is an ironic continuation of the entry which precedes it, John Masefield's 'The Examples of Great Men' (36-37), an account of the First World War battle of Gallipoli. Just as the title of *The Women's Side* suggests that Kipling's poem could do with more emphasis on female concerns, 'And Women' indicates that that Masefield's piece is unbalanced, unfinished even, that he has omitted to tell the whole story. In a tone of playful admonishment, she adds an important addendum to the patriarchal script, with her 'seven wonders of the woman's world' (38), to complete the untold narrative and reclaim an invisible female past from traditional historical discourses. Her wonders comprise the poet Sappho, Helen of Troy, Beatrice, St Joan, Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary and Eve, and their insertion into the text transforms an imperial message into a feminist anthem and foregrounds women's place in myth and history for a young female readership.

Dane's feminism in *The Guiding Book* is grounded in the patriotic ideology which defines the text as a whole. The book opens with a foreword in which the editor, Ann Kindersley, along with Helen Whitaker, states its intention: to 'try and show something of the traditions and the aims, the examples of great men and women and the ideals of service and loyalty that have found expression in the Guide spirit and law' (7). In *The Women's Side* however, Dane is less proud of national political culture and debunks the idea of service to patriarchy as a model for female behaviour in favour of a call for women to hold sway over their masculinist leaders. Her affinity with liberal nineteenth-century social-reform policies only went as far as a faith in Victorian

political energy and courage; she rejected the repressive patriarchal nature of its culture. She shared Trollope's distaste for the 'greyness of Victorian virtue [...] the aridity of the life of the middle class, middle aged Victorian woman [...] and the pretentious cold-bloodedness of the middle-class, mid-Victorian male' ('Trollope' 166). She criticises nineteenth-century patriarchal culture, holding its traditional gender politics responsible for German military aggression in The First World War. Although she frames her argument with a softening apology for her feminism, the feminist nature of her critique is still undeniable. 'At the risk of being called "feminist" – horrid word – ' she begins, 'I cannot refrain from suggesting that the Germany of the twentieth century was, at least in part, the result of the attitude of the German man to the German woman in the nineteenth!' ('Some Translations' 118). This is not a xenophobic mistrust of all Germans; she reserves her criticisms for its leaders and patriarchs, and was equally disappointed with masculinist authorities on the Allied side, as *Adam's Opera* and many of her journalistic remarks demonstrate. Opposing the allied occupation of German land on the Ruhr which was ordered in retaliation for non-payment of war reparations, she writes 'I cannot help believing that woman might do much more with her freedom than use it merely to help in elaborating a civilisation which falls foul of her profoundest instincts. Man has dreamed his dreams, and where have they led him? To the watch on the Ruhr' (*Women's* 24).

Dane's thinking in relation to the post-war international scene was shaped by the same feminist beliefs as those held by some of her more overtly politicised feminist contemporaries, Holtby, Brittain, West and Woolf.¹¹ Brittain,

for instance, on a pacifist anti-Ruhr lecture tour of the Scottish border towns in 1924, was disappointed that 'most people in these little places don't know the first thing about it, and care less' (Berry and Bostridge 191). Referring to 'woman's enemy, war' and declaring that 'no woman will ever see the sense of war' (qtd. in Barrow 98), Dane even calls for the rejection of the symbolic order and the industrial capitalism and war machine which it has created, in favour of an alternative feminine or feminised pastoral society ruled by women. Believing that 'the life of the cities to-day is no life for a woman. She is too good for it. It's waste' (*Women's* 24), she voices a radical feminist proposition that 'suppose, instead of acquiescing in the artificial civilisation of today, she, a half of the human race, should set to work to impose upon the other half a civilisation of her own- a civilisation of the country, not of the towns!' (ibid.). Her thinking is in tune with inter-war feminist writers, Mary Borden, E.M. Delafield, Susan Ertz, Storm Jameson, Helen Simpson, Sylvia Townsend Warner, G.B. Stern and Rebecca West, the co-authors of a 1932 compilation of consensual feminist essays called *Man Proud Man*, which embraces a similar feminist utopian vision. Borden is hopeful that in the future, women will 'do away with cities altogether [...] and organise vast garden cities each with a decentralised centre of industry' (36). Her optimism that woman's innate mental superiority will ultimately see her 'taking over all the tiresome brainwork for herself, and leaving [men] the manual labour only' (38) is shared by West, who looks to a future where women will assume all public responsibility and men's 'highest destiny is to be the husbands and fathers of good women' (282). *Man Proud Man* represents men as emasculated and

even contemptible. Borden calls man 'a pathetic being, resembling a large overgrown baby' (23), an 'effeminate' disappointment to women for whom 'the strong man [...] simply can and does not exist [...] save as an illusion and a dream' (25). E.M. Delafield pours scorn on male inadequacies by quoting ironically from *Hamlet*: 'what a piece of work is a man!' (41), and G.B. Stern sees Peter Pan as the epitome of 'the new fashion of man, man minus responsibility: the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up' (213). These essays share Dane's post-war disillusionment with romantic love which made her debunk romantic plots. Although her 1910s novels assert a romantic agenda, she struggles to believe in romance in *First the Blade* and most subsequent texts are as disillusioned with men's role as *Man Proud Man*.

The outspoken rejection of patriarchy which characterises *Man Proud Man* and *The Women's Side* would have been all but unthinkable for previous generations and shows Dane's alignment with contemporary feminists, sharing their confidence that the time had come to give voice to a female power in the ascendancy. Yet while feminist critics working in the field of theatre history have begun to recognise Dane's achievements, there are many, including Terry Castle, Alison Hennegan and Penny Boumelha, who have cast doubt upon her feminist credentials. This can partly be explained by the fact that her feminist-inflected novels and short stories have long been ignored by feminist criticism, and only *Regiment of Women*, recently interpreted as a piece of anti-lesbian rhetoric which has inadvertently provided a sturdy rope for lesbian critics to hang Dane with, has achieved much literary attention. There is another reason for the critical discrepancies, however. Dane's comments yield up a multitude

of contradictions which make her gender politics difficult to pin down. Although much of *The Women's Side* seeks to deconstruct traditional notions of womanliness, many passages, such as the following, are fraught with anomalies and sometimes express a rather conservative complacency:

But now a tragic-comic situation has arisen. Woman has demanded the vote and all that it implies. Man has ceded it. But what does it imply? Woman began fifty years or so ago to claim the right to support herself. Man grumbled, but gave in. But now the tables have turned. Man has begun to take it for granted that she shall support herself: nay more, to expect her to be a bread-winner, and to be quite shocked if she doesn't do her full share. For the partnership idea strikes him as rather a sound one. Woman is to take over her own life: she is to educate herself, earn her own living, assume her responsibilities for her dependents, take her share in public life, take her share in running the nation during war: in fact, lead the life of a man. Splendid! But she is not thereby freed from her previous job, the job which was supposed, through all former ages, to have been hard enough to occupy and exhaust her energies. She may go out to her business all day, but she still has to run her household as well. She may have to contribute to the household funds; but she must also be ready to bear children. She may work as long as a man, but because

her physical strength is less she must be content with less wages; but what does that matter when her expenses are, of course, less than a man's; for a woman, because she is a woman, must be able to sew, cook, clean, shop and make her own clothes: that is the woman's part. (*Women's* 21)

Fully sympathetic with gender-related salary discrepancies and the new burden experienced by women who had recently discovered that equality meant a doubling of their workload, the passage could strike a chord with today's working mothers and matches contemporary post-feminist thinking. However, Dane also mistakenly assumes that the battle for women's right 'to support herself', and 'to be a bread winner' has been all but won. Given that 'the single most arresting feature of the inter-war years was the strength of the notion that women's place is in the home' (Beddoe 3) and 'it would not be going too far to say that the climate in inter-war Britain was anti-feminist' (4), Dane's contention that there was now an expectation for a woman 'to educate herself [...] take her share in public life, take her share in running the nation during war', seems hopelessly optimistic. In truth it was 'considered wilful and perverse of a woman to wish to earn her own living' (3) and ordinary women had certainly not succeeded, as Dane claimed, in turning 'the claim of equality of opportunity into a fact' in 'this great house of freedom' (*Women's* 122) where 'even the most prejudiced are grudgingly admitting that it is better [...] that women should keep herself rather than be kept' (123). Her observation may well have reflected her own circumstances but it certainly did not

represent the experience of most women and was out of touch with the prevailing spirit of prejudice and misogyny.

Dane's conviction that women have always 'ruled the roost' (*Women's* 18) and that 'however man has treated women in theory, in practice it seems that he generally did as she told him' (21), also seems spuriously remote from reality. Dane finds some rather untenable examples in literature to support this claim, citing the dominance of the Wife of Bath over her five husbands, and suggesting that it is always the central female protagonist in Shakespeare, Richardson, Austen and Meredith who 'emerges triumphant' at the close of her narrative (20). Given Second Wave feminism's rigorous project to deconstruct false representations of female experience in male-authored texts, and to call into question the integrity of Shakespeare's gender politics in particular, it is difficult to find such a theory of gender history based on fictitious examples convincing. Indeed, while Dane was writing *The Women's Side*, her contemporary, Virginia Woolf, was only three years away from pointing out that 'woman', defined in the masculine imagination as 'great as a man, some think even greater' (*A Room* 55), had from 'about 1470' to the present (54), lived a very different reality than the one patriarchal literature would have us believe in, one which saw her, 'locked up, beaten and flung about the room' (56).¹² Dane's conservative quasi-historical interpretation of English literature was soon to be discredited by Woolf's historical research,¹³ and this comparison between the two feminists demonstrates fundamental weaknesses in Dane's feminist analysis.

Dane is also prone to essentialist pronouncements on the different biological and mental capacities of men and women, which would now be construed as anti-feminist. Her reader is advised to accept 'being told that she can't do everything that a man can' as the truth, given that 'though the spirit may be willing the flesh is weak, and that woman's problem always has been and always will be – her health!' (*Women's* 22). Dane herself suffered from a multitude of physical complaints: she worked so hard as a volunteer in the First World War that she 'collapsed' and was 'hospitalised' (Butcher 298), she was 'laid up with a nervous breakdown as late as 1921' (Arnold n.p.), she pulled out of writing her regular column for *Time and Tide* in 1922 because of 'one silly ailment after another, influenza, poisoned face, influenza *again*' (letter to Belloc-Lowndes n.p.), and she suffered from gall-bladder problems which 'had been poisoning me for years' (letter to Hugh Walpole n.p.). It is likely that her assumption that all women were too frail to match up to working men was based on the evidence of her own health problems. Even more contentious is her claim that women's imaginations are also less robust than men's and 'after forty the advantage is all with the man: he continues to grow years after the woman's prime is definitely over' (*Women's* 26). She even argues that men and women have fundamentally different kinds of mental powers, referring to 'a strength of the spirit that is the special gift of women, as strength of intellect is the special gift of man' ('Some Translations' 114). Indeed, of the attributes of her great women: 'The song of Sappho/ The face of Helen / The beckoning hand of Beatrice / The sword of Joan / The passion of the Magdalen / The grief of God's Mother / And the immortal spirit in the

burdened body of Eve, the labourer's wife' (*And Women* 38), only two – poetic creativity and warrior courage – are great achievements; the others are the traditional normative qualities of sufferers, enticers, muses and helpmates.

At one point she develops her shaky line of essentialist reasoning into a reactionary philosophy of literary and art history. 'Genius in a man' she contests, is complemented by 'the feminine of genius [...] the creature who drives him to create' (*Women's* 138), and the scarcity of female texts in the literary canon is unrelated to women having been 'deprived of education and opportunity' (133) since 'genius has always made its own opportunities' (134). It is important to compare her thinking on this point with Woolf's contemporaneous project, explicated in *A Room of One's Own*, to contextualise literary tradition by pointing out the material disadvantages which had prevented women in history from achieving literary merit. Reinterpreting Shakespeare's genius as the constructed product of favoured circumstances, Woolf argues that this 'could (not) have been born among women whose work began [...] almost before they were out of the nursery, who were forced to it by their parents and held to it by all the power of law and custom' (63). Her vehement belief that 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' (4), exposes Dane's judgment as anti-feminist, not only by today's standards but by the inter-war standard which Woolf set.

Even Woolf, whose thinking was radically ahead of its time however, has been accused of retreating from the implications of her feminism, particularly in chapter five of *A Room of One's Own*. Here she disavows the enthusiasm for androgyny for which she is well-known, with an assertion that

'it would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men. [...] Ought not education bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities?' (114). She even concurs with Dane's endorsement of the symbiotic union of male genius and his female muse who offered 'some stimulus, some renewal of creative power which is the gift only of the opposite sex to bestow' (112). If Woolf fell short of rejecting traditional ideologies, then Dane stood little chance of doing otherwise. Indeed, although some of Dane's otherwise feminist values may appear reactionary in relation to post-Second Wave feminist consciousness, neither her essentialism, her false confidence in new opportunities for women's economic independence, or her misplaced assumption that equality for women had been achieved are out of step with inter-war feminist thinking. Winifred Holtby, for instance, wrote in the *Yorkshire Post* in 1935 that the previous twenty-five years had been 'the most notable in the whole history of British women' so that 'we take it for granted that women should become surgeons, engineers and ministers' (qtd. in Bingham 81). *Man Proud Man* similarly mirrors Dane's optimism and also her anxiety. Its title, taken from *Measure for Measure's* 'man proud man / dressed in a little brief authority', reflects the writers' belief in the limited and transient nature of patriarchal rule, and their faith that they have already lived to see 'that blessed day when the star of female dominance dawned' (West 268). West claims that 'the superiority of women is now admitted by all, save the more neurotic and over-educated sort of man' (261), and Stern is confident that in her zeitgeist, 'the economic situation develops in favour of women' (198). The consensus is that men have willingly relinquished to women a

mastery to which they were unsuited. Like Dane, the authors of *Man Proud Man* complain about their new public and working responsibilities, contradicting our general understanding that opportunities for women to work were limited in the inter-war period. For Borden, 'emancipation is not a tale of triumph, it is a story of long disillusion and disappointment' (30) for the woman who 'didn't want to leave the lazy, warm, protected seclusion, where she could eat, sleep and play with her children, while her man went out to fight for her and provide for her' (28), and for whom 'the last thing she wanted was power and responsibility' (29). In her ironically-titled chapter, 'Man the Helpmate', Storm Jameson shares this sentiment, begrudging female empowerment and a new state of affairs in which a man will no longer 'now offer to support a wife who can support herself, and in an increasing number of recorded cases the tendency among men married to self-supporting women is towards complete dependence' (111).

Feminism has undergone considerable redefinition since the 1920s and 1930s, when it signified a different set of attitudes than it does now. Examining the work of women writers like Holtby, West, Stern and Dane requires careful consideration of what feminism meant at a time when New Women novelists and their female readers generally believed that equal suffrage was the removal of 'the last great symbol of women's inequality' (H. Smith 61). Inter-war feminist political activity as a whole had splintered into different groups with different beliefs and priorities, which echo the disparities in Dane's work and in the writing of her contemporaries. While equality feminists, led by Ray Strachey, believed that the pre-war suffrage struggle for

equal opportunities for women was still necessary, New Feminists brought feminism in line with post-war ideological notions of male and female difference, stipulating a general reversion to traditional sex roles in the drive to rebuild shattered men, family harmony and national peace and confidence. Some feminists ceased to believe what had once been held as a feminist truth, that 'gender and sexuality were culturally or socially constructed' (Kent 71). Feminist Cicely Hamilton registered in *Time and Tide*, only one year after the publication of *The Women's Side* that, 'the peace in our time which we all crave will mean a reaction, more or less strong, against the independence of women' (qtd. in Kent 70). In response to this back-lash, New feminists worked strategically, advocating reforms related to women's 'special concerns' such as motherhood (H. Smith 48) in order to reflect the new hegemony and attract young women to their cause. MP and women's rights campaigner, Eleanor Rathbone upheld both positions. Her 1925 presidential address to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies urged that women should be 'focusing on women's special contributions as mothers rather than seeking to eliminate sex role differences' (H. Smith 56), both in order to facilitate recruitment and 'fulfil the potentialities of their own natures' (qtd. in H. Smith 56). In opposition, *Time and Tide* supported the alternative equality feminism agenda – to move towards 'a gender-neutral society' (H. Smith 48). In March 1926 it emphasised the 'common humanity of men and women, not their differences', and resisted the growing adoption of a separate spheres philosophy and 'dangerous insistence on women's natures' (qtd. in H. Smith 48). It was concerned that by pointing to essential differences between men and women, New Feminists

were liable to inadvertently reiterate patriarchal thinking and instigate politically counter-productive modes of analysis inclined to continue or even deepen women's oppressions.

This reactionary feminist phase was exacerbated by women's experience of the guilt and estrangement of the outsider in relation to the war-dead and war-wounded men who lived among them; this undoubtedly prevented the progression of more radical feminisms. Brittain, for instance, considered that 'for us who cannot fight, it is a burden almost more than we can bear, to feel that we owe our safety to the lives and sight and strength of such as Roland and Victor and Edward' (her own war-dead fiancée, friend and brother respectively) (qtd. in Tylee 222). Storm Jameson believed that men's war-time experience 'was incommunicable to others' (qtd. in Tylee 185), and 'the gulf which divides the women of my generation and their men who fought in the War is impassable on any terms' (184). Dane shared the widespread female reverence towards the nation's returned soldiers. 'When we speak of war', she wrote, 'how can women understand?' ('Old History' 494). Reviewing Rudyard Kipling's *The Irish Guards* (1923), she passionately defended its author against critics inclined to object to his Victorian attitudes, partly no doubt because of the poem's unexpectedly sympathetic attitude to the Irish, but also in recognition of Kipling's own tragic loss of his son, John, at the Battle of Loos in 1915. Referring to his other gruelling literary accounts of combat, she insists that 'Mr Kipling has earned the right to hurt us if he chooses' (494).

Time and Tide cited a 'well-known feminist' who remarked that 'Dane will never write anything which is likely to offend men' ('Personalities' 56), and

Dane's gender politics were indeed sensitive to a conservative zeitgeist in gender history when feminism was in retreat from its radical pre-war standpoints. It is likely that she was one of those feminists who were persuaded by guilt and dominant ideology to back-track, coming to rely 'upon the same analytical framework as anti-feminists' (Lewis qtd. in H. Smith 61), or to follow the tactical lead and 'sensible decision of feminist leaders to accommodate themselves to the prevailing political culture' (Harrison qtd. in Kent 66). Although her commitment to the equalising tenets of the Six Point Group suggests an allegiance to equality feminism, *Time and Tide* described her as someone who was 'sociologically feminist [...] who insists more on the diversity between male and female than is quite acceptable to those who find a common denominator in humanity' ('Personalities' 55). From the position which she adopts in *Good Housekeeping* and *The Women's Side* – published in the same year that numerous articles appeared in *Time and Tide* on the advantages and disadvantages of new and equality feminism – it can be deduced that she was one of the essentialist culprits, entering this feminist dispute while the argument was at its height and choosing to identify herself foremost with New Feminist principles. This was perhaps a factor in her departure from the newspaper the same year.

However, in comparison to the climb down of key political feminists, and the rejection of feminism by many altogether, in favour of the non-feminist townswomen's guilds 'which attempted to teach women how to perform their traditional roles better' (H. Smith 61), Dane's feminist credentials stand firm. She did recognise woman's oppression through history. 'Man' she wrote, has

'had his money's worth out of her. Since the dawn of time she has been put to do the inglorious work of the world: she has not only been the world's housewife, but the world's drudge' (*Women's* 14). She also held men accountable for the international mess of the early twentieth century. Furthermore, her disinclination to identify female genius in her essays may well have been actually grounded in feminist thinking. Given eugenicist concepts of the relationship of genius to degenerative madness, feminism sought to distance women from notions of genius. Havelock Ellis, the enormously influential eugenicist, regarded genius as one in a range of hereditary abnormalities to which men were more disposed than women (Boumelha 171); Fellow eugenicist, Lombroso, who had begun to equate abnormality with madness, proceeded to count genius as a 'degenerative psychosis belonging to the group of moral insanity' (qtd. in Boumelha 171). According to Boumelha, these convictions posed a problem for feminists who were struggling to claim intellectual equality for women. Firstly, the concept of heredity in itself suggests a lack of personal control over destiny and perhaps even the pointlessness of the kind of hard work and ambition that feminists were encouraging in women. Secondly, while they sought to prove women balanced and logical, against the associations of femaleness with biologically induced hysteria and madness which had been culturally prevalent throughout the nineteenth century, the identification of genius as an inherited condition predisposing the subject to madness, was not likely to be helpful to their cause. What might be considered anti-feminist in Dane's gendered conception of genius then, was more probably a genuine attempt to establish a model of

the extraordinary talented woman outside of problematic definitions of intellectual genius, based instead on her possession of special superior spiritual qualities.

The idea of female spiritual superiority was important to many feminists, including suffragist Maude Roydon, whose pacifism was framed by a conviction, expressed in 1922, that in women's feminine 'vision' and abilities to persuade men 'to cease thinking of the world as a battlefield and to begin thinking of it as a home' (qtd. in Kent 79), lay the nation's hope of peace. Dane's 'And Women' is conceived along similar lines. Her female wonders may not have all been warriors and leaders, but they compare favourably with the pitifully mortal status of the 'seven wonders of the ancient world of men', inanimate treasures of 'brick and ivory and gold and stone', unable to withstand the test of time so that, 'gone are now the hanging gardens: forgotten the temples and the tombs. Colossus has stumbled in his stride and the still standing pyramids are defaced, defiled' (38). Dane's female wonders are the spirits of 'unforgotten' women (ibid.), who continue to wield an eternal influence over the consciousness of our culture.

While Dane's journalism is often contradictory and sometimes conformist in its opinions on social issues and the woman question, her plays, short stories and novels tell a different and more subversive story and contain a more stable feminist consciousness. In her early *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*, the feminist message habitually takes refuge in the sub-text, and in this respect Dane fits Elizabeth Maslen's profile of those inter-war female writers who, she believed 'entertained those who only looked for entertainment

but also offered signals that the text could be read at another subversive or polemical level' (37-38), thus 'persuading readers to engage with radical ideas, while sustained by familiar conventions' (36). Dane's feminist message becomes stronger and more overt as her work develops over time. Her reluctance to attribute genius to women in her journalism is directly contradicted by her dramatisation of the life of a fictional literary genius in *Legend*, suggesting a lack of firmness in her conservative conviction, and she increasingly creates congenitally-gifted heroines who withstand the degenerative pitfall of insanity which befalls the men in their families. Indeed, all of her fiction satisfies Joannou's definition of the feminist text. Joannou claims that, written in a context in which 'anti-feminism was ubiquitous among intellectuals', authors 'who did not relinquish their desire to speak in the name of woman, to speak of women's experience, aspirations, subjectivity and sexuality' (11), and held 'a commitment to the authority of a woman's perspective' (12), can be considered 'radical' (11). At all times speaking 'in the name of woman' (ibid.), Joannou's key feminist criterion, Dane's essentialist fiction echoes New Feminist initiatives to produce positive images of women's self-worth within a framework of feminine difference.

While it could be argued that most of Joannou's criteria for inter-war feminism had already been met by nineteenth-century women writers such as Austen, Eliot, the Brontes and Gaskell, who had established the female-authored convention of creating representations of extraordinary women, theirs was not a modern feminist consciousness and the overt feminism of Dane's novels and short fiction exceed both the specifications of Joannou's

model of feminism and the literary rebellions of the female literary predecessors who paved her way. Essentialist but not conservative, she defines female difference not with a eugenicist maternal outlook, but within a framework of professional and public, as well as domestic equality. Her novels seek to address an important inter-war consideration, pertinent perhaps to her own childlessness and put to her *Good Housekeeping* reader in the following question: 'as a woman, what is going to happen to you if you can't get on with children?' ('Twelve' 106). She loved children and venerated motherhood but very few of her heroines are mothers and those that are, are more usually identified by their artistic and professional endeavours than their maternal role. She also deconstructs traditional womanliness by destabilising the traditional romantic plot. If women were to achieve equality, she believed, they must take political and public responsibility and the kind of reading material which they had in their possession was to have an important bearing on this. She urged:

It is not a question of our mere literary interest, our whole position is involved. Our long desired physical and legal freedom, our intellectual independence, this deep- rooted belief of ours that we are intended to move level with our men folk in a shared existence, all this will avail us little if [...] we read principally sentimentalities and sex-novels, [for then] we show pretty plainly where our interest in life begins and ends, and I believe that the world cannot much longer afford to tolerate any human being whose interests are purely personal. ('Sea' 173-4)

Discussing her 'market research', she alludes to the 'rise' in popularity of the romantic novel: 'I have often been told by librarian friends,' she notes: 'women won't read anything but love stories, then it is a situation to be seriously considered. For women are the chief part of the reading public, and the demand creates the supply: which means that it is the women who are making it difficult for any but the rich and famous author to produce the stuff that is in him' (173). Seeking to tread the line between satisfying the demands of the reader on the one hand, and asserting her own anti-romantic /anti-sentimental and politically principled agenda on the other, she was increasingly to desist from writing 'sob stuff' (ibid), distancing herself from the kind of female-authored fiction which was stigmatised as ' "sentimental" or merely popular' (Clark qtd. in Ardis 122). In her own novels, Dane either eschewed romantic resolutions or undermined them with more uncomfortable sub-textual or secondary plots.

Dane is now counted among those playwrights whose productions 'theatre historians have failed to validate' (Gale, 'Women Playwrights' 27) because of their use of realism, and her novels are yet to be recognised as representative of the modern world and the anxieties of a modernising womanhood in particular. Yet contemporary feminist commentators are among those who now challenge modernism's claims for supremacy, redefining benchmarks of literary quality to privilege the 'radical politics' which counters the conservatism of male-authored modernist texts 'in branches of female middlebrow writing' (Schenck qtd. in Ardis 125). Disentangling realism from its

associations with dominant ideology, Felski identifies traditional form as a crucial and appropriate medium for feminist writing (Ardis 124). Furthermore, Dane's work defies common assumptions that middlebrow texts by the same author are necessarily of similar ilk, type and kind. Her destabilisations of romantic plots are consistent with the modern outlook and technique of modernist writing, and while *Regiment of Women*, *First the Blade* and *Legend* have ostensibly Victorian-style romantic realist plots, they also contain sharp sub-textual social and feminist criticism, and what Angela Smith calls a 'female modernist language of uncertainty, ambiguity' (173-4) which is characterised by the use of multiple perspectivisation, shifting focalisation and introspection often within realist forms. Dane's feminism crosses the boundaries that have separated and categorised different genres as appropriate for either high, low, or middlebrow writing. Even her genre novels sometimes follow but often challenge the conventions of the genre; using popular genres can constrain but more often liberates her work from traditional gender politics, producing compelling representations of female modernity outside of the restrictions of outdated conceptions of romantic love.

Dane's gender politics were more radical than her convictions relating to social issues. She can perhaps be best described as a champion of tolerance and individuality with a respect for tradition, whose middle-class perspective prevented her from giving too much thought to the inequalities of the class system, but which enabled her to develop a certain zeal for social justice. Her anti-militaristic perspective on the First World War may not have been inconsistent with a generalised 1920s and early 1930s war-weariness, and her

abhorrence of capital punishment was shared with Alison Light's principal conservative modernists, including Agatha Christie. What is counter-cultural, however, is her anti-patriarchal internationalism, her sensitivity to marginalised groups, and her strong belief in female empowerment, demonstrated in much of her journalism, in *Bill of Divorcement*, *Adam's Opera*, 'The Valiant Little Tailor' and her novels published in the 1920s and 1930s.

Indeed, if we consider Adrian Bingham's research on the way that inter-war social and cultural values were reflected and shaped in newspapers, it is clear that Dane's perspectives situate her within liberal frameworks of thought, as reflected in the liberal press, specifically the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily News*. Bingham argues that there were a 'variety of different gendered discourses' (6-7) articulated in the inter-war popular press. Although opposing viewpoints were often expressed within the same newspaper, and there was sometimes an overlap between right and left-wing newspapers in relation to their perpetration and assimilation of a new hegemony of limited tolerance of modern gender roles, his evidence demonstrates a clear general divergence of opinion on most issues between the conservative *Daily Express* and the liberal *Daily Herald* and *Daily News*. While conservative newspapers re-evaluated femininity only 'within strict limits' (21), feared what they perceived to be a female invasion of male spheres, gave overwhelming support to the institution of marriage, celebrated the traditional female role of housewife and mother which they elevated to the status of a profession, and reinforced an image of woman as a 'decoration for the male gaze' (20), the liberal press placed more emphasis on compatibility in marriage and the need for men to become more

aware of the emotional needs of their wives and children. They included input from feminists such as Ray Strachey, Lady Rhonnda and E.M. Delafield to reinforce their acknowledgment of the right of married women to work (68). They were more vehement than their conservative rivals in encouraging women to exercise her vote and celebrated assertive modern womanhood as an improvement on older cultural images of dutiful housewives, mothers and glamorous companions. Comparing Dane's feminist perspectives with the gender ideologies generated by these newspapers, it seems she was either in accordance with the liberal press or inclined towards a more radical outlook. While the liberal press ignored the injustices of the newly imposed marriage bar, unequal pay and the treatment of female teachers for instance, Dane championed these causes, and she did not share the liberal papers' anxiety that the traditional breadwinner model was under threat. Neither did she consider women's interests to be restricted to generalities; she addressed specific internationalist issues in her journalism. Dane did not succumb to the general press silence about homosexuality, which tended to mask feelings of distaste, and her internationalism was in opposition to the jingoism of the conservative press, and the *Daily Express* in particular. The paper sought to 'buttress traditional male virtues', (192), praised manliness and military service against what they perceived to be the growing threat of effeminacy amongst men, derided the League of Nations and upheld notions of empire throughout the period. The liberal press, on the other hand, asserted an internationalist agenda, rejecting older imperialist and masculinist attitudes, sympathising with impoverished returning soldiers, recognised kinship with the defeated

Germans, criticizing 'profiteers at home' (192) and consistently regarding the enfranchisement of womanhood as important to world peace. Towards the end of the period, against the pro-fascist position of appeasement taken by the conservative press, they urged women to 'drop their objections to war' (192) and serve the country against Hitler's army.

Given Dane's, albeit unstated, liberal political allegiances, she cannot be grouped with the conservative modernists, or with the kind of middlebrow writers condemned by Woolf as instruments of social control and producers of social conduct texts, comfortable and comforting entertainers of sleeping audiences. The disturbing nature of some of her fictional material and challenging assertions in her journalism were perhaps more inclined to wake the reader from sleep or verify the beliefs of an already alert audience. Indeed, exceeding Joannou's expectation that a feminist author does not necessarily have to have 'a set of beliefs and values which exist prior to the act of writing' (1), between the very hesitant feminism of her wartime novels, and her 1930s output, an increasingly consistent, crystallised and overt feminist perspective evolves in Dane's work. The distance in her writing between 'the meaning prevalent at the historical moment of production and [...] present-day understandings of gendered experience' (1) closes, as her feminist project gains momentum.

**CHAPTER 2 IMPERILLED IDENTITIES, SUBMERGED SEXUALITIES:
EDWARDIAN REPRESSIONS IN *REGIMENT OF WOMEN*, *LEGEND* AND
*FIRST THE BLADE***

Dane's pre-1920s novels, *Regiment of Women*, *First the Blade* and *Legend* are loosely autobiographical, centring on imaginative young women whose experiences of teaching, painting and writing reflect Dane's own. Like many middlebrow novels of the period, they struggle to make sense of the 'confusions' of the 'cultural moment' (Light 2) as they interrogate the cultural forces which impinge upon and shape protagonists who are caught between conformity and rebellion, Victorian moral codes and emerging Edwardian and modern philosophies. Similar in theme, the texts differ in the extent to which they conform to patriarchal ideology and to narrative structures associated with the realist novel. *Regiment of Women*, a realist text fraught with

conservative cultural anxieties related to 'abnormal' sexuality, marriage, and spinsterdom, creates a vibrant lesbian character, deliberately asserts a pro-feminist educational agenda, and is committed to the freedom and autonomy of women. These ideological anomalies are repeated in *Legend*, which contradicts the normative heterosexual script by providing the heroine with a questionable marriage which does not comfortably resolve the lesbian plot. *Legend* is markedly less convinced than *Regiment of Women* of the benefits to women of marriage and self-abnegation and also echoes a more modernist preoccupation with female psychology and impatience with plot. Terry Castle's theory relating to the coded narrative structure of the lesbian plot is useful to an understanding of these early texts. *First the Blade*, on the other hand, is a heterosexual narrative which explores the psychological growth of the central female protagonist, and makes a firmer case for women's independence and fulfilment outside of marriage than either *Regiment of Women* or *Legend*.

Female-to-Female Relationships and Girls' Education in *Regiment of Women*

Regiment of Women's main protagonist is Clare Harthill, a dynamic, attractive and powerful senior teacher at an old-fashioned boarding school for girls. Many of the school's female residents adore her, including Alwynne Durand, a young teacher who becomes involved with Clare in a relationship based on mutual love, and Louise Denny, a pupil psychologically damaged by the death of her

mother and the insensitive treatment meted out by her father and step-mother. The narrative is structured in two halves. Within the claustrophobic classrooms of the school, the first centres on Alwynne and Clare's relationship, and Louise's school-girl crush on Clare, a love which precipitates her suicide. The second shifts to Compton Dene, an idyllic rural village and country seat of the Lumsden family, where Alwynne is sent by her Aunt Elspeth when her feelings of guilt associated with Louise's death cause her to have a breakdown. The different outcomes of the two halves mark a difference in genre: as Alwynne heals and Roger Lumsden woos her away from Clare, the tragic mood dissipates and the text assumes the features of romantic comedy.

Published in an era which saw 'a flourishing of education novels' (Baldick 192), *Regiment of Women* is among those texts which explore the pressures exerted by boarding establishments upon their pupils. Education or school novels, tended to be uncomfortable reads, providing truthful accounts of school experience, often at variance with normative reassuring messages promulgated in the more cheerful school tales popular with younger readers in this period. Many of the latter were written by Angela Brazil and Dorita Fairlie Bruce and contained fantasy prototypes of 'sanity and health [...] qualities which the atmosphere of these books is designed to promote and prolong' (Cadogan 192). *Regiment of Women* gives a more candid account of the manipulations and unhappiness that can exist in schools. The first half of the narrative, like 'The Valiant Little Tailor' and *Adam's Opera*, registers a modernist pessimism. Indeed, when it was first published, it was praised for being 'representative of modern introspective fiction' and 'free from all touch of

unhealthy sentiment' ('A Remarkable' *Scrapbook*). It was also progressive in other ways. Where Brazil's popular war-time novels 'quite shamelessly exploited the reinforced sense of nationality' endemic in a zeitgeist when 'to be English had suddenly become an obligation, as well as a privilege' (Cadogan 119), *Regiment of Women* is not only devoid of patriotic feeling but contains no reference to the war at all.

A common feature of these girls' stories was dormitory love; this was perhaps surprisingly often loosely homosexual in nature. In Angela Brazil's *The Patriotic Schoolgirl* for instance, 'girls were always falling madly in love with one another, and occasionally with older women; innumerable friendships "flamed to red heat"' (Cadogan 122). Usually, all was kept 'firmly on a sentimental plane' however, there was 'no suggestion of the physical' and according to Cadogan, the lesbian undercurrents did not appear to make them problematic to author or reader (ibid.). Indeed, the 'idealised love for an older, publically successful woman' (Vicus, qtd. in Horner 14) had not traditionally been discouraged in boarding schools, was generally 'accepted as a normal part of growing up' (Horner 15) and seen as 'a very common fact' ('New Novels' *New Statesman. Scrapbook*). Most early critics of *Regiment of Women* recognised that the novel's key subject was schwarmerei, a German term for this 'passionate hero-worship of a mistress or school fellow' (Barrow 18). Some took the old-fashioned view – that the schwarmerei was nothing more than the harmless prelude to married love, that the novel 'deals with that phase in a good many young and emotional girls' lives, which, known to every school and college and convent, leads them before they have met the one man, and while

sex is mostly a sealed book, to adoration of some older girl or woman' ('Turning Over' *Scrapbook*). With the exception of *The Saturday Westminster Gazette*, which refers to Clare's 'perverted sex instinct' (*Scrapbook*), all of the other forty-four reviews read the novel as the tragedy of Louise's infatuation rather than a representation of lesbian love. Most overlooked Clare and Alwynne's relationship and those who did comment interpreted it as a chaste example of 'women's friendship' (*Sunday Times. Scrapbook*) and defined the novel's central preoccupation as 'the thoughts and emotions of women' ('*Regiment of Women*' *Atheneum. Scrapbook*).¹⁴ Recent critics, however, believe the novel was 'planned as one of the great Awful Warnings of anti-lesbian literature' (Hennegan v). It has been called 'the most noxious of the lesbian vampire novels' (Faderman, *Chloe* 41), 'one of the more openly homophobic texts of the early twentieth-century' (Castle, *Literature* 703), one which denounced female-to-female friendships as 'vampirism' (Tylee 171), and recommended '*expulsion from society* of the power-hungry, sexually frustrated spinster who preyed upon innocent younger women' (Vicus 172). Critics consider it heavily influenced by the anti-lesbian nature of the early twentieth-century zeitgeist, fuelled by the sexology theories of Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, which replaced the nineteenth-century consensus that female-to-female relationships were harmless.

The dichotomy between early and contemporary opinion can be explained by the growth of lesbian criticism, sensitive to same-sex love in literature and in the life of the author. There is a growing consensual assumption that Dane's long term friendships – with Elsie Arnold, to whom

Regiment of Women is dedicated, and later Olwen Bowen Davies – were homosexual in nature, and that she dramatises and then betrays her own sexuality in the novel. Indeed, the terms of her will indicate strong ties with both women; she left everything to Bowen Davies with the proviso that Arnold should be allowed to remain until her death in the home they had once shared in St John's Wood (Hamer 87). She was also rumoured to have developed a strong attachment to a young actress, Diana Wynyard, in the 1930s. In the context of textual criticism, *Regiment of Women* corresponds with Castle's theory of the narrative structure and ethos of the anti-lesbian text, of the key pattern of 'dysphoric lesbian counterplotting', in which 'male erotic triangulation' or the rivalry between two men for the affections of one women, 'is isolated or under assault [until] homosocial desire reasserts itself [when] the lesbian bond is broken, often in marriage' (Castle, *Apparitional* 85). By charting the collapse of an unhappy same-sex relationship and endorsing the subsequent fairy tale marriage, Dane's novel prescribes marriage and motherhood as preferable to the alternative (lesbian) spinster pathway. Despite its challenge to the patriotism and sentiment of popular school novels for girls, it meets normative cultural requirements and expectations in the happy resolution worked towards in the last few chapters. Clare is appropriately defeated by Aunt Elsbeth, one of literature's legitimised Victorian womanly women who function as complacent, repressive obstacles to change by conforming to society's ideal of womanhood (Eldridge Miller 197). Elsbeth drives the marriage plot by rescuing Alwynne from Clare's selfish man-hating clutches and matchmaking her with Lumsden, and the closure resembles the

endings in Brazil and Fairlie Bruce's novels, which tended to bury girls' career ambitions and drew a 'sentimental equation of marriages with "happy endings"' (Cadogan 194).

Some lesbian critics oppose Castle's insistence that all women-to-women relationships in literature and in life are and were of a sexual nature (Castle, *Apparitional* 95), and acknowledge that many are more accurately defined as 'romantic friendships' (Faderman, *Chloe* xiii), with 'no intended implication of lust' (Tylee 172). Indeed, the text's representation of Alwynne as both a lesbian and angel-heroine problematizes critical attempts to classify the novel as a simplistic anti-lesbian text. Alwynne's sexual innocence suggests that her relationship with Clare is conceived primarily as a romantic friendship, a kind of celibate lesbianism. Statements which Dane made about her own life appear to support this reading. In the 1930s, when the press intimated that she was sexually involved with other women, she responded angrily, writing in an article that was never published that 'the thousands of normal, innocent-minded single women who find comfort and companionship in the society of their own sex have a right to protection against such fantastic and intolerable shadows of suspicion' (qtd. in Barrow 21). Many of her friends' testimonies, including Noel Coward's comment 'I think she is a little homosexual [...] but only in her mind [...] she didn't express her sexuality physically' (qtd. in Barrow 19), also suggests that her own relationships, and by implication, her fictional representations of same-sex love, were celibate. On the other hand, given that 'both living and writing openly as a lesbian required an exceptional courage right through to the 1950s' (Wachman 40), it is also possible that she kept a

homosexual life deeply hidden. The fact that she asked her literary executors to destroy all of her personal papers and information about her personal life on her death (Hamer 88), is highly suggestive of an uncomfortable secret and Nicky Hallet interprets the wording of *The Times* obituary: 'the drama she did not write [...] she found in daily living which she shared with innumerable friends' ('Miss Clemence Dane' 17), as a coded reference to her lesbian sexual activities.

Dane's concerns about what she termed the 'abnormal complications of the sex problem' (*Women's* 67-68), were more likely to have been motivated by personal experience than political conservatism. Through the sufferings of Louise and Alwynne, it is likely that the novel re-imagines Dane's own personal experience of the pains of schwarmerei, first when she was a school girl at Wycombe Abbey, and then as a young teacher in Germany, infatuated with an older colleague, Fraulein Haentzschel, on whom Clare is most probably modelled. She was 'desperately unhappy and victimised by the other girls' (Barrow 12), which she describes in *A Women's Side* as the common response to the girl with a crush (60). Her friend Fanny Butcher claimed that Dane told her that Utterbridge School was also 'a composite picture of some at which she had taught' (Butcher 298), and early reviews of the novel recognised the autobiographical element: that Clare 'must have had her semblance in the flesh for her author in the book to have seen her so intimately' ('A Book About' *Scrapbook*). That Dane's personal experience informs the novel is also intimated by another 'undated, bitter draft for an article' (Barrow 21), likely to have been written during the early 1930s, which relates 'the wrecking of a

normal girl by an older abnormal woman', referred to as 'a vampire' (ibid.).

She also discusses her acquaintance with teachers who, like Clare, were inclined to 'amuse herself and gratify her love of excitement by playing on this tendency to exaggerated hero-worship in the children and mistresses under her care' (Women's 63-64).

While contemporary critics focus on the lesbian theme and Clare's destructive role, the novel was originally interpreted principally as a progressive contribution to Edwardian cultural debates about how educational reform might solve the problem of sexual misconduct in boarding schools, principally among boys, but also within female-to-female relationships. Commentators welcomed its hopes for a 'reconstruction in education' ('Schools' *Scrapbook*) that would put a stop to the kind of girls' school which 'still retained many of the evils of forty years ago' ('New Sydenham' *Scrapbook*). Dane's rebellion was against this Victorian old-style boarding school system with its draconian educational methods. She persuaded her father to remove her from Wycombe Abbey (Barrow 12), established in 1896 as one of those 'large public schools for girls which were intended [...] as the counterparts of the leading boys' public schools of the time' (Dyhouse 56). Historical research confirms the archaic nature of the Wycombe Abbey regime which 'maintained a careful supervision of girls' social behaviour [...] particularly in matters of dress, deportment and decorum' (68). It shared with other schools of its type a system where teachers were 'extraordinarily watchful over the behaviour of their pupils [...] Chaperones were insisted on [and] girls' relationships with the other sex – even brothers – were carefully monitored' (67). Dane was not to

attend a higher education institution and does not discuss university education for women in any of her writings. Her silence on this subject perhaps suggests that she did not particularly value either her own education or her brief time as a teacher, and carved her career as a writer and painter perhaps in spite of rather than as a result of her own school experience.

Dane was personally committed to the replacement of schools like Wycombe Abbey with modern co-educational establishments to 'change our unnatural way of educating children' (*Women's* 66). In *The Times*, she put her name to an appeal on behalf of the new alternative mixed-sex Caldecott school, an establishment run on egalitarian principles with 'no domestics [...] the directors and [...] teachers sharing with the children the work of the house, the farm, and the garden', and where, 'in spite of the short "study" hours, the standard of intellectual attainment is high' ('Caldecott Community' 25). Compton Dene, noted by critics as a place where it is 'difficult to distinguish between masters and pupils: where freedom and initiative and self-respect and co-operation were the ruling characteristics' ('Schools' *Scrapbook*), was undoubtedly inspired by Caldecott. Critics praised *Regiment of Women's* 'very strong argument in favour of co-education' ('*Regiment of Women's* *Christian World. Scrapbook*) and educationalists hailed Dane as a revolutionary writer who had 'made us ashamed of the weight of unintelligent tradition and convention which kills the spirit; and raised us to enthusiasm for the fight for freedom and the individual' ('Schools' *Scrapbook*). Her modern integrationalism was compatible with her feminist consciousness and reflected the philosophy of many of her feminist peers, drawn to a system which advocated that 'girls

should study the same subjects as men' (Dyhouse 59). Vera Brittain, for instance, was strongly opposed to 'our unnatural system of separate education for boys and girls' (qtd. in Berry and Bostridge 368). Believing that single-sex education was 'the root cause of anti-feminism', she was 'determined that her children would be taught on progressive, coeducational lines for as long as possible' (370). E.M. Delafield also felt strongly about the issue and her provincial lady's adoption of a friend's forward-thinking advice to send her daughter to a co-educational school is clearly intended to indicate her openness to modern feminist ideas (*The Provincial* 129). The co-educational views of Dane and her feminist peers were sharply opposed to the anti-feminist sexologist thinking of Stanley Hall. Calling for an end to mixed-sex schools on the grounds that they were liable to feminise boys and provide girls with 'false goals in life', he feared that by bringing girls into contact with 'callow, unripe youths of their own age' they might 'lose their respect for the male sex' (qtd. in Dyhouse 124).

Dane's radical standpoint on education is not necessarily undermined in the main plot, which on close inspection is not as reactionary as it would appear. Although the conformist main narrative marks a triumph for the womanly woman over the independent lesbian, given the lack of critical consensus on the nature of inter-war female friendships and the uncertainty surrounding Dane's own sexuality, to claim that the purpose of *Regiment of Women* was to vilify all lesbians is, as Emily Hamer points out, 'an over-simple response' (84) to a novel which 'deserves rather more critical scrutiny than it has hitherto received' (88). It is indeed 'Clare's habit of encouraging women's

feelings for her, for the sake of idle amusement, that Dane sees as reprehensible, not her lesbianism *per se*' (85), and the narrative's main interest lies in its exploration of the workings of power and domination in one specific relationship rather than in asserting a homophobic ideology. Certainly Dane is perhaps guilty of supporting the prevailing anti-feminist school of thought which held that for women it was 'selfish to become wrapped up in their own interests' and that 'their ambitions should be related to social care' (Dyhouse 26), but it is selfishness and not lesbianism which is held to account in *Regiment of Women*. Clare's careless abnegation of responsibility and lack of will to channel her ambition into genuine dedication to her school and its pupils is represented as morally reprehensible. Alwynne on the other hand, who is also lesbian-identified, is the first of a succession of Dane's models of modern feminine identity; she can accommodate pre feminist ideals where Clare, her antithesis, cannot.

Clare's defeat is not necessarily a sign of anti-lesbian sentiment. According to Hamer's assessment of Edwardian lesbian fiction, 'no book about lesbians for another fifty years would have a happy ending' (84), given the 'public distaste for lesbianism and public nervousness [which] ensured that they were not published' (85). Dane perhaps felt obliged to pull Alwynne from the margins and her relationship with Clare to the centre and marriage. Furthermore, with her contention that it is generally the pro-lesbian novel which is 'almost always dysphoric in tendency' and inclined to mourn the lesbian defeat, Castle unwittingly comes to Dane's defence (*Apparitional* 86). A different and markedly pro-lesbian interpretation – that the resolution of

Clare's story is relatively positive – is also plausible. Dane's main protagonist resembles Henry James's Olive Chancellor in *The Bostonians*, who is, according to Castle, the 'first woman in mainstream Anglo-American writing to desire another woman and survive' (177). In Castle's view, Olive's survival constitutes a resistance to the norms of heterosexual realism and is a significantly pro-lesbian narrative manoeuvre, highly indicative of James's 'sympathetic reading of a lesbian character' (ibid.). That Clare is possibly the second fictional lesbian to avoid death perhaps indicates both Dane's sympathy and the influence of James' writing on her work, an influence which Ford Madox Hueffer acknowledged. An intertextual connection is also traceable in the clear narrative parallel between representations of Olive and Clare's feelings of bereavement when they lose their female beloveds to a male rival. Clare's final epiphanous self-confrontation – 'when the dawn came, she was still sitting there, thinking – thinking' (*Regiment* 345) – implies a contemplation of her failed relationship which resembles Olive's and is similarly tinged with pain and remorse. Indeed, the novel's configuration of Clare achieves the kind of textual multivalence which Castle recognises in *The Bostonians*, whereby we are 'free to regard Olive as morbid or unnatural if we wish [...] but James allows for a more humane response' as well, creating a 'lesbian tragic space' (*Apparitional* 177, 178). Parallels can perhaps be drawn here between Dane's sexuality and what Castle calls James's 'homoeroticism' which predisposed him 'to a kind of imaginative identification with Olive Chancellor' (178).

Literary opinion at the time when the novel was published recognised the text's multivalence in its treatment of Clare. The *Times Literary*

Supplement noted 'the beauty and the attractiveness of her' ('New Novels' *Scrapbook*), and *Literary World* considered that, despite her faults, it could not be denied that she was a 'highly trained and competent university woman [with] a strong personality and will, brilliant intellectual gifts, great charm [...] emotionally sensitive, tremendously interested in her work [...] an ideal teacher, even an ideal woman' ('*Regiment of Women*' *Scrapbook*). It was noted that she was conceived with far more enthusiasm than Roger: one critic observed how 'the author does not seem as happy with him as with her feminine characters' ('The World' *Scrapbook*), another that he is 'less real – far less real – than the women' and does not 'really matter as the women do' ('Book About' *Scrapbook*). Early press reviews were kind to Clare even when they disapproved of her conduct. Acknowledging Dane's '“all-roundedness” of outlook upon human life', The *Times Literary Supplement* described Clare as 'a real woman, no nightmare, no Renaissance study in pure villainy', but 'generously, justly drawn' conceived with no 'touch of spite in the portrait' ('New Novels' *Scrapbook*). Her 'very real affection' for Alwynne was also noted, in an article which also pointed to her psychological complexity, casting doubt on Roger's description of her as '“a poisonous female”', claiming that she was 'much besides' ('Book Notices' *Scrapbook*). Twenty years later the general consensus had not changed; in 1937 Margaret Lawrence wrote that 'the heroine is not treated as a melodramatic vixen, but as a woman in the grip of a complex psychiatric ailment' (368). Even contemporary lesbian criticism has inadvertently conceded the deficiency of its interpretations. Unable to keep to her position that Clare is 'a fictional *archetype*' (vi) and '*symbol* of “unnatural

passions" ' (ix), (my italics), Hennegan is forced to admit that she is also 'one of the most fascinatingly complex and subtly observed psychological portraits of a particular sort of homosexual woman [...] utterly credible, even (dare we whisper it?) recognisable' (v-vi).

Indeed, explicit disapproval of Clare's behaviour is considerably undermined by her sympathetic treatment in parts of the text. There are tacit criticisms of Elsbeth, for instance, who in some ways is just as Machiavellian. Admitting, 'I quite foresaw that Alwynne would be difficult', but adamant that she needed 'a firm hand' (*Regiment* 334), she manipulates her niece into resigning the career she loves and at which she excels in order to marry a man for whom she appears to lack enthusiasm. She accuses Clare of harming Alwynne by 'cram[ming] her with poetry and emotional literature' (336), the very literature which Dane herself so cherished. She represents the failure of Dane's vision of emancipated imaginative womanhood. Unsuccessful as a teacher and stunted by self-sacrifice, she 'knew that she was not a clever woman. She had been too much occupied, all her life, in smoothing the way for other people, to have had leisure for her own cultivation, physical or mental' (24). Clare, on the other hand, is academically brilliant, witty, modern, assertive and confident. Travelling independently and working hard in an occupation which sharpens her intellect and challenges the girls and young women in her charge, she lives the kind of life that women in the post-Victorian world were beginning to aspire to and which resembled Dane's own.

Defences of Clare's leadership and conduct are made by the novel's omniscient narrator. 'There are women to-day, old girls of the school', Dane

writes, 'who owe Clare Harthill the best things of their lives, their wide knowledge, their original ideals, their hopeful futures and happy memories: to whom she was inspiration incarnate' (*Regiment* 31). The novel registers a modernist uncertainty. After remarking, 'the Clare remembered by her grateful former pupils is not the Clare that Elsbeth knew, that Alwynne learned to know, that Clare herself, one bitter night, faced and blanched at', the narrator enquires 'which of them had knowledge of the true Clare, who shall say?' (ibid.). Dane desists from making simplistic judgments and rejects the confidence of the traditional realist text with its easy categorisations of good and evil. As well as using narrative interjections, Dane also employs a modernist narrative transparency. She 'makes no treatise of it. [...] She leaves it to tell its own story' (Lawrence 369), thus conferring a psychological realism on the text. The novel dramatizes how Clare's charm operates to get the best work out of the pupils, not to seduce them, and shows how she is largely unaware of the strain which she places on the girls and of Louise's particular vulnerability. It depicts her recognition of the dangers of intimacy which cause her to suppress what amount to motherly feelings for Louise. Occasionally she lets her guard drop, packing Louise's books in her satchel at one point, feeling genuinely concerned when she witnesses the impoverishment of the girl's family life at another. Her interior monologues focalise her anxieties and human qualities and reinforce a sense of her multiplicity. She is plagued by conscience, regret and self-recrimination over her shabby treatment of Alwynne whom 'she had come to love [...] deeply and enduringly' (*Regiment* 67), and is haunted by Louise's suicide. Unbeknown to the other mourners, she

writes 'with love' on a card that she places at the girl's graveside (192), revealing an affection for her tragic pupil which is kept from the enemies who are perhaps too quick to impugn her.

Clare's dilemma reflects a period of educational transition which saw an emerging consensus that relationships between pupils and teachers should become less affectionate and more formalised. As Carol Dyhouse observes, 'women teachers undoubtedly found some difficulties in adjusting their behaviour from the forms appropriate in a small private school to those more fitting in the new, large-scale and more formally organised institutions [and] role confusion stemmed [...] from ambivalence between the codes of behaviour appropriate to two kinds of school' (71-2). Where contemporary critics have condemned *Regiment of Women* as conservatively anti-lesbian, Edwardian critics, more aware of the kind of role confusion which Dyhouse describes, considered the novel progressive in its will to challenge the education system in order to protect boys and girls from over familiarity and worse. For novelist S.P.B. Mais, the novel brought home the uncomfortable home truth that:

those who are keenest over their work, most anxious to produce noble citizens, may all unconsciously find themselves so far tampering with human souls as to drive them to ruin. The natural corollary of Miss Dane's book would seem to prove that no teacher can afford to try to win that human companionship or

affection from the young, which is one of the most precious joys in life. ('Books' 74)

Referring to the close attachments which some pupils make with 'the chance acquaintance, the neighbour of desk and bedroom; occasionally, very occasionally, for the girl's feverish admiration usually precludes sane acquaintanceship, a mistress of more than average insight' (*Regiment* 49-50), the narrator of *Regiment of Women* also suggests that it is often the heightened feelings of the girls rather than the machinations of teachers which instigates emotional mayhem. Dane absolves the teacher from responsibility in *The Women's Side*. Recalling 'one of those charming young women [in school] with nothing at all of the vampire in her nature, but who, nevertheless, had a disastrous effect upon her pupils. She over-excited them' (*Women's* 65), she testifies that even the most well-meaning of mistresses can create havoc in the context of a school system which de-stabilises girls and unwittingly incubates relationships between teachers and impressionable pupils.

Barrow suggests that, intent on exposing her own school in her novel, Dane changed her name to avoid the possibility of 'connections [being] made between Utterbridge and Wycombe Abbey which might present legal difficulties' (22). She highlighted the school's Victorian practices as damaging to teachers and girls. Pupils who venture out unaccompanied are 'locked up in their bedrooms for three days, and nobody might speak to them for the rest of the term' (*Regiment* 220), and the school ethos involves 'prolonged and personal daily prayers', an obligation on the girls to 'learn their daily Bible

verse', and to carry a 'little note-book [...] with its printed list of twenty-five possible crimes, and the dangling pencil wherewith, at tea-time, to mark herself innocent or guilty' (108). There are a 'hundred and one rules [...] useful [...] forty years before' which now are 'obsolete, irritating, or merely unintelligible' (ibid.). The novel asks why 'nobody thought it worthwhile to question directly the entire sufficiency of a bygone system to the needs of the new century's hockey-playing generations' (ibid).

At Compton Dene, on the other hand, girls 'have everything else with the boys', except needlework and housewifery (*Regiment* 219). The antithesis of Utterbridge's overcrowding, terrifying orthodox religious practices, rigid curriculum and regime of designated crimes and harsh punishments, it has a modern relatively secular ethos, holds no truck with concepts of hell fire and brimstone, relationships between staff and pupils are informal, and the children enjoy a 'pleasant fearlessness of manner' (218). All Victorian notions of femininity whereby Utterbridge girls are counselled to 'remember they were ladies' (220) are firmly counteracted: as Alicia, one of the teachers remarks, 'I don't think they want "ladies" here' (ibid.). Nature is integral to the educational vision, and the wide sunny country spaces where Alwynne's health is restored are sharply contrasted with the claustrophobic interiors of Utterbridge. In defiance of the regulatory discipline of the normative girls' school, this modern institution promotes physical freedom and girls are encouraged to go for 'a tramp [...] by themselves – without a master or a mistress or anything' (220). While Hall held a eugenicist conviction that education should not interfere with girls' primary role – to produce healthy offspring and strengthen

the race – Dane creates a visionary system which focuses on the importance of the girls themselves and not their role, liberating them from restrictive Victorian cultural mores, putting them on equal terms and mixing them freely with boys, nurturing their imaginations, assisting their growth and fostering their autonomous identities. Clearly the novel is not, as many critics have suggested, a narrow eugenicist text. Indeed, in *The Women's Side*, Dane treats with irony 'all the doctors and politicians and preachers [coming] down upon such lazy, such self-indulgent parents who thus limit the birth rate, [crying] "a declining birth- rate means a dying nation!" ' (125-6). There is also a conspicuous absence of eugenicist rhetoric in her novel, no assertion of the supremacy of maternity or any connection made between girls' health and their ultimate role as producers of healthy offspring.

Contemporary critics assume that on account of the fact that Dane's 'elite background' meant she 'did not have a personal financial stake in the outcome of teachers' struggles' (Julien 119), *Regiment of Women* harbours a 'contempt for spinsters' (Wachman 54), especially that type of 'woman increasingly feared early in [the twentieth] century: the spinster teacher' (Hennegan V1). Early critics, however, recognised the true sympathy, generated by an author who was economically obliged to work for a living, for 'teachers whose life is one long painful grind, numbing all enthusiasm, all hope, all romance' ('Some New' *Scrapbook*). Indeed, Dane particularly admired spinster teachers 'who give up their whole lives to serving other people's children' (*Women's* 63), calling them the 'most unselfish and hard-working body of [...] women in the world' (75). Recent critical (mis)interpretations that

the novel 'concerns itself with the well being of pupils and not teachers' (Julien 119) are contradicted by Dane's comment that 'surely the system is as bad for [the teacher] as for the child she teaches' (*Women's* 74). She empathised with 'the segregated girls of the last generation' who had become 'the celibate mistresses of to-day' (73). Julien's contention that, 'remarkably at odds with the facts, she represents teachers as well off and not in need of equal pay' (119), is not sustainable either if Dane's membership of the Six Point Group, which campaigned for equal pay for women teachers, and her dramatisation of the economic vulnerability of the school mistresses in the novel, is given full consideration. When Henrietta Vigers is forced to resign from the school, the narrator interjects to make the reader understand that she faces destitution:

[she] was forty-seven when she left. She had spent youth and prime at the school, and had nothing more to sell. She had neither certificates nor recommendations behind her. She was hampered by her aggressive gentility. Out of a £50 salary she had scraped together £500. Invested daringly it yielded her £25 a year. She had no friends outside the school. She left none within it. (*Regiment* 209)

Clare is also vulnerable, and her self-interested economic vigilance is in many ways a strategy for survival. While her insecure fiscal circumstances determine that her relationship with Alwynne must be defined by hard work, Roger's patriarchal right to the valuable Lumsden estate enables him to seduce

Alwynne away from her with promises of peace and leisure. Internalising Elsbeth's taunting reminder that 'one day you'll be old. What will you do when your glamour's gone? I tell you [...] you'll die of hunger in the end' (337), Clare's tragedy is the single woman's counterpart to Alwynne's triumph of marriage and financial security.

Like other Edwardian women who assimilated older Victorian expectations that marriage and motherhood was the 'only natural course of life for women' and regarded careers for women 'as temporary measures, or as something to fall back on in case no marriage proposals materialised' (Eldridge Miller 99), Dane did not yet uphold the single woman as a role model as she would in her later writings, but she does challenge the popular prejudice fuelled by Hall who believed that 'the intellectual woman who did not find her supreme interest in marriage and motherhood was sick, sterile, likely to become a crabbed degenerate' (Dyhouse 124). She achieves this by constructing positive and agreeable spinster teachers in her novel. Miss Hamilton for instance, Utterbridge's feminist music mistress, is 'a level-headed and convincing speaker with a triumphant sense of humour', known to have participated in 'the more law-abiding forms of suffrage agitation' (*Regiment* 176). She is an attractive and well-balanced woman, avoiding destructive entanglements, behaving kindly to the girls, and earning everybody's respect. Alicia, 'full of beans [...] travelled and [...] interesting' (217), achieves an even fuller life in teaching, in the emancipated context of Compton Dene. She is perhaps intended to allay the cultural anxieties of both reader and author in relation to the quality of life for women outside of marriage, by showing what

this could be like under a more progressive school system. Believing that 'co-education [was] the way out for the master and the mistress' (*Women's* 74), because it mixed adults of both sexes as well as children, Dane compares the better circumstances enjoyed by teachers at Compton Dene with the grim reality of the lives of their counterparts at the more traditional Utterbridge School.

A feminist analysis might well conclude that Alwynne's ultimate position as Lady bountiful in the big house betrays Dane's vision of the fulfilled teacher in a co-educational school, especially given her heroine's gift for teaching. The existence of the marriage bar, however, means that she cannot continue her career and become a teacher at Compton Dene too. Dane stridently addresses the injustice of this in a defence of women teachers which is made in *The Women's Side*:

People will say – 'Oh, she has her holidays.' But what opportunities of change and travel and free social intercourse can a teacher with a couple of hundred a year and dependents have? Which, of course, brings us to the burning question of the payment, or rather, the wicked under-payment of assistant teachers. Are they fairly treated? Is it right, bearing the immense responsibility they do to the whole future life of the nation, that they should be, of common knowledge, underpaid, over-worked, denied (in practice) their right to learn their way about the big

world, to mix with their fellow-men and women, to marry and have children? (74)

Granted, this message is somewhat undermined in the positive treatment of Alwynne's destiny. From the 'struggle between sentiment and truth', which Dane noted in Walpole's novels, comes not his 'victory for artistic truth' (*Tradition* 209), but a compromise of sentimental main plot and truthful subsidiary text. The perspective of the main narrative is still compatible with Edwardian feminist thought, which advocated the rights of women and simultaneously privileged the traditional role as the ultimate route to their happiness. From the viewpoint of the radical education-themed subsidiary plot, however, Alwynne is defeated.

Regiment of Women captures the tensions of Edwardian feminism and Dane's own uncertain status as an unmarried but successful working woman, living with a female partner. Henrietta Vigers' likely destitution, Louise's suicide, and Clare's position as victim of cultural antipathy and the smug proponents of conformity, are all narrative elements which disturb the confidence of the traditional marriage closure. The novel was important in establishing a tradition of lesbian writing,¹⁵ and in illuminating the impossibility of lesbian fulfilment, the compromises facing spinsters, and the tragic limitations of the girls' boarding school. It is unfortunate that lesbian criticism has ignored its progressive political will to promote co-education in the interests of adolescent girls and women teachers, and its feminist

preoccupation with young female identity and the difficult circumstances which spinsters faced in the inter-war period.

Concealing Lesbian Desire and Debating Female Ambition in *Legend*

Tracing Dane's 'own experience [of the] cat-eat-cat [literary] world of backbiting and blatant careerism' (Schlueter and Schlueter 134), *Legend* replicates the narrative incongruities of *Regiment of Women*, containing the same struggle to endorse an unconvincing and unappealing marriage within a problematic lesbian narrative. Departing from *Regiment of Women* in other ways, it is the first of many of Dane's novels which interrogate the personal and cultural pressures which threaten female creativity, in narratives in which artistic female protagonists negotiate public and private domains. In the framing narrative, Jenny Summer recounts the events that take place a few years previously at the regular weekly evening gathering of a group of artists and writers, held at the home of her cousin and literary critic, Anita Serle. During the evening, the news breaks that the most famous and gifted among them, novelist Madala Grey, has died that same day in child birth, aged just twenty-six. Along with Kent Rehan, an old friend of Madala's, Jenny watches and listens to the discussion from the literal and figurative edge of the coterie, whose members try to piece together, from their personal recollections, the central mystery surrounding Madala's life story and the unexpectedly poor

quality of her final novel. Surmising that her work was adversely affected by the distractions of a romantic relationship, the guests speculate as to which man was responsible, her new husband, Carey, or an unidentified lover, possibly Rehan. With no strong evidence to implicate any one individual, they remain baffled by Madala's personal and professional life. The reader is invited to share Jenny's view: that Madala was fulfilled in her marriage, and the novel ends as her own romantic relationship – with Rehan – begins.

Despite its traditional closure, the novel includes modern and countercultural elements. Barrow writes that 'Winifred had always been interested in form in her work. With *Legend* and *Wandering Stars* she attempted to bring a new vitality to the form by tempting convention' (66). Breaking with formal structure, this third novel has 'no story or plot' (R. Johnson 187) and is composed of a series of subjective fragments of 'memory or suggestion' (189) which build towards a biography that is ultimately incomplete and somewhat enigmatic. Some of the jigsaw pieces point to a subversive subtext. It 'leans heavily upon the hint' (195) and a series of hidden textual clues thrown up in the course of the evening problematize Jenny's normative assumptions about Madala's marriage, generating an alternative lesbian interpretation of her life. Following her engagement, for instance, some of the guests recall Madala's uneasiness of manner and reluctance to discuss her new romance. 'She froze instantly', remembers one, 'she made no comment. She just changed the subject. But I felt as if I had been introduced to a new Madala' (*Legend* 116). Anita senses that 'there was something so furtive about it all: as if she were running away from something' (141). She

recounts how, during a visit to Madala shortly after her marriage, their discussion about feminist literature ended abruptly when Madala became excessively anxious to get to the shops before they closed to buy coffee for Carey, who is unchivalrously 'sour' (58) when he returns to find her not at home.

These apparent cracks in the romance are explained through textual nuances characteristic of the carefully veiled strategies of the lesbian narrative which insinuate that, unbeknown to Anita, she is the object of Madala's secret desire. This is implicit in Madala's response to Anita's criticisms of her inferior novel. Anita remembers how 'she'd been watching me all the time' (131) and how afterwards she cries: 'never mind Anita. Forget it! Put it in the fire! You like me. What do the books matter? [...] If I'd never written anything, wouldn't you be just as fond of me?' (131-2). She recalls how Madala retaliated against Anita's obvious inability to 'separate her from her work' (132) by rushing 'upon me like a whirlwind, shaking me by the shoulders, and crying out – "No, no, stop! You're to stop! It's me you like, not the books. I hate them. I hate all that. [...] *Don't!*" ' (133). As Madala subsequently makes to go home, Anita recollects that she turned back 'as if she wanted to tell me something and couldn't make up her mind' (136) and then, making what Castle refers to as the lesbian narrative 'surge towards the body of another woman' (*Apparitional* 11), 'she kissed me' even though, 'we never did as a rule' (*Legend* 136). One of the guests corroborates the lesbian undercurrent. She remembers a discussion about the impending wedding, from which Madala broke off and after some seconds of 'staring out of the window', enquired, 'if I'd not written

Eden Walls would Anita have looked at me?' (56). The sub-text intimates that Madala follows *Eden Walls* with a mediocre novel to put Anita's feelings to the test, and when it becomes obvious that Anita is only interested in her talent and the use she can make of it, she realises that her lesbian love is unrequited and impossible and so determines to marry Carey.

The lesbian sub-text is also insinuated through inter-textual parallels between the relationships of Madala and Anita and Alwynne and Clare. Like Clare, Anita is older than the dominated young woman in her thrall whom she is ultimately to lose, and it is intimated that she too entertains lesbian feelings, although these are deeply repressed. In response to Madala's impassioned personal questioning, her protest – 'fond of her! She knew my interests were intellectual. Fond of her!' (*Legend* 133) – seems unduly vehement and is contradicted earlier in the text by a more honest rhetoricism, 'who was the best friend she ever had [?] – even if I didn't make the parade of being fond of her that – ' (67). Significantly, she checks herself before her utterance is completed, and in the manner of many of the novel's other informants, conceals and retreats from the implications of the unspeakable truth, that Madala's demonstrative behaviour towards Anita resembled the conduct of a lover, and that their feelings were mutual. This is confirmed by Jenny, who comments, 'she had said [...] that she only cared for Miss Grey as an artist, and I believed that she believed it. But I don't think – I shall never think it true' (111).

Legend suggests that although Anita is attracted to Madala, what she really covets is not her body but her creativity. Fully aware that 'if genius is

[...] the power to give life [...] then I'm barren' (*Legend* 73) and consumed by a 'jealousy insatiable' (187), Anita is the classic literary and fairy tale 'monster-woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister' (Gilbert and Gubar 28).

Described as 'a creature convulsed, writhing in flames' (*Legend* 62), always 'seeking out fresh food' (187) and given to a 'queer movement of the head that always reminded [...] of a pouncing lizard' (22), she is fiend-like in her determination to metaphorically tear Madala 'to pieces, flesh and blood, bone and ligament and muscle' (73). Madala's death ultimately gives life and impetus to Anita's career. Her biography, *The Life of Madala Grey*, paradoxically verifies Madala's reputation while eclipsing and obliterating her by pushing her own biographical talents into the spotlight. According to one of its reviews, it 'places Miss Serle among the Boswells', (1) as it simultaneously diminishes Madala and, 'as we close its fascinating pages we find ourselves wondering whether our grandchildren will remember Miss Serle as the biographer of Madala Grey, or Madala Grey as the subject matter merely, of a chronicle that has become a classic' (2). By fixing Madala in an eternally beautiful state of stasis, the biography recalls the powerful and dangerous potion possessed by Snow White's stepmother. Like Snow White, Madala is silenced by an older woman; Anita erases her from the public imagination by omitting to include pictures of her in her book, claiming that none have survived. Her own portrait, on the other hand, is printed in all the newspaper reviews.

Despite its negative portrayal of Anita, critics would be hard pressed to brand *Legend* as a reactionary anti-lesbian novel. The lesbian plot is too deeply

hidden to constitute a didactic agenda: Anita's sexuality is maddeningly indeterminate and like Clare, she is represented more as an unfeeling woman than an archetypal *sexual*/predator. By drawing a narrative correlation between the monstrous and the selfish, rather than the monstrous and the lesbian, the novel inadvertently strengthens the case against the negative lesbian critical interpretations which have been made of *Regiment of Women*, its sister text. Indeed, while there is little evidence to suggest any hostility towards lesbianism, there is much to indicate a narrative sympathy. After all, the self-aware lesbian is not the villainous vampire-protagonist but the ideal heroine whom Dane wholeheartedly sanctions just as she did her predecessor, Alwynne. The text paradoxically dramatises the difficulties in admitting to being a lesbian in the early twentieth century while succumbing to cultural pressures to deny that lesbianism even existed. One way that this is achieved is through an 'infusion of spectral metaphors' (Castle, *Apparitional* 34), which according to Castle is characteristic of a kind of symbolism often employed by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century lesbian texts to demonstrate that 'to love another woman is to lose one's solidarity in the world, to evanesce, and fade into the spectral' (p.32). Castle notes a textual pattern whereby the possibility of lesbian love is raised and then 'obscured, disembodied, decarnalised' with 'the amor impossibilia' remaining only in 'apparitional' form, as the lesbian is either transformed into or haunted by 'a phantom or shadow' (34-36). Functioning 'as the necessary psychological and rhetorical means for objectifying – and ultimately embracing – that which otherwise could not be acknowledged' (60), Castle contends that ghosts are imagined to represent

either the undesirability or the impossibility of lesbianism. She claims that in the anti-lesbian text, these tropes specifically serve to exorcise the unwanted threat of female homosexuality by making it unreal, while in more progressively pro-lesbian narratives, the lesbian is more defiant, and ghosting is a re-embodiment, a refusal to be erased (34).

Both *Regiment of Women* and *Legend* see the spectral return of their lesbian protagonists. In *Regiment of Women*, Alwynne's mental collapse is induced by sightings of Louise's ghost, perhaps signifying the vaporisation of Clare and Alwynne's union and the expulsion of all three women from lesbian fulfilment. In *Legend*, Madala's phantom appears to Jenny at the end of the evening and the ghost trope is more fully developed throughout the narrative. Even in life, there is a sense in which Madala is never fully visible: one of the soiree guests recalls that in all of her photographs and portraits, 'you could never see her face, only a cheek curve or a shoulder line' (*Legend* 7). Anita recollects how she often referred to herself in spectral terms. On her return to her home village after a long absence, she was to declare: 'nobody remembers me. It's like being a ghost. Oh, I *feel* for ghosts' (34), and walking through the churchyard, where ironically she is later buried, she 'gave a kind of shuddering start', portending that 'someone must be walking over my grave' (46). Even her surname, Grey, indicates the nebulous and shadowy nature of her presence; indeed, the novel might appropriately have been titled *The Haunting of Madala Grey*.

Without referring directly to *Regiment of Women* or *Legend*, Castle counts Dane among those writers who employ 'dysphoric examples of the

spectral metaphor' for 'hostile and oppressive' uses (*Apparitional* 45). Certainly neither Louise nor Madala could be described as overtly defiant lesbians; once Madala has completed the process which Castle identifies, and is 'vaporized by metaphor and translated into (empty) fictional space' (ibid.), her ghost fails to affirm lesbianism as a cultural possibility and works instead to reinforce the hetero-normative script by bringing Jenny and Kent together. Madala's return means that for Jenny, 'at last made clear to me [was] my dream, my hope, my will and my desire [...] bodiless to me before that night' (*Legend* 181), as the ghost brings her to an understanding that her future lies with Kent. The novel repeats the structural pattern of *Regiment of Women* and other texts discussed by Castle, whereby an 'ultimate representational blockage' (*Apparitional* 45) prevents a lesbian triumph and reaffirms the normative heterosexual romance instead.

However, Madala's spectral reappearance is also consistent with Castle's interpretation of pro-lesbian literature as inclined to empower the returned lesbian to resist her annihilation. The ghost work counters Anita's attempts at effacement and replacement, and re-embodies Madala for the reader, preventing her and her veiled lesbian tale from being completely 'vaporised by the forces of heterosexual propriety' (Castle, *Apparitional* 7). This plot device also anticipates the focus on female lineage, sisterhood and women's special harmonious relationship, both with other women and with the spirit world, which Dane was to develop in her later writings. The novel ends with Jenny feeling 'a sense in my heart of a trust laid upon me, of an inheritance' (*Legend* 194). As Madala's favoured descendent, she is bequeathed her story, her art,

her identity and her specifically feminine literary vision. The story is framed by female continuity, signified by Jenny's account, at the beginning of the novel, of her retrieval of the one surviving portrait of Madala, Kent's own, 'The Spring Song', which she is to display in her marital 'den' (2).

Jenny and Anita are both Madala's doubles, representing the two sides of her conflicted identity. After reading *Eden Walls*, Jenny remarks that 'it was extraordinary that it knew how I felt about things' (*Legend* 12) and the text discloses how Madala practically foresaw the young girl who was as yet unknown to her, in her prediction relating to Kent's future wife. She refers to 'a woman somewhere, rather like me. [...] Me without the writing, without the outlet. She'll pour it all into loving him' (156). This comment clearly indicates the fractured nature of Madala's identity. She desires both love and success as a writer, but living in a pre-feminist zeitgeist means that her professional and personal selves are ultimately irreconcilable. Although she resembles Jenny in her traditional womanly aspiration to become a good wife, she also shares Anita's modern feminist professionalism. Beginning her career by, as Anita puts it, 'tracing a parallel between the development of the novel and the growth of the woman's movement – her old vein' (57), she inscribes progressive feminist messages into the grimly pessimistic and modern *Eden Walls*. Some introspective extracts from this novel are quoted in *Legend*. Characterised by 'startling originality and outspoken realism' (R. Johnson 188), and breaking out from the traditional narrative straightjacket of romantic fiction, they tell the story of a young woman's squalid life in New York, her fall into prostitution, and journey back to the English village of her childhood, where she discovers

that it has been spoiled by urban encroachment. A feminist fable, Anita recognises 'the wrongs, not of one woman, but of all women, of all ages of women, that burn behind it' (*Legend* 111), and admires the way that its traditional 'material', newly 'handled', had 'never been done quite so thoroughly, from the woman's point of view' (101). A traditional realist but not conservative middlebrow novel, it emulates Dane's ultimate vision, eschewing sentimentality and reaching a resolution which sees the survival of the single woman as a prosaic third alternative to marriage or death. Madala's own oppositional life choice which sees 'the writing, the work, all that made her what she was, tossed aside, for a whim, for a madness, for a man' (33) irritates Anita because it is a renunciation of the independence which marks her protégée's early life, promoted in her novel and mirrored in the resilience of her autobiographical heroine. Madala's novel signifies the kind of female autonomy which Anita values and has achieved for herself. 'I'm a modern woman, and the modern woman is a pioneer', she declares. 'She's the Columbus of her own individuality. She must be. It's her career. It's her destiny' (119). Like the heroine of *Eden Walls*, Anita rejects the Victorian womanly norms of her girlhood, resisting her mother's plans to 'have drugged me and dressed me and married me, I suppose, to three hundred a year and the city' (70). The correlation between her life and views and those of Madala and Dane herself, works to soften her role as the narrative villain.

Legend's representation of the dilemmas that Madala faces as a writer reflects Dane's own anxieties about authorship, readership, censorship and ideology. While Madala's creative courage earns her critical acclaim, *Eden Walls*

is greeted with horror by the 'British public' who feel 'cheated' and 'shocked' and 'couldn't forgive [...] the absence of a love story' (*Legend* 101). Ironically, Dane creates a writer-heroine bold enough to risk censure by refusing to make alterations to *Eden Walls* to appease the censors, while her own real novel is much more circumscribed. *Eden Walls* reverberates with Madala's own experiences, including her fall into prostitution, but when this is referred to in the main narrative of *Legend*, it is submerged deep in the sub-text, using the dash punctuation mark again, to intimate the unmentionable. Anita remarks, 'the things she told me that day. I knew she had been in America, but I never dreamed — She landed there [...] without a penny in her pocket, without a friend in the world' (35). In her final novel, *The Resting Place*, Madala retreats from the mode of feminist realism which characterises *Eden Walls*, indulging in her personal tendency to 'sentimentalism' (121) and writing the kind of 'pot-boiler' (132) that Dane objected to. A traditional 'simple and early Victorian' style text (R. Johnson 188), *The Resting Place* closes with the conventional line 'so they were married and had children and lived happily ever after' (*Legend* 120), and its inauthentic resolution reflects the heavily compromised endings of *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*. The rebellious spirit of *Eden Walls* is betrayed by the prescriptive complacency of *The Resting Place*, in the same way that *Regiment of Women* and *Legend* use intra-textual means to assert and subsequently retreat from their realist agendas, favouring romantic conclusions. Through these narrative processes, both Madala and Dane contradict their own feminism.

Among the explanations proposed by Anita's guests as they attempt to account for Madala's narrative capitulation in *The Resting Place*, or what one calls her 'descent into milk and sugar' (*Legend* 126), one interprets the text as 'a skit' (120), written in defiance of conventional ideology, which 'parodies the slush and sugar school' (128) while simultaneously conferring on 'the jam-pot public what they wanted' (120). This theory is corroborated by an explicit statement which Madala makes, announcing her intention to be 'a pioneer in my own way', to 'shock the lot of you' (119). Perhaps she deliberately writes a populist travesty in retaliation against Anita's imperviousness to her love. Using parody to rebel against popular demand for a conventional heterosexual conclusion differs markedly from Dane's strategy of incorporating a resisting sub-text, but there are similarities between their ironic methods. There is an almost direct correlation between what the salon guests regard as an unconvincingly wooden representation of the husband-figure in *The Resting Place* and *Regiment of Women's* inauthentic depiction of Roger Lumsdale, which so disappointed reviewers of the novel. Ironically undermining its womanly philosophy, *Legend* suggests that Madala and her art are destroyed less by her witch-rival and more literally by her husband and marriage: her death in childbirth contains an implicit warning of the price to pay for abnegating one's career in order to foster a womanly identity. The title of her last novel underscores this; the 'Resting Place' of marriage is also the final resting place of her death.

Legend is one of the first of Dane's texts to explore the modern crisis of role experienced by late Victorian and Edwardian middle-class women,

revealing a profound tension between normative ideology and feminist rebellion. As well as suffering the complications of lesbian desire, Madala is caught between professional ambition and creative talent and the pull of marriage and motherhood. Dane refutes the traditional dichotomy between uncontained witch and housebound angel, transforming the traditional moral narrative structure for a tentatively modern reader by condemning careerism which is untempered by humanity, while defending the professionalization of women. Madala oscillates between compliance with and resistance to, the prevailing cultural hegemony as, living in a pre-war Victorian /Edwardian culture, she cannot survive her fractured identity and is more vulnerable than her fictional descendents. Just as Alwynne's marriage to Lumsdale is undermined by the textual memory of her relationship with Clare, and Louise's suicide haunts the happy conclusion, Jenny's normative story of an awakening to reciprocated heterosexual love is undercut by Madala's tragedy of unfulfilled lesbian desire and creative obliteration.

Of Madala's cultural context, Dane is unable to configure either Alwynne or Madala as positive models combining benevolence and achieved ambition or to orchestrate the triumph of the single woman. In her later texts she eschews both the lesbian and marriage plot and shifts her focus to more positive narrative explorations of the possibilities afforded by the modern age for reconciling womanly candour with female creativity and independence. Reflecting the emancipations of the post-war world, she starts to achieve this in *First the Blade* and continues the project in her later writings.

First the Blade: Growing the Self

Maroula Joannou believes 'the relationship of women to male authority' to be one of the 'rich feminist themes' of inter-war feminist writing (129). Dane's major focus is this relationship and, starting with *First the Blade*, her work increasingly adopts the feminist agenda which Joannou identifies, employing 'patterns of resistance' (2) and 'empowering women to break free from the prison house of oppressive relationships' (128) in plots of patriarchal dominance and female rebellion. Written at the same time as *Legend*, although published a year earlier, her second novel examines the same dilemmas with regard to female creativity and womanliness. Like *Regiment of Women*, it hybridises realist and modernist form, combining prescriptive authorial interjections with the type of psychological inner monologues which Angela Smith identifies as central to the feminist modernist novel, infused with 'female [...] introspection and [...] personal, intimate prose' (A. Smith 129).

The novel dramatises the relationship between Laura Valentine and the self-absorbed and indolent Justin Cloud, to whom she becomes engaged in the course of the narrative. As in *Legend*, the events are situated in the fairly recent past and framed by the distanced reflections of contemporary character-commentators; in this text, they are the novel's fictionalised co-

authors. Autobiographical elements are similarly traceable: in the heroine's training as a painter and failure to go on to pursue art as a career, in the relationship between Laura and Justin which 'closely echoes that between Winifred and Arnold', Elsie Arnold's brother, to whom Dane was at one time engaged (Barrow 24), and in the friendship between the fictional collaborators who most probably represent Dane and Elsie.

Outside the sealed boarding school world of *Regiment of Women* the war cannot be ignored, and although it does not contain the kind of outspoken denunciation of the conflict which characterises *Adam's Opera*, *First the Blade* succeeds in registering some antipathy well in advance of the general disillusionment that set in once the full impact of the peace became apparent. Devoid of jingoistic rhetoric and nationalistic sentiment, it reflects the war-weary public attitude of the later stages of the conflict, which succeeded the general nationalistic enthusiasm of 1914. Frightened both for Justin at war and for her family and neighbourhood at home, Laura concurs with the local female consensual antipathy to the enlistment of the men of Brackenhurst village and she does not steadfastly sacrifice Justin in the spirit of patriotism. This is sharply opposed to the war-writings of many of Dane's contemporaries, including May Sinclair's *The Tree of Heaven* (1918). In contrast to the protagonist in Sinclair's novel, who contends that if her son 'went out tomorrow, and was killed, I should only feel how splendid it was of him' (163), when Justin enlists, Laura 'abandoned herself to [...] a terror beyond the decencies. She was wrenched and torn with weeping, frantic in her fear for him. He might suffer [...] die [...] be gone from her forever' (*First* 244). For

her, the war is more a personal than a national crisis and she cannot cultivate the patriotic feelings which are expected of her: ‘“England,” “Right,” “Wrong,” “Victory,” “Sacrifice.” “Our Fleet” – these were the words that could wait: it was first necessary to comprehend its personal significance’ (243). When Justin returns on leave, the novel further undermines traditional romantic ideological conceptions of war. Like her literary contemporaries who sought to expose ‘the biggest lie of that dehumanising war [which] was “I’ll make a man of any one of you” ’ (Tylee 128), it truthfully represents the psychological damage which the war wreaked. Laura notes how Justin becomes more feminised, ‘had acquired a nervous trick of the hands [he] was patently anxious to put the war out of his mind, and it was obvious that he could not do it’ (*First* 280).

First the Blade’s war consciousness is less pronounced however, than its preoccupation with issues that were often more important to women writers of the time, who focussed less on the war than on ‘the heroine’s intense and personal emotions about what is happening to her’ (Beauman 19). The period saw a proliferation of what Lorna Ellis and Jane Eldridge Miller call ‘bildungsromane’ (Eldridge Miller 116), female-authored narratives which specifically focus on the development of young women. Like other heroines in the same genre, Laura’s concerns relate to local and domestic patriarchal structures, and to her aspirations and attempts to forge a socially integrated but autonomous identity. The novel is typically influenced by a late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century model, which charts ‘the struggle to balance a heroine’s internal motivation with what others expect of her’ (L. Ellis 35-36). However, as Ellis points out, in these earlier texts the heroine learns ‘to

decrease her sphere of action or to “grow down” [...] give up those aspects of her independence that separate her from patriarchal society, and [...] find ways to reconcile her view of herself with others’ expectations of her’ (18).

First the Blade, on the other hand, is typical of the Edwardian equality feminist narratives which focus on the figure of the ‘rebellious woman’ (Eldridge Miller 4), and are infused with a ‘prevailing spirit of feminine unrest’, (*The Bookman* qtd. in Eldridge Miller) and a determination to ‘fight against the binary oppositions that reinforce gender polarisation and limit women’s choices’ (Eldridge Miller 4). Like the protagonists of these narratives, Laura is less inclined to compromise than her fictional predecessors. She breaks free from the expectations of her family and Justin’s mother – that she will marry her son – when it becomes clear to her that this relationship will be ultimately unsatisfactory to both partners.

Before her rebellion, Laura’s occupations are defined by the needs of her grandfather, Justin, and Mrs Cloud. Eldridge Miller has suggested that in H. G. Wells’ *Ann Veronica* (1909), the eponymous heroine has a ‘functionless existence, varied by calls, tennis, selected novels, and dusting in her father’s house’ (166). This is mirrored in Laura’s ‘day of virtue and housewifery [...] turning out the dining-room with Maud Ann, [...] entertaining the Vicarage [...] with tea and small-talk; and playing double-dummy, grimly, with Gran’papa all the long light beckoning evening’ (*First* 134). She struggles to conform to the rules established by Mrs Cloud’s daily example, inscribed in ‘her bible and her good little books’, wherein ‘she had her standards of conduct set up like ninepins’ in maxims such as ‘a continual dropping on a very rainy day and a

contentious woman are alike' (110). She tries to comply with Edwardian expectations that women should consider the interests of their male relatives before their own and provide a suitable environment 'in which [only] *men* could live and work' (Dyhouse, 26). In her relationship with Justin, she masters 'from the first, the trick of keeping him amused' (*First* 55), and strives to achieve the submissive quietness required, 'to exist demurely as no more than a domestic pet, with a trick of loosening his tongue for him and the still more stimulating habit of listening in intelligent admiration while it wagged' (68). While ideological associations of 'womanliness with attractiveness, softness, acquiescence', and notions that 'to be a [middle- class] woman is to focus on others, to nurture, to sacrifice' (Eldridge Miller 190), are often endorsed in *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*, they are completely overturned in *First the Blade*. At the same time however, the novel illustrates Laura's emotional commitment to her friends and relatives, who compel her into this traditional role because they know no better. Her breakdown and rebellion are complicated by a social context which she shared with protagonists in other novels in which the 'crushing burden' (Beauman 58) is inadvertently created by a 'kindly tyranny of family interest' (Robertson qtd. in Beauman 58).

However dominating he is, 'as long as she had her Saturdays with Justin she could bear it' (*First* 134), and accompanying him on his egg collecting expeditions provides relief from Laura's claustrophobic domestic role. However, much the same way as Lolly Willowes's bid to immerse herself in the natural world is compromised by Titus's 'possessive and masculine love', whereby 'he loved the countryside as though it were a body' (Townsend Warner 160),

Laura's sacred relationship with the rural landscape is spoilt by Justin's will to appropriate it, which extends to everything around him. As the narrator points out:

Interest him in a subject [...] and he had no peace until he had pursued that subject, netted it, stunned it with books of reference, stripped it of its robe of mystery, taken it to pieces, turned it inside out. And finally, when it was quite dead and done for, and its poor soul fled, he would hang up the dry bones in triumph. (*First* 69)

The obtrusive narrator is used at other points to reinforce the novel's configuration of masculine inferiority: including remarks such as 'Adam was first formed, then Eve. [...] Yet Eve, bless her ingenious, enterprising heart, is always so much more interesting than Adam' (7), and 'man generalizes, woman defines' (97). Indeed, while Roger Lumsden is inadvertently represented as a disappointing prototype of male heroism, Justin's tendencies to dismantle, 'to classify, to lock doors, to enclose' (112) – to make rational categorisations and endeavour to possess nature – are more deliberate representations of male inadequacy. His failure of imagination is the dichotomy of Laura's intuitive, conserving and open-minded femininity, 'ever querying, opening [...] up avenues' (*ibid.*).

The narrator mocks Justin, remarking, 'he positively must not have a sense of humour or he would never collect birds' eggs' (*First* 3), and he 'had

the magpie instinct that as pleasantly infantizes the ponderous male as a pink paper cap from a cracker the bald head of an uncle at a Christmas dinner'

(69). *Man Proud Man* was later to engage in the same deprecating tactic.

Dane's friend, Helen Simpson, later to become her writing collaborator, was to contribute a chapter 'Man the Magpie', on the subject of women's irritation with this popular early-twentieth-century masculine passion for collecting. In it she wrote, 'collectors are always men and frequently nuisances' (173) and 'if there is one masculine activity more than another which disconcerts and enrages women, it is this trick of collecting' (141). In the same volume, Susan Ertz was to contend that a general predisposition to collecting signified the generally flawed nature of men, writing that while women are 'made happiest by a heightening of consciousness, an increased awareness of self' (80), men seek endless distraction, to be 'taken out of themselves by the most frivolous pursuits' (79); indeed, 'to escape, to flee from himself and from reality' she claims, 'is the goal and ambition of every pleasure-seeking male' (80).

Justin destroys birds and Laura paints them; struggling to please Justin by supporting a pastime which is the antithesis of her urge to create and her passion for life and beauty, she is typical of the Edwardian literary heroine who labours to reconcile her intellectual or artistic drives with her prescribed ' "feminine" social identity' (Dyhouse 2). The tension is temporarily relieved when, like many young and unmarried middle-class women, including Woolf's Lily Briscoe and Dane herself, both of whom studied art in Dresden, Laura enjoys a brief spell at a European school of painting. Paris acknowledges her talent but her confidence is constrained by her conventional conviction that the

main purpose of her studies is to make her 'as good and as great and as wise as' Justin (*First* 78), and she is easily persuaded to abandon her studies in order to travel to Italy to meet up with him and become a companion to his mother who is holidaying there. She grieves for her lost art throughout her journey and the passing Lucerne landscape which she longs to paint becomes 'the torment of her [...] all-absorbing eyes and her itching finger-tips' (85). Her romantic inclinations win over however, and 'the words that were rung in her ears, "career," "success," "ambition," "future," could not convey their meaning, died away again as words, mere words' (83), once she is reunited with Justin. Now, 'beauty was forgotten, was a nothing, a phrase, a dead leaf. The high hills were cardboard, the sky a back-cloth and no more' (86). She justifies the surrender of her artistic ambitions, by imagining that her domestic destiny is to be equally creative:

a man has got to put himself into only one thing, painting or music or whatever it is. But a girl can put herself into whatever happens along. He has a gift for painting. She has just a gift. [...] That's the difference between men and women. You're born craftsmen; but [...] it's not the craft we care about. It's just something in us – the religion. [...] We could be just as religious over cooking a dinner. (125)

Regardless of her own essentialist beliefs, Dane rejects Laura's self-consoling tactics, creating collaborator-narrators' interpellations. One responds

to Laura's renunciation of her art studies by remarking that she was 'a painter who had just sold her birthright for [...] Justin' (85), and punctuates the narrative with comments such as '[Laura's] books were an education, and an education is more useful than pretty elbows' (19).

These prescriptive strategies to direct the reader to reject Laura's romantic fantasy are reinforced by the events of the plot. She is demoted from artist to sitter for Justin's mediocre painter friend, Oliver, who is also staying in Italy. Now reduced to the object of his male gaze and imprisoned in an inferior painting, she is further diminished by Justin's chauvinistic attitude and mediocre cultural tastes. As he mistakenly believes Oliver to be the better painter of the two, and is visibly irritated with Laura's new European sophistication, she placates him by reverting to her old self, hoping that 'if she only kept quiet and wore her old clothes' (*First* 96) their relationship might improve. Recognising that her 'opinions, negligible as he felt them to be, had always [...] had [...] a singular and uneasy effect upon him, as of undigested apples' (111), she again becomes 'quiet and sweet' (96), and so passive that 'if she had been his favourite armchair, at arm's length from his bookshelves and the back to the light, she could not have suited him better' (111). He rewards her acquiescence with a proposal that they marry, primarily so that his mother will have company when he is away on egg-collecting trips, and she responds with a womanly pledge of gratitude: 'I'll be so good to you. [...] I'll never get in your way. I'll learn cooking. I'll never read books till after tea. I'll do everything – ' (146). Egg collecting expeditions not being 'a woman's show' (148), Laura is re-confined now almost entirely to domesticity, and she prepares to spend

the coming periods of waiting for Justin's return by administering to the needs of Mrs Cloud.

Rebellion is imminent, however, fuelled by a visit from Justin's widowed sister-in-law, Coral, a positive and sympathetically conceived working-class character whose inclusion brings a progressive dimension to the narrative. Although the novel conventionally privileges Laura's middle-class imagination over Coral's working-class stoicism, her cheerfulness, sexual awareness and survivalism constitute a refreshing narrative contrast to Laura's delicacy and sensitivity. Coral is also important as the first in a series of female protagonists in Dane's novels for whom the theatre provides the means to achieve independence. A genuine friendship develops between the two women, which reveals to Laura the limitations of middle-class social prejudices and the patriarchal code. Against Laura's naive class-based defence of John Cloud – 'but he was a gentleman!' – Coral offers a deconstructive counter-judgment: 'a gentleman's just a man when he's drunk [...] same as most other times – swears the same and smells the same' (*First* 179). She knocks Justin off Laura's pedestal, responding to one of Laura's customary self-deprecating remarks with, 'not good enough? What utter rot! [...] As if a woman weren't always too good for a man. It's Justin who's lucky, I should say!' (174). Her remarks like, 'not that I'd live on a man even if he were my husband. I own myself, you know. I pay my way. Why - I've earned my keep ever since I was twelve' (176), give Laura a sense of self-worth, demonstrating that a woman might live by ignoring the rules of womanly conduct.

Justin's cloudy judgments and self-centred imperviousness to the needs and feelings of others become clear to Laura when she witnesses the effect of powerful middle-class masculinity on the lives of working-class women first-hand through observing his careless treatment of Coral. Over-absorbed in the arrival of a new bird cabinet, he fails to fulfil his promise to Laura: to write a letter to a theatre manager friend recommending Coral as an actress in his touring troupe. As a result of his oversight, Coral is obliged to take a position in Africa instead, which means that she must separate from her young son. By discounting her ambition as inappropriate to her sex and class, Justin offends Laura's growing feminist sensibilities and class-consciousness. Horrified by the crushing implications of Justin's complacent response to her subsequent reproaches: he had 'offered her a home and income. She need never see a theatre again', she comes to draw a parallel between Coral's thwarted ambitions and her own. 'Oh Sunflower', she cries, 'I've such a nice cellar for you! If you'll come and live in it, you never need see the sun!' (201).

Laura likes Coral's vernacular speech, but 'her accent [...] made Justin shudder' (*First* 172). On her sister-in-law's departure from Brackenhurst, Laura ignores social etiquette to make an emotional leave-taking at the station, and while 'she knew that Coral would expect it; she was of the class that could be genuinely moved in public', she is aware that Justin 'would shiver at the idea of Coral's farewells' because they 'might [...] culminate in an embrace', and she heartily 'wished he would be vulgar and human and uncritical for once' (204). Dane dramatises what was a key theme for inter-war women writers, also stridently voiced in *Man Proud Man*: the failure of the masculine imagination to

make empathetic connections. In this text, Simpson contends that 'the conscience of the acquisitive man is [...] numb and blind' (158), and Delafield claims that 'men are not imaginative. [...] If men possessed imagination [...] they would be forced to contemplate all kinds of things – injustices, inequalities' (48). Dane shares this contention, and shows how Justin's masculinist inability to comprehend the feelings of his social inferiors is exacerbated by his class snobbery. Justin's and Mrs Cloud's social prejudices prevent them from suspecting that the socially-inferior Coral might be a threat to their control over Laura. Mrs Cloud's comment, '[Laura] was doing Coral good. Hadn't Justin noticed how much quieter poor dear Coral had grown in manner', is playfully undermined by the narrator's interjection: 'neither Mrs Cloud nor Justin noticed how much good Coral was doing Laura' (*First* 177). Ironically, it is Coral who wields the influence, waking Laura to the fact that 'she had learned so rigidly to repress herself in speech and still more in manner' (202) and bringing her to an awareness that with Justin, she just doesn't 'count' (182).

Re-evaluating her relationship with Justin forces an epiphanous crisis which sees Laura take Coral's advice, to 'smash up his old eggs! Then you'll have some peace!' (*First* 206). Her rebellion is imagined in feminist psychoanalytic terms, ahead of the widespread reception of Freudian theory, and of Julia Kristeva's late-twentieth-century Lacanian-inflected explication of the workings of the female unconscious. The text imagines Laura's psyche as split between 'our garments, the Joseph-coats of manner and custom, of tolerance and caution and indifference, in which we clothe and conceal

ourselves', which would now be termed the ego, and 'our unchanging, unchangeable selves, old as age, young as youth, sexless, amoral, unconvinced by human logic, unbound by human laws' (231), or in modern terms, the id. Dane anticipates Kristeva's theory of the unconscious feminine self as a potential but suppressed threat to the status quo, and configures her own version of the semiotic. She writes of, that 'original self' which 'wakes up, with a rending of garments' during intense moments of psychological awakening, 'in emergency, in crisis [...] and takes charge', subsiding 'when the occasion is over' whereupon it is 'sunk to sleep again' and 'it is we – our bewildered, protesting surface selves who have to take the consequences' (231).

Laura's submerged semiotic surfaces to release its stored imaginative energy, the feminine source of both destruction and creativity. 'She was, for the first time in her life, in that mood which many women and all artists know', Dane writes, 'when the accumulated, unconscious thinking of many weeks, of many years sometimes, surges up and overflows the surface consciousness. It is in that naked hour that things -- murders – masterpieces – happen' (*First* 207). Regressing to what Jacques Lacan would later call the mirror stage, Laura confronts her rebellious pre-symbolic self in her looking-glass reflection, confronting the kind of mad or mutinous double that Gilbert and Gubar identified as a pervasive feature of women's nineteenth-century writing in *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

as she looked at the glass she realised suddenly [...] that not only was she looking at herself, but that herself was looking at her. It moved as she moved [...] yet all the while it stared at her with that air of critical comprehension that looking-glass faces have, and its thoughts, underneath its imitative obedience, shone in its eyes with such an odd suggestion of menace that she cried out to it at last, aloud -

'What is it? Oh what is it? I'm afraid -'

Its lips, moving quickly, answered even while she spoke -

'- of yourself! Actually afraid of yourself. You're afraid to be yourself, aren't you? Justin mightn't like it. [...] It's such a pleasure to oil the wheels - to be always exactly what he wants, where he wants, and when he wants. It's the delightfulest slavery.' (222)

Like Catherine Earnshaw, she is 'trapped in the distorting mirror of patriarchy' (Gilbert and Gubar 282), but, at variance with her famous predecessor, for whom the 'journey into death is the only way out', (ibid.), and more resembling Hetty Piele, her future empowered self is reflected back in the mirror. Rebellion makes her ill, but in a process which reverses the fate of the Victorian heroine, she recovers by choosing to hurt the patriarch rather than damage herself. Her psychic epiphany instigates her resistance to the easy comforts of submission and stagnation and to the 'tyrannous motherliness that is in every woman' (*First* 224). She recognises that there is a negative

power to be had in encouraging and condoning Justin's 'harmless, useless enterprises', in order that they might 'lead happy, well-fed lives [and] die at last, placidly, and be buried' knowing that 'that would be the end of them; because the spirit within them would have been stifled long ago...' (ibid.). This anticipates Woolf's more fully-theorised feminist dramatisation of Mrs Ramsay, the supportive Victorian womanly-wife in *To the Lighthouse*, whose nourishment of her husband's unchecked egotism also ensures the reproduction of patriarchal power structures. Both texts understand that Victorian women like Laura, 'so un-modern in her ways and thoughts, for all she was born in '94' (*First* 2), must make progressive efforts to destroy the 'phantom woman' or 'Angel in the House' in order for feminist progress to be made (Woolf, *Room* 285).

Unable to disguise her antipathy towards 'cruelty to parent birds, and the comparative value of a dead shell and a live songster' any longer (*First* 134), Laura shows that, as Simpson would later warn in her discussion of men's maddening collecting-habits, 'women can plan, and upon provocation commit, quite excellent murders' (174). Her act of rebellion is both creative and murderous. She kills the phantom woman to create her own life, saving it from embryonic paralysis, a fate which she shares with the bird foetuses. Desperate to avoid their destiny, 'having your insides blown out before you'd ever been born' (*First* 73), she fights for liberation and growth. Her break for independence is also paradoxically abortive, however. By effecting her complete estrangement from Justin, she denies herself the chance of life-giving, which the normative route from marriage to motherhood would have

bestowed. This conflict between womanliness and autonomy initiates Laura's complete nervous collapse. This is a necessary prelude to her growth, however, signalled by the novel's subtitle 'A Comedy of Growth' and its prefacing quotation: ' "First the blade, then the ear, / after that the full corn in the ear" – St. Mark iv.28'. Whether or not Justin achieves maturity is debatable. He is 'never the incipient Justin, the developing Justin, never grub and chrysalis and moth, but Justin Homunculus, Justin in enlargement, never Justin in growth' (4), but his experiences at the war-front do enable him to think more generously and tolerantly of others. As a modern feminist bildungsroman however, the novel is less concerned with Justin than with tracing Laura's development towards a full femaleness outside of marriage, 'into that heritage of knowledge, and instinct that is more than knowledge' (3).

The novel's opening remark, made by one of the fictional authorial collaborators, 'we should be justified in leaving them, at the end, wooed and wedded [...] in a very rainbow of happiness. And yet - I doubt' (3), insinuates from the beginning of the text that the novel intends to reject traditional modes of closure. While *Jane Eyre*, Laura's Victorian predecessor, is rewarded with matrimony for standing firm against Rochester in order to preserve her essential self, readers' expectations that Justin will realize the depth of his love for Laura, and abandon his egg collection in order to nurse her back to health and into marriage, are disappointed. Instead, the narrative endorses the message of another one of its prefacing quotations, from Walt Whitman's 1860 poem, *Leaves of Grass*: 'each man to himself and each woman to herself, is / the word of the past and present, and the true word of immortality',

pragmatically accepting the incompatibility of the lovers, and the possibility that Justin may never mature and that Laura may be left a spinster.

Laura's role is defined by the war-context as much as by her personal resistance to patriarchal norms, and the power shift within her relationship with Justin is in part attributed to his sufferings on the frontline and consequent feminisation. As Sandra Gilbert points out, the war was an 'apocalyptic turning point in the battle of the sexes' (201), and *First the Blade* is comparable to other female-authored novels of the time which dramatised a zeitgeist in which 'while men were now invalid and maybe in-valid, their sisters were triumphant survivors and destined inheritors' (209). Like the more progressive of the 'novels published during or immediately after the war [...] concerned to explore the moral and emotional confusion instigated in middle-class, non-working women by the clash between romance and the war [which] far from resembling conduct books [...] set out to [...] confront the disruptions to the romantic myth initiated by the death or absence of husbands or lovers' (Ouditt 103), Dane's text also dramatises the new and painful estrangement which occurred between combatants and women like Laura. Dane's departure from a conventional resolution reflects a feminist consciousness that was shaped by war in another way still: through the ensuing development of modernist conceptions of the excruciatingly uncertain nature of reality. Like the pessimistic standpoint which she adopted in 'The Valiant Little Tailor' and *Adam's Opera* a few years later, she acknowledges that, 'in these days a happy ending [...] would be so manifestly untrue to life, would be so consequently inartistic' (*First* 5). Anita is excited by Madala's *Eden Walls'* challenge to the

'formula [where] they are all young and beautiful, and they all die', with the heroine's survival as a single woman, because 'that's the point' (*Legend* 101), and in the same spirit, Dane consciously resisted publishers' expectations of *First the Blade*. In a conversation in which William Heinemann asked, 'do you mean to say, Miss Dane, that you are not once going to let the hero take the heroine in his arms?', she recollected later that she 'couldn't get him to see that this was the point of the story, and we were both a little shocked at each other' (qtd. in Barrow 23).

Perhaps mindful that her readers and publishers demanded a hopeful narrative outlook however, Dane falls short of adopting a completely nihilistic position, and the possibility that Justin may survive the war and marry Laura is never totally ruled out. She also uses strategies of counter-realism; the reader is distanced from Laura and Justin by the collaborators' reassurance that 'they're not real people! They're not real troubles! Only marionettes that we have set a-jig-jigging up and down our mantelpiece to make us laugh o' nights, and forget the unending war' (*First* 297) .¹⁶ In spite of its contemporaneity, Laura's tale is comfortably consigned to 'those dogmatical days' (11), a patriarchal past confidently defeated by a more comfortably modern present. In the prefacing and closing framework, the narrator addresses her collaborator from within a safe, creative, female environment, free from patriarchal interference and reflective of the independence which Dane and Arnold enjoyed together. She invites her to 'draw' the blinds 'close, lest the Zeppelins catch us at our story-telling, whilst I put the carpet to rights again and pile up the logs (we sawed them ourselves didn't we?) upon the fire. [...]

And now – you have your knitting and I the fountain-pen you gave me: [...] and fat, blank scribbling book' (1). Here, Dane celebrates her own life beyond the novel, in a home where the womanly angel has been thoroughly put to sleep. The walls create a boundary between the domestic interior where the female imagination flourishes and the external forces from which they are sheltering – the men who once would not let them chop their own logs, the likes of Justin who might at one time have compromised their growth and artistry, and the man-made war, whose Zeppelins overhead still threaten the feminine tranquillity, but from a distance only. Separating the events of the narrative from real life softens their gloomy impact and creates a feminist paradox. On the one hand, conceiving Laura's story as remote and detached from the experience of the collaborators reduces its urgency and makes the feminist agenda to reform society seem less than necessary. On the other, the contented and independent spinster collaborators provide important role models – for Dane's female readership – of shared authorship and co-operation between women.

In the manner of Dane's feminist contemporaries, Sinclair, Cicely Hamilton, Rose Macaulay and Rose Allatini, who 'chose to present their novels in the initial guise of stories of romantic love, but departed from the conventions of this genre [so that] their heroines do not finally marry the man of their choice' (Tylee 127), in *First the Blade*, Dane adopts an early twentieth-century variety of women's writing which re-evaluates the nineteenth-century romance in the light of the truth of women's experience, and challenges the assumptions of 'the social order' (128). While *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*

disguise their ideological contradictions through their romantic resolutions, *First the Blade* throws up unsolvable complications by means of its uncertain outcome. Laura is culturally stranded at the close of this second novel like the heroines of other anti-courtship bildungsromane, 'undefined, unattached and unrestricted' (Eldridge Miller 119), with an unpredictable future. Like many Edwardian female-authored novels, *Regiment of Women* and *Legend* are confined by traditional cultural beliefs, which were to weaken with the war and the onset of a more modern world, and challenges to these beliefs are confined to the sub-text. *First the Blade*, on the other hand, overtly argues with its own heroine's conservatism, and sanctions her painful development of a more modern consciousness. In this respect, it is most uncharacteristic of the middlebrow conduct-novels maligned by critics like Bracco. Sceptical about romance and war, and principally preoccupied with its heroine's psychic rebellion against patriarchy, it is far more explicit in its challenge to normative ideology than either *Legend* or *Regiment of Women*. Yet all three novels share an underlying sympathy for single and particularly single artistic women, and anticipate the challenges to the traditional marriage novel which developed in Dane's 1920s and 1930s fiction.

CHAPTER 3 FANTASTICAL FICTION AND FEMALE VISIONARY EXPERIENCE

We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal: but the things which are not seen are eternal.

-II Corinthians (Epigraph. The Lover n.p.).

In the 1920s, the literary marketplace 'positively embrace[d] the supernatural and paranormal' (Moody 80) and many middlebrow writers, including Dane, 'abandon[ed] realism for fantasy and other non-realistic forms' in this period (Lucas qtd. in Wallace, 'Uncanny' 33). Shifting from realist text to ghost story in its last few pages, *Legend* marks the beginning of a decade of writing during which Dane conducted her explorations of female consciousness and

psychology in fairy tales, ghost stories and gothic novels, texts which can be grouped under the umbrella term of fantasy, 'a literary mode from which a number of related genres emerge' (Jackson 7). One of these texts is *Wandering Stars*, a realist novel about the staging of a fantastical play, published together with *The Lover*, a novella version of the play itself. Dane went on to write another generic hybrid in four separate volumes, *Third Person Singular*, *Midsummer Men*, *Creeping Jenny* and *Lady Babyon*, brought together by Heinemann in 1928 as one text, *The Babyons: The Chronicle of A Family*, and commended by the *Times Literary Supplement* as a 'mixture of the fantastic with the real [...] convincingly done by Miss Dane's accomplished pen' ('Babyons' 78). She also wrote a series of supernatural, or what Rosemary Jackson terms 'marvellous' (7) short stories, including 'Spinsters' Rest' (1926).

Dane's choice of epigraph for *The Lover* signifies a commitment to the intrinsic reality of magical worlds and spectral visions, reflecting her personal belief in a spiritual existence beyond the empirical.¹⁷ This was not an unusual or particularly controversial position to adopt: in the otherwise cynical 1920s, there was an increased interest in spiritualism. S.M. Ellis in her 1923 review of ghost stories, for instance, refers without scepticism to 'an authenticated case [...] where the apparition touched a woman's arm, which immediately became paralysed and remained useless for two weeks after' (1001). Dane's supernatural writing emanated both from her personal spiritual conviction and from her professional interest in a healthy middlebrow. She approved of the injection of middlebrow gothic into modern literary culture, writing, 'it is easy to believe that the modern English novel, which is suffering so severely

nowadays from specialists, highbrows, and cranks, will benefit as thoroughly from its course of Edgar Wallace [...] and M. R. James as it did a century ago from its dose of Monk Lewis, Maturin and Mrs. Radcliffe' (*Tradition* 28). She goes on to acknowledge the authorial wisdom of meeting the demand for gothic stories made by the contemporary reader, who had 'politely called the attention of the principal writers of his day to his just needs' (ibid.).

Writing the marvellous enabled her to do more than affirm the reality of the unseen and the validity of the supernatural genre or jump on a literary band-wagon, however. She satisfied the public taste for the supernatural while reflecting the exigencies of modern womanhood. Indeed, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's observation that Daphne Du Maurier 'was able to explore through Gothic writing the anxieties of modernity in the kind of fiction many people find accessible' (188) could have been made about *The Lover*, 'Spinsters' Rest' or *The Babyons*. Dane's protagonists are not subject to the little everyday domestic oppressions and problems with servants which depress the heroines of *Rebecca* and other middlebrow texts, such as E.M. Delafield's 1927 novel, *The Way Things Are*, but they have heavier modern burdens to bear. In 'Spinsters' Rest' a shortage of marriageable men leaves the protagonist 'on the shelf', and so prevented from having a longed-for child, and *The Lover* and *The Babyons* are the first of Dane's texts to correspond with domestic modernist explorations of marriage, as 'the subject of rather than the solution to the plot' (Briganti and Mezei 18-19). *The Lover* reflects a time of 'growing divorce statistics' (Humble 227) and a 'relaxation of sexual taboos' (238), whereby 'sexual experience outside marriage is newly presented as a

commonplace part of women's lives' (231). It dramatises the plight of a woman threatened by these new sexual freedoms and recent divorce-legislation, which enable another woman to become her husband's mistress and attempt to break apart her marriage. The heroine of *Lady Babylon* also negotiates her status in an unhappy patriarchal marriage, but in this text she ultimately redefines herself as a single woman. In contrast to the emotional satisfactions of popular literature, in the highbrow and some elements of the middlebrow market, post-war pessimism had engendered a certain 'horror of "gush" or "tosh", of the emotionality with which the pre-war bourgeois woman had been burdened' (Light 161), which suited Dane's personal feminist commitment to eschew the 'sob stuff' in her writing, already proven in *First the Blade*. She was disdainful of popular romantic stereotypes, surviving 'in every popular magazine that you open, and in every light novel where the plain little typist who slaves for her family is married to the head of the firm' ('Things that go' 32). In her fictional narratives she deliberately disappoints normative expectations that a woman's ultimate happiness lies in marriage.

Dane's feminist vision was reinforced by her psychic confidence. In all three texts, she conceptualises the supernatural to claim the existence of a feminine-inflected spirit world with utopian possibilities for women. Fictional ghosts are not necessarily revenants of the dead; they can also be 'spirits [of] living men' or 'the ghost-soul or *Doppelganger*' (Briggs 12), and *The Lover* dramatises the empowerment of her heroine through her encounter with the apparition of a living man. In *The Babyons*, the ghost story genre – considered by Diana Wallace to be a subversive female writers' form¹⁸ – is combined with a

type of female gothic sometimes called feminist gothic or gothic feminism,¹⁹ which critics such as Ellen Moers (126), Anne Williams (103) and Kate Ellis (xiii) consider a radical female mode of writing.²⁰ 'Spinsters' Rest', a marvellous text, written in a genre also known as literature of estrangement, is a fairy tale appropriation which anticipates the overtly feminist magic-realist writing which emerged later in the twentieth century. The outcomes of Dane's supernatural plots liberate her heroines in ways that were not achievable in her earlier realist texts. While the everyday context inevitably limits *First the Blade* to an uncomfortably uncertain conclusion, in her subsequent fantastic narratives, reality-defying transformations open up time and space to create places where Laura's successors can evade the oppressions of the repressive cultural order. As specifically feminine eternal dimensions in opposition to the real and tangible controlling world of the masculine symbolic, their fairy and ghostly domains call to mind Julia Kristeva's semiotic.

Dane's marvellous texts can be usefully compared with the gothic and fantastical writings of some of her middlebrow contemporaries. There are particularly striking similarities in plot and theme between 'Spinsters' Rest' and Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926), *Lady Babyon* and Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), and *The Lover* and May Sinclair's short story 'The Villa Désirée' (1921), which like 'Spinsters Rest' was published in Cynthia Asquith's 1926 compilation of short stories, *The Ghost Book*. Both 'Spinsters' Rest' and *Lolly Willowes* are feminist by virtue of their specifically female pagan vision. 'The Villa Désirée' on the other hand, defends the kind of masculine power which *The Lover* challenges, and while *Lady Babyon* interrogates

normative 1920s constructions of womanhood, *Rebecca* works to support conservative definitions of female identity. Less grounded in the real world than these texts by other writers, Dane's work is distinctive in terms of the claims made for the intrinsic truth of spectral visions, and for the crucial importance of psycho-spiritual knowledge and encounters with the unseen to the process of her heroines' empowerment.

Telepathic engagements with ghosts of the living in *The Lover* and 'The Villa Désirée'

The Lover exemplifies the gothic convention of 'transition from mind to matter' (Todorov, qtd. in Jackson 50). Hetty Piele, a middle aged woman trapped in a traditional marriage, endures empty days broken only by daily visits from her emotionally-distant female neighbours. They find her dull in comparison to her talented husband Harry, a successful businessman with aspirations to stand for parliament, who lives and works in London for most of the week. Having no children and anxious that she has failed to fulfil her prescribed womanly role, her marriage is further endangered when Harry becomes involved in an extra-marital relationship. Contemplating suicide one night, Hetty is distracted by the appearance in her bedroom mirror of a phantasm in the form of Harry as the young and ardent lover, who to her he once was. She falls in love with the apparition, pulling it into the room and subsequently wandering with it at night

through the grounds of the house. The combination of witness-accounts and her newly invigorated and youthful appearance makes her the subject of the village's speculation. This arouses Harry's suspicion and he responds by discarding his lover and refocusing his rekindled affections on Hetty. Deciding to confront her one night, as he mounts the stairs to their bedroom, he hears her laughing with her lover on the other side of the door. She then releases the phantom, and on entering the room with intent to challenge the interloper, Harry finds nothing in there but a shadow. Reassured, he becomes reconciled with Hetty, becoming the loving husband in reality which she has only been able to create in her fantasy.

The story is informed by Dynamic Psychology, a science of the mind which had widespread currency in the early part of the twentieth century, evolving from what was a particularly Victorian 'intense interest in spiritualism, as well as a developing cultural interest in psychological phenomena' (Moody 78). According to George M. Johnson, one of the hypotheses of Dynamic Psychology was that the mind was capable of 'exerting psychic energy on mental processes' (2), creating 'psychic reality, as distinct from material, external reality' (3). This was manifested in literature and in the ghost stories of May Sinclair in particular, as 'psychic phenomena [...] metaphor[s] for projection of inner states' (107). The phenomenon is dramatised in *The Lover*, suggesting Dane's familiarity with conceptions of Dynamic Psychology in its most popular forms. She was also familiar with the 'Freudianism without Freud' which eventually eclipsed Dynamic Psychology and 'informed a great deal of middlebrow women's fiction between the wars' (Humble 228). She describes

Hetty as a 'simple woman who knew not Flammarion', a popular inter-war psychic investigator, 'and had never heard of Freud' (*Lover* 5) and in *Good Housekeeping*, she alluded to the 'subconscious' ('Faerylands' 152). Not an admirer of popular Freudianism – she was dismayed that the otherwise 'brilliant modern borderland fiction' of her time had been 'influenced by the craze for psycho-analysis' ('Autumn' 143) - elements of Freudian psychology are nevertheless traceable in *The Lover*.

The doubling of Harry in the form of Hetty's disembodied lover evokes the 'mirrored reflections or shadows' of Freud's uncanny (Armitt 50).

Furthermore, although *The Lover* predates Lacanian and French feminist psychoanalytic theory by half a century, interpreting the text from these later perspectives reveals a feminist consciousness at work at a sub-textual level.

The story recalls the process by which the infant self passes from the fulfilled imaginary to the constructed symbolic world of normative values and legalised constrictions, key to Jacques Lacan's mirror-phase and a 'central image of the literary fantastic' (46).²¹ Hetty re-experiences the mirror-phase trauma, the shattering of prior illusions of completeness, the forced 'recognition that one not only sees, but is also seen, that "I" the subject, am also an object' (Williams 154) and ultimately lacking. Like Catherine Earnshaw and Laura Valentine before her, she 'caught with a sense of shock a sight of herself in the mirror on the wall' (*Lover* 12); in her case, she sees an alien jaded middle-aged construct, a picture of failed womanhood:

Mirror and moonlight exposed her cruelly. She realized for the first time that the years had sharpened her features, that the faint almond-blossom flush of her girlhood had set and dried into the skin about her cheekbones, that her grey hair and girlish figure cancelled out each other and left her ineffectual, unimpressive, a poor wraith of the nineties in a modern frock. With trembling lip and no pride at all to help her she translated what she saw into her own simple phrases.

I'm growing ugly – she thought – ugly as well as old. [...] It's no wonder I bore him, poor Harry! He's taken and taken and taken until I'm empty. (*Lover* 12-13)

Hetty's is a distinctly gendered anxiety, generated from her place in a culture in which 'nothing separates female experience from male experience more sharply, and more early in life, than the compulsion to visualise the self' (Moers 107). The 'self-disgust, the self-hatred, and the impetus to self-destruction that have been increasingly prominent themes in the writing of women in the twentieth century' (ibid.), is clearly evident here in Dane's text.

Where Catherine Earnshaw can only regain her authentic and original self in death however, in *The Lover* the mirror-phase is dramatised in reverse, and Hetty experiences a positive psychic regression from the symbolic back into the imaginary. As 'her tears blurred the sight of her own image' (*Lover* 13), she divides into two selves, an aging woman struggling in the symbolic, and a youthful version who joins an effeminised and compliant fantasy-lover in

a magical realm of completeness and fulfilled desire, free of the cultural restraints of the real world. Like *First the Blade*, *The Lover* dramatises the subversive possibilities of psychic life, more recently identified by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva hypothesises that: 'the split subject [or] our position within the symbolic is continually displaced and destabilised by the fantastic possibilities of the semiotic. This, just like the uncanny itself, continues to threaten and disrupt, haunting the order of the symbolic with its irrepressible phantoms' (qtd. in Jackson 4). *The Lover* symbolises Kristeva's dark, feminine semiotic through textual configurations of the moonlit woodlands and night-garden as semiotic spaces of unfettered female desire. At the same time it replicates tendencies in domestic modernist writing to feature houses and domestic routines and trappings as dominant metaphors for constraining norms and social expectations, which are either internalised or resisted by female protagonists. In her fantasy existence, Hetty inhabits outside places, defying her real patriarchal husband, who, in the oppressive heat of rational daytime, presides over the masculine-controlled house. Rebelling against his directive: 'you'll come to bed' (*Lover* 23), she responds, 'I *am* going out, Harry. The moonlight's too mad to miss' (24).

Dane's appraisal of Hetty's rebellion and her relationship with Harry corresponds to a 'radical reassessment of [...] the romance that had been at the centre of previous literary conventions' (Humble 198), characteristic of middlebrow fictional responses to the trauma of the First World War and to new gender roles. Harry is absolved from narrative censure because Hetty's romantic aspirations are partly responsible for the failure of the marriage. Both

partners are victims of her romantic expectations. Having fashioned him in her imagination as a romantic object of almost religious worship, she fails to see him as a real and aging man, and considers, rhetorically, 'what had this flesh and blood to do with the dear likeness that she had received into her heart, that hung there still, the altarpiece of a chapel ardent?' (*Lover* 4). She separates her husband out into the real middle-aged, corporeal and disappointing Harry who 'was flushed and flabby, and breathed noisily in his sleep' (ibid.) and the younger version of her memory, transmuted into spectral form. Her phantom lover brings her to a truer understanding of her marriage. He points out, 'he and I, we were one man, one ordinary man. Good enough, you know. Good enough to go round. But you, you wouldn't believe that. You left him nothing. You took the best of him out of him, out, away, into yourself' (19). Hetty comes to recognise that she must adjust her expectations if her marriage is to survive.

The textual re-evaluation of romance includes a reconsideration of the role of the traditional male hero, also a feature of women's middlebrow writing in this period. As Alison Light notes, Du Maurier's work contained, 'no wholly admiring picture of English masculinity such as thrilled the readers before the war' (170); both Du Maurier and Agatha Christie represented their male protagonists as full of self-doubt, and prone to nervous illnesses. The war had rendered it 'no longer possible to be properly male' (Light 7), and Harry is typical of the 'newly emotional, psychologically wounded man [which had] become the masculine prototype for the middlebrow woman's novel' (Humble 200). Recalling the shell-shocked Justin Cloud, he is another somewhat

diminished object of female desire who loses his sense of mastery in the course of the narrative, and comes to resemble his 'colourless suburban' counterparts, figures identified by Light in texts by other female writers (124). As Hetty becomes more remote and he comes to value her more, his status in the relationship collapses and his formerly safe world of traditional gender relations is overturned. Increasingly insecure, uncertain, ill and tired, he recognises 'how small he was, how lonely' (*Lover* 68), that, 'Hetty lost to him [...] was the loss of himself, of his own soul' (72). His self-hood becomes entirely determined by his wife's regard, and while she starts to become whole for the first time, he suffers a crisis of identity. Dane employs modernist techniques of multiple perspectivisation here, providing Harry's point of view as well as Hetty's, to give the reader an insight into his tortured consciousness. As Hetty's confidence grows and her introspective musings cease, the closing sections of the narrative become dominated by expressions of Harry's self-doubt, mirroring Hetty's anxious interior monologues which marked the story's opening passages.

The Lover reflects the specifically modern cultural and legal context. The short supply of men and the 'sexual adventuring of the post-war generation' (Humble 216) meant that women like Harry's mistress were in a good position and had a strong motive to replace unwanted wives without transgressing hegemonic values. However, women were now also more able and inclined than before to break out of marriages which did not give them emotional satisfaction, or refashion them more to their liking (Bingham 239). Accordingly, Hetty comes to view her marriage with a sardonic detachment, recognising

how 'so far had she come in the last year from the blackest night of her life that she could label their misshapen relationship comedy, not tragedy now' (*Lover* 58). Once she shrinks her imaginative romantic conception of Harry, she is able to release the spectral representative of his younger virile self and accept the flesh-and-blood version as the defeated middle-aged man in need of her sympathy and protection that he has become. Before the concept had been formally identified,²² and a decade before its representation in literature would 'become matter of course' (Light 18), the text demonstrates a modern enthusiasm for an emerging new marriage model, the 'companionate partnership' (ibid.), the 'antithesis' of romance (Humble 215). Hetty draws on her female imagination to enter the semiotic and reclaim a best self, returning to the symbolic with the confidence to end her oppression, recast her marriage along modern companionable lines and re-address the balance of power to her advantage.

There are strong parallels between the fantastic scenario dramatised in *The Lover* and the psychic experience of the heroine of May Sinclair's 'The Villa Désirée'. Sinclair was more fully committed to the actual scientific principles of Dynamic Psychology than Dane. She was a member of the Society for Psychical Research from 1914, and through her association with the Medico-Psychological Clinic in 1913, she also came into contact with Freud's theory of the uncanny. The significance of the fact that she called one of her collections of short stories *The Uncanny* is noted by Paul March-Russell in his 2006 introduction to the text (10). Sinclair is well-known for her fictional application of Dynamic Psychology, and her 'evocation of the supernatural [which]

combined a Freudian awareness of symbolic displacement with a Jamesian projection of ghosts as representing states of mind' (Seed, qtd. in Wallace, 'Uncanny' 61). Like Dane, she admired James' work, whose inscription of ambiguous ghostly appearances, interpretable both as supernatural events and the projections of a troubled mind in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), firmly established the place of the uncanny in the modern novel. She compared the unconscious to an inexorable force of nature. 'Our psychic life', she wrote, 'is not a water-tight compartment, but has porous walls, and is continually threatened with leakage and the flooding in of many streams' (qtd. in G. Johnson 111). Dane employs similar natural metaphors – of flame and watery deluge – to dramatise Laura Valentine's mental epiphany in *First the Blade* and Hetty's more overtly psychic experience in *The Lover*. Through the 'hard trodden surfaces of [Hetty's] nature' (*Lover* 5) or her culturally constructed outer self, the imaginary leaks through 'the small cracks [...] ever reappearing through which would spurt up from the depths odd fumes and flickers of phantasy or surmise or belief' (ibid.). Referring to one of Sinclair's *Uncanny Stories* as 'great art' ('Things that go' 138), it is likely that Dane was influenced by Sinclair's text when she wrote *The Lover*.

Like *The Lover*, 'The Villa Désirée' also addresses modern cultural themes and pressures, and undermines the outmoded concept of the romantic hero. In the text, Mildred Eve is enthralled by her fiancé, Louis Carson, and persuaded by his 'personal magic, the fascination of his almost abnormal beauty' (2) to holiday with him in the French Mediterranean, in a respectable arrangement whereby she will stay in a villa that he owns there and he,

making the same journey the following day, will sleep in a nearby hotel. On her departure from England, he 'thrust his face forwards and kissed her feet [and] as the train moved he ran beside it and tossed the roses into her lap' ('Villa' 3). Mildred is ultimately made to look beyond this kind of empty courtship masquerade when she is faced with the reality of a male sexuality which, the text intimates, his romantic gestures seek to conceal.

Mildred is met at the station and taken to the villa by her friends, Rolf and Martha Deering, who are co-incidentally honeymooning in the same area. The antithesis to a traditional couple, their easy camaraderie is sharply contrasted with Mildred and Louis' destructive romance. In some ways, their modern marriage evokes Hetty and Harry's re-evaluated union and anticipates relationships in 1930s detective fiction, which were 'figured in almost entirely comradely terms' (Humble 210). Modern, cynical, and deeply suspicious of Louis' motives, they work like a detective partnership to uncover his sexual machinations. Discovering that he 'was always having women with him' at the villa, ('Villa' 14), and 'the young [...] bride' who had reputedly died there 'hadn't been his wife' (10), the couple pick up on the sensual odours and atmosphere of its rooms, the clinging feminine curves of the 'French and fragile [...] gilt chairs and settees carved like picture frames round the gilded cane', and the 'hot light [which] beat in through the long windows open to the terrace, drawing up a faint powdery smell from the old floor' (4). Mildred's naive observation, 'it does look a little queer and – unlived in', meets with Martha's modern and worldly rejoinder: 'I should say [...] it had been too much lived in, if you ask me' (5).

The villa's rooms and furnishings warn of the sexual fate which awaits Mildred there. She declines her friends' offer to put her up at their place, and as she settles down for the night, a phantasm of Louis appears to her in a grotesque form, with apparent intent to rape her. She escapes to the Deerings', resolving to return to England and to have no more to do with Louis, and the next morning receives a letter from him, announcing his arrival at the hotel the night before and his plan to come up to meet her at the villa later that day. The story ends with Mildred's attempts to contest Rolf and Martha's opinion that her night-visitor must have been the real Louis, and to challenge their 'stolidity, their unbelief' ('Villa' 15) with her own contention: that her experience had been a psychic event, a telepathic warning. The Deerings' prosaic and logical interpretation of the visitation as an actual appearance from Louis discredits not only Mildred's spectral experience but Sinclair's own solid psychic faith, and it is quite possible that the author intended to satirise the couple as spiritually empty moderns, types which were generally much derided in middlebrow fiction.

Sinclair's approval of Rolf and Martha is open to question in other ways. On the one hand, their disclaimers of romance mark a deliberate tendency to underplay the closeness of their relationship, a middlebrow convention by which 'the reader is expected to pick up the strong emotional subtext' and 'reticence [...] becomes the key guarantor of emotional- and – especially – romantic authenticity' (Humble 210). They are perhaps, however, *too* 'detached and cool in their happiness' ('Villa' 4). Dismissing the honeymoon period with 'what rot! We've got over *that* silliness. Anyhow, it's our third week

of it' (ibid.), they reveal a lack of sexual intimacy which is not necessarily sanctioned in the narrative. The Deerings' objections to Louis' conduct at the villa with 'not particularly nice women' where, 'he seems [...] to have been rather an appalling beast' (ibid.), suggest that Mildred has had a lucky escape from the kind of debauchery which it seems her predecessors were subjected to, and the story can be read as moral fable about the need to be vigilant in protecting one's chastity. However, there is also an implication that the narrative is not concerned to uphold conventional moral decency. The eroticised description of the bedroom, 'like a great white tank filled with blond water where things shimmered, submerged in the stream; the white-painted chairs and dressing-table, the high white painted bed, [...] all vivid and still, yet quivering in the stillness, with the hot throb, throb of the light' (5), evokes a mood of female sexual anticipation. The title of the story also implies that the villa is the locus for female desire as much as for Louis' perversions. Furthermore, despite Mildred's professed terror and her disgust with the 'frightful and obscene' nature of masculine sexuality and its 'unearthly abominations' (12), her resistance to the phantasm's sexual advances contains orgasmic connotations: she 'struggled against wave after wave of faintness; for the moment that she lost consciousness the appalling presence there would have its way with her' (ibid.).

The ghastly phantasm can in fact be viewed as a symbol for Mildred's unhealthy sexual frigidity, and the narrative as a whole as a warning against the failure of sexual courage and unwise repression of illicit desire. This interpretation is particularly plausible given the messages inscribed into

Sinclair's other writings. Gwendolen's self-denial and consequent breakdown in *The Three Sisters* (1914) for instance, recalls her earlier text, *The Helpmate* (1907), which, according to Jean Radford, 'made a major assault on the Victorian stereotype of the sexless angel in the house', reflecting the author's belief in 'the importance of sexual drives and the harmful effects of sexual repression' (vi). In another story, 'Where Their Fire is not Quenched' (1921), repulsed by the sexual nature of a relationship which she had hoped would develop more as a spiritual union, the protagonist is punished for denying her sexuality in a particularly appropriate fashion. When she dies, she enters a hell of her own making, running eternally from her lover's advances and brought at every corner to an ever-repeated onset of sexual assault. Like Sinclair's other frigid heroines, Mildred values the 'mystical union' ('Villa' 2) which she falsely believes she has with her lover. Surveying herself in Louis' mirror, she is 'angry with the face in the glass with its foolish mouth gaping' (9), rejecting the phantom's invitation to her to transcend her unyielding conventional mirror-reflected self. While Hetty's encounter with the mirror returns her to the imaginary and liberates her, Mildred rejects the returned repressed, declines the modern erotic possibilities symbolised by the visitation, and chooses to remain imprisoned within her socially-constructed identity on the terra-firma of received sexual morality.

For Dane and Sinclair, Dynamic Psychology provided a framework within which to explore the modern anxieties of their female protagonists. Their psychic stories see the return of the female repressed in the form of phantasms which rescue them from their worst fears: sexual cruelty in 'The

Villa Désirée' and a precariously powerless existence within a loveless, faithless marriage in *The Lover*. Dane avoids controversy by making a sympathetic representation of her male character and understating the sexual nature of Hetty's desire which remains confined within the legitimate bounds of marriage. Where Sinclair sub-textually supports masculine sexuality however, and Mildred's rescue and retreat reduces her to the kind of 'weak person who fails to overcome circumstance in order to attain individuation' which George Johnson observes in some of her other work (142), by returning Hetty to the female semiotic and diminishing the power of the feminised husband in *The Lover*, Dane performs a greater act of narrative rebellion against the patriarchal order.

Sanctuaries for Single Women: 'Spinsters' Rest' and *Lolly Willowes*

With the exception of her 1930s detective novels, *The Lover* is the last of Dane's texts to temper its rebellions with a continued faith in marriage as a means of fulfilment for women. Subsequently, her work sanctions a single life for her female protagonists; at the close of their narratives they are redefined positively as unmarried, divorced or widowed, and the development of her feminist consciousness can be traced through her increasingly sympathetic treatments of what Maroula Joannou calls the ' "dame seule" theme' in literature (85). 'Spinsters' Rest' can be situated within a modernist feminist

short-story genre, wherein the concerns of 'peripheral members of society' are voiced (A. Smith 163). The text uses a feminist strategy identified by Elizabeth Maslen in her discussion of the fiction of Naomi Mitchison, who 'goes into fairy tale mode to disarm us' (Maslen 39), in a context in which 'matters which could not be located in contemporary Britain could reach readers if they were situated in the [...] realm of fable or fantasy' (4). Although this literary device had been adopted by some of the more radical of her Victorian predecessors,²³ Dane's revision is a culturally specific modern revision of a fairytale - - the Grimm brothers' 'Mother Holle', or 'Mother Hulde' (1909). This tells of a girl's journey to a magical land, where her virtue is rewarded by an old woman who bestows her with gifts to sustain her in back in the everyday world. In Dane's version, the focalising point of view is held by Mary Pawle, a single London-office clerk in her late twenties. Her life is typical of a new generation of inter-war working woman, but far from feeling emancipated, she finds her work menial and monotonous. In addition, having been recently jilted by her lover, she feels she is damaged goods and out of the marriage market, and her social status has dwindled. To escape her miserable city life, Mary becomes a paid companion to an old woman in a big country house called Spinsters' Rest. One of her duties there is the supervision of a group of underprivileged children, who come from London once a year for a party given in the grounds. One boy, a cripple, goes missing during his visit, but as none of his relatives care enough to make a fuss, his disappearance is not properly investigated. Mary is intrigued at having last seen him ascend the staircase of the house during the party, just as she sees the daily charwoman do every Sunday morning, not re-

appearing until the end of the day. The old woman reveals to her that the two disappearances are into a magical rural place, and she gives Mary permission to make the same journey. One day, while exploring the enchanted space, the old woman, conjurer of the vision, suddenly dies and Mary is transported back to the ordinary common garden at the back of Spinsters' Rest. She prepares to return to London with a sad heart, but while she is looking round the house for the last time, she sees the lost boy sitting on a windowsill, and takes him back to the city to live with her, fulfilling her heart's desire.

Mary is healed by the presiding secular successor to a series of abbesses and an original pagan goddess. Spinsters' Rest has long been a sanctuary for distressed single women, and as Mary's landlady informs her, 'there's always been a lady living there' ('Spinsters' ' 172), 'a friendly person' (171). Once a nunnery managed by a kindly medieval abbess, the house evokes the fictional convent inscribed in many women's texts, an 'object of desire [...] an attractive, and sadly lost, alternative for single Protestant women [...] a place of refuge' for those with 'no means of financial support', characterised by 'good works that women in positions of authority could accomplish' (Delamotte 162). Before it was 're-sanctified [...] as a Christian fane' however ('Spinsters' ' 173), Spinsters' Rest was a 'temple in Roman times, of – Minerva, possibly' (ibid.). Of the two accounts given of the history and nature of the house, Mary's landlady relates a pagan version, about a benign non-Christian female lineage, which has survived through its inscription in local folklore and gossip: 'not board-school, miss, but – well, they say so, hereabouts' (ibid). The local rector tells Mary the official version, that there is

no evidence of female pagan activities, due to the fact that 'in the sixth century [...] all records were obliterated' and that the only certainty is that it was 'a nunnery in later years' (ibid.).

Rather concerned that the present occupier is 'not (he lowered his voice), a communicant' ('Spinsters' ' 173), the rector utters the official word of the father, speaking on behalf of patriarchal religion, one of the key institutional metanarratives which Foucault has identified as a means of cultural and social control. The discourse surrounding the house tells of the erasure of pagan female tradition from history, a history which Dane seeks to reinstate. She spoke out against the more conservative and misogynistic elements of Christian doctrine on many occasions in *Good Housekeeping* and elsewhere in the press,²⁴ and openly challenged the desecration of pre-Christian female pagan mythology just months before 'Spinsters' Rest' was published. She alerted her readers to 'the accounts of the fierce persecution of wise and beautiful heathenisms', which 'make one ready to cry for the images defaced, the books burned, the lovely legends mutilated' ('Mother Night' 114). She condemned the:

clerical zeal [which] damned and uglified all that was ancient and strange, and fanaticism [which] debased holy Pan into a horrific and filthy devil, reduced Perchta the bright and shining to a nightmare, turned benign and Holder, the sender of the snow, into the old woman with a long nose and the feather-bed of the

fairy tales, and denied to Nereids, Oreads and Dryads, immortal souls. (115)

In contrast to Rebecca West, who was of the opinion that 'pagan ritualism' was 'senseless and exacting' (255), Dane privileges mystical power over patriarchal Christianity, as the redemptive force which rewards Mary.

Although not an adaptation of any specific old story, *Lolly Willowes* adopts the same tropes associated with rural idyll, pagan myth and fairy tale as 'Spinsters' Rest', to assert an alternative to normative Christianity, and to imagine a different space for women outside the oppressions of the symbolic, where 'gender will not be so limiting as in their own experience' (Donawerth and Kolmerten 4). At around the time that she was working on 'Spinsters' Rest', Dane wrote a positive review of Townsend Warner's novel, describing it as her 'mistress piece' and admiring her 'supernatural-made-natural' narrative technique adapted 'to her purpose [...] perfectly' ('First Flights' 176). The novel's eponymous heroine is another unhappy spinster living in London who retreats to a rural community where magic transforms her life for the better. As in 'Spinsters' Rest', historical definitions of refuge are destabilised. Lolly's longings to live in a village called Great Mop, bring her in her imagination to the village's eighteenth-century almshouses, designed and constructed by women, but only nominally free from the control of patriarchal-style charity. Seeing herself locked outside and unable to gain admittance, she recognises the precarious nature of her cultural position: the fact that 'had she been born a deserving widow, life would have been simplified' (*Lolly* 88). She discovers

an even better sanctuary however, in a local cottage, where she finds the same kind of companionship which Mary Pawle and Mother Holle enjoy, with the landlady, Mrs Leak. An image of 'the two women sat by the fire, tilting their glasses and drinking in small peaceful sips' (118) contrasts with the endless sterile evenings which Lolly spent in London, under the jurisdiction of her oppressive religious sister-in-law, Caroline.

While she was living in London, Lolly's 'mind was groping after something that eluded her experience, a something that was shadowy and menacing, and yet in some way congenial, [...] a kind of ungodly hallowedness' (*Lolly* 76), and in *Great Mop*, she finds this 'something' when she is introduced by Mrs Leak to a witches' coven. Like women revisionists before them, both Dane and Townsend Warner radically revise the normative ideologies of patriarchal fairy tales, myths and legends, reversing the usual dichotomisation of witch and princess, and interrogating traditional representations of the spinster-witch figure. *Lolly Willowes* uses Margaret Murray's 1921 research on the occult; this appeared to provide her with 'imagery of witchcraft to represent female resistance to hetero-patriarchal conventions' (Palmer 121), and 'Spinsters' Rest' draws on pagan mythology for the same purpose. In her twentieth-century version of 'Mother Holle', Dane recasts the pagan witch as a godmother who heals Mary with the creative impetus of her stories, folk songs and endless knitting: it 'seemed [...] as if the long thin needles were indeed busy, not with threads of wool but, fantastic notion, threads of sunlight' ('Spinsters' ' 180). Her benign magical role recalls Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of women's literature itself as the 'subversive

transfiguration of those female arts [...] into the powerful arts of the underground Weaver Woman', who uses her magical loom to weave a distinctly female 'Tapestr(y) of paradise' in a cave which is 'not just the place from which the past is retrieved but the place where the future is conceived' (102). Dane's representation also recalls those nineteenth-century women's revisionist fairy stories which reinterpreted the witch-figure, 'in a succession of [sympathetic] female spinners' (Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher 4), as a redemptive 'quasimythological figure' who will 'restore the broken female vision' (7). As Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher note, in Ann Thackeray Ritchie's re-telling of 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood' and 'Beauty and the Beast', an independent spinster storyteller, Miss Williamson, comfortably situated with her female friend H on 'either side of the warm hearth', is able to challenge the patriarchal order, 'without fear of fiery dwarfs skipping out of the ashes' because her 'own sexual segregation [...] allows her to treat marriage plots with wry detachment' (14). Ritchie's narrative device anticipates Dane's framing strategy in *First the Blade*, in which her women writer-collaborators spin a tale from the security of their husband-free fireside, detached from the gender-related trials of the central protagonist within their story. Their domestic freedom, in turn, prepares us for Mother Holle's protection of Mary, and anticipates Lolly and Mrs Leak's shared sense of emancipation.

From her new life in Great Mop, Lolly reconsiders 'a picture she had seen long ago [...] about the persecution of the witches' (*Lolly* 180), and in an empathetic reinterpretation of the witch-figure, she comes to 'see all over England, all over Europe, women living and growing old, as common as

blackberries, and as unregarded' (234). While 1970s women's fiction is better known for using witch-symbolism to foreground 'the interplay between history and legend, past and present-day cultures' (Palmer 123), 'Spinsters' Rest' is one earlier text which like *Lolly Willowes*, draws a powerful analogy between witch-hunts of the past and present-day prejudices against spinsters. While the local people regard the women who have lived at Spinsters' Rest as kind and creative healers, suppliers of effective herbal remedies whose gates have always been open to the sick, just as the old woman's powers are regarded as suspicious by the rector, the activities of her predecessors were punished by the patriarchal authorities. Mary 'shuddered' when she learns of an occasion when 'they took the woman of the house to be a witch and swam her and stretched her, and burnt her at last on her own doorstep' ('Spinsters' ' 172).

Dane found the origin of the term spinster significant to her feminist fable and she focuses on this in her narrative. Mary reads the dictionary entry: 'spinster – an unmarried woman – so called because she was supposed to occupy herself with spinning' ('Spinsters' ' 178), and the house is ambiguously named after the spinsters who first established it and the spinster-spinners who have come to it as a place of rest. Past and present residents include the benign witches who spun stories and invoked magical redemptions, women weavers, and their modern factory-worker counterparts. As in *Regiment of Women*, the precariousness of spinsters' working life is a key feminist theme, and single women's working-history can be read in the history of Spinsters' Rest. Minerva, the first female presence was 'patroness of spinners' (173), and the present day charwoman granted rest in the upstairs rooms and the magical

realm beyond precedes Mary as the latest in a long line of oppressed and exploited surplus single working women:

'She's had a sad life. She's a spinner' said the old lady. 'That's why her back's bent double.'

'A weaver, you mean? I thought that hand looms –'

'Factory-work, I mean,' said the old woman. 'Isn't it factories now? It was looms once. But always the spinning-wheel, my dear, behind it. Call it what you like, it works out the same. [...]

Fourpence an hour – sweating, don't you call it, in your London?

Sweat of the spinsters, it waters the earth. Bend 'em and break

'em, the women who spin, plenty more where they come from.'

('Spinsters' '177)

In the story, the spinster-spinners make a redemptive journey, which like Hetty Piele's, is a kind of psychic regression, a move from the symbolic into the semiotic. Lulled by the stories told by her surrogate spinner-mother, Mary regresses to her infant pre-oedipal self, and enters the hazy psychic dream-space of the imaginary, where she 'let herself wander, as she had not done for twenty years, into the half light, the half consciousness of that accessible middle land that a child enters so easily, and that some children grow never too old to enter' ('Spinsters' ' 165-6). This dream state is the gateway to an alternative reality. While the ground floor of the house represents the symbolic, and narrative events which occur there remain within the bounds of

a plausible normative reality, from the child's room at the top of the house, which Mary recognises as 'her own [...] but whether the nursery of her yesterday or tomorrow she could not tell' (187), the imaginary is given full reign. In the enchanted world accessible from this top room, she reclaims a landscape evocative of the fantasised body of the lost mother, soft and fluid with a 'meandering river with its white scarves of ranunculus, [...] gilded meadows, and trees heavy with heat, [...] vaporous hills, [...] purple yard of ocean' (194). Here, she experiences what Gilbert and Gubar describe as the 'rising' of 'the resurrected continent' (101,100), the elusive universal goal of all women. They cite Christina Rossetti's 1868 poem, 'Mother Country', as the epitome of this female yearning, While the speaking subject of Rossetti's poem enquires in vain: 'oh what is that country / And where can it be / Not mine own country/ But dearer far to me?',²⁵ Mary and Lolly fare better, and Mary reaches 'her own country and her own kind' ('Spinsters' ' 191).

Compared with Lolly's, Mary's utopia is totally feminised; with the exception of the lost boy, it is peopled exclusively by single women. Inscribing a queendom of heaven, or feminist-inflected sister/motherland into her story, Dane contributes to a female tradition of literature of estrangement, a form of writing which emerged in the Victorian and early-twentieth-century period. Encompassing utopian science fiction and fantasy texts, the genre featured women protagonists, marginalised in dominant culture, who 'need to create a world that nurtures them instead of one that silences them' (Donawerth and Kolmerten 13). Many writers imagined all-female rural communities which provided 'the good life' of 'seclusion from the world of men', endowing their

heroines with a 'subject position in that separate world' (5).²⁶ The enchanted land in 'Spinsters' Rest' is one such egalitarian paradise, a peaceable, pastoral alternative to contemporary cities which, as Dane contends in *The Women's Side*, are defined by patriarchal, capitalist militarist ideology. Introducing a feminist dimension, she retreats from a negative vision of modernity that also provoked ambivalent feelings in modernist writers. Upholding the co-operative and non-hierarchical nature of the female utopia inscribed in feminist tradition (Donawerth and Kolmerton 13), she incorporates a fictionalised version of the spinster queen, Queen Elizabeth I, who dwells on equal terms amongst ordinary women from various periods in history. Many of these are spinner-wordsmiths: tellers of women's stories. One, with 'a spindle in her hand, singing to herself as she sat on the edge of a well' enunciates 'in a strange language' ('Spinsters' ' 191), a form of semiotic jouissance. Like Lolly, Mary achieves a space, both psychological and geographical, where she can belong, pursuing her dreams within a community of women unimpeded by the patriarchal symbolic. Although Dane's utopia is only a temporary place, as a result of her sojourn there, Mary is strengthened. She is first mothered and then gains her own maternal fulfilment through the gift-child.

Dane's fantasy of single parenthood is perhaps guilty of failing to acknowledge the hardships which Mary is likely to endure in her new life, and of promoting normative beliefs that to be a complete woman, one should aim for maternal self-sacrifice. This perhaps marks 'Spinsters' Rest' as antithetical to the doctrine of other feminist utopian novels from the nineteenth century onwards, which posited 'collective or mechanical alternatives to the housework

and childcare that constitute women's work' (Pfaelzer qtd. in Donawerth and Kolmerten 7). Mary's fulfilment also counters a tendency, which Humble notes, for radical female-authored middlebrow fiction to be 'dismissive of motherhood' (222), to make 'a radical refusal of one of the defining elements of femininity' (223). 'Spinsters' Rest' does correspond, however, to many Edwardian feminist novels which uphold the sanctity of motherhood but not the importance of marriage; in which the sadness of childlessness is always 'felt far more acutely than the loss of a lover or a potential husband' (Eldridge Miller 108). Indeed, Mary considers 'husband – love – troublesome [...] rather hateful; but to be put up with, you know, because of children' ('Spinsters' ' 163), and her antipathy towards marriage establishes 'Spinsters' Rest' as a challenge to the ideology of womanly-conduct narratives. Lolly feels the same 'temperamental indifference to the need of getting married' (*Lolly* 26), and her redemption entails a complete embrace of organised witchcraft in order 'to have a life of one's own, not an existence doled out to you by others' (239). Both Dane and Townsend Warner associate paganism and witchcraft with 'marriage resistance and an independent life-style' much earlier than the 1970s writers who regularly adopt this narrative pattern (Palmer 122). In this respect, both texts satisfy one of the criteria which Joannou establishes for the inter-war feminist text and which she observes in *Lolly Willowes*: a will to explore, 'the wider options that should be open to the increasing numbers of women whose minds did not travel along the smooth road to matrimony' (78), to counter the widespread 'resilient and [...] common' (83) culturally hegemonic myths about 'the frustrated spinster' (88), who is 'desperate to find a man' (84), her life

spent in 'interminable waiting, for a husband who never quite materialises' (83).

'Spinsters' Rest' champions the single woman's right for a child, a feminist cause which would not be espoused until later in the century. Dane's feminist credentials not only match those of Townsend Warner, but indeed many post-second wave feminist writers, including Angela Carter, who make similar deconstructions of traditional (Christian) patriarchal discourses in their writing. Dane's reflections on her social context are in many ways even more radical than Townsend Warner's. Mary is of a lower social class than Lolly, and without the private income which Lolly enjoys, is unable to achieve the same kind of freedom and independence. Lolly's allowance facilitates her permanent place in utopia but Mary enjoys no such luxury, and her return to a modern urban working environment injects an element of realism into the text. Mary is also twenty years younger than Lolly, whose dependent maiden-aunt status was established in 1902, in what was likely to have been recognised by her readers as an unprogressive but now defunct cultural period. Mary's cultural circumstances, on the other hand, are those of the modern woman, and by depicting her social alienation, Dane illustrates how gender demarcations continue to plague spinster-women in her own times.

Modern Transformations of the Gothic Plot in *Lady Babyon* and *Rebecca*

While Dane considered that 'nobody pretends that falling in love and getting married and having healthy children is not the most important thing in life', she also argued that 'it is not the only thing, nor the only interesting one' ('The Sea' 73), and that it is only 'death to the normal woman *without a creative profession* to go without love and children' (*Women's* 128: my italics). This assertion suggests that it would be unwise to regard 'Spinsters' Rest' as a eugenicist text about the supremacy of motherhood. It underlines Dane's belief that while marriage and motherhood are desirable, fulfilment is equally or more possible through other (creative) endeavours, and this is the position adopted as the narrative perspective in *The Babyons*. A hybrid novel, this text combines the Edwardian feminist marriage-problem novel or narrative of rebellion, in which domestic relationships are the source of a protagonist's oppression (Eldridge Miller 192), and the female gothic/ghost form which employs gothic trappings to express female perspectives. *Jane Eyre* is the most famous example of a female gothic thriller that is ultimately grounded in social reality. It famously influenced Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (Horner and Zlosnik 9) and is also likely to have inspired *Lady Babyon*. The inter-war years saw an 'obsession' with the Brontës, and a 'rise in critical research on their works and lives' (Humble 176-7), and Du Maurier and Dane both paid tribute to the Brontë

sisters, Du Maurier writing their biographies, and Dane penning a play based on their lives called *Wild Decembers* (1932). In *Tradition and Hugh Walpole*, she categorised canonical texts as examples of either 'traditive' realism or psycho-spiritual romance, praising the Brontës' hybridisation of these genres, which, she wrote, had 'coloured the waters of the English novel for all time' (42). Admiring the ways in which their novels focussed on the inner psychic consciousness of their protagonists within realist contexts, or 'annexed to the domain of the traditive novel the sovereignty of the inner, the unexpressed, perhaps inexpressible world of the soul' (ibid.), it seems likely that she emulated the Brontës' method in *The Babyons*.

Dane and Du Maurier's shared interest in the work of the Brontës would perhaps account for the broad similarities between *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca* and *Lady Babyon*, in relation to narrative structure and their thematic treatment of patriarchal lineage, romance, marriage and female independence. All three follow what Williams identifies as the archetypal plot of female gothic writing. In a typical narrative trajectory, a heroine works for a wealthy family with an ancestral house and a troubled history, becomes romantically involved with the attractive but slightly sinister master, and is subsequently haunted by the mansion's threatening ghost, either the lingering presence of the master's dead wife or a similar kind of female force: 'the other woman, the sinister housekeeper, the madwoman in the attic, the master's dead wife' (Williams 101). In *Lady Babyon*, Antonia Drury, a middle-class Londoner, marries Lord Nicholas Babyon of Devon and discovers that his house, Babyon Court, is haunted by the ghosts of his female ancestors and has become an archetypal

place of terror in the female gothic tradition, 'an enclosed space that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison' (K. Ellis xiii). Particularly troublesome is the phantom of Hariot Babyon, whose romantic rejection by her cousin, Jamie Babyon, from whom Nicholas is also descended, precipitated her madness and suicide two hundred years previously, in a series of events which are dramatised in the first part of Dane's saga, *Third Person Singular*. Just as Rochester is unable to efface Bertha by loving Jane and Maxim cannot banish the memory of his crime against Rebecca by taking a second wife, Sir Nicholas Babyon's marriage to Antonia fails to prevent a curse, which fell on the family in the wake of Hariot's death, from wrecking his life.

In many female gothic texts including *Jane Eyre*, 'the death of [the] vengeful and passionate Other Woman means that "she" is no more able to trouble the heroine's prospects of domestic felicity' (Delamotte 156). In modern examples however, including *Rebecca* and *Lady Babyon*, 'death, the most supreme form of self- destruction, serves as a form of recomposition' (Bronfen qtd. in Horner and Zlosnik 105) and ghosts, real and imagined, signify the stranglehold of the patriarchal past against which the modern protagonist struggles. The second Mrs De Winter and Antonia Drury grapple with female revenants whose invincible return thwarts their husbands' efforts to escape their pasts, and prevents the couples from cementing their marriages. The continued influence of the dead women instigates an emotional and physical decline in Maxim and Nicholas, who are distinctly modernised versions of the traditional gothic hero-villain. Nicholas becomes helpless, sick and dependent

on Antonia, and Mrs De Winter is typical of Du Maurier's heroines, who, 'finally older and wiser than their men, [...] come in the end to mother them', regarding them as 'boys who never grow up' (Light 171). Both men resemble Harry Piele and Justin Cloud, other modern examples of war-traumatised manhood, constructed in line with the general trend in women's inter-war literature for effeminised and vulnerable male protagonists.

Rebecca is less radical than *Lady Babyon* in its treatment of the key gothic themes. Both Maxim and Nicholas select young wives to bear them children and continue the paternal line, but where Maxim's patrilineal motivations are not made explicit or subjected to narrative scrutiny in *Rebecca*, the reader of *Lady Babyon* is made fully aware that Nicholas 'intended to marry and wanted a son' (*Lady* 280), and because he wished to secure the male succession, he 'exalted the mother above the wife' (299). As Antonia struggles to survive the ghosts' malevolence, she also contends with her husband's growing indifference towards her, which abates when she becomes pregnant, but returns after she loses her baby. *Rebecca* condones Maxim's wife-murder even though it is committed in order to protect his lineage and succession from the taint of corrupt blood. *Lady Babyon*, on the other hand, condemns Nicholas for prioritising his position within a dying patriarchal aristocracy over his marriage. Furthermore, while *Rebecca* is a lesson in proper feminine conduct, maintaining a traditional anti-feminist dichotomy between Mrs De Winter's passive virtue and Rebecca's active wickedness, *The Babyons* as a whole challenges the binary oppositions established in patriarchal fiction between the angelic heroine and vilified witch-like female other. Dane foregrounds

patriarchal oppression instead, in narrative conflicts which centre not on the differences between good and bad women, but on power struggles between all women and the patriarchal family, the net in which they are caught and trapped.

Rebecca disappears from the narrative before it begins, effectively erasing her point of view, which lingers only in traces filtered through Mrs Danvers' vilified memories. This enables Du Maurier to sanction Maxim's masculinist perspective on his first marriage. In *The Babyons*, on the other hand, in the radical tradition of female-authored ghost narratives that 'offer critiques of male power' (Wallace, 'Uncanny' 57), the wronged woman returns in spectral form to tell her own story. Hariot is the crazed impediment to Antonia's marriage, but unlike Bertha before her, and contrary to the assessment made by the *Times Literary Supplement*, that she is a 'wicked, frustrated eighteenth-century spinster' ('Babyons' 78), she is represented not as a witch but as a victim of the oppressions meted out by her patriarchal family, who cannot rest in peace. Parallels can be traced between her depiction in *Third Person Singular* and representations in other radical female-authored inter-war ghost fiction of the effacement of women rendered 'derelict' or 'ghost like' on account of 'their exclusion or abandonment outside the symbolic order' (Wallace, 'Uncanny' 57). Hariot's account, for instance, of how, 'they took away my body [...] they locked all the doors and there I was naked outside the doors of life', and her plaintive appeal to be brought in from the cold: 'it's so silent where I am – outside' (*Third* 11-12), constitute consciously feminist

transformations of Cathy's spectral wailing to be admitted back into *Wuthering Heights*.

Hariot is subjugated by the kind of tyrannous patriarchal law deconstructed in Michel Foucault's late-twentieth-century analysis of the institutional application of arbitrary medical truth values regarding sanity and madness. Challenging the grand metanarrative, Dane shares the perspective of her feminist contemporaries whose work 'reverses patriarchally preferred interpretations of events and hierarchies of knowledge' (Moody 78). She also demonstrates how the economies of power operating in the eighteenth century use received psycho-medical knowledge to prevent Hariot from gaining access to her income. In consequence of her diagnosis, her inheritance is effectively confiscated, and as patriarchal law stipulates that only her future spouse can retrieve it, any kind of financial autonomy is perilously dependent on marrying a man who is willing to sign it over to her. When her matrimonial hopes come to nothing, her only options are the madhouse or suicide.

Jamie rejects Hariot because she is unable or unwilling to adopt a feminine façade. She 'is unseemly in his eyes,' talks to him 'as if he were a schoolboy' (*Third* 6), has 'unpowdered hair as no woman wore it', employs 'free utterance and gesture' (9) and has 'eyes, so black and bright', which posed 'a challenge' (3). Her vitality repulses him; she is akin to an exotic mythical Greek creature, 'a black woman on a red ground, writhing round a vase, a sight he should have seen last year on his tour, not now, home in safe, sunny England' (12). Hariot's angelic opposite, Menella, on the other hand, has 'conformed' (6), and typically possesses 'tendrils of fair hair, dropped lids and a

sweet glance asleep behind them' (3). The antithesis of Hariot's dark female will, Jamie chooses her for his wife. This opposition between the passionate and odious alien and the rational English heroine girl recalls *Jane Eyre*, but in Dane's novel, Jamie's xenophobic vilification of Hariot is not sanctioned but interrogated.

Antonia, last in the line of female victims of patriarchal oppression, forges a connection with Hariot. While gothic literature ultimately provides a rational explanation for supernatural events, the ghost story defies the comforting resolutions of realism: the events are 'super natural [...] it is truly the dead who return, and there is no place for rational explanation or artifice' (Gilbert qtd. in Wallace, 'Uncanny' 57). By affirming the existence of the spirit after death, Wallace claims that the female-authored ghost story emphasises a fundamental part of female intuition and knowledge. This is exactly what Dane celebrates in *Lady Babyon*. In Antonia's world, ghosts are real and she prefers the writings of the visionary Emily Brontë to those of her more rational sister, Charlotte. Her psychic faith is the antithesis of Nicholas's paradoxical spiritual vacuum. Like the archetypal gothic villains which Kate Ellis describes as trapped in 'chaos and old night' (xv), he is terrified of death and of the dead, but also strongly sceptical about the séances which his sister holds at Babyon Court. He has rejected Christianity but developed no alternative kind of belief in the immortality of the soul, like many of his generation of late-Victorian atheists. Conversely, Antonia has a special and privileged visionary role, representative of Dane's own belief.

She also has a modern feminist antipathy towards marriage, and harbours aspirations to travel and paint which become crushed after her wedding. Just as *Rebecca* 'provides a kind of commentary on the instability of women's sense of themselves when everything they do or say needs the approval and imprimatur of men' (Light 178), *Lady Babyon* dramatises Antonia's diminishing independence, growing sense of insecurity, and reliance on Nicholas's opinion of her. In both texts, as the male protagonists become preoccupied with estate work and increasingly estranged from their marriages, the wives are left defenceless against the destructive impulses of their dead predecessors who seek to drive them from the house. Mrs de Winter's acceptance and passivity is in direct contrast however, with a survivalist strategy which Antonia adopts to defuse the ghostly machinations of three generations of Babyon women. While Mrs de Winter's over-active and self-destructive imagination causes her to obsessively misread Maxim's feelings, thus exacerbating her anxiety, Antonia is able to reach the unseen and transform the troubled house and her status therein, in a triumph of women's positive imaginative powers.

Antonia's unspoken spiritual contact with the ghosts of Hariot and Hariot's female descendants begins a process by which she reclaims women's history, reassesses her marriage, gains self-knowledge and a strong sense of identity, and achieves emotional and economic emancipation. As Hetty did, both Mrs De Winter and Antonia retreat to the grounds of the house to escape persecution, but only in *Lady Babyon* do the gardens provide an opportunity for cathartic work. Antonia 'was up at five and came in at ten' (*Lady* 46),

spending the intervening period weeding out the choking thistles, symbolically preparing herself to return to the house for the coming battle with the revenants. In an ironic feminist twist on the homoerotic love triangle of traditional twentieth-century gothic tales, in which 'women find not sisterhoods in relationships between women' (Blackford 246), she moves from a conventional and hopeless Radcliffian gothic terror of her ghostly rivals, to a spirit of sympathy and co-operation, a recognition that they are all in the same patriarchal boat. She comes to identify with their former frustrated desires and stunted lives, to sympathise with their state of disembodiment, disconnectedness and marginalisation, signifiers of the experience of living women in a patriarchal society too, existing 'nowhere [...] never in touch with each other, lost in the air like ghosts' (Irigaray, qtd. in Wallace, 'Uncanny' 57).

Ann Williams describes how female gothic portrays 'a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the "male" and the "female" [...] are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking in the fathers' corridors of power' (107). In *Lady Babyon*, the portraits of the ancestral women which hang in the literal corridor of Babyon Court provide Antonia with a gateway into their world, reflecting a different reality to the one intended by the men who painted them. In the spirit of the modern feminine gothic novel, which operates as a 'site of resistance to [the] concealment of unequal power relations' (K. Ellis xvi), Antonia deconstructs the portraits to unearth the sub-text of their lives. She decodes the patriarchs as fallible, tortured and ruthless, and reinterprets her Babyon nemeses as victims, prevented from resting in peace, not by any evil act of their own, but by their

suffering under patriarchy. Nicholas tells her how his mother, Mary Ann Babyon, 'took a mask off her face' when she was not in the presence of his tyrannous father (*Lady* 335), and Antonia realises that Mary Ann has been subjected to the same cultural construction and socially-imposed identity in death as in life, assuming an eternal false front in the painting. This recalls the portrait of Aurora Leigh's dead mother in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1857 poem, *Aurora Leigh*, which Gilbert and Gubar describe as a 'male defined mask [...] the dead self that is a male "opus," '(19), representative of the death of female (creative) identity within a patriarchal literary tradition. While Aurora uses literary art to reclaim her mother, and 'replace the "copy" with the "individuality," ' (ibid.), Antonia uses visual art, repainting the women's portraits to reveal their real hidden selves and recover their history. As Nicholas observes, her revision of his mother's painting is 'better than the thing you took it from. Much more like her' (*Lady* 358).

It has been suggested that by the end of *Rebecca*, the second Mrs De Winter has gained from Rebecca a knowledge of female potential, an 'understanding of herself and the world about her which has given her strength and self-confidence' to manage Mandalay with the authority she previously lacked (Horner and Zlosnik 119). I would argue, however, that Du Maurier's narrator fails to develop the courage to address her anxieties, which are overcome rather by her changing circumstances, and she cannot be claimed as a model of modern female empowerment. In the second half of the narrative, she remains in a condition of undeviating idleness and achieves very little beyond challenging Mrs Danvers over the dinner menus. Her feminine vanity is

reassured by Maxim's revelation of his hatred of Rebecca, and she is not troubled when it comes to light that she has married a wife-murderer. In the tradition of gothic texts, in which the protagonist's encounter with her other serves only to imperil her identity, Mrs De Winter disappears into Rebecca, the woman she wants to become. On the other hand, Antonia's selfhood is strengthened by her relationship with her spectral sisters. While the second Mrs De Winter cannot prevent the destruction of Manderley, and is not directly responsible for Maxim's mellowing, Antonia uses the medium of paint to do the revisionary work of the feminist gothic novel: to 'sketch in the outlines of a female self that is more than the "other" as purely archetypal or stereotypical' (Williams 138), to 'scheme [...] and map [...] alternatives to the Father's law' (140). In addition to redefining and befriending the Babyon women, and restoring Nicholas' emotional equilibrium and spiritual harmony to the house, Antonia contests the oppressions wrought by him and his ancestral patriarchal family, producing a permanent change in gender power and gender relations when she gains control both over her diminished husband and her own life. In contrast to Mrs De Winter, also to Woolf's Lily Briscoe - who is only temporarily successful in making sense of the world through painting - and Dane's own Laura Valentine, who abnegates her artistic life, Antonia's art effects a re-evaluation of her identity. One of the portraits is 'less a painting than a map of her own heart', and she 'gained knowledge of herself and control of her own spirit as she painted. She had fought battles and won them [...] She had lost her fear of the gallery. [...] She was grown up and old at last' (*Lady* 357). Her creative endeavour echoes Dane's authorial project, which belongs to a radical

female gothic tradition of texts. Defying 'women's continuing need for definition through others' (Blackford 245), the gothic feminist textual resolution 'enlarges [the heroine's] world, opens up the possibility of discovering good, and of finding what she seeks' (Williams 145). Like Mrs de Winter, Antonia comes to full maturity in the course of the narrative, but by harnessing the redemptive power of female creativity, her achievement far surpasses that of Du Maurier's heroine.

The classic female gothic text which 'defies male power and thus makes it available for contestation, [...] ends with a woman in possession of a previously contested castle' (K. Ellis 221). Despite their feminist credentials however, the usual narrative resolution of these texts also sanctions patriarchal romantic fulfilment. Even Williams, who champions gothic as a feminist genre, equates fully-formed female identity with marriage. She describes how:

[the heroine] experiences a rebirth. She is awakened to a world in which love is not only possible but available; she acquires in marriage a new name and [...] a new identity. Indeed she is often almost literally reborn, rescued at the climax from the life-threatening danger of being locked up, walled in, or otherwise made to disappear from the world. (103-4)

Her observation certainly applies to some of the best-known examples of female gothic fiction. *Rebecca*, for instance, follows *Jane Eyre's* narrative trajectory towards marital tranquillity. Although it is often argued that the

heroines of both texts gain a measure of autonomy as a consequence of their husband's disempowerment, by ending Jane's journey in marriage, Charlotte Brontë was unable, as Gilbert and Gubar put it, 'consciously to define the full meaning of achieved freedom' (369). The second Mrs de Winter's sense of completion is similarly subject to the resumption of Maxim's love and his assurances that he had never loved Rebecca, and the validity of the patriarchal marriage is ultimately upheld. Where *Rebecca* is confined within a framework of conventional romance however, *Lady Babyon* counters the ideology of popular gothic, by eschewing the romantic resolution. Like modern feminist-inflected ghost stories, 'critical of the romantic formula and its celebration of heterosexual love and marriage' (Moody 7), Dane's text rejects the traditional scenario whereby the heroine survives a gothic nightmare to realise that she has only mistakenly read her circumstances as supernaturally determined, and that in reality 'the master loves her and her alone' (Williams 101). Where Mrs De Winter's suspicion that Max regrets their marriage is unfounded, Antonia's same fear about her husband's feelings is fully realised. Although her marriage becomes reasonably companionable, this is not represented as a satisfactory situation.

Towards the end of the novel, Nicholas dies in a riding accident, like Jamie before him, seemingly as a narrative punishment for his ancestors' crimes against women. The satisfactions of the resolution lie ultimately in his expulsion from the narrative, which paves the way for Antonia's new freedoms. The novel works harder than *Regiment of Women* to evade any unconvincing conjugal bliss and deconstruct normative heterosexuality, fracturing the

conventional love triangle completely. Unsure whether Nicholas' last word 'dearest' (*Lady* 378) was meant for her or his dead mother Mary Ann, the last of the Babyon ghosts, Antonia relinquishes her hopes of heterosexual love and androgynously widens her affection to include Mary Ann too, declaring, 'what does it matter? I love you both' (ibid.). Her final reward, however, is celibacy. Watching him linger on in life for a few days following his accident, she comes to realise that 'if Nicholas died, [she would] still have her happiness' (375). Granted, her supernatural experiences and metaphysical imagination have effectively defeated her fear of death, so that in her full expectation of reunion with her husband in the after-life, widowhood is not a tragedy. However, the 'peace and quiet – there was peace at Babyon' (378), comes as much from having been liberated from patriarchal control as from the exorcised ghosts. 'Glad that there was no picture of Nicholas. It was better to have him safe in her own mind' (ibid.), she appears relieved that masculine will is at last contained. Deliverance is political as well as personal. Dying without issue, Nicholas is the 'last master of an ancient house' (299); the termination of the aristocratic patriarchal lineage is a gothic feminist triumph which sees a middle-class woman become the victor and heir.

Antonia's failure as a wife and mother is more than compensated for by the peace of independent widowhood, whereby she achieves a full humanity and combines a confident modern life of art, solitude and self-definition. Once she has rectified the misogynist abuses of the past and won her own fight for autonomy, the romantic and sexual satisfactions of conventional narrative are replaced by another kind of fulfilment still, when the First World War breaks

out and she gains a public role, transforming Babyon Court into a military hospital. *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* reject the permanent validity of women's work, removing their heroines from their roles in teaching and service, in order that they can properly attend to the needs of their husbands. Theirs are not the castles of feminist gothic, which must be restored by 'women's *activity*, not only within its walls but outside in the world as well' (K. Ellis xvi). Conversely, the female redemption of Babyon Court situates Dane's novel more firmly within a feminist literary tradition.

The text equivocates however, retreating from a full feminist-inflected affirmation of woman's fulfilment by failing to imagine an emancipated future in life for Antonia, who, the reader is told, is to die not long after the novel closes from 'influenza and over-work' as a result of the war (*Lady* 377). Her role as a military nurse would likely have appealed to a female readership undoubtedly sympathetic towards demobilised shell-shocked First World War combatants, and the novel's outcome was perhaps determined by the kind of war-associated female guilt which so complicated and reconfigured feminism in the 1920s. Like Mary Pawle before her, her role is ultimately a nurturing one, and defining her within this kind of vocational framework somewhat restricts the impact of the texts' contestation of domestic ideology, and comes dangerously close to reconfirming the institutional order. Furthermore, by celebrating Hetty's reconfigured companionable marriage and Antonia's freedoms in the modern present, as improvements on the patriarchal past, *The Lover* and *Lady Babyon* suggest that while the bad old days had women in a patriarchal stranglehold, the modern twentieth century is a much more

comfortable time for women to live. This is over optimistic, complacent even, and potentially damaging to inter-war feminist struggles to improve women's conditions and increase their rights and powers.

Notwithstanding these outward shows of compliance, all three of Dane's fantastical narratives are redeemed by their radical sub-texts: in the reconfiguration of Hariot the madwoman as a victim of patriarchy, in Mary and Antonia's fulfilment outside marriage, and in the implied supremacy of women's visionary experience. Writing the literature of estrangement, feminist gothic and feminist ghost narratives enabled Dane to explore female anxieties and possibilities pertinent to the conservative but modernising inter-war context. Opening up time and space, her fantastic texts reveal hidden patriarchal history and reclaim the female past, creating imagined utopian spaces and supernatural worlds where women can access the semiotic, transform the symbolic, evade the oppressions of the repressive cultural order and forego or escape the shackles of matrimony. While the challenges made to normative gender ideology are limited in Sinclair and Du Maurier's gothic writings, it is quite appropriate to rank Dane's work in this genre alongside the more innovatively feminist *Lolly Willowes*. More concerned than Townsend Warner to maintain an ideological balancing act however, Dane succeeds in harnessing the fantastic to contest established gender roles, gender relations and gender power and validate an alternative reality to that mapped out by the symbolic, while still satisfying the conservatism of the middlebrow market.

CHAPTER 4: FROM DOMESTICATION TO PROFESSIONALISM: FAMILY CHRONICLES AND THE THEATRE CONTEXT

While Gothic and ghost narratives were the most popular forms in the 1920s, in the decade which followed family sagas became the staple diet of middlebrow reading. Often referred to as historical romances, they 'trace[d] the movements of historical change through microcosmic histories of fictional families across two or more generations' (Baldick 176). Daphne Du Maurier's *The Loving Spirit* (1929) and some other female-authored chronicles were inter-generic, 'hybridised, cross-fertilis[ed] with romance, fantasy, [and] the gothic' (Wallace, *Woman's* 3), and *The Babyons*, Dane's first venture into the saga domain, similarly bridged the gothic and saga genres. Her next saga, a realist text entitled *Broome Stages*, published by Heinemann in 1931, met with great success. Her shrewd appraisal of the mood of the literary zeitgeist clearly

paid off: her novel was 'acclaimed by the critics' (St John 225),²⁷ and 'would prove the most popular of all her novels, finding a new readership in every subsequent generation' (Barrow 62). When Dane was planning *Broome Stages*, she was initially interested in writing about the English royal succession, but Richard Addinsell, who collaborated with her on her musical plays, suggested that since political histories were not currently in vogue, she should write instead about the lives of several generations of a fictional theatrical family (ibid.). By following Addinsell's suggestion, she was able to use her vast knowledge of the theatre, create positive role models of working women, and contribute to a feminist expansion of the saga genre which began to put women back into historical narratives from which 'they have been excluded' (Wallace, *Woman's* ix), to 're-write history from a point of view that centralises women's concerns' (5). These developments suited Dane's own rhetorical purpose: to reinstate women's perspectives into narrative.

Influential Sagas: the Forsyte, Herries, and Rakonitz Dynasties

Although this was 'a moment when male writers were moving away from the genre', leaving a space for women novelists to appropriate this form of writing, (Wallace *Woman's* 3), two of the best known sagas are male-authored. According to Nicola Humble's definition of middlebrow texts as *read* but not necessarily written by women (14), *The Forsyte Saga* by John Galsworthy,

published between 1906 and 1921 in four parts, can be considered the seminal blueprint. It set the scene for subsequent middlebrow sagas, one of the most notable being Hugh Walpole's four volume *The Herries Chronicles* (1930-1933), comprising: *Rogue Herries*, *The Fortress*, *Judith Paris* and *Vanessa*. Both the *Times Literary Supplement* ('Broome' 580) and Barrow's biography take Galsworthy's text as a reference point for their praise of *Broome Stages*. Claiming that it 'achieves a more satisfying whole than Galsworthy did' and that 'Galsworthy did not have the same thread, nor the sense of completion' (Barrow 63), Barrow's comparison would have been even more apt, had he acknowledged the two writers' shared liberal ideology. *The Forsyte Saga* provides a liberal critique of Victorian patriarchy, upholding Jolyon and Irene's feminised imaginations and love of art and beauty against Forsyte financial and business acumen. The novel champions divorce, tolerates unmarried sexual relationships, and contests hegemonic belief that marriage is necessarily and automatically sacrosanct. Despite their common ground, Dane regarded Galsworthy as somewhat out of date, possibly in terms of his representation of women, whose point of view and inner life are absent from the narrative. His heroine, Irene, furthermore, is fearful, vulnerable, guilty and remorseful, and her idealised beauty and passivity work to satisfy the voyeuristic desires of male reader, narrator, and a string of male characters in the text. Indeed, the only feisty independent unmarried character, June, is depicted as an eccentric object for pity.

In *The Herries Chronicles*, Walpole creates the same dichotomy between the sensitive, imaginative and bohemian branch of a family, and its

propertied, stolid, more conservative opposites. A conventional popular romance, full of sentimental sensibilities and idealised love-matches, its guiding narrative philosophy situates it within a twentieth-century male literary tradition epitomised variously by E.M Forster's credo, 'only connect [...] the prose and the passion' (Forster. Epigraph. Walpole, *Herries* 762), Thomas Hardy's veneration of the laws of nature,²⁸ and D. H. Lawrence's idealisation of phallogentric sexual love. The novel is also, perhaps unintentionally, reactionary in its social and political account of the rise of the middle classes in England, through the evolution of its prime representatives, the extraordinary Herries family. Galsworthy employed 'the contrary rhetorics of sympathy and irony' (Harvey 128), and his 'critique [...] of the commercial upper-middle class to which he belonged is frequently blunted by judicious sympathy' (127). Walpole's novel is equally anomalous. Guilty of that bourgeois effeteness which Terry Eagleton associates with the liberal traditions of English Literature, the narrative registers a sympathetic admiration for the middle England which it purports to criticise. One of its hero-protagonists, Adam, flirts with Chartism but becomes repelled by what he believes is its mob mentality and lack of organisation and turns to novel writing instead. His ostensibly bohemian daughter, Vanessa, experiences a similar political about-turn, developing a patriotic pride in the family's conservative values and coming to reject socialist alternatives. She asserts that 'this family to which she belonged contained the real benefactors of the human race. [...] If it were not for them the Poor, the Unprotected, almost everyone in fact who wasn't Herries, would perish' (*Fortress* 527). Dramatising the General Strike of 1929 while it was a very

recent event, the chronicle sees even Benjie, the most maverick and non-conformist of the Herries, stand on the side of law and order against the strikers and their radical social movement, with the blessing of the narrator. The saga closes with Benjie's affirmation of his faith in marriage, his optimism about the fate of England, and his new-found admiration for the relatives which the narrative originally set him up to oppose. 'They weren't so bad, he thought. [...] He had fought them all his life and was glad to be rid of them, but he saw quite clearly their integrity, their wholesome common sense, their loyalty to their own beliefs' (*Herries* 1008).

Not surprisingly, given its conservative philosophy, the novel's gender politics are patriarchal and Walpole pays lip service to women's independence. Vanessa, the main heroine, is a paragon of womanliness, 'kind and generous and simple-hearted' (*Herries* 306), and loyal to her husband, Ellis Herries, in spite of his cruelty and mental instability. Even when he rapes and attempts to murder her, she refuses to leave him, and when he tries to have her certified she has to be rescued by Benji, the true object of her affections. Transferring her nurturing compulsion from husband to lover, she aspires only 'to care for him, understand him, comfort him, make him happy' (629), and like Hardy's Tess Durbeyfield, she is redeemed from her fallen status in the reader's eyes, by her self-abnegating femininity. Benji and Vanessa's relationship is idealised in Lawrentian terms; what is deemed his essential polygamy is contrasted with her natural monogamy. She declares that, 'women are faithful. [...] it's the thing they like best to be!' (841), and: 'being a woman and therefore having all her eggs in one basket (which was Benjie), Benjie could satisfy her wildest

longings. She could not satisfy Benjie. Nor did she try. When this restlessness came upon him, she let him go free' (807). Neither her phallic worship, her tolerance of his infidelity and absences, nor his irritation with her tendency to nag and bore him, are questioned in the narrative. Indeed, her feminine dullness is treated with admiration. When she is introduced to New Women thinkers and modern female authors, she responds to their writings with a mixture of envy, antipathy and smug self-satisfaction:

they had no beginning. [...] Nor had they any conclusion. [...] They were depressing stories [...] very feminist. Men figured as poor creatures, mean, faithless and greedy. But oh! What cleverness! What observation! [...] Vanessa knew, as she read, that one thing that was the matter with herself was that she was not clever at all. [...] She could not remember that she had ever said a brilliant thing in her life. (767)

'But oh!' suggests that she is impressed by the writers' ingenuity, but not their feminist representations of men, which she construes as false, unkind, and at odds with her own more wholesome gendered values. This reflects the validated narrative position, which privileges her womanliness over feminist 'cleverness', and sanctions her idealisation of Benji and her masochism and self-recrimination. Vanessa's extra-marital rebellion is short lived. When Ellis suffers a breakdown, she goes back to him in a spirit of martyrdom. Subsequently, after a few defiant outbursts, her modern twentieth-century

daughter, Sally, comes to capitulate on her more feminist outlook too, to follow in her mother's womanly footsteps. Meeting a war-blinded peace activist, she finds conventional fulfilment in caring for and encouraging him, and contributing towards his work in the internationalist sphere. Admittedly this constitutes a break with the usual Herries' political inactivity, but her role is nebulous and limited, and she does little more than mix with other internationalists under her husband's direction. Dane's enormous admiration of Walpole, as the harbinger of what she considered to be the acceptable face of modernism, meant that she very likely aspired to his narrative methods in her own sagas. Ironically, although there are tensions between conservatism and radicalism in her texts, her feminism always transcends the normative ideology generated in *The Herries Chronicles*. As Baldick notes, 'historical fiction offered to a number of feminist authors between the wars an opportunity to explore the variety of ways in which women could live their lives, outside the currently legitimate roles of respectable femininity' (223). Dane avails herself of this opportunity: her creative, imaginative, and professional women forge painful identities and develop integrities centred on work, independence and a strong sense of selfhood, in marked contrast to both Walpole and Galsworthy's conventional womanly Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian protagonists.

Albeit contradicted by moments of narrative conservatism, both *The Babyons* and *Broome Stages* take a feminist standpoint on primogeniture - a staple theme of both male and female-authored sagas - and dramatise the injustices of patrilineal inheritance. In this respect, they mirror the more radical of the female-authored novels in the genre, concerned with 'reconstruct[ing]

maternal genealogies which had been lost as a result of the patrilineal nature of patriarchal history' (Wallace, *Woman's* 5), a history firmly reproduced in male-authored texts. One of the best-known novels of this kind is Woolf's *Orlando* (1928); less familiar is *The Rakonitz Chronicles*, a three part chronicle written by G.B. Stern. The first part of the saga, *Tents of Israel*, was published in 1924, with the whole collection, including *A Deputy Was King* and *Mosaic* published in 1932, a year after *Broome Stages*. Given that Dane and Stern were friends, it is very possible that they consciously engaged with each other's work. Indeed, Dane wrote a positive review of *Tents of Israel* for *Good Housekeeping* magazine ('Family' 150).

Stern's representation of modern women, forging careers in the arts and the fashion industry, strongly parallels Dane's depiction of women working in the theatre. Both novels address themselves to a prevailing theme in 1920s and 1930s women's writing: the pleasure and pains of work and independence for the modern woman. Both are broadly feminist texts, but unlike *Broome Stages*, *The Rakonitz Chronicles* is prone to elegise the cultural demise of the womanly-woman and traditional masculine and feminine roles. Belonging to the London-branch of a bourgeois European Jewish family fallen on hard times, its principle heroine, Toni Rakonitz, forges her inter-war identity in opposition to traditional models of womanhood, running her own fashion house. She is a reluctant career woman, and only becomes a breadwinner in order to support her elders. In *A Deputy was King*, she questions the gains of the women's movement, declaring, albeit ironically:

I, the child of the age, the privileged daughter of the twentieth century, the beneficiary of years of fighting for women's emancipation from harem slavery, I solemnly declare that there's nothing in the world I want quite as much, as to do no work, and, for no reason at all, to have tons of money to spend which is all made by somebody else (338).

She marries a rich man, Giles, to support her, but he is of the new modern type, shell-shocked, debilitated by poor health and general tiredness, and reliant on his father's money, having no will or ability to work himself. When he squanders their allowance, she is forced by necessity to return to her business. This is in bad shape in consequence of her neglect and Giles's misinformed and ill-judged business decisions, which she has indulgently permitted him to make on her behalf. Realising that she has been humouring him in this respect, he feels humiliated and punishes her by running away to Italy with her seductive cousin. When he becomes dangerously ill, Toni forgives his philandering and relinquishes her career, selling her business and using the vast profits to set up home in Italy, where she can surround herself by Giles, their children and members of her extended family in a continuance of Jewish matriarchal tradition. Stern suggests that this new life is her ultimate fulfilment: 'her secret longing [...] was to have room for any members of the Rakonitz tribe who might at any time need to be sheltered and fed. [...] The idea of bounteous hospitality brought her a glow of comfortable satisfaction. It was, though she did not define it thus, the matriarchal instinct [...]' (685).

The sequel, *Mosaic*, set in Paris, centres on Toni's modern cousins. Val is a successful artist and Helen buys Toni's business, drives a car and has a pilot's licence. In spite of her modern identity, and her scorn for Victorian ultra-femininity however, when a man with whom she is infatuated confides to her that he is in love with a local womanly-woman, Helen is not totally convinced that to be 'terribly smart and not a bit attractive, with a great big nose, and such quick brains that you're always doing yourself in', is preferable to having been born or socialised into the kind of femininity which her triumphant love rival, 'large and slow and stupid, with brass-gold hair [...] bosoms, [...] teasing *les messieurs*', enjoys (1053). She continues to entertain hopes that 'she might marry, one day, some decent, moderate man' (1052). The saga closes with two of the old Rakonitz sisters from a previous generation, Berthe and Letti, learning to let go of their children, and coming to an understanding that individual self-actualisation is preferable to relying on matriarchal Jewishness alone to constitute their identity. Ironically, Toni and Helen of the next generation suspect the opposite, and feel that the price of modern independence can be too high. Stern makes the happiness of her key female protagonist dependent on keeping hold of her husband and retreating from the public world of work. Although this position is reconsidered in *Mosaic*, which abjures matriarchal entrenchment and resists the conventional marriage as a narrative outcome, the feminine ideal is preserved in *The Rakonitz Chronicles* as a whole through the text's elevation of its male protagonists to romantic figures and its contention that duty is women's proper priority. Stern's work

falls short of the optimism of *The Babyons* and *Broome Stages* in relation to the fulfilling possibilities of work and a single life.

Undermining Aristocratic Power in *The Babyons*: Women, Jews, and Gypsies

According to Nicola Humble, as the feminine middlebrow registered the decline of the traditional ruling elite and the growing power of its own modernising middle-class, it 'resisted those approaching freedoms that it also desired' (195), developing a fascination with doomed aristocratic dynasties and old-fashioned families, despite or perhaps because of their 'dramatic unlikeness to the conventional nuclear family that was becoming increasingly normative' (150). An awareness that their social superiors were becoming a rarity, destined to go the way of the dodo, engendered in middle-class readers a particularly intense, and perhaps nostalgic, voyeuristic relationship with the English aristocracy. This was transposed into the inter-war saga, where fictional eccentric and highly strung titled old families began to occupy central positions. In *The Babyons*, Dane exploited readers' conservative preoccupations with aristocratic extraordinariness, not only to secure commercial success, but to smuggle a sub-textual feminist agenda into her work. Each volume dramatises female rebellions against the misogynistic nobility, and whereas eccentric families in inter-war literature generally 'elicit in their readers a compelling combination of fantasy-identification and

repugnance' (ibid.), Dane's audience is manipulated to separate out these responses in gender-specific ways: to respond negatively to the male Babyons and empathetically to their female counterparts. The aristocracy is never romanticised, but condemned as an institution of patriarchal oppression and the novel depicts the ascendancy of female power over outlived and defunct male aristocrats, increasing with each generation and culminating in the welcome extinction of the blood-line and shift of power to Antonia, a modern middle-class woman.

The ghostly first volume of *The Babyons, Third Person Singular*, is succeeded by a Georgian fable, *Midsummer Men*, which tells the stories of Menella and Jamie's son Ludovic and daughter, Isabella. At the start of the novel, Menella, who lives with her adult children at Babyon House, is in possession of the family wealth, and the narrative centres on her unorthodox decision to bequeath it to Isabella, and Ludovic's attempts to control and ultimately disinherit his sister. He calculates that his mother can be persuaded to change her will in his favour if Isabella marries into the affluent local gentry, on the grounds that she will then have no need of money of her own. He proceeds to encourage the suit of a humourless and chilling neighbouring aristocrat, Sir Hervey Ypres. The other contenders for Isabella's hand are two social outcasts: a nameless gypsy and a wealthy but socially-despised local Jew called Ralph Samuels. According to Deborah Epstein Nord, Jews and gypsies in literature 'were frequently paired throughout the nineteenth century and beyond' as 'people of Diaspora' (5), within narrative frameworks which romanticised their differences in relation to normative culture. Dane represents

the operation of this dual cultural apartheid against Jews who were only ostensibly part of society, and gypsies who remained completely outside (6). Ludovic vehemently opposes the arrival of gypsies in the neighbourhood, calling them, 'tramps and vagabonds!' and determining to use his powers to have them evicted: 'I'm on the bench. I'll not have it –' (*Midsummer* 95). Fearing the contamination of his blood-line, he also regards Samuels' romantic encroachments as an affront to English cultural tradition, the behaviour of a 'stinking, greasy Jew' (102). Nord notes that gypsies and Jews featured particularly prominently and were given sympathetic treatment in the novels of Sir Walter Scott and George Eliot. Dane was very familiar with both writers and her narratives are likely to have been influenced by the tolerant representations made in their work. In her eyes, both gypsy and Jew are serious contenders for Isabella's hand; the gypsy offers sexual fulfilment and Samuels' courtship is gentle and romantic. He is depicted as a sensitive man, enamoured by the Devon landscape and caught between an intellectual secularity and loyalty to his lost people. The suitor who represents the power of the normative centre on the other hand, is cast as the narrative villain. Sir Hervey offers Isabella a relationship based upon economic exchange. Having squandered a fortune made in the manufacturing industry, he promises her 'an establishment' (134), in return for her promised inheritance.

While Isabella mulls over her choices, like Hetty Piele, she makes nightly escapes from her stifling domestic environment to the woodland which surrounds Babyon House, another of Dane's semiotic spaces. Here, rural lore usurps patriarchal law and she is endowed by the gypsies with pagan

knowledge and power. In literature, gypsies had traditionally been 'imagined as long-standing features of English rural life, and in some nostalgic views of the English past, signify the very essence of true and ancient Britishness' (Nord 4). *The Babyons* continues in this tradition. Following instructions by one of them, Isabella is put on the right path to fulfilment by means of a primeval ritual, which stipulates that she plants three orpine roots in the forest, names them after her three suitors and waits until Midsummer-night for one of them to come and claim her for his bride. While waiting for the revelation, she gains strength from this folk-wisdom and her own rebellious nature, coming to an autonomous decision to resist Ludovic's machinations and reject Sir Hervey. Feeling at liberty in the marginal space of the woods, Isabella also toys with the idea of accepting the attractive gypsy 'as a banner of defiance' (*Midsummer* 99), before making her final choice: to accept Samuel's marriage proposal and face inevitable social ostracism. Initially, her ingrained prejudices make her question 'was a Jew a man?' (112), but her preconceptions are challenged and subsequently defeated once she becomes more fully acquainted with Samuels' gentleness and integrity. During their pastoral courtship, she comes to recognise their affinity and shared sense of otherness. Both are cursed – Isabella in relation to her female rebellions as much as her genetic inheritance – and both are accustomed to 'closed doors' (126), and worship 'strange gods' (128). She feels as if they are 'fellow countrymen, wanderers met by chance in a foreign city' (*ibid.*). By countering Ludovic's patriarchal racism with her heroine's sympathy for her lover's noble suffering and identification with his marginalised position, Dane challenges a literary

tradition in which 'seldom [...] are Jewish characters romanticised or idealised' (Nord 6).

At the prescribed Midsummer hour when the superstition dictates that her future husband will be revealed, Isabella finds that two of the orpine roots have withered. In an allegorical enactment of patriarchal power and female resistance, Ludovic enters the forest, kills Samuels, and in return is fatally stabbed by his frenzied sister. Her act frees her from renewed cultural bondage: the gypsy presents himself as her true husband and leads her deep into the woods to join the gypsy community, over which she becomes the presiding matriarch. The closure is fraught with ideological complications, however. On the one hand, it correlates with the progressive vision of other modernist writers such as D.H. Lawrence, whose contemporaneous novella, *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (1930), 'expose[s] the atrophy of England's ostensibly superior native racial stock' and privileges 'the potent energy of a nomadic people [as] important in the English land' (Kramp 64). It also demonstrates a patently feminist identification with racial others. In other ways, however, it is politically ambiguous. Isabella's revenge against Ludovic is a triumphant act of rebellion and she becomes 'a mad woman, rejoicing in the strength that madness lent her' (*Midsummer* 159). This is both liberating and morally suspect, and Dane is perhaps dangerously close to contradicting her Foucauldian critique of Heriot's institutional misdiagnosis in *Third Person Singular*, and surrendering to the popular inter-war conception that bad blood was an inherited curse. Furthermore, in describing Ludovic's racial insults – 'a repeated epithet which even a Jew will not endure' (158) – as attributable to

'the rage of a just man and a careful brother' (ibid.), either the narrative is intentionally ironic, Dane's philosophy is contradictory, or she manifests a struggle here to satisfy hegemonic demands *and* express her own personal tolerance and feminist conviction. The narrative outcome also appears to strike a blow for female primogeniture; with Isabella's self-exile, the family fortune passes to Ludovic's as yet unborn son, Henry. However, as Heriot's wild niece, prone to wearing her black and red colours, Isabella avoids the fate of her dead aunt with whom she has long identified, and lives to bear a daughter who comes to reinstate her mother's lost female heritage. This is anticipated in Isabella's acknowledgement of the significance to matrilineage of an old portrait of Hariot, which she rescues and hangs in her bedchamber. It is this same portrait which inspires Antonia to reclaim female Babyon history in *Lady Babyon* one hundred years later, and Isabella's gesture also recalls Jenny Summers' symbolic allegiance to the one surviving painting of Madala in *Legend*.

The closure also constitutes a deft piece of escapology and a triumph for female sexuality. Having been socially conditioned to associate illicit sexual passion with madness and the death of the soul, Isabella has long been caught between sexual desire and fear of physical intimacy. The promise and terror of sexual love is symbolised in the phallic nature of the orpine roots, one with a 'half-grown stem flaccid and dull' – representing Hervey – and the 'two remaining plants [...] stiff and upright' (*Midsummer* 116), signifying Samuels and the gypsy lover. Her anxieties are also dramatised in a dream in which an unidentifiable suitor saves her from the gibbet by warming her bones, a

physical act which generates the departure of her soul from her body. The reality of her union with the gypsy is, however, a pleasant surprise: feeling 'that she had known him all her life' (117), her sexual fears are completely overcome. The narrative perspective parallels Lawrence's moral elevation of Yvette's sexual partnership with a gypsy over normative family life, whereby the gypsy offers her 'a glimpse of a nomadic existence based upon mobility and sensual desire' (Kamp 64).

Dane's treatment of Isabella's sexual union anticipates Lawrence's sexual philosophy, but in *Creeping Jenny*, the sequel to *Midsummer Men*, the glorification of phallic mastery for which he would become infamous and which is reflected in *The Herries Chronicles*, is undermined. Isabella's gipsy-husband is entirely absent from this story, and Isabella is reconfigured as the matriarchal ruler of the gypsy tribe. Furthermore, the narrative centres on a second powerful gypsy woman, Isabella's daughter, Teresa. Teresa was very probably modelled on Meg Merrilies, the central female protagonist of Scott's novel, *Guy Mannering* (1815), a 'gypsy leader [...] who helped establish the figure of the androgynous - or masculinised - female gypsy in nineteenth-century literature' (Nord 14). Like Meg, Teresa works from the margins of the camp to infiltrate the centre, which in Dane's text is the River Hayes estate of Robert Thistledallow, son of Ludovic's widow from her second marriage. When Teresa becomes Robert's mistress, and the mother of his illegitimate baby daughter, Mary Ann, she defies his standard patrician plan – to avoid responsibility and dispatch her back to the gypsies with the unwanted child – by leaving him with the baby instead. The text appropriates and then

transgresses the nineteenth-century literary gypsy-trope. Teresa's bestowal of her baby upon the feudal master reverses the popular stereotype which associates gypsies with child abduction. Furthermore, although resembling other 'gypsy plots [which] chafed against patterns of gender conformity [with] gypsy characters who deviated from conventional forms of masculinity and femininity', (12) while these narratives represented their female gypsies as 'exotic female beauties', to satisfy 'fantasies of heterosexual male longing' (ibid.), in *Creeping Jenny*, Teresa's 'faint gesture of dislike that struck his pride full of pins' (170), a mark of her assertive self-definition, makes for Robert's nightmare and not the fulfilment of any sexual fantasy.

Treated as Robert's 'property' (*Creeping* 170), as 'something of his own to have in the house to serve him when he was old' (172), Mary Ann is the victim of his family's determination to exclude her, and becoming aware of her illegitimate status, she learns to adopt a creeping manner, appropriate to her subservient position. Like Dane's other women, she takes refuge in the rural environs surrounding the house, wandering to the edge of the estate where 'she put off her habit of restraint as a runaway nun might put off her convent serge' (223). There is danger over the boundary however, as the land there belongs to another patriarch, Sir Charles Babyon, her father's second cousin and the child of Ludovic's elder son, Sir Henry Babyon. Sir Charles' marital ambitions recall Sir Hervey's; his lavish lifestyle has generated mounting debts, and he is in pressing need of a wealthy heiress to bail him out. The ensuing romance is treated with irony, underscored by a feminist discourse on female inheritance. Charles is not the shepherd lover of pastoral literature that Mary

Ann has dreamed of, and she jumps out of the frying pan of paternal control not only into the fire of marital submission and indifference, but into the flames of disinheritance. When she marries him, her 'dowry was in her husband's control: she had no alternative to obedient service' (250).

Creeping Jenny is named after a species of ivy, and the text is prefaced with an adage from traditional lore: 'Man is the oak, woman the ivy tree'. Reflecting Mary Ann's creeping movements and the way she fastens her hopes of emotional survival onto Sir Charles, the proverb's avowal that a gender model based on female weakness and dependency and masculine strength and dominance makes for a desirable state of affairs, is contested by the narrative. During their first meeting:

he [...] turned to the ivy and had ripped off a long trail before her little shocked exclamation stopped him.

'Oh, don't!' softly said Mary Anne.

'What?'

'The ivy. Why do you tear it?'

He was the practical landowner -

'It kills the trees. It clambers over them and sucks them. A trail like that' – he spanned the delicate growth – 'can kill a young oak in twenty years.'

She said oddly -

'Ivy has to live too. It must hold on to something.' (*Creeping* 234)

Pointing to the paradoxical strength and survivalism of the dependent ivy, this exchange posits a revisionary, more feminist interpretation of the old maxim, and anticipates the reversal of power in the marriage which occurs later in the text. Just as the weakness of the ivy belies its ability to destroy the host tree, Mary Ann's timidity masks a hidden capability. When Teresa returns to help her daughter combat her husband's abuses, the two women metaphorically strangle Charles, and reduce him to a dissipated and powerless 'ruined oak' (261). Complaining that Charles 'rules you and drives you, [...] and you can't get free of his rules' (255), Teresa proposes a mother-daughter partnership to run the estate and usurp his power. Like Lawrence, who 'giv[es] his gypsy an identity and a voice' (Nord 7), Dane inscribes Teresa's point of view into the narrative. She also has Meg's 'maternal physicality that does not partake of middle-class femininity' (40). Unlike Lawrence and Scott, however, Dane connects two generations of gypsy women in a tale of female empowerment. Many texts enacted literary fantasies of gypsies assisting gentrified protagonists to 'escape from the bonds of obedience and conformity' (12), but enabling female gypsies to permanently infiltrate the masculinist power-base of the real world is markedly feminist. Like Mother Holle in 'Spinsters' Rest', the recovered figure of the lost mother is marginalised but empowering, and in *Creeping Jenny*, the mother-daughter combination completely destroys masculine power. When Teresa moves from the margins to the centre, the two women create a successful business enterprise, and as Charles' 'income lessoned', he becomes Mary Ann's 'pensioner' (257). Matrilineal lineage is thus reinstated and the Babyon fortune restored for the

women to enjoy and Antonia to ultimately inherit. This is an ironic feminist transposition of Meg's narrative role. Scott's gypsy woman also watches a child grow up from the margins of the gypsy world, but this child is a boy, and by restoring his title and family inheritance – and giving up her life for the good of patriarchy in the process - she restores male primogeniture and re-establishes the status quo.

Broome Stages and Bourgeois Theatre Culture: Women in the Margins of the Profession

While Harriot, Menella and Isabella are of the Georgian world and so completely outside the public domain, in the Victorian and Edwardian context, starting with Mary Ann's foray into the working sphere, and continued with Antonia's occupations in the early twentieth-century sequel, Dane's female protagonists become increasingly professionalised. In *Broome Stages*, Dane further develops the narrative of women's work. She ceases to write about the idle rich and abandons the country-house saga formula completely, centring her narrative in the urban and non-domestic context of the London theatre. Vestiges of the political history which she originally intended to write remain visible in the Broome family genealogy, which loosely resembles the Plantagenet royal family.²⁹ There are parallels with the Norman and Angevin

rule, beginning with the story of William (Dick) Broome, named after William, Duke of Normandy, and ending with the adventures of his descendent, Richard Broome, whose overwhelming success as a film star in Hollywood, is vaguely analogous to Richard the First's conquest of that earlier fortune-hunters' destination, the similarly named Holy Land.

Despite these references to earlier royal figures, the Broomes' origins are proletarian. Dick Broome is an imaginative boy from an ordinary family who joins a group of strolling players and makes his fortune through his talents as an actor; the family only becomes gentrified when his daughter marries into the aristocratic Wybird dynasty. The novel romanticises the lowly itinerant origins of the Broome dynasty as it did the wandering gypsies and Jews in *The Babyons*. As in *The Babyons* also, aristocracy is negatively associated with disease and decadence. In *Broome Stages*, it provides the strain which taints the brilliant and creative peasant blood and creates the family curse: a depressive melancholia, instigating erratic and aggressive behaviour, self-destructiveness and even suicide among the family's men. Like *The Forsyte Saga* and *The Herries Chronicles*, the novel sanctions affluence for characters with artistic sensibilities or imaginative natures. In a middlebrow literary context in which 'the bohemian casualness of the artistic community was becoming increasingly attractive to the bourgeoisie' (Humble 165) however, its focus on the work ethic of the theatre community is unusual. The novel may represent the Broome family as tortured and melodramatic, but its 'grasp of the cultural mutations of 150 years of London theatre' is 'very material and grounded' (Bratton 198). There is nothing bohemian about the family's

hardworking pursuit of their goals; their genetic workaholism or the 'devil in us [...] that has to be given work', as Stephen Broome puts it (*Broome* 368), and a tendency which Lettice Broome observes, to 'do everything to excess' (476).

As the primary focus of *Broome Stages*, work is also the nexus between the characters which enables Dane to make her analysis of gender and historical change. The working theatre is the site where normative gendered values and behaviour undergo a transformation over the two-hundred year time span of the novel. It is also a metaphor for a specifically female struggle towards self-actualisation and professional status in the public sphere: over time, women become fully integrated into the work of the stage as actors and managers, and come to enjoy their hard-earned economic prosperity. It was not uncommon for women's interwar sagas to follow generations of a family 'often connected to a specific trade or occupation' (Wallace, *Woman's* 64): *The Loving Spirit's* connection with boat building is one example. Dane's saga is unusual however, in the fundamental importance of work to the lives of the female protagonists and the central position which women come to hold in the family business. Choosing the stage as the context for her novel provided Dane with an opportunity to dramatise women more fully at work than was the norm. As an industry arguably ahead of its time in its employment of creative women, during the nineteenth century in particular, positions were more available in the theatre than in most other vocational areas, both on the stage and behind the scenes in theatre management (Davis 305). In 1859, an anonymous writer for the *Englishwoman's Journal* expressed her admiration for actresses: how 'the way in which they have had to grapple with real, hard

facts, to think and work and depend upon themselves, [...] and the constant use of the higher faculties of taste and imagination, raise them far above those women who are absorbed by the petty vanities, and trifles and anxieties of a woman's ordinary life' (qtd. in Powell 6).

Before her marriage into the Wybird aristocracy, Dick Broome's daughter, Hilaret, is the first female Broome to work on the stage – as an actress. When her spirited daughter, Lettice, marries her actor cousin, William Broome, she too enters the profession, joining him on tour to manage his career. Childbirth leaves her 'delicate' however (*Broome* 70), and when she becomes pregnant with her second child, unable to cope with the uncomfortable and dirty living and working conditions in the theatre and receiving little support or relief from William, she is obliged to return home to London. From here, she continues to control 'the common-sense side of William's ventures' (72) organising business contracts, keeping accounts of theatre profits and salaries, and taking on 'fresh blood every year or so' (ibid.). While she gains a modicum of professional success, for William 'the gains were even greater. He was at the head of his profession as far as the provinces were concerned: news of his triumphs had intrigued London [...] and he had a fabulous offer for an American tour' (71). It soon becomes clear that William has no intention of coming back to her in London, and he disappears to tour the provinces with his leading lady, also his mistress.

A domestic modernist text, *Broome Stages*, like *The Lover and The Babyons*, undermines the domestic context, conceiving the home as a place of restriction for its female protagonists. 'Torn between the wish to accompany

[her husband] and the knowledge that her children and her settled order of life held her fast' (73), Lettice is uncomfortable with the limitations that her house and her duties within it impose. When William makes a fleeting visit to the London house to see his sons, her pinioned static position as the heartbroken deserted wife is drawn in marked contrast to his mobility. On his departure, 'she stood at the window, staring at the billow of white dust which William's carriage had left behind it' (76), and reflects on the emptiness of her role and her emotional dependency, thinking, 'if anybody had told her that she, at her age, with her advantages, with her poise, would find nothing better to do than sit in the garden, with her hands in her lap and say "William!" to herself, she would have thought them merely silly' (ibid.). When the couple are happily reconciled towards the end of William's career, she takes the healthy decision to overcome her 'objection to the hugger-mugger of life behind the scenes' (90) and joins her husband for a last tour during which 'they got on delightfully' (ibid.).

Lettice's decision to return to the life of the strolling player is motivated more by her adoration of her husband than by professional ambition, however, and the novel demonstrates the folly of women's reliance on their romantic hopes and expectations. Widowed in the early nineteenth century, during which time the stage had started to become socially stigmatised, Lettice responds to the changing hegemony by withdrawing from the family business and leasing its theatres. This symbolises a retreat into femininity, and without any work of her own, she becomes a negative model of womanhood. Increasingly preoccupied with the feminine consolations of poise, luxury and

leisure, she reinvents herself as a salon matriarch with an obsession with social convention and feminine accoutrements, an oppressive and dominating presence in the lives of the next generation of Broome women. The matriarch was a ubiquitous figure in inter-war middlebrow fiction and drama (Humble, and Gale, *West*), and 'it was rare to find any critique of this family figure' (Gale, *West* 121). Certainly Walpole drew his principle matriarch, Judith Parris, with considerable affection. Dane's novel on the other hand, casts her as an unproductive and destructive figure. She forces her recalcitrant androgynous granddaughter Donna into 'the proper wear for an ingénue' (*Broome* 271), and persuades her son Harry's second wife, Adelaide, to adopt the insipid mores of early Victorian womanhood: 'Adelaide had taken on the tinge of the room. She wore a gay fashionable dress, but her kind, unintelligent face was pale. [...] She was only four years older than Donna but already she was a matron and her bloom was gone' (374-5). By the end of her life, all of Lettice's conversations and gestures are related in some way to matters of social etiquette and clothing fashions, and she dies in appropriate and ironic circumstances when her dress catches fire (429).

Lettice's particular brand of fashionable femininity is the product of her Georgian culturalisation; the next generation of (early Victorian) women is represented by her first daughter in law, Maud. As a young man, Harry compiles a mental inventory of the qualities of his ideal wife. She:

must be extremely beautiful and preferably fair. [...] She must have peaceful, peaceable brown eyes. She must waltz well, for he

liked dancing. She must move gracefully and wear clothes as well as his mother wore them. He must be able to rely upon her to play the hostess for him perfectly. He must be able to be proud of her at the head of his dinner-table, in his carriage, on his arm. She must have a sweet and soft voice. She must understand him. He did not want a stupid woman, but he did not think it would be suitable for her to have any active talents of her own. (*Broome* 144)

'Socially and pictorially [...] impeccable' (ibid.), an exemplarily meek and pious Victorian womanly construct and the epitome of Victorian female philanthropy, Maud is the model angel-wife who fulfils Harry's requirements. She assumes a charitable role in the theatre, making sure that the cast have a good cooked breakfast at the end of all-night rehearsals, and persuading Harry to buy and renovate that 'festering dust-bin' (251), the *Syracuse* theatre, in order to secure better conditions for the workers there. She is prevented from any kind of creative endeavour however, and the narrative perspective implies that for women of this period, access to the world of work was still limited. Indeed, without the power to effect changes autonomously, she has little choice but to disguise her 'great intelligence, organising power [and] common sense' (ibid), and perform a shrewd masquerade, assuming a compliant femininity in order to have her will. As Harry observes, 'almost it seemed to him, sometimes, that Maud was soft and yielding, and meekly stupid and intelligently repentant, on purpose' (188). Her early death, from a fever contracted on one of her

charitable expeditions abroad, is as ironic as Lettice's; both die in the course of their pursuit of a feminine/womanly identity.

Donna Broome and the Victorian Wo-manager³⁰

According to Diana Wallace, in female-authored family sagas 'the ultra-feminine woman, [...] coquettish, illogical, often rather silly [...] usually a secondary character' is drawn in marked contrast to the 'centralised heroine' who 'rebels against the conventions of "femininity" and embodies "masculine" virtues – clear thinking, resourcefulness and good sense' (*Woman's* 41). Dane's 'secondary' characters, Menella, Mary Ann, Lettice, Maud and Adelaide, break with this essentialist stereotype of fixed identity. They start out as resourceful women, but become increasingly compromised by cultural demands for their normative feminine conduct. The textual representations of their unfeminine antitheses, Hariot, Isabella, Teresa and Harry's daughter, Donna, also evade the female-authored saga stereotype by opposing the ideologically more reassuring model of the rational female heroine, appropriator of male-identified logic. Donna Broome is particularly erratic, prone to an invidious 'heavy temper, the sullen ways, the inaccessibility, the uncontrollable explosions of passion' (*Broome* 260). The narrative prevaricates in relation to the prevalent cultural belief that personality was genetically determined, with each generation punished for the sins of their fathers. In the more radical sub-text,

the self is represented as a construct, socially conditioned by changing family and national cultural ideologies. It is characteristically circumspect in its explanation of Donna's gloomy outbursts. On the one hand, these are the result of her congenital make-up. As 'a Broome with [the family] instinct', she is inclined to 'act as if the Broome whim were the universal law, and complete personal freedom the Broome inheritance'; she is also Maud's inveterate daughter and 'had inherited her mother's [...] stubbornness' (320). On the other, like her rebellious female ancestors and indeed a number of female protagonists in later-twentieth-century feminist fiction, her defiant and deviant behaviour is a reaction to cultural oppression, or what Humble terms, 'the operation of a powerful pro-domestic ideology' (196). She is subjugated by patriarch and matriarch alike: by 'her elder's' whim to turn her out a 'pattern young woman' in 'spotless fashionable clothes' behaving with 'enforced maiden gentility' (*Broome* 320), and by her father's selfish and brutal ambition to 'break her in' as an actress in order for her to be 'useful' to him in his theatre business (263). As a Victorian, she enjoys fewer freedoms than her father, brother, cousin Stephen, and indeed her Georgian predecessors. Living in a condition of domestic petrification, she rails against her circumstances: 'from the moment I get up to the moment I go to bed I wear pink and white muslin and I'm under somebody's eye [and] even when I'm acting with father I'm ruled and regulated' (281).

Alison Light contends that conservative writers with 'a modernist spirit', such as Ivy Compton-Burnett and Agatha Christie typify the female interwar impetus 'to upset the Victorian image of home sweet home' (61). While the

homes which Light discusses are generally poisoned by female antagonisms however, and as Christine Bridgwood points out in her summary of some of Light's arguments, 'the saga hero is a father-figure, [...] displaying very little of the authoritarianism and emotional distance typical of the romance hero [he] is usually open and supportive' (193), Dane's domestic environments are blighted by the powerful will of tyrannous husbands and fathers. Her representation of Donna's father is a particularly uncomfortable one. 'The centre of his life' is his son, Gilly: he 'had accumulated an extremely large fortune for Gilly and Gilly's children: also a position [...] as manager' (*Broome* 334). For Donna, however, he harbours only feelings of hostility. His antipathy towards her derives from her refusal to eschew her androgynous identity. 'Dark, silent, scowling [...] always with a book in her hand', to his mind, she is a 'masculine, new-womanish type', (259), a 'ridiculous and clumsy giantess in white muslins' (271), whose bedroom is 'singularly unfeminine [with] no pictures, no flowers, no ornaments, no fallals' (289). Dane defies popular convention and normative idealised conceptions of fatherhood by dramatising the physical abuse which Harry subjects Donna to. He 'cuffed her repeatedly on the cheek and ear [...] struck her again and again till she and he were alike dazed by his violence' (262), and even when she is married and has moved away from him, she would still 'feel her father's long strong hand holding her chin in a vice, and see his cold, implacable face in front of her, and feel again blow after blow on her cheek' (325).

Donna, Hariot, Isabella and later, Elinor, match Wallace's concept of the saga's centralised heroine with their resistance to prescribed femininity and

their valiant struggle against the tyranny of the patriarchal family. Feeling 'a sick black rage' against Harry (*Broome* 325), Donna escapes the intolerable restraints imposed upon her by marrying a gentle middle-aged Irishman, Sir Joscelyn Pallas, and moving to Ireland. Outside of her father's control, she begins to flourish. Ireland, the land where Maud was born, is the mother country of Rossetti's eponymous poem and like the bucolic idyll in 'Spinsters' Rest', it offers empowering possibilities. In this rural space, away from the stifling bourgeois world, Donna reconfigures her identity in positive freer terms, and Dane's affection for this country where she lived for a while is clearly evident. Joscelyn's mild-mannered and serene spinster-sisters wholeheartedly welcome Donna as the mistress of their ramshackle Georgian house, Brian's Fort, which is untouched by modern Victorianism and where a more traditional way of life prevails. Consequently, she determines that 'at last she would let herself go!' and she begins to look forward to 'all the days of the long journey through life in which to find herself' (319). As for all of Dane's heroines, Donna's spiritual empowerment is realised outdoors: she finds in the healing space of the Irish garden, 'her kingdom as the theatre was her father's kingdom, as the social world was her grandmother's [where] she came into the possession of something [...] for which her womanhood longed, for which her nature starved' (322-3). She is 'uncriticised, unblamed' (319), and Joscelyn offers her the kind of companionate union which inter-war readers would recognise as a modern improvement on the normative Victorian marriage: as well as 'his wife and hostess she became his companion and friend' (340). Even so, his gender, class and religious power limit her new found freedom

and her journey to autonomy. In his Anglo-Irish Big House, she is sealed off from the local catholic community: walking to the edge of the estate one day for instance, she desists from venturing further because 'Joscelyn would dislike her wandering down the road by herself. It would so disturb his notions of how she should carry herself in the village' (357). When all is said and done, Donna's kindly husband is still a patriarch.

When Joscelyn dies of pneumonia, it becomes apparent that he has financially mismanaged the estate and doomed Donna to poverty. The rules of patrilineal succession by which Harry continues to try to regulate his daughter's life now come into force too. Gilly is recently drowned at sea, and Harry's obsession with the continuance of the family blood-line means that emotionally he can no longer afford to cut Donna out of the family business and out of his will as he originally intended. Making her the sole heir to the Broome estate, which under his control has become 'the largest theatrical combination in London' (*Broome* 335), he offers financial incentives to attempt to entice her back to London. In need of her father's money to enable Joscelyn's impoverished sisters to stay on at their beloved Brian's Fort, with 'the hunted air of an animal handed over to new masters' (374), she reluctantly returns to London and to renewed oppression. She is now subjected to a double enslavement: the jurisdiction of her father and emotional bondage to his new business associate, her married cousin, Stephen, with whom she embarks on a brief and painful affair. The narrative perspective on her fall from sexual purity and subsequent pregnancy is candid, modern and sympathetic. Repudiating the kind of sentimentality which characterises Benji and Vanessa's idealised

extra-marital relationship in *The Herries Chronicles*, the text dramatises a stark social reality – that illegitimate children are frequently conceived in brief and unsatisfactory liaisons – and sanctions Donna's pragmatic, unromantic decision to enter a marriage of convenience with Geoffrey Angers.

Donna escapes what proves to be an unsatisfactory second marriage by succeeding as actress and wo-manager in her father's theatre-company. Aware that he might well alter his will in Stephen's favour, she throws herself into theatre-work, not out of a love of the stage but in order to survive and prosper outside of patriarchal control. Recent feminist theatre-historians have noted that in the Victorian era, actresses could only 'escape the tyranny of the actor-managers' (Hollidge 36) if they set upon 'entering management [to] free themselves to shape their own careers' (Powell 66). Of this cultural context, Donna becomes the first woman in the Broome dynasty to forge a professional role in the theatre. Powell observes that 'a few women became managers in spite of the odds against them' (73), and the novel's suggestion that there were real opportunities for women in this era is not a fantasy. Donna counters Stephen's objection to her role in the family business on the grounds that she is a woman, by citing real-life Victorian role models, female theatre-managers whom Dane obviously admired: 'I have been managing my own companies in America these ten years', she retorts. 'Besides, you talk as if a woman running her own company were an event. Look at Mary Anderson. Look at Madame Vestris. Look at Mrs Lane down at Hoxton' (*Broome* 451).³¹ The demands of work and motherhood leave her little time to satisfy Geoffrey's need for attention and affection, which she finds increasingly burdensome. She 'hated

to be nagged. She was the masculine half of that partnership, and as she grew older and the habit of controlling her company, her child and her life grew fixed, she found Geoffrey's more feminine qualities a nuisance and a bore' (446). She willingly acquiesces when Geoffrey requests a divorce and embarks on a more fulfilling life as a divorcee. By the inter-war period, 'the idea that a married life [...] may be a kind of limitation for women, could appear in the popular novel without fear of shocking its readers' (Light 167) but still, 'very few novels by women in the period [...] described a woman finally giving up love and marriage for her career [because] the staple readership of the circulating libraries was largely women who [...] if they were unmarried, [...] were presumed to be longing not to be' (Beauman 82). Dane challenges this romantic convention, dramatising her personal belief that living as a single woman is preferable to remaining within an inadequate marriage.

In her early life, Donna was determined to bring down the house of the father: 'she made up her mind that when her day came she would bethink herself of his methods and use them, if need be, against himself' (*Broome* 268). In middle age, following Harry's death she widens her resolve, determining to win the gender struggle for power in the theatre world. In the novel, changes in theatre practices parallel modernisations at a wider cultural level and the Broome family consolidate, extend or lose power according to how well they adjust to changing theatrical and cultural norms. It is distinguishable from other sagas by its gendered treatment of the theme, whereby women of every generation are more adaptable than their male counterparts. Thus Donna triumphs over the economic slump of the late

Victorian period and sweeps clean, buying Stephen out of their jointly-owned theatres, *The Genista* and *The New Broome*. She exploits a zeitgeist which, although marked by sexual conservatism, was also characterised by audiences who 'were sufficiently daring' and 'went uncertainly to Ibsen and were convulsed by Wilde' (457). Narrowly escaping the censor, she woos this new generation of theatre-goers 'whose taste was only just being educated by the aesthetic craze' (ibid.), with her revival of her Uncle Robin's controversial play, *Clever Kate*. Stephen meanwhile, struggles in vain to fill his remaining theatre, *The Gloriana*, resorting to crass commercialisation and popularisation to keep it afloat: in 'a series of shabby experiments – a Jubilee Ball, a pantomime with a talking horse for hero, a water pageant, disreputable gala nights, circus enterprises and the forlorn ventures of closet dramatists, rich amateurs, and theatre sharks' (456).³²

Stephen comes to regard Donna as 'one of the Eumenides with a whip of snakes' (470), an image born of his misogynist horror of her indomitable intractability and her defiance of feminine models of forgiveness and reconciliation, to which traditional saga-heroines were inclined to submit. Many of Donna's acquaintance also define her according to their particular conceptions of womanhood. Geoffrey fears her as 'one of these New Women, not to be broken, best avoided' (ibid.), and to her theatre-going public 'she was a lesser Mrs Siddons' (ibid.),³³ as powerful and dramatic as her famous predecessor, although less brilliant. Her bewildered male business associates agree that 'she was a woman to obey for the sake of peace and quiet: wrong headed, but not to be resisted' (ibid). Her ultra-feminine stepmother, Adelaide,

describes her as 'darling, eccentric Donna who would look ten years younger if she would only take life more easily and spend two hours over her morning toilet, and wear her hair as everyone else did, fringed on the top' (ibid.).

A multivalent figure, Donna is less formidable as a mother than as a business woman; her manipulative son Edmund regards her as a mere 'useful, ornamental and manageable mother' (*Broome* 466). As he grows into the next patriarchal Broome tyrant, and his masculinist values and exploitations of her maternal love begin to threaten her with 'inner death' (560), she obeys her female 'instinct, stronger than reason' (ibid.), leaves the oppressive London environment where she feels a domestic prisoner once again, and retires to Ireland for the second time. Here, like *Orlando* and other radical historical novels which 'explore and conceptualise identities and otherness' (De Groot 67), *Broome Stages* deconstructs the various gendered identities with which Donna has become saddled, and she is reconfigured as the woman she wants to be. Like Hetty Piele, Mary Pawle and Antonia Babyon, her redefinition emerges through a combination of instinct and psycho-spiritual experience, which returns her to the pre-symbolic. In the open space of the countryside she is receptive to supernatural visitations, pantheistic epiphany and transcendental unifying moments. She ceases to feel a sense of separation between self and other:

Sky, hill and the grasses pressed in upon her mind, embracing her, and she thought that voices must be urgently speaking to her also; but she heard nothing. She was all sight and touch, but her

ears were stopped and her quivering soul said to her –‘You are not yet born.’

She went along by the hedge on the further side of the field. [...]

It was a common bit of hedge, not striking or beautiful; but as she passed by, it looked at her and smiled, and she saw quite clearly that it was Joscelyn. There was his unaltered personality imbuing the hedge with life, passing through it, part of it and then part of her. She felt him become part of her and stood still, shuddering with delight.

The strange, inexplicable moment passed, and she put her hands to her eyes and rubbed them like a child who has come out of a dark room into a garden. For now she could hear as well as see: now it seemed to her that she was born. She was part of the grass on which she stood, part of the sky, part of the hill before her, part of the eternal air. She was an appearance, at one with all other appearances, and enjoying that reality indescribable of which appearance is but a symbol. The dead dog, the iron of the hoof that had killed it, the book lying open at home waiting for her to finish it, the baby [grandson] Richard, Edmund in the train, her parts that she had played a thousand times, the minds that wrote those parts, the tears that she had wept, Joscelyn, the clouds, the earth- all these were hers: all these were in her: all these were herself and she them. (*Broome* 561-2)

Donna's self-completion recalls *Lolly Willowes*' textual celebration of self-exile or 'the ability of a witch to be herself and not *woman* as defined by society' (Brothers 208). Like 'the sisterhood of the mind' which Lolly enters, where 'to grow up has meant to cast off the view of the way things are according to the patriarchal scriptures' in order to reach an 'inner space' (20-11), Donna's reaches a solitary intuitive life in a private space, by renouncing the spiritual sterility of the patriarchal socio-economic battle field. Casting off domesticity and the patriarchal home, which she calls 'not a gift [but] a burden shifted', she also rejects the masculine Broome-dominated theatre she has 'always hated' (*Broome* 492).

More Theatre Liberations: *Broome Stages* Elinor Wybird and *Wandering Stars*

Damaris Payne

Donna's determination to succeed in a man's world is not indicative of a wider feminist consciousness: she has a particular antipathy to Ibsen's pro-feminist plays, for instance.³⁴ Despite this, the in-roads which she makes into the world of acting and management constitute a powerful matrilineal bequest. Visited in Ireland by Edmund and his new wife, Elinor, she inspires in her daughter-in-law an enthusiasm for the theatre, providing her with acting lessons and professional advice. Unrelated to the Broomes, Elinor is untainted by aristocratic genes, as her spiritual sister Antonia is by blue Babyon blood. A

New Woman in the 1890s and Dane's approximate contemporary, she is 'consciously invested [...] with parts of [Dane's] own life' (Barrow 64), and shares her modern feminist outlook. Like her author, she attends art school in Dresden, her first ambition is to paint, and she is an actress during the First World War. She combines a late Victorian/early Edwardian conservative notion of good sense with a bohemian modern liberal tolerance, and rejects the constrictions of the 'Old Testament' and its myth of 'the sins of the fathers', internalised by multiple generations of the Broome family as an explanation for the family curse (*Broome* 600). With a feminist passion for autonomy, work and independence, her values reflect Dane's own.

She travels a long journey from her betrothal to the elderly Sir Lewis Wybird at the beginning of her narrative to her state of independence at its close. Her early restrictions are symbolised by the confinements to which her body is subjected on the eve of her wedding. The maid accidentally burns her neck with the curling-irons, and Wybird's sister laces the bodice 'dreadfully tight: she could not breathe', and ignores her plea to 'make it looser' (540). Wallace comments on the significance of this kind of feminine ritual to the inter-war reader in her discussion of Georgette Heyer's 1926 middlebrow novel, *These Old Shades*. According to Wallace, when the heroine is dressed up in Victorian finery, her sense of 'alienation from her own image in the mirror', is intended to evoke in female inter-war readers a reminder of both the restrictions of the past and 'the limitations that are still in place' (*Woman's* 39-40). Like other feminist authors of historical fiction, engaged in 'implicitly likening contemporary anti-feminism with the discarded tyrannies of past ages'

(Baldick 223), Dane uses this clothing trope to make the same point as Heyer, that although Victorian feminisation has had its day, there are still perils to be resisted; indeed, when Elinor casts off her bridal apparel to elope with Edmund, she merely exchanges Victorian womanliness for another kind of subjugation. Her first encounter with Edmund replicates Mary-Ann and Charles' first meeting in the grounds of River Hayes. The conventions of popular romance are once more subverted. Elinor is as misguided as Mary Ann over the handsome suitor who romantically appears in the pastoral grounds of the Wybird mansion, falsely reading him as the one 'man who didn't seem to despise me [who] talks to me as if I were a man, [...] as if I had sense' (*Broome* 538). With crushing irony, the text deconstructs the traditional romantic rescue of popular fiction, as it becomes increasingly clear that Elinor's feminist sensibilities will not be safe in a union with Edmund. Not long into their marriage she realises that 'Edmund had broken the bars of her cage certainly, but it was only, she thought sometimes, to put a collar on her and take her out for walks on a lead. [...] He was the centre: he was the actor-manager: her gaiety must be the decoration of his solidity' (582). Possessing fin-de-siècle values, Edmund approves of her role as an actress in his theatre only so long as she remains within his control and there are uncomfortable echoes of Harry's mid-Victorian expectations of Maud in his marital wish list. Desiring, 'a mistress and a business manager, a hostess and a pupil [...] he wanted a mother who put her children first, but never let the children or her motherhood get in the way when he wanted her. He wanted a kind shadow, who would yet be a woman of importance when he took her about' (564).

Elinor is of a new generation however, and she defies late-nineteenth-century normative gender ideology. While Harry's Maud was easy to subjugate, Edmund 'perceived that if he neglected to make [Elinor] to his pattern she would make herself to her own' (555) and he ultimately loses his battle to control her. After many years of tolerating his aggressive behaviour to their children and his sexual indiscretions with a string of actresses, including his own son's girlfriend, she puts down the burden of feminine guilt and transcends the sense of responsibility for marital failings which constrains Hetty in *The Lover*. She comes to the conclusion that because she 'had thought him divine when he was but a faulty creature' and 'put him on a pedestal' (597), it does not follow that she should be held accountable for Edmund's shortcomings. The epitome of Dane's feminist consciousness, she is the only one of her heroines to sue for divorce. She has long-dreamed of an alternative life to marriage and domesticity. As a girl, she imagines 'what the world would be like [...] if you could do what you liked and earn your living, and go about by yourself [...] or go out to dinner with a man quite alone, and each pay for yourself – or he be your guest' (538). Her friend Fina warns her that such a life would entail having to become 'a frump and wear bloomers and have short hair' (538-9), but Elinor proves her wrong. Following her divorce, she contests the stereotype, taking 'more pains with her clothes than she had done since she was twenty' (619), becoming a model of modern professional womanhood without compromising her femininity.

She skilfully juggles work, family and the heavy demands made upon her as 'everybody, almost without exception, needed humouring' (*Broome* 619)

but like Donna, she gains little pleasure in domesticity. From the start of her marriage, the theatre 'became her actual home, and her home the mere comfortable hotel which she kept for husband and her sons' (612). As she enters middle age, her work 'freed her true nature', formerly 'bound down and repressed outside the theatre by early marriage, early motherhood, the responsibility of a household and the overbearing and exigent personality of her husband' (563). Becoming a single professional, 'she was like a dog released from a chain [in] wild high spirits' (563). She becomes:

happier than she had ever been in her life. She worked hard: she enjoyed her work: she was not torn any more by personal passion: she had put off Edmund and her past life: and she had her children. [...] For twenty years the horror of losing Edmund's love had hung over her. She had lost it, and now she rejoiced daily in the loss, because of the freedom it had given her. (665)

For Elinor, as for Donna and Antonia Drury, losing a husband means gaining a life. Characteristically professional, Elinor also demonstrates that a woman's stage-career is not inhibited by age, establishing herself as a ground-breaking role model for middle-aged actresses: 'At forty-nine she was still a handsome woman, just able to play young parts still, but as steadily refusing them and striking out her own line in elderly comedy' (664). Her happiness is augmented by the high standing in which she is held by young people and her sons in particular: they 'took a pride in her [and] respected her authority, not

as a mother but as a star' (619). According to Barrow, Ginette Spanier recognised Dane's own enthusiasm for modernity, inspired by her friendships with young actors and writers in the 1930s, in Elinor's delight in her sons' modern friends and in her reputation and identity in the post-war world. Barrow quotes part of the following passage from *Broome Stages* – in which Elinor considers herself in relation to the modern world – arguing that it is particularly representative of Dane's 'own reaction to the younger generation's view of her' (64):

the girls [...] were [...] astonishing, contesting elections, controlling businesses, flying. [...] Marvellous, terrifying post-war boys and girls, how she envied them! How she admired this generation that had bought itself bloodily a freedom of which her youth had but dreamed. Oh to have been born twenty years later into the world! Well- if she could not keep as young as she wanted to keep, and could not think as youngly as she wanted to think, at least she could watch with excitement and appreciation the younger generation. And what did it matter if they thought her grand and comic? She was grand and comic: she owned it, chuckling, for she was happy. (*Broome* 665)

Although Dane's celebration of Elinor's progressive outlook and comfortable relationship with modernity is radical, *Broome Stages* is a fairly conservative text in its treatment of social class. Its representation of

bourgeois stage culture and privileged wealthy wo-managers from an established theatre family is perhaps not an accurate reflection of socio-economic realities. Life on the stage was not as easy for ordinary actresses as for the Broome women and 'economic subjection was institutionalised in the Victorian theatre, limiting the exercise of talent and the development of potential in a career that only seemed on the surface to offer a liberating escape from the gender inequities of Victorian life beyond the footlights' (Powell 158–9). In *Wandering Stars*, her earlier novella based on theatre culture, however, Dane more fully acknowledges its material privations. Through an extended dialogue between two of her male acquaintances, Cairns and George Greydon Hart, an eminent playwright with whom she was once secretly in love, the novella narrates, retrospectively, the early life of poor Edwardian actress, Damaris Payne. Believing that Hart has unwittingly ruined Damaris, Cairns tells him his version of her story of Damaris' fall from innocence and spiritual grace, revealing the playwright to be the cause. After having 'been cuckooed out to type her way through life' by her step mother (*Wandering* 124), Damaris relinquishes secretarial work to forge a career on the stage, renting 'the cheapest home from home in London' (ibid.). In a male-dominated Edwardian theatre culture, 'sexual attractiveness to men was almost essential to success' (Powell 64) and the 'casting of the female roles was [...] subject to the control of the managers' (Hollidge 22). Actor-manager Maginnis engages Damaris more for her 'eyes and her figure' (*Wandering* 124), than in recognition of her imagination and extensive knowledge of Shakespeare. In a context in which as Damaris points out, plays that focus on 'how a woman

feels, a real woman' are non-existent (146), she dreams up her own, and because he has the masculine authority which she lacks, persuades Hart, who is as yet largely unknown as a playwright, to write them down and get them performed. Hart abuses her creative impetus in order to launch his own career: according to Cairns, he 'liked to use a razor to cut his kindlings. She could type, shorthand, and [...] she had ideas. No doubt he found her useful' (163). Hart corroborates this, confessing that when 'pearls and diamonds [...] sprang from her mouth' (138) and 'ideas [...] showered from her, [...] I had no scruples in exploiting her' (104). Their unequal collaboration produces Hetty Piele's story, *The Lover*, Hart 'made a fortune out of it; or rather, Damaris made one for him' (123), and he takes the play to New York, abandoning the play's true author in the process.

During the writing of *The Lover*, playwright and unacknowledged muse become 'a doubled creature, the east and west of one sky, birth in her eyes and a sun coming up, and in his [...] a reflection of her glory, a false dawn' (*Wandering* 139). After Hart discards her, Damaris is transformed from a rising, shining creative force with fixed sphere and purpose to the 'wandering star' of despair, for whom, in the biblical words of Jude, 'it is reserved / the blackness of darkness forever' (Epigraph. *Wandering Stars* n.p). It is important to recognise however, that it is Cairns who defines her as a fallen angel and his point of reference is the hardening of her attitude towards men on her road to 'star' status. He is an unreliable narrator, mistakenly reading her rejection of romance and heterosexual love as the death of her soul, when in reality he is mourning his own lost opportunity of possessing her. Meeting her some years

later, he notes that within her, 'there was nothing lacking save, as I remembered now that I missed it so, the former beautiful crimson in her cheeks as she welcomed me: and in her eyes – nothing, nothing left of me' (241). Both wandering and star are open to different, more positive interpretations and Damaris' fall from Cairns' masculine ideal of female beauty and purity can be interpreted as a rise to professionalism and autonomy. Her acquisition of a sardonic and subversive humour, for instance – Cairns finds it 'monstrous that she should speak and move about the earth still –and laugh' (ibid.) – is perhaps a rejection of patriarchal notions of femininity. Her wanderings are as ironic as her rebellious laughter; androgyny and economic power give her the freedom to range free from domestic restrictions, and of a fashion, she recovers the itinerant lifestyle of the strolling player and the liberated women-gypsies of *The Babyons*.

The radical recognition of class and gender inequality in *Wandering Stars* is perhaps compromised by the text's individualistic message that poverty is surmountable through the right mix of creativity and ambition. It does follow the feminist narrative trajectory of Dane's other post-First World War texts in which women come to reject romantic ideals and domestic stasis however, and notwithstanding the tension between feminist optimism and a more conservative internalisation of capitalist cultural myths, her portrayals of ambitious actresses from across the class spectrum, Coral, Damaris and Elinor in particular, are not necessarily distortions of reality. According to Powell, the actress was to some extent 'freed and empowered by her life on the stage' (4), and women working in the theatre 'might transcend a fixed domestic identity,

cultivating “myriad lives” and exercising a power and independence thought incompatible with wives and mothers’ (27). Yet Dane failed to make any reference to feminist theatre, or to the Actresses Franchise League in particular. Given that she was likely to have been acquainted with this organisation, which prior to and during the First World War, ‘nearly every actress in the business joined’ (Hollidge, qtd. in Gale, *West* 57), her omission is a falsification of theatre history. She also makes no reference to Shaw’s pro-feminist socialist theatre. This is perhaps surprising on two counts: firstly, Shaw ‘used his plays as a platform to attack the marriage laws’ (Hollidge 31), as she did in her own *Bill of Divorcement*; and secondly, Shaw was supportive towards her in the early stages of her playwriting career. Her conservatism here is probably a concession to her middlebrow readership and may also be attributable to her limited knowledge of the conditions of theatrical production beyond the West End. Indeed, she was one of only three playwrights (the others being Dodie Smith and AA Milne), popular enough to have no need to work outside the ‘timid and reactionary commercial theatre’ (Marshall qtd. in Gale, *West* 47). Her allegiance to the West End notwithstanding, Dane does include amongst Elinor’s career experiences, a spell playing to mainstream audiences in less than auspicious working conditions. With the onset of the First World War, she tirelessly works hospitals and small theatres with her son, John, asking half their usual salary, raising morale and money for the war effort and performing to what would have been a ‘“new class of audience”: lower middle-class working women and soldiers on leave’ (Gale, *West* 39).

Broome Stages and The Feminine Male

While Elinor 'worked like a beaver [...] going from theatre to theatre [...] to watch the [...] new importations, polishing, modernising herself' (*Broome* 619), Edmund cannot survive the dawn of the modern world. Unable to keep abreast of change, his career goes into decline in a reversal of fortune which mirrors Donna's triumph over Harry and Stephen, and further facilitates the establishment of a place for women at the forefront of twentieth-century theatre. He was:

a pre-war Napoleon; he could not adapt himself to the entirely changed conditions of the post-war theatre world. He could not accept the fact that new audiences had grown up which knew not the Broomes and had no use for the problem plays, the honour dramas, and the elaborate but old-fashioned spectacles on which he had built his fortune. (*Broome* 666)³⁵

With diminishing touring returns, and 'no longer a symbol of the great traditions of the English theatre, but a commercial manager who had miscalculated his public's mood' (*ibid.*), he becomes increasingly financially reliant on his old-fashioned perennial Christmas play at *The Gloriana*. With the coming of film, the 'cultural development which most threatened theatre'

(Gale, *West* 69), he is no longer able to fill his London houses or secure the capital to see him through the crisis, and is forced to sell up.

Edmund's demise is not so much attributable to 'the working [...] of the familiar curse', and his inheritance of his father's 'inhibition of all emotion' and tyrannical mood swings (*Broome* 254), as to a context-bound misogyny. By adopting the approach of other inter-war female-authored historical novels, which 'examine *masculinity* [as well as femininity] as a social and cultural construction', suggesting that 'gender [...] is historically contingent rather than essential' (Wallace, *Woman's* 8), *Broome Stages* ultimately supports Elinor's rejection of genetics. Dane attributes her patriarchs' despotism to their internalisation of Victorian masculine norms as much as to sexual biology or the Broome strong will. Celebrating the triumphs of her female protagonists and welcoming the fall of masculine power, her novels are also always sympathetic towards the defeated and doomed patriarchs who are configured not as archetypal villains of popular melodrama but as complex mixtures of genetic and cultural construction. In *Broome Stages*, she repeats the method used in *The Lover*, employing multiple perspectivisation or what Wallace calls an 'act of ventriloquism' (23), to register her male characters' sense of cultural bewilderment. Harry's narrative reveals an incommunicable pride in Donna's achievements and tender feelings for Maud for instance, emotions which compete with his will to dominate women. The reader witnesses Edmund's similar inner-struggle to comprehend why his masculine values have alienated his wife and children. Elinor voices the overriding narrative perspective which reflects the inter-war current of female opinion, sympathetic to the mental

anguish of returned soldiers and men who lost sons and brothers in the First World War. In 1918, defending Edmund against her eldest son's criticisms of his father, she remarks: 'your mind's been blown about for four years, Richard, and so has his. I'll never judge any man who's been through the last four years – ' (*Broome* 650). In the same vein as Dane's personal expressions of pity and compassion in response to Kipling's war stories, *Broome Stages* forgives Edmund's patriarchal machinations on account of the death of his beloved and promising illegitimate son, Willie Marshall, which recalls Kipling's famous bereavement.

The new generation of Broome men, Richard, Gerry and John, are also culturally feminised by the war. John is 'shaken to pieces by the home-front panics of the previous five years' (*Broome* 663) and traumatised by the death of his brother, Henry, at the front. Other cultural factors come into play to shape their identities. As a consequence of Edmund's domination, which overrules Elinor's hopes to send them to a liberal modern co-educational day school of the kind that Dane herself championed, they are made to attend an old-fashioned boarding school where they are sexually abused by older boarders. This is clearly a prescriptive plot element which recalls *Regiment of Women*, alerting readers to what in Dane's mind was a dangerous single-sex school environment. Saved from the effects of the school and their father's brutalising disciplinarian ethos by Elinor's informal and affectionate parenting strategies, Dane clearly approves of the modern feminised sensitivity which she nurtures in the Broome boys. John becomes a creative, tolerant and insightful poet and playwright, and Gerry marries an older divorcee and is

fulfilled as a kept man. Richard, meanwhile, a compulsive reader of Conrad, one of Dane's own favourite writers, joins a general drift of actors to Hollywood, and settles into a loving and mutually supportive homosexual relationship, which Elinor heartily approves of, enthusiastically welcoming him and his partner, Ken, to her home when they visit from America. In her narrative treatment of Richard, Dane has come a long way from the hesitancies and equivocations which mark her representation of homosexuality in *Regiment of Women*. Indeed, her clear differentiation between homosexual abuse in schools and the consensual homosexual love enjoyed by consenting adults, suggests that interpretations which point to her first novel as homophobic are misguided.

Richard is probably the first homosexual in literary history to be rewarded with sexual and creative fulfilment and prosperity. In a difficult post-war economic climate which saw 'the running of theatres moved from actor-managers [...] to the investor, or financial speculator' (Gale, *West* 39), while Edmund's 'hatred for the cinemas grew into an obsession' (*Broome* 666), his modern sons capitalise on this new medium which 'provided [...] lucrative possibilities of work for actors and actresses' (Gale, *West* 69). Richard is the most successful, making a fortune on the big screen and investing his film profits in a business partnership with Philip Wybird, the youngest of the rich Wybird dynasty. This assures continued success for the rest of the Broome family in the theatre industry, enabling them to circumvent the 'new divorce between business and aesthetics' (40), and straddle both industries. As John stages a successful *Romeo and Juliet* at the O.U.D.S., Richard's most recent

film shows at one of the newly-converted theatres in the same town. Where the close of *The Babyons* marks the dying of the heterosexual family dynasty, the Broomes are revitalised by the gender reconfigurations made possible by the modern world.

Wallace contends that 'the model of history as a cyclical, rather than linear, progression frequently informs the family saga [which is] haunted by the idea that history is repetitive rather than progressive' (*Woman's* 55). In some ways, this is true of *Broome Stages*. Closing with a statement of John's determination to 'make money. Make a very great deal of money [...] fall in love [...] have a huge success [...] enjoy myself!' (*Broome* 703), the cyclical family model and the ideology of the '“long view” perspective' (Bridgwood 189) which privileges the survival of the family over other concerns, is somewhat validated. *Broome Stages* cannot be dismissed as a conservative text, however. There is an element of cultural realism in John's triumph, commensurate with Wallace's observation that female-authored sagas 'use the story of [...] generations of women to conduct a kind of historical stocktaking, a measurement of the progress made and that still to be attained' (*Woman's* 55). John's words may be construed as Dane's narrative warning that history may yet repeat itself: he may yet follow in his father and grandfather's patriarchal footsteps, there is no room for complacency and there is some way to go before a full shift in the balance of gender power can be achieved. Despite the gloomy message, moreover, there is a general mood of feminist optimism. Broome power is finally consolidated under a softer male rule, influenced by a professional mother who constitutes an independent role

model for future generations of women. Cultural change has facilitated female professional autonomy and a greater tolerance of homosexuality, and there is a sense that history is progressive and women are becoming self-empowered.

Dane's sagas break the mould in other ways. Many of her contemporaries, including Daphne Du Maurier, Georgette Heyer and other late twentieth-century chroniclers whom Brigwood identifies, emulate *The Forsyte Saga* and *The Herries Chronicles* by subscribing to conservative ideologies which 'sustain the dominant models of social ordering', including, 'hetero-normative relationships and strictly defined gender roles' (De Groot 52). They close their sagas with imminent or recent weddings, and reconciliatory unions between young members of the latest generation. Dane desists from this popular romance convention in both *The Babyons* and *Broome Stages*. She de-romanticises men, and in *Broome Stages* inscribes and fully acknowledges homosexual fulfilment. At the same time she promotes creative work and spiritual autonomy for women as viable and preferable alternatives to marriage. The domestic modernism of *The Babyons* and *Broome Stages* contrasts markedly with the domestic conservatism of *The Rakonitz Chronicles*. While *Tents of Israel* doubts what has been gained through the progress of women's history, making the happiness of her key female protagonist dependent on keeping hold of her husband and retreating from the public world of work, Dane's sagas unequivocally celebrate the modernisation of women. Giving her readers no assurances in both texts that marriage is the answer to a multi-generational family's needs or a woman's happiness, she relegates fairytale marriages to the dustbin of discarded patriarchal myths,

making divorce the freely chosen and successful option for her most fully emancipated protagonist. Furthermore, although both texts focus on the extraordinary, glamorised family, they are fascinated more by their middle-class female protagonists than by the aristocracy. The Wybird nobles in *Broome Stages* are only minor characters, and the declining titled patriarchs in *The Babyons* represent an ailing repressive patriarchy which the narrative openly critiques. Moreover, a traditional conviction that family traits are fixed, is superseded by a modern belief in socialisation and cultural construction.

Dane's conservative modernist tendencies, manifested in her valorisation of middle-class power which buoys up the existing status quo, are radicalised by her domestic modernist-inflected feminist gender politics. Affirming religious, racial and sexual tolerance, her sagas re-instate women into the historical narrative and like radical feminist writers, Virginia Woolf, Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, who have 'used the historical novel to express multiple, complex identities and used them as sites of possibility and potential' (De Groot 67), Dane examines different ways of configuring the self. Her female protagonists confidently move towards a rejection of feminine constructions, and triumph over family exploitation, progressing from dispossession to repossession, domesticity to professionalization.

CHAPTER 5: RE-WORKING A POPULAR GENRE: DANE'S FEMINIST TRANSFORMATIONS OF DETECTIVE FICTION

While Dane was embedding her New Woman and domestic-modernist agendas in gothic texts and family sagas, another kind of novel was fast becoming the most popular middlebrow genre of all. This was the detective story, which evolved from popular thrillers, mysteries and tales of crime into a recognisable form by 1920, 'accounting for one quarter of all new novels published in the English language' by 1939 (Watson 96). Dane's collaboration with her friend Helen Simpson,³⁶ was part of a phenomenon which saw a raft of middlebrow writers migrate to the detective novel during this 'Golden Age' period - a term which conveys the success and popularity which the genre enjoyed at this particularly prolific time. Detective novels became 'money makers' (Mann 49), as Charles Evans, one of Heinemann's chief readers, recognised in 1928 when

he first suggested the idea of writing a detective novel to Dane and Simpson. He apparently joked with the two writers that 'if only the two of you could write books like this [...] instead of your intellectual novels – you would both make a fortune!' (qtd. in Barrow 58). He suggested that they co-author a detective novel, even providing the plot-outline for what later became *Enter Sir John*, and his contribution is acknowledged in a prefatory note to this text, which was published in 1928 (and made into a Hitchcock film *Murder!* in 1930). It was the first in a trilogy of detective novels featuring Sir John Saumarez, followed by *Printer's Devil* in 1930, and *Re-Enter Sir John* in 1932.

All three novels enjoyed good critical reviews and Dane and Simpson were accepted as detective writers of merit and importance. The *Times Literary Supplement* admitted feeling apprehensive that in *Enter Sir John*, 'two such accomplished writers [...] might, in a form unfamiliar to either of them, have fallen something short of their purpose', expressing relief that 'fortunately for everyone concerned no sort of hesitation is called for' ('Enter' 182). The reception of *Printer's Devil* was equally enthusiastic and *Re-Enter Sir John* was praised for keeping 'us continually interested and amused' ('Re-Enter' 424). *The Morning Post* also described this third novel as 'marked by clever characterisation and brilliant dialogue all very lifelike' (Preface. *Re-Enter* n.p.) and a *Daily Express* reviewer was moved to 'commend it to all those who like detective stories' (ibid.). In his seminal work on detective fiction, *Murder for Pleasure* (1941), Howard Haycraft cites the two writers in his discussion of authors he 'ventures to consider cardinal in the development [...] of the British detective story between the First World War and circa 1930 [who] most

significantly *influenced* the progress of the detective story' (154). He also includes *Re-Enter Sir John* in his 'Readers' List of Detective Story 'cornerstones' (302). The strength of the reception of *Enter Sir John* admitted its authors to The Detection Club of London,³⁷ an organisation formed by a group of writers in 1929. Dane was approached by the BBC in 1930 to collaborate with other club-authors on *The Scoop* (1931), which was first broadcast as a radio serial and then serialised in *The Listener*. She went on to contribute to a second collaborative novel, *The Floating Admiral* (1931). In his introduction to the recent reprint of this text, Simon Brett counts Dane as one of the collaborators 'whose name is still reasonably well known, at least to crime fiction buffs', in contrast to writers such as Canon Victor L. Whitechurch and Henry Wade who 'have dropped off the radar almost completely' (vi).

Analysing the Saumarez trilogy, it is not possible to distinguish between Dane and Simpson's individual contributions to the texts. They shared similar liberal-feminist views and Dane was reported to have said of *Enter Sir John*, 'we used to take the greatest delight in imitating each other's style; so that when a rash friend said, "now I know it was you who wrote that chapter," it invariably turned out to be the other one!' (qtd. in Barrow 60). Their experiment was both pragmatic and political. Utilising the detective genre, they explored gender-related themes, reaching the wide readership that was enthusiastic about this new form of writing. Their collaborative work can be usefully considered in the light of critical assessments that much inter-war female-authored detective fiction, and particularly the fiction of Dorothy L. Sayers, was covertly feminist. Indeed, in view of the fact that there are strong

resemblances between Sayers' work and Dane and Simpson's narrative focus on the developing romantic relationship between the sleuth and his love interest, I will compare *Enter Sir John, Printer's Devil* and *Re-Enter Sir John* with Sayers' *Strong Poison*, (1929), *Have His Carcase* (1932), *Gaudy Night* (1936) and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937). Sayers was well-acquainted with Simpson and Dane. Simpson was one of the three friends to whom Sayers dedicated *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937) (Gorman and Matter 54), she collaborated with both writers on projects instigated by The Detection Club, and useful comparisons can be drawn between Sayers' and Dane's contributions to *The Scoop*.

Inter-war practitioners of detective fiction were anxious to 'assert the dignity of the genre' (Ascari 3) by insisting that it be developed in accordance with a rigid set of rules or guidelines relating to plot and structure. The degree to which these were followed was considered a measure of the success of the emerging crime writer. American author, SS Van Dine, compiled 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories' (qtd. in Brauer 3) and Ronald Knox prefaced his edited anthology of *Best Detective Stories* with a 'Detective Story Decalogue' which also 'served as a guiding list of dos-and-don'ts for detective writers' (Brauer 3). This list was later refined by G.K. Chesterton in his role as first president of The Detection Club; indeed, the very aim of the organisation was to improve the quality of the genre. Contemporary approaches to Golden Age detective fiction are less occupied with questions of quality and strict adherence to the rules and more inclined to see the genre as 'a form of popular modernism' (Light 66). These recent critics have examined the ways in

which the texts reflected and shaped cultural experience, and registered and mirrored anxieties, and they have considered the degree to which hegemonies were contested and dominant inter-war ideology interrogated. Most contemporary and less recent commentators appear to agree that in the main the genre was inherently conservative, written to uphold traditional privileges of the established order and mould public opinion along ideological lines. In *Bloody Murder* (1972), Julian Symons was the first to posit that its writers were 'unquestionably Right-wing [and] overwhelmingly conservative in feeling' (105), noting the ubiquity of racial, class and gender stereotyping. Symons' contemporaries, Colin Watson (1979), George Grella (1970) and John Cawalti (1980), and later critic, Warren Chernaik (2000), have also argued that Golden Age writers punished their fictional transgressors in order to convince their middle-class readers of the validity of normative ideology and to provide reassurance that their economic stability was safe within the traditional social structure. The pull of structural and thematic conventions is seen as responsible for reinforcing this reactionary agenda, supposedly making it impossible even for writers with left-wing sympathies to subvert the genre (Ousby 72).

Although it is generally accepted that detective writing was conservative at this time, Maurizio Ascari points out that ideological conformity was confined to the mainstream and 'the genre as a whole cannot be reduced to its bourgeois, capitalist, chauvinist and sexist dimensions' (9). He argues that crime fiction, notwithstanding the conservatism of the detection sub-genre, contained some radical elements, emanating from gothic and sensationalist

roots. There is also a particular critical disagreement about the ideologies at work within female detective writing. Discussing writers such as Sayers, Marjorie Allingham, Agatha Christie and Ngaio Marsh, some commentators argue that these well-known figures failed to contest both the rigid structure of the genre and its normative values, even those which related to gender.

Jessica Mann considers that 'these famous women crime novelists were conventional, conformist and conservative' (13), and Kathleen Klein believes that detective fiction by women as much as men, subscribed to a 'world view [where] women are put in their proper, secondary places' (2). Others identify more radical and subversive tendencies in women's detective writing. Sally Munt notes the ways in which 'on the way' towards their ideological conclusions, female-authored novels 'could offer a different, deconstructive reading of cultural norms' (29), laying the foundations for 'the more overt feminist crime novel of the 1980s' (7-8). Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple find examples 'inclined towards potentially radical areas of investigation [which] took issues that were of paramount importance to women in these periods and turned them into the subject of the crime novels' (47). Like Munt, they identify challenges to the rigid conventions of the genre, noting rejections of formal rules and formulas, and strong plot elements outside of the investigative narrative which push that narrative to the boundaries of the text. Laurel Young, Margaret Kinsman and Alison Light also observe a tendency for female authors to construct modern, companionable, equitable marriages and to make liberal feminist identifications with fellow others. Sayers is considered the predominant female writer who broke the rules and broadened the genre

to include women's issues. Young defines her as a New Woman writer (40), particularly concerned to centralise the theme of female identity by deploying female characters. She concurs with Kinsman's hypothesis that Sayers was also one of a number of women writers who created strong fictional bonds between women. As I will argue, Dane and Simpson went even further to subvert the genre, creating feminist New Woman texts which were more egalitarian than Sayers'.

Sleuths, Villains and the Inter-War Cultural Context

According to Knox's rules, 'the detective was the vitally important figure in detective fiction' (Symons 102). As Munt observes, Victorian and Golden Age male-authored texts generally had at their core a male 'unitary figure through whom all meaning in the text is distributed', the focus of 'the reader's pleasure and admiration' (4). Many critics who dismiss female-authored detective fiction as conservative and complicit with dominant ideology, base their arguments on the predominance of this model of the authoritative and venerable male sleuth in crime writing. Indeed, Christie, Marsh and Allingham's detectives are all male (Miss Marple novels were not to become Christie's mainstay until the 1940s), and although Sayers constitutes Harriet Vane as Lord Peter Wimsey's partner, she is never really more than an assistant. While Dane was perfectly able to make her central female protagonists actor-managers and leading

actresses in her writings in other genres, with no examples of real life female detectives to draw on, she too complied with the norm, creating Sir John Saumarez as her principal sleuth.

A brief summary of the action of the first two novels will help to show how Dane and Simpson's construction of Saumarez complied with tradition. In *Enter Sir John*, an actress, Magda Druce, currently performing in a play in the small Welsh town of Peridu, is found dead in her lodgings by her landlady, Miss Mitcham. Also in the room is another actress from the company, Martella Baring, with blood on her hands and appearing distracted. Martella is subsequently arrested and tried for murder, but the jury cannot reach a decision and a retrial is set. Saumarez, 'England's leading actor-manager' in the West-End theatre (*Enter* 211), and the grand-master of Shakespearean production, who once auditioned Martella and believes her innocent, sets out to find the real murderer. He is assisted by Novello Markham, the manager of the theatre company. After making enquiries in Peridu, they move their investigation to London where they track down Handell Fane, a 'dark skinned' actor in the troupe (23), friend of Martella and one-time lover of Magda. Sir John engineers Fane's capture and confession, but is unable to prevent him from escaping. Martella is released from police custody and the novel ends when she accepts Saumarez's double offer: of marriage and the position of lead-actress in his London theatre company. In *Re-Enter Sir John*, a newspaper reporter, Jill, is engaged to Peter Varley, an American acting protégée in Saumarez's company. One night, Peter accompanies Sir John to his London club for a game of cards, is caught apparently cheating when some cards fall

out of his sleeve, and subsequently disappears. Jill and Saumarez decide to try to clear his name and visit his lodgings to interview his landlady, Mrs Lake, to see if they can unearth anything in his room that might vindicate him.

Saumarez then makes a second visit to the lodging house with Sir George Clayton, one of his club friends. While they are waiting to interview Mrs Lake again, a policeman arrives looking for her relatives to inform them that she has just been found dead of a heart attack. The coroner records a verdict of natural causes, but Saumarez becomes suspicious and proceeds to investigate her death while Jill searches for Peter. He proves Sir George to be the murderer and Peter comes out of hiding and is reunited with Jill.

S.S. Van Dine stipulated that the detective 'must be a character of high and fascinating attainments - a man at once human and unusual, colourful and gifted' (qtd. in Symons 102). These inter-war types shared intellectual characteristics which evolved from well-known models, including Edgar Allen Poe's Dupin, whose 'brilliance' was the inspiration for Conan Doyle's genius, Sherlock Holmes (Grella 35). Light, Ernest Mandel, George Grella and Ian Ousby all point out that the Golden Age sleuth was always an aristocrat or at least upper middle-class. Light observes that he tended to be 'a public school and an Oxford man' who enjoys 'the glamour of Mayfair flats and manservants or gentlemen's clubs, which litter the pages of detective fiction' (77). His status worked to his advantage: 'the characters accept him socially' and 'his accomplishments give him greater mobility' (Grella 37). He also possesses 'the personal flair which comes naturally to members of a certain class' (Ousby 78). While Christie does not demonstrate 'a romantic conservatism, cleaving to the

aristocratic as a mark of a better past or a model for the good life' (Light 81), the same cannot be said for Sayers, in whose work a predominant class-snobbery has been well documented. In her representation of her own sleuth as brilliant, eccentric and noble, she goes to great lengths to expound the aristocratic superiority of Wimsey, Lady Denver and the family baronial home. There is a sense that it is precisely a romantic cleaving to a lost feudal past which so attracts Harriet to Wimsey. She thinks proudly of how 'he carried about with him all that permanent atmosphere of security. He belonged to an ordered society. [...] She thought, "I have married England" ' (*Busman's* 105). Dane's Saumarez also enjoys an auspicious lifestyle, and possessing Wimsey's wealth, strong imagination and propensity for brilliant final deductions, he may have been influenced by Sayers' sleuth. He frequents a traditional gentleman's club and in *Re-Enter Sir John*, inhabits an apartment in Berkeley Square with his wife and an army of servants: maids, valet, cook, chauffeur, secretary and the usual trusty manservant. The working-class characters recognise immediately that he is a gentleman, and he is treated like royalty wherever he goes. Staying at the Peridu boarding house where he begins his investigation into Magda's murder for instance, the landlady 'might not know his name or his fame; she might never have seen him act: nevertheless, she knew a personage when she met one, however disordered his attire' (*Enter* 177). His status also opens doors: his relationship with 'the home secretary's wife, [...] one of my first-night props and stays' (209), pulls him the necessary strings to gain access to Martella's prison cell, and his request to exhume Mrs Lake's body is authorised because he knows the assistant police commissioner from his club.

Less in the style of Sayers than Raymond Chandler however, who affirmed that his American detective novels were later 'trying to get murder away from the upper classes, the weekend house party and the vicar's rose garden' (qtd. in Chernaik 105), Dane and Simpson situate their detectives in urban environments: in the London theatre, in offices, in often basic and impoverished flats, and even, in *Enter Sir John*, in industrial Wales, 'on the edge of coal country' (*Enter* 1). Differences between Wimsey and Saumarez's background also democratize Dane and Simpson's detective narratives, and mark them as less than traditional. Whereas Lord Peter is Oxford educated and enjoys inherited wealth and a title, Sir John is a life peer from a self-made industrialist family, born 'plain Johnny Simmonds' (*Re-Enter* 48), with relatives living in 'Stockport, Clacton, and Burton-upon-Trent' (*Enter* 108). Averse to Oxford accents, his 'school had been that of Life' (*Re-Enter* 22), his large income is the fruit of his business acumen and talent as an actor and manager in the theatre and the film industry, and 'Saumarez and *The Sheridan* [his club] were his own achievement' (220). The novel celebrates a modernising society where hard work rather than privilege are the new markers of high status; Saumarez is admired because, not in spite of, his humble background. *Punch* praised the novel's representation of a new kind of aristocrat, the talented and hard working celebrity, declaring: 'Sir John is the triumph of the book. He is the perfect actor-manager, that every actor-manager should wish to be' (Preface. *Re-Enter* n.p.).

While Lord Peter is infallible and as Symons complains, 'it would be charitable to think that Wimsey [...] was conceived as a joke but, unhappily,

there is every indication that Sayers regarded him with the most delicate regard' (109-10), Saumarez is often the butt of what the *Times Literary Supplement* called 'good natured satire' ('Enter' 182). According to its review of *Re-Enter Sir John*, the authors 'present him with a tolerant humour that if it does not disguise his little weaknesses could not offend his vanity' ('Re-Enter' 424), yet clearly the narrative fluctuates between reverence and mockery. Sometimes these weaknesses put him clearly in the wrong and his role as figure of authority is undermined. Jill's faith in Peter's innocence in opposition to Sir John's misconceived suspicions for instance, 'transformed [him] in an instant to a blunderer and a boor' (*Re-Enter* 72). Christie is famous for giving her principal male sleuth the comic treatment – 'Poirot is theatrical, more of a Falstaff than a soldier hero, who enjoys playing to the gallery' (Light 73) – and Saumarez is a literal player, both respected actor-manager, and a gently ridiculed clown. His dignity is not spared: 'his protective pomposities were well known' (*Enter* 142) and he is seen by many as a 'windbag, poseur, egotist' (*Re-Enter* 109). Using 'disruptive humour' was an evolving feature of the work of the more progressive female detective writers of the period (Munt 6). By taking Saumarez out of the ivory tower of the West-End theatre, exposing his naivety and occasionally humiliating him in the real world, *Enter Sir John* engages in a feminist reduction of its male detective. Among the people of Peridu, he is unable to triumph over their provincial lower middle-class lifestyle. As he begins his investigation, he is dismayed to be denied 'a cocktail and early dinner first at the Red Lion' (*Enter* 174), by Markham's practical insistence instead on 'a sandwich while we talk to the proprietor' (176), and by the end of

a day trudging after his sprightly assistant, his 'feet were red hot in his shoes, and his bannerlike smile but a faded tatter of itself' (175). After a few days at Mrs Mitcham's meagre and tasteless lodging house, 'there was no more spirit in him' (173). Markham's energetic investigative methods have the upper hand in Peridu, Saumarez is forced to relinquish his usual control, and he is even denied the consolation of what he is used to in London: 'having his entrance worked up for him' (177). Even back in the big city, on the streets in pursuit of Fane he comes to realise that, contrary to his naïve and complacent sense of self-importance, in the eyes of ordinary people like the capable and down-to-earth police inspector, actors are esteemed 'no more than the unpaid versatile acrobats of the zoo' (282).

Sayers does not invite her reader to laugh at Wimsey, but he is a paradoxical construct. In a 1937 essay on *Gaudy Night*, Sayers registered her intention to endow her detective hero 'with a complicated psychology, involving not just the deductive intelligence, sensibility and verve of the master sleuth, but also conflicts and weaknesses' (McDiarmid qtd. in Connolly 37). She is now often credited for breaking Van Dine's stipulation that there should be 'no subtly worked-out character analyses' (Van Dine, qtd. in Brauer 3) and by the last of the Wimsey novels, she had humanised her hero, making him psychologically 'equal' to Harriet Vane (Young 46). Despite his formidable heroism, he is an effeminate departure from the late-nineteenth-century sleuth prototype. Through her creation of 'a new kind of male literary protagonist, distinguished by his vulnerability rather than virility' (Freedman 366), Sayers adopts what Munt identifies as an inter-war female literary strategy, a

' "feminizing" of male authority myths', to make 'an intrepid infiltration' of the detective genre (6). His effeminacy is most evident in the closing lines of *Busman's Honeymoon*. War trauma has made him hyper-sensitive to the inhumanity of the death penalty, and the night before the murderer he has helped convict goes to the gallows, he breaks down like a baby. The reader is told that Harriet 'held him, crouched at her knees, against her breast, huddling his head in her arms' (*Busman's* 451). Dane and Simpson also temper their sleuth's heroic masculinity with feminine qualities. Like Wimsey, Saumarez was in the war, is consequently prone to 'emotional stress' (*Enter* 112), and there are times when he 'did not feel sure of himself any more' (211). In *Re-Enter Sir John*, the extremity of his emotional reaction to the murder of Mrs Lake, a lower-class woman with whom he was only barely acquainted, anticipates Wimsey's own general anxiety about death. Its visible manifestations - he is 'more shaken by the news than he cared to admit [and] the news had shocked him' (*Re-Enter* 98) - damages his image as a merely 'baffled detective' (100). Sir George admonishes him for behaving like a 'tender hearted sentimentalist' (ibid.), a charge which 'stung him because he knew it to be true' (ibid.). This emphasis on the emotional impact of death cuts against the Golden-Age notion of the detective story as an intellectual puzzle and was probably palatable to a female inter-war readership no longer convinced by Victorian-style patriarchal reserve but not yet ready to fully embrace the notion of a woman detective. In their texts then, Sayers, and Dane and Simpson contribute to the post-First World War cultural 'quest for a bearable masculinity' (Light 73) which

generated a 'sometimes agonised sense of English manliness' (72), in much female-authored fiction.

The war moulded alternative conceptions of manhood in less progressive ways. There was a common inter-war belief that the psychological volatility of shell-shocked former soldiers combined with 'their economic and social disenfranchisement after the war [which] left them desperate for income' (Freedman 370), meant that they were more likely than civilians to break the law. Opposing this misconception, Sayers 'exposes and revises the implied alignment of shell-shock and criminality' (385), in her depiction of wrongly-accused victims of shell-shock in her novel, *Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928) and her short story, 'Image in the Mirror' (1933). In her Wimsey novels she goes one step further, asserting the possibility of compatibility between shell-shock and integrity. Dane and Simpson do likewise with their own shell-shocked detective, James Savory, in *Printer's Devil*. In this novel, after Horrie Pedlar, a successful female London publisher, is found dead, apparently from a fall from her balcony, the press begin to question the verdict of accidental death, printing suggestions that she was in fact murdered. Savory, her unassuming business manager, becomes convinced by this argument and unearths evidence which incriminates Marmion Poole, celebrity-poet and one of Horrie's friends and clients. Savory extorts a confession from Poole, which reveals how he committed the murder as an act of revenge against Horrie for refusing to publish his poor-quality and defamatory memoirs, so preventing his re-ascendance as a celebrity writer. Savory has been psychologically damaged by the war and his prospects are diminished by its

economic aftermath and the lack of political will to help integrate veterans back into society. He was once a successful man, an 'ex-don, ex-officer, ex-author, whom the war had washed up in London high and dry, without a foot, a family, or a future' (*Printer's* 35). Finding refuge in Horrie's employment, 'like many too much ill-treated dogs, he still wore in the days of peace and prosperity a surly air' (*ibid.*). He is entirely overlooked by the other characters, who regard him as an insignificant minor employee on the psychological scrap heap. During a dinner party in the wake of Horrie's death, the guests interpret the brilliant but emotional moment where he realises that Marmion is the murderer as a bad turn brought on by shell-shock. One of them remarks, 'they say no man who was through the war can be considered altogether normal. They're always liable to do odd things. Always subject to odd attacks' (272). When Savory goes on to prove Marmion's guilt, he surprises characters and readers alike and demonstrates, as Sayers does, that one can be 'both shell-shocked and heroic' (Freedman 373).

Dane and Simpson make a further deconstruction of cultural hegemony, blurring the boundaries between shell-shocked sleuth and shell-shocked villain. Although *Enter Sir John's* construction of Handell Fane, the war-traumatised murderer, succumbs to a reactionary cultural trend to pathologise the veteran suffering from shell-shock (Freedman 371), this representation is nuanced by the parallels which the authors draw between Saumarez and Fane. Both men are in love with Martella and Fane's elegant manner is comparable to Saumarez's. Before he is broken by the war and his aspirations are devastated by shell-shock-related stage fright, Fane shares Saumarez's enthusiasm for

playing in Shakespearean productions and is 'outwardly, at least [...] his match' (*Enter* 235). As Markham reliably testifies:

Everybody liked Fane, Sir. You couldn't not. A bit soft, but that was the war. They say he was a good actor before the war. Started in a circus as a kid and had worked his way up to Number One Tours and occasional London. Small part and understudied lead. 'Hamlet' and 'The Third Floor Back' – that sort of part. Lost his nerve in the last offensive. Funked London when he got back. [...] He came to us to cure himself, with plenty of first nights and quick studies. (162-3)

He mirrors Saumarez's (and indeed the writers' own) ethic of hard work and professionalism in the theatre and his similarity to Sir John inclines the reader to sympathise with his fall from grace. He recalls Sayers' character, Fentiman, the chief suspect in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, for whom the 'rules of his country [had] not provided' either. 'A spanner in the works [who] does not fit back into England, or in the space of the detective novel', his 'presence in the novel evokes a world more complex' than the one represented in traditional detective fiction (Freedman 378-9).

However, although Sayers is one of a number of female writers who provide 'realism and social commentary' in their treatment of detective and suspect (Munt 7), the motives of her villains remain unexplored in her fiction and her interest in her characters' psychology stops with Vane and Wimsey.

Her criminals are conceived with little complexity and she 'does not quite reach the "whydunnit" ' (Connolly 40). In *Gaudy Night*, Annie is driven to her attempt to kill Miss de Vine by economic dependency and a vaguely-conceived ideology of womanliness, but little dignity or importance is afforded to her confession. In *Busman's Honeymoon*, Wimsey's concern about Crutchley's fate is a measure of his own gentlemanly perfection, and the reader is not called upon to sympathise with the villain. *Enter Sir John*, on the other hand, breaks with Knox's stipulation on villains, that 'to see them in depth would have been against the rules' (Symons 104) and pioneers 'the new concept of the criminal as a complex figure rather than [...] a symbol of evil' (Connolly 40), a radical development which Connolly perhaps over attributes to Sayers. Fane's transgression is a response to intolerable cultural conditions which render him a victim, not just of shell-shock prejudice, but of racial intolerance, too. It is his experience of this double prejudice which drives him to murder. Magda exploits his racial sensitivity and fear of discrimination by blackmailing him with her secret knowledge that he is a 'half-caste – a Eurasian [sic]' (*Enter* 222). She knows that he is desperate to keep this from Martella and that he is consumed by an agonised fear that she will reject him if she knows his racial origins. He withstands blackmail but cannot endure the string of racial taunts which Madala heaps upon him in the course of her revelation of his ethnic background to Martella. Saumarez understands that war trauma is responsible for a situation where 'his temper had once mastered him so completely and [...] his nerve had broken at the sound of a woman's voice in anger' (280). What he perhaps fails to comprehend is the significance of what she says: 'she

called me a black beast. She called me a murdering nigger. I stopped her screaming then. [...] She didn't scream again' (254).

According to Watson, most Golden Age detective writing was 'of racist flavour' (123) and 'even writers of the more sedate detective stories devoted some of their talents to remarkably splenetic portraiture of characters with dark complexions or guttural accents' (ibid.). Light believes Christie failed to 'challenge the xenophobic statements of her characters [...] sitting rather firmly on the fence' (84), and Watson refers to Sayers' well-known pervasive anti-semitism and of how, 'not even Victor Gollancz', son of a Jewish rabbi, a man of international sympathies and a declared champion of minorities, 'seems to have thought of trying to restrain [her] from the snide remarks which she was always slipping into the detective stories that [he] published' (131). Dane and Simpson's representation of racial otherness is more complicated. It concurs with the racist Golden Age convention whereby 'foreign was synonymous with criminal in nine novels out of ten' (123). Furthermore, although Fane is forgiven the murder, he is not hero material and there is never the faintest possibility that he will get his girl. Allowing Martella to take the blame for Magda's death is a mark of his dishonour which throws Saumarez's oppositional moral integrity into sharp relief. The right behaviour of the Englishman who states, 'I don't think I would save my own skin at a woman's expense' (*Enter* 252) is contrasted with Fane's inability to transcend his exotic cowardice, in spite of the very real love he has for Martella. The novel's racial consciousness is ambiguous however. This is most pronounced during Fane's impassioned confession:

'You say to me, steady' – Handell Fane's voice was shrill – 'control myself, eh? Keep a stiff upper lip – British phlegm – public school tradition! White man's burden. Keep the flag flying and all the rest of it! Steady - even when you've murdered and are caught! Very proper and all that. But I'm not white'. (p.251)

In this outburst, Fane acknowledges his sense of inferiority to a superior British gentlemanly moral code. However, 'I'm not white' also suggests that he has been prevented from becoming a gentleman by racial discrimination, and his mocking of colonial platitudes points to some uncomfortable truths about imperialism. The portrayal of Fane's countenance and manner is also sympathetic and dignified: the writers refrain from littering his speeches with the kind of contrived dialects which were regularly used to stereotype non-white or working-class characters in most detective novels of the time. The novel's truth bearers hold no truck with racism either. Saumarez admires the outlook of the local police sergeant who comments 'tolerantly', that immigrants 'don't know our ways and they don't like 'em. You can't blame them for it', responding by suggesting that he would like to 'send my young actors here to you, to study the objective outlook' (281). Ironically, Martella is aware of Fane's ethnicity all along, but it makes no difference to her feelings of friendship towards him. Indeed, her loyalty to him is such that she is prepared to die at the gallows rather than reveal his secret. This might be a somewhat extreme gesture but it does serve to associate her heroism with racial

tolerance, and so challenges the prejudices of the reader and the reactionary values of the genre. Pulling detective fiction away from the predictable and towards a more psychological and social exploration of crime, involving 'conflict between individuals and authority' was a mark of (feminist) 'women's concerns' in detective fiction (Coward and Semple 54) and according to Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan's account of New Woman detective writing, 'the identity of the culprit is a matter of sociological significance, not just the bare solution to a puzzle' (qtd. Young 93). The representation of Fane's struggle with dominant culture is perhaps an example of this, situating *Enter Sir John* firmly within this feminist sub-genre. Notwithstanding the ambiguities in the novel's delineation of Fane's cultural woes then, the intimation that he is warped by society's prejudice and neglect anticipates later, more overt, fictional feminist identifications with the marginalised and parallels Dane's sympathetic representation of her Jewish protagonist, Ralph Samuels, in *The Babyons*.

Major Traill from Scotland Yard responds to Fane's escape from justice with the words, 'well, speaking unprofessionally I'm not sorry' (*Enter* 291). The narrative point of view is in accordance with this unrepentant standpoint on two accounts: firstly because Fane has had a bad deal and so should be allowed to go unpunished, and secondly because the writers are not prepared to see anyone hang. *Enter Sir John* advocates clemency, sanctioning Fane's flight from the usual detective novel alternatives of capital punishment or suicide, in a radical move away from the conservative norm. Sayers also suggested that bringing fictional villains to the gallows 'must not be done too lightheartedly' (Introduction. *Great Stories* 38). In *Busman's Honeymoon*, she

can only bear to let her murderer hang by eradicating all readerly sympathy for him. Resentful of 'truckling to a blasted title' (*Busman's* 316), Crutchley's hostility towards Wimsey is a potential threat to Sayers' idealised established order, and his class consciousness marks him as ultimately irredeemable. Feeling no remorse for his crime further incriminates him, and his heartless attitude to the numerous women with whom he is involved is pitted against Wimsey's chivalry and protection both toward Crutchley's pregnant girlfriend and his own Harriet. The incident where Crutchley throws Agnes Twitterton, 'heavily upon the settle, bruising her, and knocking her hat grotesquely over one ear' for instance, is immediately and ironically juxtaposed with Wimsey and Harriet's romantic and harmonious entrance, announced by their 'two voices singing together softly' - in French! (318). By allowing their murderer to escape detection and subjecting him to a sympathetic cultural and psychological analysis, Dane and Simpson take a more subversive stance.

Breaking More Rules: Putting Women to the Fore

In Golden-Age detective fiction, female protagonists were 'wives and mistresses, murderers and victims, assistants and troublemakers, but seldom [...] detective heroes' (Klein 96). The reluctance of women writers to challenge this convention was attributable to the nature of the genre, 'fairly rigidly defined according to a masculinist model' (Reddy 5). Even writers with a feminist consciousness were caught in a triple bind: by the form, by the real world where there were no women detectives to provide a model, and by the conservative influence of audience expectation (Klein, Munt and Reddy). Klein notes a tendency for inter-war authors, even women writers, to further succumb to ideological pressures by undermining the investigative abilities of the few female sleuths that did slip into the texts. In a society which wanted to put women in their place, where a female detective did exist, she was set up to fail. After all, 'if she can be shown as an incompetent detective or an inadequate woman, readers' reactionary preferences are satisfied' (Klein 5). Sayers is the most cited example of a writer who, through the creation of investigator Harriet Vane, instigated an agenda which was more feminist than the norm. Opinion is divided over the extent of Sayers' feminist credentials however. Klein includes her in her assessment of how 'detective fiction followed the widespread post-war attitude which supported subordinate female behaviour' (96). Watson, on the other hand, regards her as a socially significant writer who 'avenged womankind', despite a cultural climate in which

she was 'liable to encounter political hostility and moral indignation' (153) and Coward and Semple admire the courage with which she 'tackles the dilemmas of an intellectual woman and her conflicts with domesticity' (46). As a famous writer of detective fiction, Vane is a successful working woman certainly, but her detective faculties are limited. In *Gaudy Night* and *Have His Carcase*, she is never able to make much headway in her investigation without Wimsey's help, her capacity to concentrate on the case in hand becomes increasingly compromised by her romantic feelings for him, and her sleuthing work pales before his superior intellect. Wimsey suffers no such internal conflict; although he reciprocates her feelings, he is well able to keep his mind on the job. In *Busman's Honeymoon*, Vane's detective role becomes further diminished. As Wimsey struggles with the howdunnit, he 'picked out Harriet from the rest [...] as though propounding a problem to the brightest-looking of a not-too-hopeful class' (*Busman's* 391). Preparing to set a trap for the murderer, he turns to his right hand man, declaring 'Bunter – [...] I shall want you', yet he speaks to Harriet 'as though she had been his footman' (394), and clearly regards her to be less vital to the investigation.

Dane's greater commitment to the idea of a female detective is demonstrated in the *The Scoop*. Produced in the manner of a round robin, each chapter is written by a different author – although most of the authors contribute two chapters in total – and the plot is developed as coherently as possible by building on what has gone before. With the turn of each writer, a favoured character and preferred investigation methodology is pushed into prominent position in an exercise which becomes a debate about what a

detective story should be and how gender should be represented within it. Battles are fought between male exponents of mechanical ingenuity, and Christie, Dane and Sayers. They are opposing female guerrillas, who attack the genre's phallogentric core with their inclusion of a strong female character, Beryl Blackwood, a secretary in the London offices of *The Scoop* newspaper. Sayers and Dane both attempt to give some sleuthing action to the female protagonist in this collaborative novel, but Dane is the more determined.

Sayers creates Beryl in the first chapter of the novel. She receives a call from Johnson, one of the firm's reporters, ringing from a public telephone box at Paddington station to tell her that he has a story for the paper regarding a murder in Brighton which he is reporting. Following the call, he too is murdered. In chapter two, Agatha Christie widens Beryl's role from secretary to assistant sleuth, and teams her with another reporter, her boyfriend, Oliver, to investigate their colleague's death. In the following chapter, written by E. C. Bentley, Beryl disappears from the narrative and Oliver is established as the single truth-bearing sleuth. Christie then attempts to re-create the Oliver/Beryl detective partnership in chapter four, and in chapter five, Antony Berkeley erases Beryl again and puts Oliver back at the centre of the investigation. In chapter six, Freeman Wills Crofts eclipses Oliver's authority with the introduction of a superior detective and establishment figure, Chief Inspector Bradford of the Yard. When Dane then takes over in chapter seven, she disregards both of the two male detectives and re-instates Beryl: this time as the main sleuth.

Dane takes the opportunity to create her favourite kind of female heroine here, a modern young woman who enjoys the freedom of living on her own in a flat in marked contrast to middlebrow heroines trapped in patriarchal manor houses. She cooks for herself and her chosen guests on a modest budget. She shops for food, buys herself a dog because she feels sorry for it, and wanders happily around London in her spare time. Dane also endows her with the kind of spiritualist power which characterises Hetty Piele, Antonia Babyon and Donna Broome. She forms a telepathic connection with the dead reporter:

She said to herself: 'If I were a spiritualist now, I should say he were trying to get through to me'. And then, on an impulse, stood stock still in the deserted street – she could not see a yard ahead of her – and said to the wall of fog: 'All right. If he is anywhere and wants to tell me anything, let him try. I'm in the mood'. And stood, superstitiously waiting for some sort of an answer to come to her out of the filthy quiet. (*Scoop* 64)

This ethereal communication clears up the confusion about Johnson's last words to Beryl on the telephone – she was sure he said Broad Street but the editor, her professional superior, makes her believe it was Bond Street. She is mysteriously guided through the fog to Broad Street and the shop to which Johnson was trying to alert her, where the murder-weapon, a brooch, was purchased. 'Of course Oliver'll just say "coincidence," ' Beryl thinks (65) and

although there is no actual ghostly materialisation in the chapter, by introducing a power that is not strictly natural, Dane only just keeps to Knox's rule that 'all supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course' (qtd. Ousby 67). Even if Beryl's experience is not really a supernatural one, intuition – which was generally frowned on by the genre's purists as stereotypically feminine and so inferior – is here evoked as a sign of essential female supremacy with more validity as a sleuthing attribute than the male logic which opposes it. Vane redefines female intuition in *Have His Carcase*, calling it 'artistic sense', of more use as a detective tool than the 'figures and time-tables [...] all machine-made' (*Carcase* 339), or as Munt puts it, 'the ritually revered formula, obsessed with timetables, maps, locked rooms, puzzles' (7). These tools, traditionally relied upon by the male sleuth, generate a deduction which Vane believes 'cracks at every joint' (*Carcase* 339). Vane's position is overturned to privilege masculinity however, when Wimsey solves the case by means of these logical strategies.

In the following chapter of *The Scoop*, Bentley wrecks Dane's feminist agenda by relegating Beryl to the rank of witness and re-establishing Oliver as the exclusive detective. Berkeley subsequently restores Beryl to an investigative position in chapter nine, but in true patriarchal fashion, this is only to demonstrate her feminine ineptitude. He denies her the confidence and capacity to successfully pass on a piece of crucial evidence that she uncovers in Oliver's absence. She finds it 'maddening that he was away, he would have done the placing so much more competently than herself; Oliver never lost his head' (*Scoop* 81). Constrained by her feminine inadequacy, she unwittingly

entrusts the evidence to the news editor and actual villain, Mr Hemingway, who manipulates Beryl into changing her story. When Dane takes up the story again in chapter ten, she continues with Bentley's narrative thread, but from a feminist perspective, giving Beryl the space to reflect on how her integrity and regard for truth have been compromised by her patriarchal boss and her condescending boyfriend:

The more she thought over the interview with Hemingway the less pleased was she at the part which she had played. There was no use in deceiving herself. She might as well face it. She, a modern woman with a vote, a flat, a latch-key, views on life and literature, and an independent soul, had let herself be bullied. [...] She had been in the right: she had behaved with absolute correctness, yet that sour prig, that austere devil of correctness, Hemingway, had actually flustered her into a silly lie. Wasn't it monstrous?

The more she thought of that feeble lie the more annoyed, angry, furious she felt – annoyed with herself, angry with Hemingway, and really furious with Denis Oliver whose preoccupation with his own theories, whose refusal to consider her discovery important had led her to Hemingway. She saw now how unwise she had been. She should never have gone to Hemingway. But having gone she should not have let herself be

intimidated by Hemingway. Above all she should not have lied.

(89-90)

Beryl's fury resonates with what seems to be Dane's own exasperation with 'the difficulties of locating female agency and voice in a society, and a genre, where agency is associated with maleness' (Kinsman 161). In the light of Dane's inability to prevent Berkeley from suppressing her feminist narrative agenda by reducing her feisty heroine to an incapable female stereotype, Hemingway's attack on Beryl to prevent her from continuing her investigation at the end of Dane's chapter appears to symbolise women's forced silence in *The Scoop*, in the inter-war detective genre in general, and in the wider cultural arena which supported it. Had Beryl been a female detective, she would most probably have regained consciousness and resumed her investigation. This was possibly what Dane hoped would happen. Instead, Wills Croft again removes her from the storyline and re-constitutes Chief Inspector Bradford as the main sleuth. Sayers then concludes the novel by capitulating on her earlier interest in Beryl, conforming to the status quo by repositioning Oliver as the main point of interest and authority, and leaving Beryl nowhere to be seen. This is consistent, of course, with the narrative structure of her Wimsey novels, where the male detective solves the crime and the status quo is reconfirmed.

Restricted to two chapters and let down by Sayers, in *The Scoop* there was seemingly nothing Dane could do to safe guard the direction in which she was trying to go. She was less constrained in her own novels however. While

important female characters were usually scarce in Golden-Age fiction and where they did exist they were generally passive, failing to act and only required to 'react to primary characters – men' (Munt 4), Dane and Simpson generate strong female protagonists and open up the detective text to the possibilities of liberal and feminist positions. Sayers is well known for her New Woman inclinations to make 'a female's negotiation of gender [...] of equal importance, and often bound up with, the mystery' (Young 42), a strategy which according to Munt was not to become common in women's detective fiction until at least the start of the Second World War (14). Dane and Simpson were also in the vanguard in this respect. Their novels are primarily occupied with feminist configurations of women, courtship, and marriage at the expense of the male sleuth and the technical cleverness of the detection plot. They reduce the importance of whodunit and howdunnit and use a female narrative model, 'where the build up to the crime occupies over half the book [and where] the journey [...] is often more interesting than the destination' (Coward and Semple 50-51). Distancing themselves from 'the masculine critical tradition', they reject 'the formal rules of detective fiction' (Munt 7). At the forefront of a 'weariness with mechanical ingenuity' (Symons 117), which emerged in the later stages of the Golden-Age period, their stories contest the rule that the male detective and the detective process should be of paramount importance. These deconstructive tendencies have been recognised by reviewers and critics. The *Times Literary Supplement* said of *Enter Sir John*, 'this is but incidentally a detective story' ('Enter' 182) and in *Murder for Pleasure*, Haycraft closes his chapter on Golden-Age detective fiction by

acknowledging the two writers' pioneering work to widen the genre. He remarks, 'several anticipatory references have been made to the "marriage" of the detective story and the novel of character, destined to be the most significant trend in the genre in the 1930s. One of the earliest works definitely to forecast this fusion was *Enter Sir John*' (158). In Sayers' introduction to *Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, she registered her approval of 'the modern method' to have fewer stereotypes and more 'figures having more in common with humanity' (41). She envisaged a next stage in detective writing, where 'a new and less rigid formula will probably have developed, linking it more closely to the novel of manners and separating it more widely from the novel of adventure' (44). Her introduction was originally published in 1928 but it wasn't until the late 1930s, nearly ten years after Dane and Simpson's experiments, that she fully adopted this method. *Busman's Honeymoon* ends not with the resolution of the crime, but with a subsequent section written in three chapters entitled 'Epithalamion'. This dramatises Harriet's struggle to curb her possessive inclinations in order to make a good marriage, and delineates the nature and source of Wimsey's traumatic reaction to Crutchley's execution.

The main feature of the novel of manners is, of course, the predominant courtship and marriage plot and amidst much criticism, in her later novels Sayers 'blended the two genres of crime and romance together which inaugurated a new direction in the field' (Munt 10), effectively 'opposing the static unreality of the "pure" detective world' (Wald, qtd. Munt 10). She foregrounded the Wimsey-Vane romance in *Strong Poison*, *Gaudy Night* and

Busman's Honeymoon; the latter is actually subtitled 'a love story with detective interruptions'. Even a year before *Strong Poison* was published however, Sayers was still firmly against this cross-hybridization and in favour of Knox and S. S. Vine's shared rule that 'there must be no love interest, because through it [...] unity was damaged' (Symons 104). It was in 1928 that she wrote 'the less love in a detective-story, the better' (Introduction. *Great Stories* 40), calling romance 'a fettering convention' (39). Ironically, in *Have His Carcase*, even as she tentatively begins to write Wimsey and Vane's romance into the genre, she registers her reservations, through Vane's remarks about her own crime writing. Reflecting that her 'novel was not getting along very well', she attributes the lack of progress to having 'had arrived at the point where, according to the serial editor who was paying for the first rights, the heroine and the detective's friend were expected to indulge in a spot of love-making' (*Carcase* 188). While Sayers was still reluctant in this respect, Dane and Simpson were in the process of making the generic shift which Sayers has become famous for, establishing in *Enter Sir John* a detective motivated to clear Martella's name and catch the true villain not by an objective wish to see justice done, but by his romantic inclinations towards the woman wrongly convicted.

Strong Poison and *Enter Sir John* are both the first in a series of three novels which feature a romantic relationship between a woman and the sleuth who rescues her from the gallows. Until Sayers is comfortable about widening her role later in *Gaudy Night* however, Harriet Vane is 'mostly [...] a device to develop Lord Wimsey's character' (Reddy 22). In *Enter Sir John* on the other

hand, Martella is equally as important as Saumarez as the privileged truth-bearer and centre of narrative interest. Breaking Van Dine's rule that stipulated 'no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses' (qtd. Brauer 3), the novel divides its focus between the murder investigation and the delineation of Martella's character, principally through the telling of her back story. Dane combines her usual enthusiasm for championing the professional actress in opposition to normative representations of the theatre as 'never a very desirable occupation for a woman in English literature' (Grella 42) - an enthusiasm which Simpson, an actress herself, was likely to share - with her interest in creating ideal second-generation New Woman values. These are epitomised by Harriet too, who 'pits modern values against the Victorian thinking of the judge' using her own mature 'standards of honesty and integrity' (Young 45). Martella's brand of modern independence is just as firmly detached from the carelessness of the moderns. By demonstrating her old-fashioned grace and dignity, the novel suggests that there is virtue in some pre-war modes of behaviour. She is Dane's classic young New Woman actress: ambitious and courageous, dignified in her genteel poverty, compassionate towards the sufferings of people and animals, and also imaginative, intuitive and guileless, with a passion for literature and a gift for playing Shakespeare. Her hard working professionalism recalls Damaris Payne and Donna and Elinor Broome, and by directing the readers' pleasure and admiration more often to her than to Saumarez, the writers eclipse the attention usually given to the male detective and his

investigation, in line with an evolving feminist detective-writing strategy (Munt 4).

Martella plays a more minor role in *Re-Enter Sir John*. She is not one of the shadowy stereotyped wives, characteristic of traditional crime texts however, 'dimly seen as part of [the] serious detective novel's furniture [who] attract neither interest nor attention' (Mann 108). Taking turns to win arguments and engaging in conversational banter and repartee, the Saumarezes enjoy an equal and companionate modern marriage, along the lines of Wimsey and Vane's, or Tommy and Tuppence Beresford's union in Christie's 'literary exploration of a marriage partnership based on principles of friendship' (Kinsman 160). Dane and Simpson create a more feminist detective-marriage-model, in which feminine intuition is not the usual marker of inferiority, but a valuable component in the sleuthing partnership, often over-riding masculine logic. Saumarez relies on Martella's insights to provide lines of enquiry and direct the investigation and her instinctive understanding of Peter's character rights her husband's faulty assessment:

'You know perfectly well that Peter's a wronged innocent.'

'I know nothing of the kind.'

'You don't know anything, I believe,' said his wife. But she failed to annoy him. (*Re-Enter* 176)

Validating feminine intuition is one strategy employed in *Re-Enter Sir John* and *The Scoop* to outmanoeuvre the patriarchal rules of detective fiction.

Another is to divide the role of the female assistant sleuth between Martella, the detective wife operating from within a domestic context, and Jill, the modern career-woman, who inhabits and navigates the public world. Including a professional woman as a main protagonist who gets some investigative action is a feminist generic development from the simple combination of detection and love plot which operates in *Enter Sir John*. Jill is one of Dane's new feisty young heroines: a bright, independent, tough newspaper reporter who makes her living by plaguing politicians and celebrities for interviews. She is the epitome of modern, mobile, resilient womanhood. After work, unperturbed by hitchhiking and accidents, she enjoys a cigarette, 'celebrated in magazines in the interwar period' as a signifier of the 'quintessentially modern' (Tinkler and Warsh 113): 'she had early been sent off to the scene of a train smash, was peacefully smoking, stuff telephoned, duty done, by the side of a lorry-driver who had offered her a lift to London' (*Re-Enter* 35). When Peter is wrongly accused and goes into hiding, she assumes the traditional male role, seeking him out in order to save him, and becoming the nearest Sir John has to a working sidekick. Like Martella, she competes with Sir John for narrative importance, sometimes pushing him from his central position as the locus of narrative integrity. The writers break with convention to create an alliance which crosses class and gender-boundaries. Jill is Saumarez's equal in courage and integrity; he is referred to as 'a raging lion' (40) and she possesses 'so firm an eye, such a lion-taming eye' (14). The parity ends there however, as Jill's economic circumstances are exceedingly meagre. She has a stoical outlook towards her bare existence in bedsit land, philosophising that 'poverty is the

best tutor for nearly all trades' (20). Her hard work and resilience is drawn in stark contrast to Saumarez's increasing self-confessed laziness and soft, pampered life: 'Jill, that gay miracle-worker, denizen of rooms where one does for oneself in preference to being done, watched with interest the amount of actual man-power it took to get Sir John under way' (67). Seeing his privileged life through her eyes, the reader experiences her consciousness of the acute difference between the privileged life of a powerful titled patriarch and a poor female journalist.

Jill's problems are ironically compounded by her modern identity. In *Enter Sir John*, despite the questionable status of her profession and her reputation as a criminal, Martella is universally regarded as a lady on account of the obvious markers of her breeding, particularly her refined accent and standard dialect. Harriet Vane is respected for the same reasons. Jill's lower-middle-class 'London sparrow quality' (*Re-Enter* 70), combined with her investigative role makes her harder to place. When she accompanies Saumarez to Peter's lodgings in the course of the investigation, Mrs Lake, who classifies unmarried women as either 'real ladies or hussies' (ibid.), defines Jill, who is apparently neither well-bred, nor a married woman, as less-than-respectable. Her new type, it seems, is in the forefront of a not-yet culturally-acceptable modernity. Indeed, for all her modern confidence, Jill herself has internalised hegemonic norms and values. In the process of negotiating her gender role, she is not entirely comfortable with her modern identity. She considers assuming a femininity which is not part of her make-up, to engage in a masquerade in order to keep Peter's affections: 'she did not want to be brisk

and efficient with Peter. She wanted to be marvellous, and languorous and calm, to do a little clinging for once, and stop being too clever by half' (20). Fortunately however, given Peter's character and the androgynous role she has to adopt to get him out of trouble, this kind of dissembling is not necessary. Peter is constructed within a new tradition of inter-war writing by women, and so is as different to the patriarchal English hero as it is possible to be. 'Not much more than a boy', at one point during his ordeal, he breaks down into a 'dry passion of sobbing' (61). As demonstrated in Elinor's openly post-war self-determination, drawn in opposition to Maud's Victorian subterfuges, men's increasing feminisation works to reduce the compulsion for women to perform feminine masquerades. As an American, Peter also stands for a non-stuffy modernity, a brand which, it is suggested, can accommodate role reversal and support the continuation of Jill's career beyond the resolution of the detective plot.

Further Deconstructions: *Printer's Devil*

Of the novels in the Saumarez trilogy, *Printer's Devil* goes furthest to make feminist transformations to the detective genre and dismantle its patriarchal structure. It contains not one truth-bearing character but four: Savory, Horrie, and also Gilda Bedenham and Koko Fry. Gilda is one of Horrie's young secretaries, and the daughter conceived of a brief union between a deceased

woman friend and (unbeknown to Gilda for most of the narrative), Marmion Poole. Koko Fry is Horrie's young 'Cockney' publicity manager (*Printers* 173), to whom Gilda becomes engaged during the course of the narrative. The text deconstructs the authority of the masculine valorising sleuth, 'the establishment figure competently sorting out the crime' (Coward and Semple 51) and transgresses the structural boundaries of the genre by countering Knox's stipulation that the (male) detective be the crucial important character. Savory plays a minor role and his voice and perspective on life and humanity are, unusually for the astute detective, conspicuously absent from the novel. Furthermore, Saumarez takes a back seat in the text, becoming just one of Horrie's many narratively insignificant friends and dinner guests, and his part in the hunt for her killer is confined to his participation in the final chase. As Ascari contends, crime fiction is 'multifarious' (9) and detection is not 'the key element in defining the genre' (7-8); *Printers Devil* is one text which defies the narrow parameters stipulated by Knox and others. A generic hybrid, it begins as a romantic comedy, transmutes into tragedy with Horrie's death a third of the way through, and only evolves into a detective story when this becomes suspicious towards the end of the text. It also foregrounds the 'woman's plot' which evolved in this period, centralising social commentary 'for which the crime and its solution became increasingly a convenient framework' (Munt 7). The main interest centres on the female protagonists, Horrie and Gilda, and the crime narrative is superseded by the tale of their negotiations with modern womanhood.

According to Maroula Joannou's contention that 'a strong drive towards self-assertion on the part of the spinster' was a mark of the inter-war feminist writer, (78), Dane and Simpson's representation of Horrie, a central figure in the narrative, defies ideological constructions of female subservience and confirms their feminist credentials. A self-made unmarried woman, Horrie succeeds in a man's profession, to become 'London's first and only woman publisher' (*Printer's* 189), an 'arbitress of literary destinies [whose] hard work, ambition, a love of books, and good business judgment had [...] helped her raise from the depths of a dingy shoplet near the British Museum to the seemingly secure heights of the Pedlar's Pack' (*Printer's* 577). A letter found with her will makes this point: 'I am the first woman to build up, out of nothing, a publishing house in London, I have had no money backers; I have depended on nobody for my policy; I have worked very hard and worked alone, and I have made something solid' (*Printer's* 209-10). She creates an alternative domesticity centred round her office, where she combines power with a commitment to help, counsel and support friends, clients and employees: Gilda in particular. Dane's admiration for this alternative New Woman model can be inferred from the obituary which she wrote for a real professional woman, her principal publishing agent, Nancy Pearn, who was incidentally also the agent for Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby. 'She exercised considerable influence on the literary affairs of her time' Dane wrote of her, continuing: 'with this professional flair and business knowledge went a most moving capacity for faithful and zealous friendship. Her world was her office: but of that office she made a home where anyone with the least claim on her,

or with no claim at all, was welcomed, helped, and heartened' ('Miss Nancy Pearn' 8).

Constructing a blueprint for the benevolent woman professional, by using their 'collaborative skill' to 'choose their most forceful, triumphant character as the victim of murder' ('Printer's' 577), Dane and Simpson also make an innovative generic shift. This contradicts George Grella's claim that detective fiction and comedy of manners novels are connected by a shared comic moral code, which stipulates that only the undeserving are punished in order to keep the mood light in both forms. He suggests that:

because only unlikeable characters are made to suffer permanently in comedy, pains are taken to make the victim worthy of his fate: he must be an exceptionally murderable man [or] on the rare occasions when a young woman is murdered, she is always revealed a secret sinner under a respectable façade. [...] Virtually all victims [...] suffer their violent expulsion because of some breach of the unwritten social or ethical code. (41-42)

Alison Light poses the same argument, that the detective genre reflected a modern 'attitude of detachment and dispassion in the reader' (72), that 'we don't particularly care what happens to [...] victims' (71). The murder in *Printer's Devil* however, is treated very seriously, and the story is indeed, as one reviewer claims, the 'tragedy of Horrie's death' (*Printer's*. n.p.). This marks

a departure from the normal state of affairs whereby murder victims were dismissed as culpable and unimportant stereotypes. Like Mrs Lake, Horrie is neither a murderable man nor a young woman. Unlike Mrs Lake, she is also a major character of high moral integrity whose murder elicits widespread grief and shock that reverberates right to the close of the text. As *Re-Enter Sir John* departs from tradition in its treatment of Sir John's emotional response to the death of Mrs Lake, *Printer's Devil* creates a murder-victim who elicits greater sympathy from characters and readers than was customary.

As the *Times Literary Supplement* points out, Horrie's position is only 'seemingly secure' ('Printer's' 577). The manner of her death highlights the vulnerability of single women, under threat from masculine violence and the dangers of male egoism. In the same way that Allingham and Marsh 'comment upon the affectations of near-artists or the pretensions of the theatrical' in their detective writing (Symons 123-4), Dane and Simpson satirise their histrionic villain as a vain and outdated solipsist, whose theatrical archaisms reflect the pretentious and dark side of the creative community. Resenting what he calls the 'plebeian streets', his 'his present insignificance worried him' (*Printer's* 28), and his narcissism induces him to kill his chief support and old friend rather than risk professional failure. He opposes Horrie's feminine middlebrow pragmatism - she understands that the public 'liked its daily bread to be daily bread' (59) - with his out of touch masculine highbrowism and, were it not for Horrie's bequest to Gilda, his villainous act would have blocked the feminine voice of the publishing industry.

Regarding Gilda as a deserving young female, Horrie makes her the main beneficiary of her will. She writes, 'the business, which now, as I write, is among the first three in England, has been a child to me. I have given the best of my strength to it. I want it to go on. And to go on, if possible, under the leadership of another woman' (210). Belonging to a cultural context in which the New Woman spinster had come to be considered 'the enemy of the "liberated" woman of the 1920s - the flapper' (Smith-Rosenberg, qtd. Young 41), Dane and Simpson defy convention by creating a positive mother-daughter type relationship between Horrie and Gilda. They show that young women can gain and learn from the previous generation, giving Gilda the opportunity to take up the banner, carry Horrie's work on, keep her memory and methods alive, and bring feminine altruism and intuition into the masculine-dominated publishing industry. As the *Times Literary Supplement* note, Horrie's 'death does not lessen her importance in the slightest, the importance attached to an animate being, not that associated with a corpse' ('Printer's' 577). By making Gilda her heir, the novel ensures her continued presence beyond death in the same way as Mrs Wilcox's will influences Margaret and her destiny in Forster's pro-feminist *Howard's End*. Sayers also creates positive fictional relationships 'to reconcile the generations of New Women' (Young 41). In *Strong Poison*, Sayers gives her older New Woman figure, Alexandra Climpson, an important role in saving Harriet Vane's life by solving the murder for which this young New Woman has been convicted (45). In *Gaudy Night*, Harriet literally steps into the academic shoes of Miss de Vine, another older New Woman role model, in a 'utopic vision of women of different

generations uniting to help one another' (46). While Sayers' texts only tentatively suggest this kind of connection between young and older women, in *Printer's Devil*, inter-generational female support is the main theme, overtly dramatised in a real female lineage, a tangible bequest. Gilda *literally* owes her freedoms to 'the victories won by earlier cohorts of New Women in professional and educational areas [which] had made their androgynous world possible' (Smith-Rosenberg, qtd. Young 45). Horrie's bequest economically augments the new epoch of female independence; where Dane's hands were tied in *The Scoop*, in *Printer's Devil*, through Horrie, she provides her young heroine with the kind of voice and place denied to Beryl, defeating Poole's Machiavellian attempts to destroy a female dynasty in the process.

Older New Women aspired 'to be autonomous and powerful individuals, to enter the world as if they were men' (Smith-Rosenberg, qtd. Young 42), but although Horrie achieves this, she is not one of the types who easily 'rejected an older, Victorian or Edwardian female identity [and] wished to free themselves completely from consideration of gender' (ibid.). Historically and painfully bound to a feminine identity, she is 'not only a publisher of note, but a woman' engaged in 'lifelong struggles with fashion [which] had left her sore' (*Printer's* 8). In the opening chapter, she declines an invitation to speak at a public dinner celebrating the anniversary of the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* on the grounds that she was embarrassed about her poor fashion sense. The text reminds its readers that, 'life had been harder for single women – plain, penniless and devouringly ambitious – when Horrie Pedlar was a girl, than her trim young clerks – with

their good wages, neat tunics, latch keys, and liberty – would ever have the imagination to conceive’ (31). Horrie’s assessment of the modern young woman runs counter to Gilda’s experience of poverty and insignificance, however. Paresky argues that, ‘if we cannot speak, or if our efforts at speech are not understood [the] omission denies women a chance to feel mastery, to feel competence, to feel confident’ (qtd. Kinsman 161), and in the opening chapters of *Printer’s Devil*, Gilda is unable to enter public life under her own steam and find her own voice. Before she inherits Horrie’s business, she struggles to make her way in the public sphere. ‘I’m unsuitable’ she tells Koko. ‘I don’t suit anything or anyone. And yet [...] I’ve something to say in my own way, if I could only learn how to say it’ (*Printer’s* 97). Independence is still difficult in the 1930s and only a fairytale bequest can alleviate Gilda’s economic hardship and cultural anxieties.

Despite its economic restrictions, Gilda’s modern world is emancipating in other ways. Self-defining, intellectual and university educated, she assumes the right to work, and to live independently like Jill, Beryl and Martella, between Chelsea and the Embankment, in one of the ubiquitous ‘multi-occupied small terrace[s] [which] remained the typical, urban residence in the industrial and riverside boroughs’ (Alexander 312). Horrie and Gilda’s very different fates in their London apartments symbolise a cultural transition in process. While Horrie pays the ultimate price for her independence, Gilda is representative of youthful invulnerability and enjoys ‘freedom of movement, [one of the] important themes throughout the interwar period’ (Tinkler 129) and an important trope in the Saumarez trilogy as a whole. During the 1930s,

woman 'made three times as many journeys a week on public transport's comfortable new seats as [she] had done forty years ago' (Alexander 313) and bus travel is a particular marker of freedom in *Printer's Devil*, with much narrative space allocated to Gilda's excursions on this modern form of transport. When she is not on the bus, she is walking. The novel celebrates an era when walking around the metropolis and frequenting its parks had become a predominantly female activity (ibid.). Proud that 'I am my own mistress' (Printer's 22), for Gilda, the contemporary city is a beautiful and exciting place where women now wander unconfined, day and night. Like Beryl Blackwood, she explores a London which has long disappeared, a vibrant and colourful space where 'the streets between Soho and Covent Garden - dominated by the fruit and flower market - were filled with small workshops making buttons, sequins, underwear, jewellery, artificial flowers, waistcoats, theatrical costumes, scenery and make-up and the multitude of trades surviving theatre-land and the cinema industry' (Alexander 303). The text evokes Dane's own London world, in idyllic terms, as a place where 'buses thundered, taxis lingered, sparrows darted, flower-sellers called: all glamorous, all spangled with rain' (*Printer's* 245). This freedom of movement defines the end of Victorian New Womanism and the rise and triumph in the novel of a succeeding modern femininity, and Gilda is fully conscious of the new privileges which this affords. Koko proposes marriage to her during a walk and after they part company to make their own way home, she reflects lightly on how easily-contested paternalism has become: 'where his women-folk were concerned, he was proudly preparing to revert to the strictest Victorianism,

and would have been horrified had he learned that she proposed to continue the perambulation of Chelsea without his escort' (172).

As one of Dane's ideal contemporary women, Gilda's responsible modernity is a far cry from the trivial attitudes which were regularly attributed to flapper women in middlebrow writing. She is an accomplished classical pianist, and has an intellectual appreciation of 'high' culture and of the music of Bach and Stravinsky in particular. Her old-fashioned cultural mores are tempered through her acquaintance with Koko and the novel sanctions his modernising influence. She adjusts as enthusiastically as Elinor to the modern world, absorbing its informalities while holding fast to her own more outmoded tastes. After Koko introduces her to bohemian restaurants, musical comedy and popular tunes, she starts to fuse modern rhythms and classical harmonies in 'Negro spiritual' influenced piano arrangements (*Printer's* 159). Her companionate marriage, a successful hybrid of old-fashioned and modern values, is mirrored in these vibrant new musical compositions. Her updated fashion sense is matched by Koko's convergence toward her principles: he decides to reject undesirable elements of modern life, relinquishing the sordid and cut-throat world of commercial publicity to embark on a career as a writer.

In the second half of the novel, so the *Times Literary Supplement* claims, 'that admirable comedy, the falling in love of Koko Fry', replaces Horrie's tragedy as the predominately important plot ('Printer's' 577). However it is actually Gilda who takes centre stage; Koko is little more than a narrative satellite, pivoting round her in a subversive reversal of the normative detection plot. By omitting to mention Gilda at all in their review, the *Times Literary*

Supplement ignores her significance, but their recognition that Koko is a lover and not a hero shows the success with which Dane and Simpson create a feminised male protagonist. The antithesis of the traditional upper-class patriarchal hero, he originates from a working-class background, and has retained the London dialect which he learned from his cockney mother who called him 'dearie' and admonished him for 'jaw', 'lip' or 'cheek' (*Printer's* 121). His working-class otherness is compounded by his illegitimacy, a further marker of his marginalisation. Like Peter Varley, he is also sensitive and emotional. When the murderer is revealed to be his father-in-law: 'hysteria had him in his grip. He turned, to collapse crowing and sobbing across the low parapet' (303). In contrast, Gilda is controlled and capable. Initially shocked by the contents of Horrie's will, afterwards she 'showed no signs of importing any further emotion whatever into business' and Koko and Savory both 'marvelled at her decisive calm' (219). She embraces her new role with courage and professionalism, and Koko, full of admiration, describes it as 'just the sort of job I've always said you could do on your head' (214). Even Marmion goes some way towards redeeming himself with his proud recognition that 'my daughter [...] is a great woman!' (240) at 'the beginning of a reign' (218). Her career is more lucrative than her husband's and Horrie's bequest gives her the sort of marital control which Jane Eyre enjoyed. It also gives her a decidedly modern workload however, which distinguishes the novel from Bronte's Victorian fantasy. Significantly, when her work becomes all-consuming and she is 'ruefully aware, there were far fewer un-business hours than for her premises' (305), Koko is accepting and uncomplaining. The couple's roles are

the reverse of Vane and Wimsey's, with Koko taking more of a back seat and supporting Gilda's career, which he acknowledges is of more public importance than his own.

In her discussion of female-authored detective fiction, Mann contends that 'there must be a good deal of straight wish-fulfilment when a full-time woman writer has the professional women in her books treated with a deference, with an acceptance of the objective value of their work, which can rarely be quite part of her own everyday life' (105). Gilda exceeds the expectations of the real modern woman through her professional position and by virtue of the esteem in which her career is held by both her father and her husband. There is perhaps an element of unreality here, reflecting Dane's other aspirational feminist plots. Just as Elinor and Horrie are versions of the widely-respected professional women who did exist in inter-war London, fantasised into top-performing London actresses and publishers, Gilda's triumph is perhaps an exaggeration of the true conditions of working wives at the time. On the other hand, the novel's representation of Gilda can be interpreted as a progressive challenge to the cultural hegemony in 'a time of antifeminism' (Klein 97). During this period, in novels and 'in films as in life, women's work was seen as provisional – not part of her life's commitment or her self-definition' (Haskell, qtd. Klein 99) and 'public opinion was hostile to women workers who were keeping men's jobs instead of keeping house [and] they were seen as leeches and bloodsuckers for wanting decent wages and not being willing to go back to domestic work' (96-97). Compensating for falling short of establishing the fully-fledged female sleuth, Dane and Simpson create

a rounded professional woman protagonist, the dominant partner in her marriage, whose fictional working life operates to challenge hegemonic prejudices against women.

Klein's description of female-authored inter-war detective texts which 'experimented with but finally rejected a standard of equality for women and men' (100), and 'vacillated between' the 'investigation' and 'marriage plot [...] persistently undermining their protagonists by this pattern' (107) is more applicable to Sayers' novels than to Dane and Simpson's. Contrary to critical claims that an equal marriage is established in *Busman's Honeymoon* (Kinsman 160, and Young 50), there is actually little reference to Vane's career in the text. She defines herself primarily as a wife, and the conflict between womanliness and academia which characterises *Gaudy Night* is ultimately forgotten. Sayers comes dangerously close to writing a patriarchal outcome and re-inscribing the normative 'dichotomy between professional success and romantic fulfilment' (Klein 110) in 'an approved sequential pattern which [...] defines marriage as both women's life and their work' (114). Vane overly reveres Lord Peter. In *Have His Carcase*, this is manifested in an epiphanous moment which defines the future of their relationship:

[she] suddenly saw Wimsey in a new light. She knew him to be intelligent, clean, courteous, wealthy, well-read, amusing and enamoured, but he had not so far produced in her that crushing sense of utter inferiority which leads to prostration and hero-

worship. But she now realised that there was, after all, something godlike about him. (*Carcase*. 213-14)

In Busman's Honeymoon, Mrs Ruddle observes how 'she worships the ground 'e treads on' (304) and Wimsey refers approvingly to her 'alarming plunge into wifeliness' (142). She becomes increasingly solicitous for his comfort, supervising the move to and from Tallboys cottage, shielding him from the press, organising the daily help and working with Bunter to ensure that he is always able to get on with the case, free from unsettling distractions. Her main concern by the end of the novel is that she has not 'failed altogether' (447-8) as a wife. She also becomes increasingly economically dependent upon Wimsey, informing him at one point that 'at the moment I haven't got a penny in the world except what's yours' (294). Young's view that 'Sayers championed a world where human beings could exist free of the constraints of gender' (43) is contestable to say the least.

Sayers continued to work on Detection Club collaborations with Simpson and the two writers supported each other's work in a correspondence which probably lasted until Simpson's tragic death in 1940.³⁸ Simpson was not to work with Dane again however. Barrow gives as the reason for the end of Dane's detective writing career the fact that 'in 1932 America discovered Winifred and swallowed her up for a time' (61), but an examination of the chapter which she wrote for *The Floating Admiral* in 1931 indicates that she was perhaps growing a little tired of the genre. Set in a pseudo-feudal English riverside village, the stereotypical detective-novel location does not sit well

with Dane's interest in the bohemian and cosmopolitan London world of theatres, newspapers and publishing companies. As her contribution to the story does not come until the penultimate chapter, she is also unable to properly establish the kind of main female protagonist whose story she favoured over the traditional paraphernalia of clues, alibis and timetables, and which distinguished the Saumarez trilogy from detective novels by other writers. In consequence perhaps, her chapter is very short, and contributes little towards the resolution of the investigation, adding instead a rather peculiar clue related to greengages. This is not helpful to Antony Berkeley's onerous task, indicated in his aptly titled next and final chapter: 'Clearing up the Mess' (Members 202).

Dane and Simpson controlled their readers' perceptions of gender in ways which suggested new possibilities for inter-war women. In contrast to the childlessness-related anxieties of the protagonists of 'Spinsters' Rest' and *The Lover*, ten years later into Dane's career, children are not a consideration for her characters and their configured identities are the fruit of their work as much as, or indeed instead of, marriage. The fact that the Saumarez trilogy was well-received, suggests that the collaborators' modifications of dominant ideology did not alienate their middlebrow readership, and that their perspective was in tune with a changing hegemony which was perhaps opening up to their brand of feminism. Alternatively, their success could be attributed to the balance which they achieved between rebellion and compliance. For as with all of Dane's fiction, it is important to note the ways in which the feminist ethos is often contradicted and complicated by conservative

textual elements. Given that love plots were traditionally avoided by the detective genre, it is ironic for instance, that Dane adopts romantic resolutions in the Saumarez trilogy but not in her autobiographical, realist, gothic or saga fiction, where they would have been deemed more appropriate. Simpson's influence may have been a factor in this, but romantic conclusions are also likely to have been the inevitable consequence of bringing issues of female identity into a genre which more than other forms demanded a clear restoration of the status quo in the finale. The pattern which sees Dane reward the heroines of her detective fiction with marriage *and* work was an optimistic departure however, signalling her contention that women should be able to have both.

Martella's womanliness is another contentious element. After her marriage, her theatre work is hardly referred to, and she is only seen in a domestic context. Furthermore, her gender philosophy, expounded at one of Horrie's dinner parties and quoted in full here, is decidedly ambiguous:

All artists are men. [...] Women are really domesticated – housewives and mothers. 'Business' is an emancipation to 'em just as 'art' is emancipation to a man whose natural job is business. But art is beyond women altogether – except the freaks. Business is like an art to a woman. If she pretends to be an artist she can only manage it by making a business of it. [...] I'm not an artist. If I get it across I'm making a business of my acting, and Mr Savory as a publisher is just a business man; but

Mrs Fry will make her publishing business into an art. (*Printer's*
270)

Martella separates out male and female spheres, regarding art and business as masculine fields, and business and domesticity as female pursuits. This is a departure from traditional conceptions of womanliness certainly, but still establishes a hierarchy with domesticity at the bottom – the area women welcome the chance to move up from – business in the middle – the place where domesticated women want to escape to and where men hope to escape from – and art at the top as the sphere only men can aspire to inhabit. It seems then that while men can (and should) have access to the highest and middle tier, women can (and should) have access only to the middle and lowest tier. 'Mrs Fry will make her business into an art', suggests both that art is accessible to women so long as it is in the form of a commercial enterprise and so not really art at all, and that commerce can be feminised with an injection of artistic style. Only men, it is suggested, can truly be real artists. This is problematically essentialist, but at least it recognises Gilda's extraordinary talents, acknowledges the right of women to enter the professions, and points to the unacceptability of their confinement to a domestic role. Indeed, opening up the business and commercial spheres to women is exactly what happens in Horrie and Gilda's stories.

The novel closes with a marriage between a male artist (writer) and a female business woman, but the overriding narrative point of view contradicts Martella's standpoint – which after all may be intentionally unreliable –by

privileging Gilda's business and making Koko's writing only an indulgence. Furthermore, the comforting optimism of the text's romantic conclusion is problematized by Horrie's murder and by her portrait which Gilda hangs on her office wall as a source of constant inspiration, an irascible reminder of the validity of spinsterhood. Replicating Isabella and Jenny's decisions to put Hariot and Madala's pictures on display, this decisive final narrative statement of the importance of female lineage, power transference and women's careers, reinforces the perspective iterated in *Legend* and *Midsummer Men* and reduces the impact of the novel's romantic resolution.

Dane and Simpson outmanoeuvre the rigid structures and rules of the patriarchal detective genre and interrogate the conservative inter-war ideology which these structures reinforce. They incorporate plots and themes which eclipse the investigative narrative and reject the sterility of technical ingenuity. While Sayers demonstrates no compunction in relation to her unequivocal veneration of Wimsey, Dane and Simpson resist the pressures to deify their own male sleuth. They write from a modern perspective, promoting as the new markers of status, hard work and earned celebrity, rather than inherited wealth and high culture, and their egalitarian representations of racial minorities and the rise of the lower-middle and working classes, are at odds with the sanctioning of hierarchies based on entrenched notions of social class which operates in Sayers' work and the work of most of her contemporaries. They demolish Klein's argument that female-authored detection fiction in this period did no more than 'submerge and then restore the acceptable story- the traditional woman's script – and sink the unacceptable, more radical

presentation of a woman professional' (103). Sharing Sayers' interest in the social anxieties of first and second-generation New Women, Dane and Simpson's heroines transcend Vane's ultimate womanliness, configuring professional identities which prevent their becoming engulfed by marriage and enable them to keep in sight the values of the preceding Victorian generation, while fully embracing the modern world.

CONCLUSION

Dane published two further novels in the inter-war period. Both were genre novels: *The Arrogant History of White Ben* (1938) is a science fiction text, and *The Moon is Feminine*, (1938), a historical fantasy. Both appear to be informed by the impending war with Germany. In *The Arrogant History of White Ben*, the dangers of appeasement are dramatized overtly, through the rise and fall of a home-grown human scarecrow megalomaniac, who establishes a totalitarian regime on English soil. *The Moon is Feminine* addresses fears of enemy invasion more symbolically. Set in Regency Brighton, it centres on a wealthy young man, Henry Cope, who has a fixated belief that he is descended from 'the Green People', a race of human/faery hybrids, inhabitants of a fantastic place across the sea called St. Martin's Land. He becomes enamoured with a strange green skelkie-boy encountered on the

beach, with whom he identifies, as one of his own kin. The boy's beauty distracts him completely from his fiancée, Molly Jessell, the object of his somewhat ambiguous feelings. Becoming cognisant of Henry's intention to abscond with the sea-gypsy, Molly determines to prevent the 'elopement'. Reaching the seashore ahead of their meeting, she is seduced and then strangled by the boy, who disappears back into the sea from whence he came. Molly's fate indicates a darkening of Dane's mood, reflective of the national dread of the arrival of foreign male oppressors from the sea, symbolised in her text in metaphors of sexual invasion.

Writing at this point in history when minorities were most under threat – from Nazi doctrine – *The Moon is Feminine* succeeds *Broome Stages* as an enlightened representation of homosexuals. A 'deeply queer' tale ('The Presents' n.p.) about the complex psychology of a homo-erotic triangulation, it openly acknowledges the power and validity of homosexual desire. Henry Cope's infatuation marks a 1930s shift in Dane's writing, first made in *Broome Stages*, from the delineation of female to male homosexuality. This very probably reflects the (albeit marginally) more culturally acceptable reception of homosexual desire than female same-sex love at that time. The openness of *Moonlight is Feminine* was likely to have been influenced by Dane's place at the heart of a community of theatrical homosexuals, and by the romances of her friends and the atmosphere of Brighton, a long-standing homosexual meeting place which she visited frequently. She regularly met up with Noel Coward at 11, Marine Parade (now *The Amsterdam*), the hotel where Henry Cope relaxes, and she was also well-acquainted with Edward Thompson,

'fellow Hoverite', later to become 'a mainstay of Brighton Gay Switchboard for many years' ('The Presents' n.p.).

In its open treatment of homosexuality, *The Moon is Feminine* concurs with the broad, liberal, tolerant perspective on sexual orientation which informs Dane's work. It also intimates a modernist disavowal of hope, or even a new realism relating to women's vulnerability and male brutality, consistent with modern feminism. By capitulating from Dane's customary feminist model of female resilience however, the text becomes ideologically problematic. The empowering outcome is sacrificed and Molly subjected to a sadistic sexual attack in the process: 'her lips were forced apart. [...] She felt herself falling: and with the falling came a swift forward rush through the warm night-air, then shock, pain, terror, ecstasy, suffocation, and the darkness of sleep' (*Moon* 288). The multiplicity of possible interpretations relating to gender and power in the novel calls to mind Sally Munt's assessment of female-authored (detective) fiction as – to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's phrase – 'kinda subversive and kinda hegemonic' (Sedgwick, qtd. Munt 29), and reflects the often anomalous nature of all of Dane's work. Her texts oscillate between ideological positions in an inter-play between radical and more conservative representations of gender roles. *Regiment of Women* has a traditional romantic outcome and yet is passionate about educational reform and female fulfilment; in *Legend*, romantic love is both satisfying and stultifying. Both texts represent lesbianism as both monstrous and valid. Even her more resolutely feminist post-First World War texts can be ideologically equivocal. 'Spinsters' Rest' radically challenges prejudice against single women but simultaneously

venerates motherhood; *The Lover*, *The Babyons* and *Broome Stages* orchestrate the defeat of masculine power but generate a sympathy towards their conquered patriarchs which contemporary readings are likely to consider excessively conciliatory. *Broome Stages* celebrates female work and lineage but closes with the re-emergence of male primogeniture, and *Wandering Star* both advocates androgyny and single-mindedness for working women, and mourns for the death of their romantic soul. The Saumarez trilogy professionalises women but upholds their fulfilment in marriage and makes its chief detective a brilliant man. These texts seem to argue that women are better than men, but genius is the preserve of the masculine, yet even this position is contradicted by Dane's representation of Madala Grey as a genius in *Legend*.

As I have argued, the unstable nature of some of Dane's inter-war narrative perspectives derive from a complex mixture of her liberalism and traditionalism, shaped by a combination of personal beliefs and cultural internalisations: her middle-class respect for Englishness and those Victorian values which she found conducive to her vision for the modern world, her indignation at injustice, intolerance and poverty, a faith in female supremacy, an over-optimistic assumption about what had been achieved by and for women, and her assimilation of New Feminist capitulations to a conservative gender-related cultural hegemony. Her writing is also informed by a sensitivity to generic conventions, and to the requirements and perspectives of publishers and readers. 'Caught between scorn and respect for the audience' (Gale, 'From Fame' 135), it is likely that she strategically packaged her middlebrow novels

and short stories to gently affirm and consolidate modern feminist values, which her more progressive and receptive readers were likely to share, occasionally incorporating narrative components calculated to support traditional reassuring doctrines in order to meet the normative expectations of publishers and satisfy the conformist element of her audience. This means that even her most strident feminism is politically problematic, sometimes compromising her liberal credentials. Her representation of exceptional imaginative women for instance, embeds feminist messages while helping to buoy up an unequal class system. Her favoured heroines mirror the 'woman of genius' in many fin-de-siècle New Woman texts who 'trouble feminist interpretation and commentary' by symbolising the 'apotheosis of bourgeois individualism' and affirming middle-class superiority (Rachel du Plessis qtd. Bouelmha 174).

Only from a twenty-first-century perspective however, does Dane appear to stand with one foot in the past and one in the future, sliding back into conservatism and anti-feminist thinking from time to time. As Maurizio Ascari puts it, 'when looking backwards we always interpret the development of a phenomenon in an instrumental way in order to highlight those aspects that correspond to our current needs and wishes – ideology and desire both being involved in this process' (9). If we resist the tendency to judge her work from a current feminist perspective, and interpret it instead in relation to the gender ideologies of her female contemporaries: Storm Jameson, G.B. Stern, Helen Simpson, Mary Borden, Rebecca West, Daphne Du Maurier, E.M. Delafield, May Sinclair, and Dorothy Sayers in particular, it clearly

corresponds to an inter-war version of middle-class feminism, mapping a slowly changing hegemony and speaking to women accustomed to acquiescence but starting to resist traditional role-expectations.

Inflecting traditional forms and popular genres with modernist introspection, psychology and romantic disappointments, Dane steers her way between conservatism and modernism to negotiate a strong feminist identity for her fiction, which stands firm in spite of nods to tradition. Demonstrating women on the rise and men in decline, her fiction reflects feminist perceptions of gender in the inter-war context. Her shifting perspectives on the relationship between personality and heredity are perhaps not problematic after all: the gender-inflected pattern in her saga novels represents patriarchal aristocracy in a state of degeneration, while emotionally healthy women are in the ascendant, constructing their own identities, unbound by the fetters of noble lineage, and primarily influenced by a knowledge of the historical cultural experiences of women. Protagonists Jenny Summer, Isabella Babyon and Gilda Bedenham are shaped by alternative female lineages, keeping portraits of the dead women who have inspired them in prominent positions in their homes and offices. Antonia Drury goes one step further, restoring a lost maternal ancestry using her artistic flair: creating her own interpretations of women of the past, and claiming their real selves from historical oblivion.

Gay Wachman's contention that Dane broke 'the rules of silence and propriety that muffled middle-class discourse – and above all, the discourse of women – about class, "race", gender and sexual differences' (3) is, in the main, entirely valid. Dane creates rewarding partnerships which transcend

social, sexual and racial divisions: between Laura Valentine and her working-class sister-in-law, Coral; Mary Pawle and her witch-redeemer; Antonia and her mad sister-in-suffering, Hariot Babyon; Isabella and her Jewish and gypsy lovers; Mary-Ann Babyon and her gypsy-mother, Teresa; Richard Broome and his lover, Ken; Gilda and her cockney husband, Koko. Her work challenges the patriarchal metanarrative, denouncing war and territorialism, and acknowledging basic injustices that bring disadvantaged people to the gallows, discriminate against minorities, and deny women agency. She explores alternatives to normative sexuality and conceives sympathetic portrayals of characters marginalised by race, social class and gender, centralising the spinster figure in particular. Indeed, in many ways her perspectives correspond with definitions of present-day feminist writing, a discourse which represents:

as a norm and not as freaks, women capable of intelligence, moral responsibility, competence, and independent action [which] reveals the economic, social, political and psychological problems women face as part of a patriarchal society, [...] explores female consciousness and female perceptions of the world; [...] creates women who have psychological complexity and rejects sexist stereotypes. (Knepper, qtd. Klein 201)

Through Laura, Antonia, Elinor Broome, Martella Baring, Damaris Payne and Gilda in particular, she creates an alternative powerful prototype for

modern independent womanhood, motivated by humanistic impulses, but also imaginative, resourceful, ambitious and defiant.

Through these extraordinary heroines and in her representations of Hetty Piele, Mary Pawle, Donna Broome and Beryl Blackwood especially, her fiction celebrates a female essentialism defined by spiritual qualities, the gift for achieving unity consciousness, for living intuitively, even telepathically. Dane's valorisation of a female psycho/spiritual semiotic, in opposition to the logical concrete world of the masculine symbolic, does not however, preclude a narrative confidence in women's more prosaic capabilities, registered through textual dramatisations of Gilda and Horrie's business acumen for instance, and in Donna, Damaris, Coral and Elinor's success in the commercial theatre. Indeed, between the writing of *First the Blade* and *Re-Enter Sir John*, her texts trace a progression towards the gradual reconciliation of the semiotic and symbolic. Rural and fantastical (often pagan) escapes are succeeded by women's navigations and negotiations of the patriarchal city. By infiltrating its commercial organisations, Dane's protagonists transform the gender power dynamic with their distinctively instinctive and essentialist brand of feminism.

Dane's final novel, *The Flower Girls* (1954), would further develop her progressive narrative threads. It gives more space to unprejudiced representations of homosexual relationships and foregrounds her key female protagonist's celebrity status and pragmatic career choices in the world of the theatre. The text works in much the same way as *Wandering Stars* and *Legend*, enigmatically concealing its feminist perspective, which the discerning reader unveils by deconstructing the unreliable account of the character-

narrator. Dane effectively orchestrates Damaris' revenge: the unromantic heroine cynically manipulates the inappropriate romantic feelings of a male playwright in order to have complete control over her acting roles. Like all of Dane's novels discussed in this study, *The Flower Girls* anticipates the agendas of Second Wave feminism, characteristically speaking to 'the women's side'. Connecting New Woman writing and inter-war domestic modernism to this later phase of feminist writing, it marks the culmination of its author's inter-war journey towards a modern feminist consciousness.

NOTES

1. Other celebrities who frequented her Covent Garden flat included Sybil Thorndike, Alexander Korda, Lynne Fontanne and her husband, Alfred Lunt, Lilian Braithwaite and her daughter, Joyce Carey, Douglas and Mary Fairbanks, Joyce Grenfell, (who was to deliver the eulogy at Dane's funeral), Gladys Calthrop, and David Niven, who once commented: 'despite the fact that she was permanently teetering on the verge of bankruptcy, Clemence Dane [...] was the richest human being I have ever known' (336).

2. Shaw's admiration of Dane's work was such that he said of her, 'I am fortunate in seeing such a star rise before I die' (qtd. in Barrow 35), and he wrote to Dane to express his enthusiasm for her play, *Will Shakespeare*, commenting that 'I was so touched by it that I actually

paid a man six shillings for a copy of the text' (*Correspondence with Bernard Shaw* n.p.).

3. *Newsagent* praised the novel as 'written with great wisdom, efficiency and insight, [which] will delight critical readers' ('*Regiment*' *Scrapbook*) and *Everyman* admired its 'scenes which show extraordinary penetration' ('Another Surprising' *Scrapbook*). *Land and Water* commended the author's 'power of vision [in] a piece of work that is written with [...] an easy sense of mastery' (*Scrapbook*), the *Sydenham and Penge Gazette* hailed it as 'a most excellent' novel ('New Sydenham' *Scrapbook*), and the *Weekly Dispatch* claimed that 'it contains one of the subtlest and most powerful pieces of character drawing I have met with in the last five years' ('The World of Books' *Scrapbook*).

4. The *Christian World* considered that 'the whole theme is developed with rare insight' ('First the Blade' *Scrapbook*), the *Liverpool Post* pronounced it the second of 'two remarkable books to her name' ('A Promising' *Scrapbook*), and the *Saturday Review* remarked on how she had 'improved on a successful first novel by a fine piece of work' (*Scrapbook*). *Common Cause* was of the opinion that 'in literary merit it surpasses *Regiment of Women*' ('First the Blade' *Scrapbook*), The *Liverpool Post* described it as 'a delightful piece of literary workmanship' ('Some New' *Scrapbook*), *Saturday Westminster Gazette* referred to it as 'an analytical novel of no ordinary charm and dexterity' ('New Novels'

Scrapbook), *Country Life* called it 'a splendid achievement' ('*First the Blade Scrapbook*') and *Church Family Newspaper* saw it as 'head and shoulders above the ordinary novel in ability' ('Full of Ability' *Scrapbook*). The *Globe* considered that 'Miss Dane has repeated the instantaneous and deserved success she achieved with *Regiment of Women*' (*Scrapbook*).

5. These include Frank Swinnerton, Frances Brett Young, , Eric Linklater, Frederick Lonsdale, Roger Wray, S.P.B Mais, Mary Hayley Bell, Bridgit Boland, Helen Simpson, Viola Meynell, G.B. Stern, Keith Winter, Joan Temple, F. Tennyson Jesse, Margery Sharp, Gertrude Jennings, Aimee Stuart, Morna Stuart, Roger Wray, Gilbert Cannon, W.L George, Ethel Sedgwick, Eleanor Mordant, George Stevenson Martin Anderson, Dimitry Gregorovitsh, F.G. Burmester and W. Levington Comfort, Elizabeth Baker, Doris Zinkeisen, Edward Wooll, Christine Stead, Anna Gordon Keown, Anthony Berkeley, Flavia Richardson, and Oscar Cook.
6. According to E.M. Forster, Wells 'comforts President Wilson' in his *Outline of History* (Hynes 324).
7. In *Newsreel*, Cecil. Day-Lewis despairs of a general abnegation of responsibility, as the populace are effectively lured to sleep by the new cinema media:

Enter the dream-house, brothers and sisters, leaving

Your debts asleep, your history at the door:
 This is the home for heroes, and this loving
 Darkness a fur you can afford. (Day-Lewis 68)

8. For a full account of this, see Lucy Bland's discussion of how she was really convicted for her independent modern lifestyle, sexuality, and lower-middle-class status (634).
9. Apemantus admonishes Timon thus: 'the middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends' (Shakespeare). This symbolises Shakespeare's own sense that he had too often ignored the needs and requirements of his audience.
10. Inter-war feminist activity secured 'important legislative gains with regard to the suffrage, admission to the professions, divorce, child custody and pensions [and] brought future success in [...] education, [and] equal pay' (Beddoe 3).
11. Woolf also holds the regressive and imperialist nature of Victorian paternalism responsible for the First World War. She writes how 'the patriarchs, the professors' had:

in their breasts an eagle, a vulture, forever tearing the liver out and plucking at the lungs – the instinct for possession, the rage for acquisition which drives them to desire other people's fields and

goods perpetually; to make frontiers and flags; battleships and poison gas; to offer up their own lives and their children's lives. (Woolf *Room* 50-51).

12. Woolf explained this:

occasionally an individual woman is mentioned, an Elizabeth, or a Mary; a queen or a great lady. But by no possible means could middle-class women with nothing but brains and character at their command have taken part in any one of the great movements which, brought together, constitute the historian's view of the past. (Woolf *Room* 57-58).

13. This research took her to the British Museum and among other texts, to Professor Trevelyan's *History of England*, a particularly patriarchal tract which generalised about women (Woolf *Room*).

14. *The Nursing Mirror* used very similar phrasing, describing the novel as centrally concerned with 'the thoughts and actions of the feminine sex' ('Remarkable' *Scrapbook*).

15. *Regiment of Women* made a positive contribution to lesbian fiction, inadvertently influencing Radclyffe Hall, who was a friend of Dane's, to write the more outspoken and controversial *Well of Loneliness* (1928).

16. This may be a self-conscious reference to Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* which begins in much the same way. Thackeray writes of how:

the famous little Becky Puppet has been pronounced to be uncommonly flexible in the joints, and lively on the wire; the Amelia Doll [...] has yet been carved and dressed with the greatest care by the artist; the Dobbin Figure [...] dances in a very amusing and natural manner. (1)

17. Barrow testifies that Dane 'very firmly believed in ghosts' (131). She questioned normative assumptions about the nature of reality in a review of contemporary fairy stories, insisting that her own dream landscape was 'a much more real place' to her than her memories of actual past experiences and spaces and asking 'if seeing is believing, if hearing, touching, tasting, tears and laughter are proofs of reality, how can we doubt our dreams?'. Her fantasy fiction addresses a question that was undoubtedly important to her: 'if reality is not a question of the five senses, then what [...] is reality, and where shall we set up the boundary-stones of belief' ('Faerylands' 150). She empathised with the 'psychic' minority gifted with an 'instinctive recognition of life beyond our life, of lives behind us and lives which they must not explicitly acknowledge lest they be laughed at' and alerted her readers to be sceptical of 'spiritualism, yet believe that the spirit survives' (ibid.).

18. Wallace contends that the ghost story genre which emerged in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century was particularly subversive and

'enabled women writers to evade the marriage plots which dominated the earlier Radcliffean Female Gothic' and make more effective contestations of masculine 'violence and predatory sexuality than was possible in either the realist, or indeed Gothic, novel' ('Uncanny' 57).

19. The categorisation of gothic writing on gender issues has been much debated. Female gothic is now generally used to refer to female-authored texts, while feminine gothic often describes texts whose speaking subject is a woman (Smith and Wallace 1-8). Both terms are regularly employed to describe both feminist and non-feminist texts. Hoeveler uses the term gothic feminism to label those particularly progressive texts where the heroine masquerades as a conventional victim within an oppressive patriarchal society while 'utilising passive-aggressive and masochistic strategies to triumph over that system' (Smith and Wallace 2).
20. Others, however, such as Eugenia Delamotte, view female gothic as inherently conservative (221-222).
21. Lucie Armitt explains how 'the work of Jacques Lacan is seen to have application to fantasy texts. For in his well-known ideas about the mirror stage of infantile development [...] the mirror is repeatedly found as a double-sided symbol, which, as well as having its conventional, mimetic

properties, likewise functions as a metaphorical gateway facilitating entry into another world, realm or stage of character development' (46).

22. According to Bingham, (169), the concept of the companionable marriage was first referred to in *The Revolt of Modern Youth* (1928) by Ben Lindsey and Wainwright Evans.
23. From the mid-nineteenth century, it became commonly known that fairy tales such as those published by the Grimms had been collected from women informants and had female origins. Women writers began to regard the genre as their own, reversing an earlier reluctance which had 'prevented [them] from overtly acknowledging the importance for their own creative efforts of the fantasy lore bequeathed to them by their anonymous foremothers' (Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher 12). Writers like Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Maria Louisa Molesworth and Juliana Horatia Ewing engaged in subversive revisions of popular fairy tales to 'tap [...] mythic female sources', in order to 'reinspect from an ironic adult perspective the archetypal relevance of tales [and] the cultural poignancy of parables [...] concerned with female empowerment' (13).
24. Dane complained that: 'when I ask for a good book and am returned *The Whole Duty of a Christian* I can't help feeling that the English language is not adapting itself to my personal needs as tactfully as it might' ('Best Sellers' 20). She also argued that interpretations of the creation myth

should refocus on the positive attributes of Eve: the 'strength of Eve maternal, not of Eve enchantress' ('Capes' 113). She objected to early twentieth-century divorce ruling – which she famously challenged in *Bill of Divorcement* – on the grounds that it was founded on patriarchal Christian edicts which made falsifying and constraining constructions of women. She called it:

the last stronghold of the old bad disbelief in the soul of the creature Woman, in the tradition that she, the crooked rib of the man God made upright, was but half human, had but half a soul and that half, when it was not directly mischievous, at least so childish, so irresponsible, that she could not be allowed to exist as an independent creature at all. (*Women's* 107)

25 The poem continues:

Yet mine own country
 If I one day may see
 Its spices and cedars
 Its gold and ivory
 As I lie dreaming
 It rises, that land
 There rises before me
 Its green golden strand

With the bowing cedars
 And the shining sand;
 It sparkles and flashes
 Like a shaken brand

26. Other literary representations of the female domain include 'An Island' (1838), by Elizabeth Barratt Browning, which celebrates a utopian paradise where all creatures are 'glad and safe. [...] No guns or springes in my dream' (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 103).
27. *The Times* called it 'a fine achievement', the *Daily Herald* described it as 'a beautiful, disturbing book' and *Week-end Review* hailed it as, 'a fine piece of work, beautifully written and exhibiting everywhere an imagination of great formative and assimilative power' (Flyleaf. *Broome Stages* 1933). The *Times Literary Supplement* considered it original, 'an unusual and charming book, told [...] with an unfailing spirit, a keen wit and an unusual gift for language' ('Broome Stages' 580).
28. Reflecting on the way Benji (his father) and Vanessa are socially ostracised because they are living together outside marriage, Tom refers to *The Woodlanders*, which he is currently reading, in order to endorse their way of life: 'the writer of that book would understand if he were here and would come to see them and be their friend' (*Herries* 32).

29. Planta-genista, another term for Plantagenet, is the Latin word for broom:

Henry 11 wore a sprig of it in his battle helmet.

30. Tracy Davis' term for female actor-managers (275).

31. Madame Vestris was the first woman to run a theatre company, taking over management of the Olympic shortly before the start of Queen Victoria's reign. Seeing herself as a 'warrior woman', she identified with Joan of Arc (qtd. in Powell 70). Sarah Lane took over the working-class Britannia theatre in Hoxton from her husband - who had demanded from her, 'a meek submission to his own rule and guidance' (Crauford, qtd. in Powell 69) - after his death. She built a successful career with plays which represented women as 'magnetic [and] heroic' (Powell 131). Mary Anderson managed plays at the Lyceum from 1887 (67).

32. According to Powell (49), wealthy titled amateurs started to enter the theatre in the late nineteenth century. This made the theatre more respectable but perhaps less creative.

33. John Styan calls Mrs Siddons, the Victorian actress, one of the 'great creative artists' (301) and a 'great tragic actress' (305), and Powell describes how she 'dominated the stage with her flashing eyes and clarion voice, spellbinding her audience' (51).

34. Ibsen wrote social rather than society drama (Hollidge 2), and his play, *A Doll's House* 'provided a powerful way of exploring and revealing the truth about the marriages of the characters' (Styan 340).
35. Wilde was the most famous exponent of this style of play which always began 'at the crisis so the audience was plunged quickly into the predicament of the hero or heroine' (Styan, p.332). Dane indicates that Edmund, like Wilde, is out of fashion after the war.
36. Dane and Simpson met when Charles Evans asked Dane to read through the type-script of Simpson's *The Baseless Fabric* (1925). The correspondence between them which ensued led to their becoming 'firm friends' (Barrow 58).
37. Barrow relates how the BBC approached Dane because she was 'regarded as a major writer of detective stories' (61). Brett notes that one of the criterion for membership of the detective club was that that its collaborators should have already 'written at least two detective-novels of admired merit' (iv).
38. See Sayers, *The Letters* 342, 359-60, 375-376, 386, 392, 395-6.

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