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EXAMINING THE PARTICULAR, ILLUMINATING THE SINGULAR:
GENDER, SEXUALITY AND DESIRE IN THE LIVES AND WORKS
OF MARIANNE MOORE AND BRYHER

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ABSTRACT

Female figures of the literary modernist movement came of age in the early twentieth century. This was a time of significant changes to discourses of sexuality and gender identity as well as female agency and desire. The lives and works of modernist women exemplify the ways these evolving conceptions were received and practiced. Marianne Moore and Bryher (Winifred Ellerman) are of interest to this study because their lives resist a heteronormative frame while their texts (correspondence, personal writings, published poetry and prose) explore a range of possibilities.

Modernist figures, such as Moore and Bryher, who privileged nonheteronormative lifestyles and same-sex companionship have been absorbed into the discourse of both queer theory and feminist theory. However, Moore and Bryher are among a group of women who actively refrained from identifying themselves according to terminology indicative of sexual desire and gender identification. This has complicated scholarly work intent on examining them within the critical discourses of queer studies. No one approach has produced a framework that accommodates modernist women's various embodiments of nonheteronormativity, and which interprets them as viable alternative modes of engaging in affective same-sex relationships while constructing nonheteronormatively-gendered conceptions of self. This project interrogates contemporary theories of gender and sexual identity and attempts to redress critical constraints by avoiding the application of a framework and taxonomy of female intimacy and gender identity which Moore and Bryher themselves avoided.

My study considers the sociohistorical circumstances in which Moore and Bryher wrote, lived, and loved, for the ways they may have mediated their expressions of sexual identity and desire. I examine aspects of their lives and works which have hitherto garnered little attention, and discover their desires to seize uncompromised agency, to prioritise their artistic lives, and to find freedom from heteronormative discourses bent on confining them or defining them according to categories of identity.

DEDICATION

For Imogen and Owen,
So they might believe in Freedom and Multiplicity

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INTRODUCTION

PART ONE: METHODOLOGY

Being able to identify something—someone—by a name, a word, allows us to understand an otherwise mysterious other. Moses of the Old Testament seeks such understanding when he asks the name of God-in-the-burning-bush. Unfortunately for him, God answers *`ehyeh `āšer `ehyeh*. Not only does God refrain from giving Moses a name, the answer God provides could be interpreted in a myriad of ways: “I am who I am”; “I am who I was”; “I am who I shall be”; “I was who I am”; “I was who I was”; “I was who I shall be”; “I shall be who I am”; “I shall be who I was”; “I shall be who I shall be.”¹ Such an enigmatic and multiple response complicates discussion and frustrates knowing. The divine subject does not actively appropriate or reject a particular signifier. Instead, it insinuates dynamism, not staticity—momentum, not fixity.

The modernist women at the heart of this study do not necessarily set out to frustrate knowing to the extent illustrated above. Certainly, they don’t claim to be God. Nevertheless, they can be frustratingly reticent. They are rarely forthcoming with confessions of their deepest sexual desires and do not always provide a clear indication of their gender identification. They may, however, have something new to teach us about both these things if we will explore their singularity in all its contradiction, dynamism and mystery.

My project examines the particularities of two modernist women who eschewed heteronormativity: Marianne Moore and Bryher (Winifred Ellerman). Contemporary criticism has long positioned them on the “queer” side of things, where “queer” indicates and celebrates all the diversity of desire and identification represented by nonheteronormativity. Moore was a celibate spinster whose most significant relationships were with women. Bryher desired women and inhabited a masculine gender identity. Consider a selection of descriptions of Bryher and Moore for the multiple ways in which their nonheteronormativity is signalled. Bryher and her partner H.D. have been dubbed platonic lesbians,² intimate friends,³ and primary

¹ Possible translations of Exodus 3:14 listed in Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 64.

² Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 303.

companions.⁴ Bryher is labeled a sexual invert,⁵ H.D.'s lover,⁶ and a "female husband ... a transgender modernist[.]"⁷ Furthermore, Nancy—Bryher's fictional proxy—"records a sense of gender dysphoria[.]"⁸ Moore is sometimes categorized as a lesbian poet exhibiting gender fluidity,⁹ and is described as *not* asexual.¹⁰

The various designations used to categorize these women and their (sexual) desires reflect the multiplicity each woman enacts and embodies as well as a critical imperative to gain purchase where conceptual handholds on the nature of their relationships may be few. The many identifications assigned to Moore and Bryher by various scholars reveal how these subjects can rarely, if ever, be represented by a single (sexual) category, and reinforce my claim that there is no definitive answer to the question of what—exactly—to call these women.

In my thesis I refrain from identifying Moore and Bryher according to terminology such as asexual, lesbian, invert, transgender or bisexual, which implies sexual or gender identification, unless they used the terminology to describe themselves. I take this approach as an alternative to works of historical/literary/queer scholarship which name and (re)claim queer historical subjects. I do not intend to diminish important projects which seek to make visible those works and artists who represent a queer constituency which has suffered historical erasure. I recognize, however, that identifying female modernist writers, in particular, according to one or another label for sexual or gender identity and desire can be a contentious exercise. It

³ Herbert R. Haber, "Beach, Sylvia Woodbridge," in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period, A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 4, ed. Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green (Cambridge, MA: Radcliffe College, 1980), 70.

⁴ Jean Walton, *Fair Sex, Savage Dreams: Race, Psychoanalysis, Sexual Difference* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 64.

⁵ Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 136.

⁶ Adrienne Harris, "Transference, Countertransference, and the Real Relationship," in *Textbook of Psychoanalysis*, 2nd ed., ed. Glen O. Gabbard, Bonnie E. Litowitz and Paul Williams (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2012), 257.

⁷ Susan McCabe, *Bryher: Female Husband of Modernism*, forthcoming biography of Bryher, see <http://www.americanacademy.de/home/person/susan-mccabe>, accessed August 29, 2016.

⁸ Joanne Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 69.

⁹ See Dell Richards, *Lesbian Lists: A Look at Lesbian Culture, History, and Personalities* (Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Publications, 1990), 37, and Cristanne Miller, *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 97.

¹⁰ See Kirstin Hotelling Zona, *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop & May Swenson: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 6, and Elizabeth Wilson, "El Greco's Daughter: Necessary Deflection in Marianne Moore's 'For February 14th' and 'Saint Valentine'," in *A Right Good Salvo of Barks: Critics and Poets on Marianne Moore*, ed. Linda Leavell, Cristanne Miller, and Robin G. Schulze (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 193.

may serve to obscure important particularities—contextualized by sociohistorical milieu—which confound or otherwise complicate that identification.

Labelling according to gender identity or sexual desire may preclude the sort of critical exploration which might lead to inklings of the “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” promised by a more queer approach.¹¹ For example, in Appendix A, I will detail how contemporary critical preoccupation with reclaiming queer historical subjects according to the term “lesbian” has resulted in the reproduction of an error, and ultimately a misidentification.

My project takes a cue from contemporary theorists including Madhavi Menon and David V. Ruffolo who imagine inquiring trajectories which refuse “every substantialization of identity, which is always oppositionally defined,” (which is how Lee Edelman characterizes queer theory).¹² In Chapters One and Two, I consider Marianne Moore and Bryher from Menon’s queer universalist frame in the hopes that by exploring their singularity, my project will help to illuminate what their work and lives have to say about sexual and gender identity from within the modernist movement. More specifically, I aim to gain a greater understanding of the desires of Moore and Bryher, with a lesser focus on the details and articulation of their sexual desires, and a greater focus on desires which might otherwise be called hopes, dreams, wants.

RECLAIMING/NAMING QUEER HISTORICAL SUBJECTS

Since the 1970s, lesbian and gay studies scholars have been involved in a recuperative effort. They have been searching for and illuminating historical figures and texts which represent “the love that dare not speak its name.” Claude J. Summers explains that the “gay and lesbian studies movement has not only discovered and recovered neglected texts and authors but has also reclaimed mainstream literature, revealing the pertinence and centrality of (frequently disguised) same-sex relationships in canonical works.”¹³ In the context of historical literary criticism, the

¹¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.

¹² Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3-4.

¹³ Claude J. Summers, “Gay Male Literature,” in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature*, ed. Steven R. Serafin (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 1999), 434.

population of a queer canon is important work, making visible those who have been expurgated from literary history.

Many nonheteronormative works and individuals can be found within the modernist movement. Some well-known figures include Renée Vivien, Gertrude Stein and Radclyffe Hall. Queer texts include Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936), Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), and Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Modernism, therefore, has been of particular interest to scholars of gay and lesbian studies eager to identify queer relationships, texts and subjects. This recuperative effort has necessarily involved the identification—the naming—of gay and lesbian subjects and texts.

The Problematics of Naming

The question of how best to identify a queer historical subject is complicated by at least two circumstances. First, when the subject predates what I call the Foucauldian divide and, second, when the subject does not *self*-identify according to terminology recognized today to indicate a nonheteronormative identity. These challenges have spurred the inception of new critical and theoretical frameworks as well as the creation of novel terminology. Useful as these are, they represent a conceptual dependence on identificatory terminology and invite a discussion of the problematic relationship between signifier and signified.

The Foucauldian Divide

Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1976) theorized the shift from a conception of sexual acts as behaviour to indications of identity and located this shift around 1880.¹⁴ Anna Clark writes that this theory “profoundly changed the history of homosexuality.”¹⁵ Thus, the scholarly practice of revealing or identifying pre-1880 subjects as gay or lesbian has the potential to ascribe to historical subjects conceptions of identity and sexuality which may be anachronistic. Judith Halberstam addresses the

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *An Introduction*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

¹⁵ Anna Clark, “Female Sexuality,” in *The Routledge History of Women in Europe Since 1700*, ed. Deborah Simonton (New York: Routledge, 2006), 57-58. See also, Mary E. Wood, “‘With Ready Eye’: Margaret Fuller and Lesbianism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature,” *American Literature* 65 (1993): 2.

term “lesbian,” in particular, and dates its etymological inception as an identitarian signifier much more recently than the turn of the twentieth century. She claims “‘lesbian’ constitutes a term for same-sex desire produced in the mid-to-late twentieth century within the highly politicized context of the rise of feminism[.]”¹⁶ Concern with the interrelationship of terminology and chronology and evolving interpretation can even be detected in the works of women who now find themselves the subjects of historical study. In 1911, within the context of first-wave feminism, Coralie M. Boord, a contributor to *The Freewoman*, expressed the importance of using words thoughtfully and intentionally. Boord wrote: “In a social transition stage like the present *words* need careful handling for the accepted meanings of yesterday may not be the accepted meanings of today or ... to-morrow.”¹⁷

Lillian Faderman uncovers same-sex female relationships in her important work *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981). In *Surpassing the Love of Men*, Faderman’s use of identificatory terminology reflects the politics of identity outlined by the Foucauldian divide. She begins discussing lesbian(ism)s once her history of “Love Between Women” reaches the late nineteenth century. The previous chapters deploy the term “romantic friendship” to describe the relationships of women-desiring women. This move has garnered criticism, however. Bonnie Zimmerman claims that “the concept of romantic friendships between women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is often used, with an audible sigh of relief, to explain away love between women[.]”¹⁸ Faderman defends her position, explaining that she chooses not to use the word “lesbian” to describe the women or relationships who pre-date the Foucauldian divide because she is wary of what she sees as a critical “passion for

¹⁶ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 51.

¹⁷ Coralie M. Boord, “Correspondence,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 4 (December, 1911): 70, emphasis hers. Boord was writing in response to what she saw as the systemic reinforcement of traditional female roles disguised in progressive packaging, including the creation of a “Housewives’ Degree” promising to add a scientific and academic gloss to “woman’s work.” Boord points out that when the education provider touts the course’s relevance to house-wives, it precludes the participation of men in the sphere and reinforces the primacy of the domestic domain in women’s lives. She suggests, instead, that the course be directed toward “house-holders” and anyone “wishing to prepare themselves for the efficient management of their own homes[.]”

¹⁸ Bonnie Zimmerman, “Is ‘Chloe Liked Olivia’ A Lesbian Plot?,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 6, no. 2 (1983): 171.

placing people in sexual categories” and extending contemporary terminology to historical subjects.¹⁹

Scholars who do not subscribe to a Foucauldian historical model risk incurring charges of anachronism. Kathryn Kent finds such practice unacceptable: “Obviously, it would be anachronistic to apply contemporary standards of lesbian identity to women in a period in which the term ‘homosexual’ (as well as the term ‘heterosexual’) did not even exist.”²⁰ Thus, a scholar must determine whether the application of contemporary concepts and terminology in some way risks performing an inappropriate projection on unwitting subjects, or if it provides a useful framework for exploring their nonheteronormativity.

Emma Donoghue’s *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (1993) rejects the Foucauldian divide.²¹ Donoghue’s seminal text looks back upon a wealth of real and fictional subjects. She concedes the characters and individuals she studies are, within their particular contexts, referred to by “such terms as tribade, hermaphrodite, romantic friend, Sapphist and tommy,” but chooses to appropriate them under “lesbian as an umbrella term.”²² Thus, she would have the term “lesbian” unify a queer cohort for the purposes of examining the phenomenon of same-sex female love. “Lesbian” in this case serves to represent a relatively broad constituency.

The many signifiers Donoghue lists exemplify a diverse manifestation of nonheteronormative desire, identification and behaviour. Judith Butler references this multiplicity when she asks, “What, if anything, can lesbians be said to share?”²³ Given the variety represented by nonheteronormative subjects, the usefulness of the term “lesbian” as a signifier cannot be denied; Butler explains that while “no transparent or full revelation is afforded by ‘lesbian’ ..., there remains a political imperative to use these necessary errors or category mistakes, as it were ... to rally and represent an oppressed political constituency.”²⁴ Thus, the political motive behind

¹⁹ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981), 172.

²⁰ Kathryn R. Kent, *Making Girls Into Women: American Women’s Writing and the Rise of Lesbianism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

²¹ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993).

²² Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 7.

²³ Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 309.

²⁴ Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” 309.

a critical work may determine whether exactitude or generality is preferred in the signifier/signified relationship. In other words, depending on the purpose of the scholarly work, “lesbian” might represent a particularly defined subject or a broad and inclusive group. Halberstam sees pitfalls in this approach and argues the term “lesbian” invites at least sub-conscious projections of contemporary understandings onto historical subjects and she calls for its careful application, asserting that

many contemporary lesbian historians cannot extricate themselves from contemporary understandings of lesbian identity long enough to interpret the vagaries of early same-sex desire. Accordingly, we have any number of analyses claiming to find lesbians or protolesbians in any number of different historical periods without proper consideration of the sexual and gender forms in question.²⁵

Donoghue anticipated criticism along these lines, and provides her reader with a pre-emptive retort, stating “concepts such as ‘marriage’ and ‘wife’ have changed their meanings radically over the centuries, but nobody is accused of anachronism when they refer to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ‘marriages’ and ‘wives’.”²⁶ Donoghue’s argument is flawed, however. It is true that a 17th-century woman would have referred to herself as a “wife,” and that her understanding of that role would differ from a 20th-century woman’s understanding. However, a 17th-century woman would not have referred to herself as a lesbian.

Scholars and historians who adhere to the Foucauldian divide are driven to consider the sociohistorical context of a text’s production as well as understand the chronological evolution of terminology. The differences between Donoghue’s and Faderman’s naming practices represents one of the problematics of identifying queer historical subjects.

Subject Innominacy

Another challenge arises for the historian when the queer subject post-dates the Foucauldian divide but refrained from self-identifying. In other words, how should the historian identify a nonheteronormative woman who eschewed identificatory terms (such as lesbian, bisexual, homosexual, invert) despite their

²⁵ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 50.

²⁶ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 7.

availability within her sociohistorical context (at very least via legal and medical discourses)? Several modernist women, including Marianne Moore and Bryher, complicate the critic's task by never identifying themselves according to the sexological terminology with which they are, today, frequently identified. Despite having access to many signifiers such as lesbian, invert, bisexual and transgender, they chose instead to veil—if thinly—their identifications and desires.

The modernist era—which extends roughly from 1850 to 1950—intersects with the Foucauldian divide. Some modernists including Bryher, Marianne Moore, and Djuna Barnes survived long enough to see the dawn of the gay rights movement in the West; such women had access to terms like lesbian. Thus, when they are referred to as lesbians in contemporary scholarship, the charge of anachronism does not apply. Nonetheless, within the context of modernist studies, there exists some contention around the study and naming of nonheteronormative modernist women. For example, Linda W. Rosenzweig and Linda Leavell urge scholars to stop looking to modernist women and their same-sex relationships for historical versions of contemporary relationships. Rosenzweig argues “it is difficult if not impossible for the late twentieth-century historian to distinguish among the various ‘shades of sexual, nonsexual, and semisexual passion that the nineteenth century accepted as part of the normal spectrum of human emotions.’”²⁷ Leavell insists “we can hardly expect [Marianne Moore’s] generation to understand identity politics as we do.”²⁸ This is not to suggest queer loves and identities were not represented—they were. Anna Clark claims, however, their conception of identity “was not the same as our modern notion of an innermost essence, but more likely to be defined by social relationships.”²⁹ With a few exceptions,³⁰ modernist women’s relationships as well as the content of their work often transcended the defined boundaries of the time between heterosexual and homosexual and eschewed the terms then populating sexological and psychoanalytic taxonomies.

²⁷ Linda W. Rosenzweig, *Another Self: Middle-Class American Women and Their Friends in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 29-30. Quoting Paula Blanchard, *Sarah Orne Jewett: Her Life and Work* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1994), 219.

²⁸ Linda Leavell, “Marianne Moore, the James Family, and the Politics of Celibacy,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 219.

²⁹ Clark, “Female Sexuality,” 57-58.

³⁰ Radclyffe Hall and her character Stephen Gordon of *The Well of Loneliness* represent textbook inverts, according to theories of inversion proposed by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter.

A handful of strategies has emerged for studying and describing nonheteronormative subjects who either predate the Foucauldian divide or who chose innominacy. Some scholars have attempted to circumvent the issue altogether. Early work in the area of modernist literature, such as Suzanne Juhasz' *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition* (1976), explores the work of Marianne Moore, Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath, among others. Juhasz examines their poetry in relation to patriarchal social structures, but does not discuss the sexual identity of these women. She does not use the terms "lesbian" or "homosexual" in her work, and does not speculate on the desires or object choices of the poets she features. Juhasz comments obliquely on her decision to side-step identifications of desire and sexuality, positing an irreconcilable disconnect between the "experience of sexuality ... [and] the language ordinarily assigned to it[.]"³¹ In *Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (1987), Gillian Hanscome and Virginia L. Smyers also refrain from the practice of naming. Instead, they emphasize the general trend of nonheteronormativity prevalent among modernist women, and the links that exist between a writer's nonheteronormativity and her work; Hanscome and Smyers gesture toward "a clear connection between literary endeavour and the shunning of conventionally heterosexual lives[.]"³² Approaches such as these are the exception rather than the rule.

Theoretical and Terminological Accommodations

The contention surrounding terminology and its critical application may be a symptom of a discomfort with what Judith Butler calls "received grammar."³³ Moya Lloyd explains that Butler's "received grammar" hinges on the understanding that "language (including grammar and style) is not 'politically neutral'" and that "to be able to communicate intelligibly with others requires that a certain set of grammatical rules are [*sic*] learned and followed. This process is one that Butler construes as a normalizing process: a process, that is, of being inducted into a specific set of norms.

³¹ Suzanne Juhasz, *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1976), 191. Rich's "Two Songs" appeared in *Necessities of Life: Poems, 1962-1965* and was published in 1966.

³² Gillian Hanscome and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for their Lives: The Modernist Women 1910-1940* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1987), xv.

³³ Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, "Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification," *JAC* 20, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 728.

Failure to conform to these norms—grammatical rules—means that one’s speech risks being unintelligible to others.”³⁴

Butler is dismayed by “increased calls for scholarly work to be ‘accessible,’ to appeal to ‘common sense’ through a ‘common language,’ and to be written within the terms of an ‘already accepted grammar’[.]”³⁵ Butler explains it is “a mistake to think that received grammar is the best vehicle for expressing radical views, given the constraints that grammar imposes upon thought, indeed, upon the thinkable itself.”³⁶ Such practice, she believes, “constrains our thinking—indeed, about what a person is, what a subject is, what gender is, what sexuality is, what politics can be—and I’m not sure we’re going to be able to struggle effectively against those constraints or work within them in a productive way unless we see the ways in which grammar is both producing and constraining our sense of what the world is.”³⁷

Many historical scholars whose work touches on modernist women struggle against “received grammar” and the term “lesbian” in particular. Dissatisfaction with existing taxonomies of identity, desire and sexuality has encouraged many scholars to generate alternative terminology and theories which can be applied to nonheteronormative historical subjects. Martha Vicinus, for example, recognizes that same-sex attachments were embodied and enacted in multiple ways for multiple reasons and, along with Judith M. Bennett and Leila Rupp, she proposes the creation and use of more fluid terms to accommodate this multiplicity. Similarly, Halberstam imagines such terms would constitute “ever more accurate or colorful or elaborate or imaginative or flamboyant taxonomies, ‘nonce taxonomies[.]’”³⁸

Adrienne Rich’s theory of the “lesbian continuum” has proven to be a helpful framework for scholars unwilling to gloss over the nonheteronormativity of their subjects, but who resist using “received grammar” to describe them. In “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), Rich defines the “lesbian continuum” as “a range ... of woman-identified experience” which has the potential to describe every woman at some point in her life, “whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or

³⁴ Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 21.

³⁵ Olson and Worsham, “Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification,” 728.

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2008), xix.

³⁷ Olson and Worsham, “Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification,” 733.

³⁸ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 47.

not.”³⁹ The lesbian continuum accommodates both essentialist and constructivist theories of sexual identification. It aims to prevent “the reduction of lesbianism to sexuality” by deemphasizing the coincidence of lesbianism and sexuality,⁴⁰ and acknowledging lesbianism as a political manoeuvre. Locating a subject on the lesbian continuum does not require the subject’s self-identification. This suits the study of innominate modernist women. Modernist literary scholars such as Susan Stanford Friedman and Linda Leavell have put Rich’s concept to good use. Stanford Friedman recognizes that the lesbian continuum lends itself nicely to a study of H.D.⁴¹ Leavell, for her part, asserts that Marianne Moore also intersects with Rich’s lesbian continuum all the while maintaining distance from her sexual identity.⁴²

Another terminological tool at the disposal of modernist scholars is Judith M. Bennett’s term “lesbian-like.” Lesbian-like recalls Rich’s lesbian continuum and is inclusive of a wide range of subjects and behaviours.⁴³ It describes “women whose lives might have particularly offered opportunities for same-sex love; women who resisted norms of feminine behavior based on heterosexual marriage; women who lived in circumstances that allowed them to nurture and support other women[.]”⁴⁴ Caroline Gonda, too, adds to the taxonomy of “identificatory erotics” with the term “homoaffectionate.”⁴⁵ These novel terms and theories represent a theoretical drift away from binary thinking toward a more rhizomatic map of possibility; an exchange of the fixity of binarism and polarity for the dynamism of multiplicity.

Problematic Investment in Terminology: When the Term Matters Too Much

³⁹ Adrienne Rich, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (London: Onlywomen Press Ltd., 1981), 20, 23.

⁴⁰ Susan Stanford Friedman, “‘I go where I love’: An Intertextual Study of H.D. and Adrienne Rich,” in *The Lesbian Issue: Essays from SIGNS*, ed. Estelle B. Freedman et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 120.

⁴¹ See Friedman, “‘I go where I love’: An Intertextual Study of H.D. and Adrienne Rich.”

⁴² Leavell, “Marianne Moore, the James Family, and the Politics of Celibacy,” 220.

⁴³ Judith M. Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 1-2 (January/April 2000): 15, 21.

⁴⁴ Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms,” 9-10

⁴⁵ Caroline Gonda, “Being Faithful: The Ethics of Homoaffection in Antonia Forest’s Marlow Novels,” in *Twenty-First Century Lesbian Studies*, ed. Noreen Giffney and Katherine O’Donnell (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2007), 92. Gonda adapted this term from Susan S. Lanser’s description of “homo-affectional or homo-erotic behaviour” in the latter’s examination of the Sapphic picaresque. See Susan S. Lanser, “Sapphic picaresque, sexual difference and the challenges of homo-adventuring,” *Textual Practice* 15, no. 2 (2001): 256.

When Emma Donoghue defends her use of lesbian as an “umbrella term,” she explains that she uses the term “lesbian” *because*—not despite the fact—it “does not have the specific connotations” of other terms (such as tribade, fricatrice, Sapphist, etc.).⁴⁶ In other words, Donoghue values “lesbian”—in this case—for its flexibility, its ability to signal a relatively diverse constituency. However, there are certain high-stakes contexts within which the strength of the signifier/signified relationship is paramount: for example, when the contemporary scholarly machine performs the naming and situating function of an historical chronological account of the emergence of queer identity, which underpins concepts such as the Foucauldian divide. In this case, the historical textual emergence of terminology is important, particularly when constructing an etymological record. In other words, the first textual example of lesbian subjects—referred to as “lesbians” and colliding with contemporary conceptions of the term—is an important moment in the historical record of lesbian identification and subjecthood.

The recuperative effort to name/claim historical queer subjects, and the search for the originary usage of terminology is akin to an archaeological endeavour. In archaeological terms, “excavation is destruction,”⁴⁷ so the utmost care is taken when noting observations, cataloguing artefacts and taking measurements. The archaeologist investigates further when an artefact is discovered in an unexpected zone, or when an anticipated find is absent. In either case, the archaeologist takes note of problematic evidence and asks: “Why?” However, in the scholarly search for terminological artefacts, such principles have been overlooked in at least one case, and have permitted the transmission of errors.

When reading Donoghue’s *Passions Between Women*, I was surprised to find a quote pulled from the late eighteenth century which describes “females ... called Lesbians.”⁴⁸ In the course of my research and during my investigations into the etymology of sexological terminology, I had never come across use of the term “lesbian”—used to indicate women-desiring women—prior to the 1890s. This was an unexpected find and I felt compelled to examine the original source. After conducting a thorough investigation which stretched back through three centuries of text, across three languages—including Old German (Fraktur script)—and through several

⁴⁶ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 7.

⁴⁷ “Excavation,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, accessed May 18, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/science/excavation-archaeology>.

⁴⁸ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 242.

publication contexts, I discovered that the quotation was reproduced in error and that its reproduction had been facilitated—if not propagated—by the motivations of authors and publishers who carried and modified the words from their original literary location to present-day texts.⁴⁹ In this case, I found that—because of the power and political currency of a particular word—a snippet of eighteenth-century text was transmitted to contemporary scholarly works *not* because of the specific details it held about historical subjects, but because of the word that was (not actually) used to describe them. I found that the female subjects and the titillating report of their same-sex enclave had been commodified first by an eighteenth-century travel writer, then by a nineteenth-century sexologist, followed by a less-than-reputable twentieth-century publisher, and finally by unwitting contemporary scholars. The latter were likely more interested in pointing to an astonishingly early identification of “lesbians” than in closely examining the find. Acceptance of the term’s application was not interrogated, in this case, and so the details pertaining to its misuse went undiscovered.

This example demonstrates how a term such as “lesbian”—where the desire to reclaim the term and its historicity is imperative—may be traded as semantic currency in the academic economy through the production and circulation of critical texts.

Reckoning the Signifier/Signified Relationship

Much of my discussion thus far has centered on the application and interpretation of identificatory terminology within different contexts. In some cases, the textual appearance of a term like “lesbian” might serve to pinpoint the emergence of a contemporary identity. The application of the term may or may not reflect the Foucauldian divide. Its designated constituency may be broadly or narrowly defined. It might inform the creation of novel terminology and concepts. This focus on terminology invites me to inspect the signifier/signified relationship.

In the case of modernist women, the relationship between signifier and signified is described by Shari Benstock as a precise one, of critical importance to modernist thought. Benstock writes the “one sacred belief common to all was what seemed to be the indestructibility of the bond between the Word and its meanings,

⁴⁹ A detailed account of this investigative adventure can be found in Appendix A.

between symbol and substance, between signifier and signified.”⁵⁰ This bond, exemplified in Imagism, “forged a new relationship between signifier to signified, fixing a strict relation between the word and its referents[.]”⁵¹ It is likely that this emphasis on exactitude accounts for why some women chose not to self-identify according to available sexological terminology. Bryher and Moore, for example, may have resisted identifying themselves according to categories available to them in their time if they didn’t see themselves as a fit to the “signified” in relation to signifiers such as “lesbian” or “invert,” even “spinster” in Moore’s case. They would have hesitated to position themselves with such fixity given the modernist values of exactitude and accuracy.⁵²

Virginia Woolf disapproved of the application of terminology associated with sexual identity. In 1930, she wrote: “Where people mistake, as I think, is in perpetually narrowing and naming these immensely composite and wide flung passions—driving stakes through them, herding them between screens[.]”⁵³ Woolf was writing from the context of her own complicated nonheteronormativity to her lover Ethel Smyth, and she articulates disillusionment with the categorization and codification of sexual desire. Clearly, Woolf saw such labeling as a violent act. Would she levy this criticism against contemporary scholarship? Would she perceive it performing a disservice by continuously seeking to label the “immensely composite and wide flung passions” she refers to? I cannot propose a single answer to this question. I do, however, argue for a less frequent deployment of this practice and attempt to focus on the particularities of historical queer women, relationships and texts.

READING THE QUEER SUBJECT

⁵⁰ Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 158. It is true that one preoccupation of modernist writing was to pursue exactitude in relation to words and their meanings. Marianne Moore, for example, writes that the poet “must strive for precision.” (Marianne Moore, interview with Donald Hall, *The Paris Review*, no. 25 (Summer-Fall 1961), accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interview/4637/the-art-of-poetry-no-r-marianne-moore>.) However, some modernist writers such as James Joyce and Djuna Barnes, for example, were concerned with interrogating relations between signifiers and signifieds. See Peter Francis Mackey, *Chaos Theory and James Joyce’s “Everyman”* (Tallahassee, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999), 82-5, 91-5, and Erin G. Carlston, *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernity and Fascist Modernism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 76-9.

⁵¹ Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, 329.

⁵² Ezra Pound wrote that “the touchstone of art is in its precision.” See Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 100.

⁵³ Quoted in Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London, UK: Vintage, 1997), 598.

When a singular subject is matched to a particular signifier, this requires the legibility of that subject in a way that is independent of whether the subject self-identified or not. Madhavi Menon writes that homosexuality “is considered that which can be *read* (on the body)[.]”⁵⁴ In the case of the recuperative work I have been discussing, this legibility hinges upon the expression of identifiable criteria of queerness.⁵⁵ A scholar searches for signals or a set of “queer markers”—a subject’s actions/words/presentation—in order to identify the queer subject. Scholars must often contend with queer opacity—where a subject’s nonheteronormativity may be concealed, coded, or otherwise deemphasized within her own life’s writing as well as the historical/biographical record.

For example, when collecting source material for *Passions Between Women*, Donoghue recalls having to “trawl widely, follow hunches and browse almost at random in a variety of genres” in search of “lesbian love” *named as* lesbian.⁵⁶ She describes a near silence, a suppression of signs, an underground existence. Donoghue illuminates particular sets of behaviours, certain expressions of affect or desire, as well as physical (gender) presentations which combine in any number of constellations to signal the nonheteronormative women and loves she describes in her book. However, by positioning the term “lesbian” as the holy grail of her project, she goes in search of a reified concept that is being created by the discourse she only imagines uncovers that concept.

When Bryher is identified as lesbian in contemporary scholarship, it is not because Bryher herself used the word “lesbian.” “Lesbian” is applied to Bryher because she exhibits a set of nonheteronormative characteristics and behaviours which signal a particular embodiment of “lesbian-ness”: masculine presentation, primary erotic and affective attachments to women. In this case, the question need not be whether or not Bryher *should* be called “lesbian.” Instead, we need to consider what questions are not being asked when the story of (sexual) identification begins and ends with that identification. Perhaps we should not be satisfied that Bryher fulfills a set of queer criteria that make her legible, but focus instead on how her

⁵⁴ Madhavi Menon, “Introduction: Queer Shakes,” in *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham: Duke University Press,) 13.

⁵⁵ For a detailed analysis of queer indicators, see Lisa Walker, *Looking Like What You Are: Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

⁵⁶ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 9.

legibility might complicate our conceptions of queer embodiment. They demand we investigate the singularity of Bryher's desire, identification and representations.

Queering Practice

Barry Adam warns that focus on queer legibility may, in addition to risking the retrospective exportation of current queer formations to historical subjects, perpetuate the questionable "behaviour-identity binary."⁵⁷ Adam encourages us to interrogate this behaviour/identity binary in order to "understand why so many people wish to connect the two."⁵⁸ The study and naming of nonheteronormative historical subjects within the context of queer studies might be considered in relation to a theoretical question Adam's comments reflect: Does this practice contradict the agenda of queer theory—to dismantle dichotomous frameworks—by privileging the identification of queer subjects over queering the way historical studies are framed? Adam signals that queer practice necessarily involves a persistent reflective process wherein the scholar reserves the possibility of "a third space [or fourth or fifth] that undoes the restrictive dialectics of outside and inside" or gay and straight, butch and femme, male and female, etc.⁵⁹ He challenges us to consider "how people and desires come to be separated into the two camps of homosexuality and heterosexuality in the first place."⁶⁰

Debra A. Modellmog suggests that "work that has approached the history of sexuality as a search for sexual ancestors whose desires and practices are grounded in contemporary understandings of sexual identities ... misses or misconstrues a more complicated and messy range of sociosexual experiences available to men and women at any given time[.]"⁶¹ She gestures to a "queer historical turn" which represents "a desire to write (deviant) sexual history differently, to investigate nonheteronormative eroticisms and their social meanings without being beholden to traditional forms of

⁵⁷ Barry Adam, "From Liberation to Transgression and Beyond: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Studies at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century," in *Handbook of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, ed. Diane Richardson and Steven Seidman (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2002), accessed March 8, 2012, http://sage-reference.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/hdbk_lgs/n2.xml.

⁵⁸ Adam, "From Liberation to Transgression and Beyond."

⁵⁹ Joanne Winning, "Lesbian modernism: writing in and beyond the closet," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, ed. Hugh Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 57.

⁶⁰ Adam, "From Liberation to Transgression and Beyond."

⁶¹ Debra A. Modellmog, "Modernism and Sexology," *Literature Compass* 11, no. 4 (2014): 273.

historical evidence or methodologies, such as establishing continuity or teleology.”⁶² Modellmog uses Julian Carter’s description of the “interpretive value of a nonidentitarian historical practice” and Laura Doan’s discussion of “queering the history of sexuality” as examples of this “queer historical turn.”⁶³

Madhavi Menon’s Queer Universalism and David Ruffolo’s Post-Queer Theory

Like the first Copernicans, whose “intuition ran ahead far in advance of all the theoretical and empirical work that had to be done[,]”⁶⁴ scholars responding to queer theory continue to work in uncharted waters to a certain extent. They are charged with the important task of sorting out how to *do* queer theory (or, theory queerly). As I attempt a queer approach to the examination of Marianne Moore and Bryher, I appreciate Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s permission to work “near the boundary of what a writer can’t figure out how to say readily, never mind prescribe to others: in the Jacoblike wrestling—or t’ai chi, as it may be—that confounds agency with passivity, the self with the book and the world, the ends of the work with its means, and, maybe most alarmingly, intelligence with stupidity.”⁶⁵ In this endeavour, I turn to the theorizations of two queer theory thinkers, Madhavi Menon and David V. Ruffolo, for guideposts from around which to map my queer modernist literary exploration. David V. Ruffolo’s “post-queer theory to-come” is a (re)conception of queer and its theory which follows a non-dyadic trajectory.⁶⁶ Ruffolo guides my thinking away from the binary identificatory frameworks of the queer/hetero dyad. Madhavi Menon’s queer universalism supports my examination of subject specificity outside the binding expectations of signifier/signified relationships.

Ruffolo’s provocative *Post-Queer Politics* (2009) gestures toward a *post-queer* theory where “post-” is “less about the after and more about the *beside*, the

⁶² Modellmog, “Modernism and Sexology,” 273.

⁶³ See Julian Carter, “On Mother-Love: History, Queer Theory, and Nonlesbian Identity,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1-2 (January 2005/April 2005): 107-138, and Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women’s Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁶⁴ Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 9.

⁶⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

⁶⁶ Michael O’Rourke and Noreen Giffney, preface to *Post-Queer Politics* by David V. Ruffolo (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), xii.

peri- rather than the post- understood as after, assemblage rather than gridlock.”⁶⁷

Ruffolo does not aim to recreate yet another binary where his theoretical musing—post-queer theory—would face off against queer theory. He does, however, describe what he sees as queer (theory’s) flaws which his post-queer theory might traverse:

The current politics of queer, as seen through its relations to subjectivity, are limiting for the future of queer studies because of its unequivocal commitment to the queer/heteronormative binary where the politics of such discourses are restricted by the endless cycle of significations that reposition subjects on fixed planes—bodies that are either resituated in predetermined significations (moving from one identity category/norm to another) or are represented through differentiated significations (new representations that differ from already emerged significations).⁶⁸

Ruffolo turns away from identitarian terms as they value and enforce the fixity of boundaries, which contain, prohibit and control subjects and their desires. He sees the queer/hetero binary as a perpetual creation and re-creation of fixing categories of identity diminishing queer theory and queer subjects.

Some work within modernist studies reflects Ruffolo’s rejection of oppositional binary thinking, including Scott Herring’s work on Willa Cather. Furthermore, the interrogation of dyadic opposition may have been at work in some modernist texts. For example, Herring sees Willa Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925) “struggling to think its way outside the opposing cultures that this [homo/hetero] binary began to produce[.]”⁶⁹ Herring argues same-sex relationships in Cather’s work operate “as an ‘irritant’ not only to heteronormativity, but also to discernable hetero- or homosexual identity[.]”⁷⁰ According to Herring, Cather seeks to “imagine unforeseen designs for same-sex friendships[.]”⁷¹ Heather Love also

⁶⁷ O’Rourke and Giffney, preface to *Post-Queer Politics*, ix. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also identifies the importance of “the irreducibly spatial positionality of *beside*” as it offers “some useful resistance to the ease with which *beneath* and *beyond* turn from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos.” See *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 8.

⁶⁸ David V. Ruffolo, *Post-Queer Politics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 4.

⁶⁹ Scott Herring, “Catherian Friendship; Or, How Not To Do the History of Homosexuality,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 74-5.

⁷⁰ Herring, “Catherian Friendship,” 74-5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

suggests that while Cather resists queering,⁷² she encourages the critic to “rethink intimacy beyond the family and the couple.”⁷³

In the same way Adam and Ruffolo aim to dissolve the sexual behaviour/identity binary, Madhavi Menon would see her theory of queer universalism destabilize the connection between object of desire and identity. Menon explains that “particularism, which forms the basis of what we call identity politics, invests deeply in differences among people.”⁷⁴ In other words, particularism treats those characteristics which make a group *particular* as the most important characteristics. So the characteristics (read: differences) which set a group apart are emphasized and valued.

In queer universalism, Menon campaigns to release subjects from particular categorical confines. She criticizes practices which demand the body serve as a legible surface upon which identification(s) can be read,⁷⁵ and challenges us to interrogate the privileged co-occurrence of the signifier and the signified. In queer universalism, differences and particularities—which are otherwise charged with sustaining identitarian categories—are released from this function. Differences and particularities are *not*, however, stripped from the subject. In fact, universalism values the many particularities a subject may inhabit because this unique combination of particularities creates a singular subject, and this singular subject then flies in the face of difference as the cornerstone of identitarian logic.⁷⁶

Queer universalism—which applies to both subjects who identify with a particular category of difference and to subject outliers—facilitates the generation of multiple configurations of desire, ensuring the object(s) of desire do(es) not fix the desiring subject to a particular identification. Instead, Menon champions the study of a subject’s singularity.

⁷² Heather Love writes that “despite some early brushes with a queer identification and her forty-year relationship with Edith Lewis, [Cather] did not see herself as queer.” *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 8.

⁷³ Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, 74.

⁷⁴ Madhavi Menon, “Queer Universalism,” Departmental Seminar, Department of English, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand, February 8, 2012.

⁷⁵ Erin G. Carlston insists we should be wary of “apparently benign current efforts to locate, for example, homosexual difference in claims about chromosomes, hormones or, ... the alleged difference in the length of the ring finger in lesbian and heterosexual women.” *Double Agents: Espionage, Literature, and Liminal Citizens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 26nd.

⁷⁶ See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 99.

Menon's theory celebrates multiplicity and has the potential to guide the search for a new space where modernist women and their intimate relationships might be considered independent of functions allying them on one side or another of the queer/hetero opposition. The renegade desires and unruly identifications of the women in this study have, in Butler's words, "the effect of proliferating ... configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality[.]"⁷⁷ Queer universalism accommodates them despite the fact that the nonconformist trajectory of their desire challenges practices of sexual categorization and the regimes of power that demand their fixity.

Menon conceives of a scholarly practice where "sexual acts and skin colour would not provide a shortcut for a person's intellect, emotions, and politics[.]"⁷⁸ where "we would have to do things the hard way and actually reconceptualise how to know people without designating them either within or out of bounds."⁷⁹ Menon suggests we release the subject from the expectation that it authenticate a particular identity and experiment with new means for familiarizing ourselves with each other and our selves.

Prioritizing the Story of the Subject

This focus on singularity Menon champions is a method scholars like Joanne Winning propose as an alternative to the prevailing models within modernist studies which follow a more identity-focused approach. Winning argues "the lesbian modernists are not best described as being 'out in history'."⁸⁰ Rather, employing anti-binary queer rhetoric, Winning sees such modernist writers "as writing beyond these categories and envisioning other possibilities and spaces of living and loving together."⁸¹ She writes, "it is impossible to explore sexuality within the modernist period without making some attempt to understand the personal circumstances of each

⁷⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 200.

⁷⁸ Menon, "Queer Universalism."

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Winning, "Lesbian modernism: writing in and beyond the closet," 62. Winning is referring to Thom Nickel's *Out in History* which lists a number of modernists including Marianne Moore, Bryher, and H.D. as lesbian writers who did not 'out' themselves publicly in their lifetimes. See Thom Nickels, *Out in History* (Sarasota, FL: FLF/STARbooks Press, 2005).

⁸¹ Winning, "Lesbian modernism: writing in and beyond the closet," 62.

practitioner.”⁸² Winning suggests that, by shifting the focus to the particularities of singular lives, we may broaden our understanding of historical subjects and potentially inform contemporary contemplations on identity and desire.

George Chauncey urges scholars to “pay attention to the very different terms people used to describe themselves and their social worlds,”⁸³ and Catharine R. Stimpson would have us step away from a focus on sexuality, insisting “the danger now is not that we will avoid their wedding and their bedding, but that we will linger there too long.”⁸⁴ Martha Vicinus would have us investigate “the ways in which women themselves described their intimate friendships and desires.”⁸⁵ I would add “gender identification” to this list of points of interrogation because, as Heather Love points out, some women whose gender presentation was located on the masculine side of the spectrum have been counted among lesbians because, “before homosexuality was understood primarily as a matter of object choice, it was understood both in popular and medical context as gender variation.”⁸⁶ Love suggests that introducing a discussion of gender expression and gender identification “offers an alternative to lesbian and gay frameworks that would read many cross-gender practices as versions of homosexuality[.]”⁸⁷

Kathryn R. Kent gestures toward an interrogation of silences—a search for the reasons a subject might have for not self-identifying. As an example, Kent points out that modernist women such as Gertrude Stein—who refused to explicitly articulate her sexual identification—had reason to do so. Aside from the modernist conception of the signifier/signified relationship which Benstock proposes, Kent explains how innominacy served as a means of escaping the control of those (patriarchal, homophobic) powers that constructed the identificatory taxonomy and condemned

⁸² Joanne Winning, “Lesbian Sexuality in the Story of Modernism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 221.

⁸³ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 6.

⁸⁴ Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, 176. Quoting Catharine R. Stimpson, “Gertrude/Altrude: Stein, Toklas, and the Paradox of the Happy Marriage,” in *Mothering the Mind: Twelve Studies of Writers and Their Silent Partners*, ed. Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), 128.

⁸⁵ Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), xxv.

⁸⁶ Heather Love, “Transgender fiction and politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, ed. Hugh Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 149.

⁸⁷ Love, “Transgender fiction and politics,” 149.

queer relationships to a pathological framework.⁸⁸ Kent does not see a subject's rejection of identificatory terminology as a regrettable omission that frustrates a reclamative effort, but sees it as an opportunity for discovery and illumination; she suggests a preoccupation with identification may obscure a more interesting scene. However, silences—absences, omissions—are not always welcome within the context of an academic argument and necessarily invite interpretation.

If silences are managed with a subject's singularity in mind, they may be presented in a way that preserves another scholar's ability to engage with that silence. But when a silence is patched with conjecture in a way that conceals the silence, that silence cannot be interrogated. For example, in *Cinematic Modernism* (2005), Susan McCabe describes a formative meeting between Bryher and the sexologist Havelock Ellis. Referring to Bryher's description of the event (which Bryher penned in a letter to H.D.), McCabe writes that Bryher "diagnosed herself as a sexual invert or member of the 'third sex' with Ellis' help."⁸⁹ McCabe's assertion is somewhat misleading, however, because Bryher does not use either "sexual invert" or "third sex" to describe herself. Instead, Bryher wrote to H.D.: "Then we got on to the question of whether I was a boy sort of escaped into the wrong body and he says it is a disputed subject but quite possible and showed me a book about it ... we agreed it was most unfair for it to happen but apparently I am quite justified in pleading I ought to be a boy ... I am just a girl by accident."⁹⁰ Instead of aligning herself with the "sexual invert or member of the 'third sex'" she reiterates her lifelong sense of being a boy. McCabe references the correspondence, but her readers—if they do not pursue that primary text—are left with the impression that Bryher identified as an invert. The way McCabe chooses to fill the silence of Bryher's innominacy precludes the question, Why *didn't* Bryher identify as an invert or member of the third sex?

When a subject's singularity becomes the focus of critical examination—as opposed to identifying her according to one or another term—a shift occurs which may prove fruitful. Questions can veer away from whether some modernist women can be described as homoaffectionate, lesbian-like, lesbian, woman-identified or intersecting with the lesbian continuum, toward an exploration of, for example, how

⁸⁸ Kent, *Making Girls Into Women*, 237-8.

⁸⁹ McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism*, 136. McCabe refers to Bryher's letter to H.D. on March 20, 1919 as the evidence for her statement. See *Cinematic Modernism*, 254n9.

⁹⁰ Bryher to H.D., March 20, 1919, quoted in Maggie Magee and Diana C. Miller, *Lesbian Lives: Psychoanalytic Narratives Old & New* (London: The Analytic Press, 1997), 5.

modernist women perceived emerging lesbian identification. How should we read their refusal to identify? (How) Did they express their same-sex desires? In what ways did they write queerly? What do they teach us about embodying and enacting same-sex desire and intimacy beside a homo/hetero binary? The answers hold transformative potential.

EXAMINING THE PARTICULAR, ILLUMINATING THE SINGULAR: A FLIGHT PATH

The intimate lives of the women in this study represent a richness and diversity of desires. Their persistent reticence and reluctance to name their desire poses a challenge, but if they resisted naming their desires, they didn't necessarily conceal them. They spoke/wrote passionately to one another and spoke/wrote passionately *of* one another. They authored loosely veiled autobiographical texts exploring their relationships. They lived with their beloved(s). Their relationships were often public and explicit enough to inspire gossip. Still, many chose not to define their relationships according to the sexological terminology of their time.

The chapters that follow include a component of literary analysis, but are weighted more toward biographical exploration. Furthermore, where I examine the literary works of my subjects, I do so with an eye to what these texts might reveal about their authors. The biographical nature of these chapters—which might otherwise be described as case studies—reflects my understanding of the reflexive relationship between my subjects and their texts, and the self-consciousness of my subjects about their literary legacies. In other words, it matters to my study that Moore and Bryher were writers (though I envision Menon's framework of queer universalism proving a fruitful point of departure for the examination of non-literary historical figures too).

Scholars recognize the autobiographical nature of Moore's and Bryher's work. Moore's poetry, for example, often contains phrases pulled from a variety of sources that intersected with her day-to-day life: a national park pamphlet, a magazine advert, a monument's inscription. Bryher's fiction is read for the insights it provides into her real-life relationships. Susan McCabe, for one, reads Bryher's *West* (1925) for

descriptions of Bryher's first impressions of the United States, and for a characterisation of Bryher's early relationship with Moore.⁹¹

Furthermore, Moore and Bryher dedicated their lives to literary production; word-craft was their career and vocation. Not only did they control the deployment of language in their literary texts, they wrote and/or edited their personal texts conscious of a (future) critical readership. They tore pages from their notebooks. They sometimes kept carbon copies of their letters, or at other times asked correspondents to destroy them. Moore and Bryher used language deliberately. It is in the context of their deliberate use of language that I consider their refusal of sexological terminology to be of particular importance. They may not have explicitly refused terminology—for example, I have no evidence that Bryher said/wrote: “I am not an invert.” However, neither did they embrace the terminology according to which they are sometimes identified by contemporary scholars.

Because of the dialectical relationship between the works and lives of Moore and Bryher, I contend that the biographical details I discuss and reveal in the body chapters of this thesis can inform future scholarship of both literary and biographical texts. I shed light on elements of their biographies that have remained more-or-less obscured, and my analysis of select texts might help us better understand the subjects who wrote them.

Examining an absence—in this case, an absence of identification—is to risk conducting a study based on negative results. Projects yielding negative results are routinely relegated to the filing cabinet as projects that have failed. However, this study embraces the possibility of (and *in*) negative results.

Where I hope this project will succeed is in discovering what these women achieved through their innominacy—what they *do* tell us, if not (always) about their desires. Whether my discoveries result in new literary interpretation or the shadow of a hint of a new biographical insight, both would suggest there is some critical advantage to examining a subject while setting aside identifying terminology and any (inadvertent) critical assumptions that might accompany those terms. Sidestepping the different sexual labeling commonly applied to the women of this study doesn't guarantee them the pleasure of embodying their particularities. It might, however, release them from the expectation that their lives, bodies, texts, even clothing and hair

⁹¹ See Susan McCabe, “‘Let's Be Alone Together': Bryher's and Marianne Moore's Aesthetic-Erotic Collaboration,” *MODERNISM/modernity* 17, no. 3 (2010): 607-637.

styles, reflect the identity they are presumed to share. This work seeks to open promissory spaces by revealing in a new light the realms of possibility women like Bryher and Marianne Moore sought to inhabit. Judith Butler writes that “possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread.”⁹² I believe that these women would concur.

Notorious WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange explained in an interview that the “naming of things is very important. . . . We all have words for different objects, like ‘tomato.’ We use a simple word, ‘tomato,’ instead of actually describing every little aspect of this goddamn tomato. Because it takes too long to describe this tomato precisely, we use an abstraction so that we can think and talk about it.”⁹³ Abstractions such as “lesbian” have facilitated the discussion, examination—indeed, the (re)discovery—of queer modernist subjects and texts. Many scholars of the last half-century have made it their life’s work to remove the veil of historical invisibility from these nonheteronormative elements. Projects like mine would be unthinkable without such groundwork. After making this gesture of gratitude, I will now set aside identificatory terminology and attempt to explore “every little aspect of this goddamn tomato” with the conviction that nonheteronormative modernist women have even more to teach us about loving, living and writing queerly—how to “make it new.”

⁹² Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), 29.

⁹³ Julian Assange, *When Google Met WikiLeaks* (New York: OR Books, 2014), 80.

INTRODUCTION

PART TWO: SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT

Renowned modernist scholar Joanne Winning believes “it is impossible to explore sexuality within the modernist period without making some attempt to understand the personal circumstances of each (modernist) practitioner.”¹ In Chapters One and Two of this thesis, I intend to honour Winning’s assertion by taking a close look at the lives and writing of modernist artists Marianne Moore and Bryher. In this chapter, I will set the stage for my examination of these important modernist figures by describing “the context of that cultural and social world” in which Judith Butler insists lives and works “ought properly to be read[.]”² Joan Copjec identifies in historicist work a “simple impossibility” which I must acknowledge, however.³ Copjec claims that “the incomplete – and permanently so – accessibility of any moment to itself, its partial absence from itself, forbids historicism’s motivating premise” which is to increase understanding of what has come before.⁴ She insists we recognize “that the past must be understood in its own terms” without the infiltration of presentist concerns and understandings.⁵ I recognize the inherent complications in looking back upon a time removed from my own.

The women of modernism were born into and lived in an age of social upheaval in the western world. The industrial era was approaching its zenith, British imperialism was reaching a tipping point, the American slavery-dependent economy had come to a close, women were fighting for their personhood and right to vote. Modernist women bore witness to several significant conflicts including the First and Second World Wars. In their later years, many modernist women survived to see the sexual revolution, the anti-war movement, the emergence of second-wave feminism with its (continued) fight for gender equality and corporeal sovereignty, and the dawn of the gay rights movement. It was during this tumultuous and dynamic time that modernist women like Marianne Moore and Bryher lived, loved and created.

¹ Joanne Winning, “Lesbian Sexuality in the Story of Modernism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth, and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 221.

² Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 173.

³ Joan Copjec, ed. *Supposing the Subject* (London: Verso, 1994), ix.

⁴ Copjec, ed. *Supposing the Subject*, ix, *emphasis hers*.

⁵ Copjec, ed. *Supposing the Subject*, ix.

Much of the scholarship pertaining to Moore and Bryher focuses to some extent on their particular expressions of sexuality and desire, and my project is no exception. The fact is that many modernist women, including Moore and Bryher, did not leave explicit textual descriptions of their relationships—sexual or otherwise—and the nature of their desire. It is tempting to supplement the stories of their lives with my own interpretation. However, I am wary of filling in the gaps with theories that are representative of my own contemporary notions of sexual identity, gender and desire. As I explained in Part One of this introduction, my work avoids naming Moore’s and Bryher’s identities and desires. I employ this strategy in an attempt to circumvent any distortion or dislocation which might diminish their singularity. Scholar Bonnie Zimmerman warns that describing or naming the sexual identities—as well as the erotic and affective relationships—of historical women “without accounting for historical circumstances, may serve to distort or dislocate the actual meaning of these women’s lives (just as it is distorting to *deny* their love for women.)”⁶ My work responds to Zimmerman’s claim by way of an exploration of the sociohistorical milieu of my subjects in addition to the study of certain particularities of their work and affective lives.

My examination of the sociohistorical context of Moore’s and Bryher’s lives will function as scaffolding from which I can address the following questions: From what models of same-sex female relationships did my subjects create their own intimate relationships? If Marianne Moore rejected marriage, what sort of marriage was she rejecting? If Bryher’s oeuvre thematises freedom from oppression, what oppression did she perceive? If both Moore and Bryher practiced reticence when representing their gender identity and/or desires, what social forces incited that reticence? Moore and Bryher both challenged the gender status quo—how might they have felt encouraged in this pursuit?

SETTING THE HISTORICAL STAGE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Romantic Friendship, Education, Feminism, Marriage and Sexuality

⁶ Bonnie Zimmerman, “What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism,” in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Methuen, 1985), 198-99.

I begin this chapter with an examination of romantic female friendships, as the evolution of these relationships necessarily informs an understanding of the affective and (sometimes) erotic relationships between modernist women. Marianne Moore and Bryher were growing up in the shadow of a longstanding tradition of intimate female friendship where women formed strong intellectual, emotional and physical bonds with other women. Romantic friendships can be traced back to (at least) the seventeenth century, but have likely always been a feature of women's lives even when textual evidence is absent. A romantic friendship was identifiable by its primacy in a girl's or woman's life, and by characteristics which mirror a romantic heterosexual courtship such as written and verbal expressions of passionate love, the exchange of tokens or gifts, pledges of commitment and solidarity, and the emotional tragedy of separation. Some relationships incorporated financial interdependence, cohabitation, and the sharing of a bed.⁷ Romantic friendships flourished for centuries in part because they were seen as nonsexual affective attachments which did not pose a threat to the prevailing social order which positioned men as the dominant sex.⁸

The legacy of romantic friendship is evident in the lives of Moore and Bryher, as their most significant relationships were with other women. Moore was rarely separated from her mother, Mary Warner Moore, and the latter was involved in every aspect of Moore's life. Moore also formed affective relationships with other women, including Peggy (Margaret Mary) James (daughter of William and niece of Henry) and Elizabeth Bishop (whom Moore mentored from the 1930s). Bryher's relationship with poet H.D. is well known. It was an intimate and long-lasting commitment and, for Bryher, at least, was love at first sight.⁹ Whether or not these passions featured the erotic physical intimacy we now expect to coincide with romantic sentiments, these relationships profoundly affected the participants and, in some cases, shaped expectations of future heterosexual relationships.

Moore and Bryher both had their first encounters with female friendship during their school days. From the mid-nineteenth century, girls' schools and women's colleges such as Vassar, Wellesley, Barnard and Bryn Mawr provided the fertile ground where romantic friendships could establish their roots. It was at her

⁷ See Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981).

⁸ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 109.

⁹ Bryher, *The Days of Mars: A Memoir, 1940-1946* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), 115-16.

boarding school in Pennsylvania—then women’s college Bryn Mawr—that Moore experienced the tumultuous ups and downs of her schoolgirl crush on Peggy James. H.D also attended Bryn Mawr, which is where she met Frances Gregg, a woman she would always hold dear. Bryher, too, established a significant, long-term friendship with Dorothea Petrie Carew at Queenwood in East Sussex.¹⁰

Educational institutions were also settings where feminism could flourish.¹¹ Educated women emerged as a (feminist) class of women who found themselves with the time to become politically active, who often forewent marriage and childbearing, and who challenged the (gender) status quo. In fact, some of the most important social movements of the early twentieth-century—suffragism, labour reform, abolitionism, temperance—were led by single, educated women in concert with one another. The educated woman—with her framework of female support—threatened the traditional fabric of society by pursuing the vote and advocating reformed labour laws, but she also challenged the dominant narratives concerning adult women which, until the turn of the twentieth-century, were represented in the cult of “True Womanhood” and the asexual “Angel in the House.”¹² She threatened the very patriarchal institutions upon which society depended when she challenged woman’s role as (asexual) wife and mother. Marianne Moore and Bryher would both choose paths which veered from the Victorian ideal.

As Lillian Faderman explains, “the first glimmerings of a feminist movement in the nineteenth century immediately awoke an antifeminist movement.”¹³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg characterise the antifeminist movement as an “ideological attack mounted by prestigious and traditionally minded men” against the New Woman and her demand for equal rights, education, and birth control.¹⁴ In Bryher’s autobiographical novel *Two Selves* (1923), a minor character named Mrs. Hearth rails against the education of girls, saying, “If I had my way I should make them stop at school until they learned their duty to the home where they belong.

¹⁰ Dorothea Petrie Carew, *Anything Once: An Autobiography* (Penzance, Cornwall: Wordens of Cornwall Ltd., 1971), 42.

¹¹ See Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2010), 184, and David Bergman, “Marianne Moore and the Problem of ‘Marriage’,” *American Literature* 60, no. 2 (May 1988): 343.

¹² Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 150.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁴ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, “The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and her Role in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 2 (Sept 1993): 333.

These pernicious screeching women with their reforms and their ideas are ruining family life.”¹⁵ Mrs. Hearth demonstrates the antipathy felt for the feminist project as one which threatened the family.

Scientists, politicians and doctors deployed a variety of tactics to discredit new images of what a woman could be and achieve. For example, women were warned that their education could transform them into undesirables who would be unsuited to marriage, and might even compromise their ability to conceive. In fact, doctors warned of the “great variety of illnesses” which had “suddenly beset the middle-class American girl because she was forcing her brain to use up the blood which she needed for menstruation.”¹⁶ Essentialist arguments, sometimes relying on Darwinian principles, claimed woman’s biological inferiority and unsuitability to education. Citing the inferior size of the female brain in comparison with the male brain, German scientist Carl Vogt wrote in 1879 that “in the most intelligent races ... there are a large number of women whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed male brains. This inferiority is so obvious that no one can contest it for a moment; only its degree is worth discussion.”¹⁷

Since this first wave of feminism sparked debates on the very nature of women, the antifeminist movement exploited the medical and biological fields in order to reinforce the popular belief that the “Victorian woman’s ideal social characteristics ... [had] a deeply rooted biological basis.”¹⁸ The ‘natural’ woman was distinct from the brash and masculinized female intellectual, artist, or professional. The ‘natural’ woman readily heeded the call of matrimony and maternity. In contrast to the image of the ‘natural’ woman, feminists were exploring their identities as independent sexual agents. By the first decades of the twentieth century, open discussions on sexuality were becoming more common, even popular.¹⁹ Questions about women and their sexuality were hashed out between book reviews and poetry in

¹⁵ Bryher, *Bryher: Two Novels, “Development” and “Two Selves,”* ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 213.

¹⁶ Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 235. Grant Allen, in his 1889 “Plain Words on the Woman Question,” asserted that “both in England and America, the women of the cultivated classes are becoming unfit to be wives or mothers. Their sexuality ... is enfeebled or destroyed.” See “Plain Words on the Woman Question,” *Popular Science Monthly*, 36 (1889): 179, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://biodiversitylibrary.org/page/1843468>.

¹⁷ Quoted in Rebecca Traister, *All The Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 53.

¹⁸ Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, “The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and her Role in Nineteenth-Century America,” 334.

¹⁹ See Linda Leavell, “Marianne Moore, the James Family, and the Politics of Celibacy,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 235.

the pages of avant-garde magazines such as Dora Marsden's *The Egoist*.²⁰ Marsden invited thoughtful contributions; she "deplored 'the failure of language' to express a new sexual awareness among women."²¹ As a result, the (*New*) *Freewoman* published opinion pieces on the cutting edge of social discourse. For example, in a piece entitled "The Freewoman," which appeared in the *Freewoman* in 1912, Guy Aldred encouraged women to take a more radically independent position within the patriarchal economy. He wrote,

Women advocate for equality, yet marry men and lose their identity in that of the man by taking his name. Why do they not assert the supremacy of motherhood, insist on the negation of the conception of woman now abroad as an instrument of man's lust, put an end to man's power to send innocent girls and women on the road to prostitution, by daring to form free-love unions, and preserving their own names, without fear or shame?²²

Men and women were arguing that women desired, deserved, and even *needed* sexual satisfaction. Reframing women as active agents within a sexual framework "tampered with the order of the Universe" imagined by Victorianism and contributed to discussions of marital reform.²³

Romantic friendship had traditionally offered a woman a significantly different dynamic from the one she was likely to find in a marriage. Katie Roiphe explains how the feminist liberation which had begun before WWI extended into "a rapid rethinking of the institutions of the last century" including the institution of marriage."²⁴ The model of marriage—the companionate marriage—which emerged was one that deemphasised the longstanding dominant position of the husband. It presented women with the notion that a husband could be a legal spouse, a sexual partner *and* a friend.²⁵

²⁰ Peter Brooker, *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 44. *The Egoist* featured a commentary on women and sexual pleasure in its January 15, 1914 issue, and from as early as the 1880s, members of the London Men and Women's Club were figuring out "how to speak about sexuality." See Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, 34.

²¹ Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, 69.

²² Guy Aldred, "The Freewoman," *Freewoman* 1, no. 9 (18 January 1912): 179, quoted in Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism, Science* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 70.

²³ Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), 28.

²⁴ Katie Roiphe, *Uncommon Arrangements: Seven Portraits of Married Life in London Literary Circles, 1910-1939* (New York: The Dial Press, 2007), 9.

²⁵ Esther Newton explains how "the sex reformers attacked Victorian gender segregation and promoted the new idea of companionate marriage in which both women's and men's heterosexual desires were to

But although intellectual and emotional intimacy were the ideal, and featured in some progressive marriages, they could not be expected. A woman who married in the early twentieth century might be provided with a degree of companionship (if she was lucky), with children (whether she wanted them or not), with financial security (if she was of a good class) and higher social recognition (compared with her unmarried counterparts). Once she was married, however, the fact remained that a woman's duty was to manage the household and produce children, male heirs in particular. In fact, "many found the reality of married life disappointing in comparison with the ideal of companionate marriage," according to Linda W. Rosenzweig.²⁶ For this reason, some women chose to remain single or marry only under particular conditions.

Marianne Moore and Bryher both took different approaches to marriage. Moore, for her part, remained unwed until her death. In Chapter One, I will explore some reasons why she chose not to marry. In particular, I will propose that Moore was so committed to her work that she was unwilling to enter into any relationship that might require her to divert her time and attention away from her craft—she did not believe that women could have it all.²⁷ Bryher, in contrast, married twice. However, as I will discuss in Chapter Two, both of Bryher's marriages were contracted in order to achieve specific ends. Her first marriage, to Robert McAlmon, secured Bryher access to her inheritance. Her second marriage, to Kenneth Macpherson, enabled her to maintain her closeness with H.D. (who was involved with Macpherson at the time).

Although some women were experimenting with new marital frameworks, there were many more who were challenging their prescribed roles of wife and mother; greater numbers of women were choosing to remain unmarried. In America "in 1895, just as education for women was really coming into its own, there was a great public outcry when a survey revealed that more than half the graduates of women's colleges remained spinsters."²⁸ In fact, Marianne Moore was among these educated women who chose to remain single. Angela Oram describes how women were working toward legitimizing the option to remain single, and that in "the early

be satisfied." See "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," *Signs* 9, no. 4 (Summer, 1984): 564.

²⁶ Linda W. Rosenzweig, *Another Self: Middle-Class American Women and Their Friends in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 107.

²⁷ Bergman, 'Marianne Moore and the Problem of 'Marriage',' 241.

²⁸ Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 227.

1900s, an important strand of feminism upheld spinsterhood as a political position and lifestyle.”²⁹

Amidst the essentialist and paternalistic arguments levied against women who dared to defy their prescribed roles, even more insidious claims emerged which did not settle for attacking a feminist’s morality, intellect and sanity; they attacked her sexuality and her gender identity (a notion which was receiving its own share of attention at the time.) In *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century*, Sheila Rowbotham writes that those “who sought to keep women from taking a wider social and political role were quick to attack below the belt, caricaturing rebel women as unsexed and absurd, or over-sexed and deranged.”³⁰

Sexology

In “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,” (1920) Freud identified feminism as an indication of abnormality in women.³¹ Sexual abnormality was the focus of the burgeoning fields of psychoanalysis and sexology. In particular, since the mid-1800s, scientists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfeld, Iwan Bloch and Edward Carpenter had been studying sexual deviancy—the “love that dare not speak its name.”

Havelock Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* (1897) was the first medical textbook published (in English) on the topic of homosexuality.³² Ellis described the inverted male as effeminate: physically soft and supple, lacking physical strength and possessing a high voice; “In several cases the hips are broad and the arms rounded.”³³ His mannerisms are feminine, and he is more comfortable in the company of women than men. And, true to the heterosexual frame, the inverted male desires a man

²⁹ Alison Oram, “Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-war Feminist Discourses,” *Woman’s History Review* 1, no. 3 (1992): 414.

³⁰ Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, 2.

³¹ Elisabeth Ann Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 174n5.

³² Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, ed. Ivan Crozier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1. It should be noted that the taxonomy used to describe nonheteronormative subjects and their desires at the time was extensive. Same-sex love was referred to as, variously: homosexuality, sodomy, paederasty, buggery, inversion, sapphism, lesbianism, tribadism, and homogenicism, just to name a few. Implicated subjects were homosexuals, sodomists, paederasts, inverters, sapphics, lesbians, tribades, *fricatrices*, ribalds, anandrinics, homogenics, Uranians, Urnings, and hermaphrodites. Sexological works such as *Sexual Inversion* were dedicated to describing the invert’s physical and psychological characteristics, and the nature and objects of their sexual desires.

³³ Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, vol.2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 3rd rev. ed. (Middlesex, UK: The Echo Library, 2007), 271.

exhibiting hyper-masculine traits. Although Ellis's study focused primarily on the male invert, he did describe the female counterpart. The "commonest characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity or boyishness."³⁴ Her mannerisms can also be characterized as masculine; she is inclined to abrupt conversation and imposing behaviour, and the inverted woman is attracted to an ultra-feminine woman.³⁵

The similarities between this description of the inverted woman and the characteristics of the feminist New Woman of the 1920s beg for comment. Those women who discarded corset and skirts for slacks and a masculine style, who lopped their locks in favour of an Eton cut, who smoked and cursed and voiced their opinions very much resembled the invert in Ellis' *Sexual Inversion*. However, the provenance of the two is distinct. The New Woman's masculine style evolved as she began occupying the traditionally male sphere. She rejected the literal and figurative confines of the feminine domestic domain as well as women's restrictive fashion. She sought mobility on the seat of a bicycle, so she eventually donned pants. She encroached on traditionally male territory, and her outward appearance shifted to match. Even the most glamorous style of the twenties saw women seeking a sleek, androgynous form. Thus, though the masculine woman may have stood out in the 1890s, she was very much au courant in the 1920s. As a consequence, the physical characteristics by which an invert was believed to be identifiable became less reliable indicators as they were adopted by a great number of fashionable women.³⁶

Sexological texts described inverted subjects according to their physical attributes but focused on their deviant desire. In terms of her sexual desire, the invert

³⁴ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, vol.2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 232.

³⁵ Theories of inversion often conflated gender identity with sexual desire. As Heather Love puts it, before "homosexuality was understood primarily as a matter of object choice, it was understood both in popular and medical contexts as gender variation." Theories of inversion assumed that opposite-gender identification necessarily coincided with same-sex sexual desire. This says more about the (sub)conscious imperative to preserve heteronormativity's male/female binary than it represents the actual configurations of nonheteronormative relationships, and the gender expressions and sexual desires of queer individuals. See Heather Love, "Transgender fiction and politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, ed. Hugh Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 149.

³⁶ Sheila Rowbotham claims that "by 1929 the boyish styles were no longer modish, and short hair, monocles and tailored clothing came to assume a chosen lesbian identity." Rowbotham attributes this shift in part to the widely publicized obscenity trials of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. See Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, 45. The coincidence between the appearance of the New Woman and the homosexual is not random. However, a discussion of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this project. See Valerie Rohy, *Impossible Women: Lesbian Figures & American Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), and Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman."

has a “sexual instinct turned by inborn constitutional abnormality toward persons of the same sex.”³⁷ Although Ellis considered inversion congenital, and, as such, not the fault of the inverted subject, he did not present it as a variant of human sexuality in the same way that eye colour and hair colour are variants of genetic expression. He maintained only heterosexual behaviour and heterosexual desire were normal: “We have further to distinguish sexual inversion and all other forms of homosexuality from ... [the] heterosexual, that is to say, normal.”³⁸ When we consider why some nonheteronormative modernist women chose not to employ sexological terminology, we must recognize they may not have been receptive to a discourse which positioned them as “abnormal.”

Although many sexologists—including Ellis, Krafft-Ebing and Iwan Bloch—presented their work as unbiased scientific inquiry, some “experts” such as Swiss scientist Auguste Forel focused their work on sensational claims about the invert’s sexual habits. In *The Sexual Question: A Scientific, Psychological, Hygienic and Sociological Study for the Cultured Classes* (1908), Forel makes a fantastical claim that “the excesses of female inverts exceed those of the male. One orgasm succeeds another, night and day, almost without interruption.”³⁹ In contrast with Forel’s image of the sex-crazed deviant, Edward Carpenter—who identified as a member of the intermediate sex—elevated the invert’s love to a celestial, otherworldly level. Carpenter described his subjects, the “Uranians,” as “often purely emotional in their character[.]”⁴⁰

Sexology and the Decline of the Romantic Friendship

No sooner had sexological theories made their way into public discourse than they were aimed at those who were seen as challenging the social order. The single woman, the female romantic friends, the educated woman—they became targets in

³⁷ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, vol.2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 9.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Auguste Forel, *The Sexual Question: A Scientific, Psychological, Hygienic and Sociological Study for the Cultured Classes* (New York: Rebman Co., 1908), 252, *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/3mvxg8>.

⁴⁰ Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex* (Middlesex, GB: The Echo Library, 2007), 14. According to Michael Hames-Garcia, “*Urning* was first popularized by Karl Ulrichs to refer to men like himself who had a sexual attraction to other men,” but that “writers like Oscar Wilde and Edward Carpenter later changed the term to *Uranian*” which indicated “a third gender between male and female” and generally gestured to any number of nonheteronormative subjects. See “Between Repression and Liberation: Sexuality and Socialist Theory,” in *Toward a New Socialism*, ed. Anatole Anton and Richard Schmitt (New York: Lexington Books, 2007), 262n12.

the early twentieth century as they were now associated with a growing number of women who were eschewing traditional roles. Lillian Faderman posits that the decline of the romantic friendship was concomitant with the dissemination of sexological and psychoanalytic theories.⁴¹ In fact, romantic friendship and female education were two birds hit with the same stone. If sexology inadvertently cast suspicion on the phenomenon of romantic friendship, it also extended this suspicion—theoretically, at least—to all female friendships. Critics of female education elucidated the sexual dangers of the homosocial boarding-school environment. (Ironically, although girls and women had long been each other's companions, suddenly teachers and fellow students could pose a moral threat to the female pupil.)

On one hand, sexology presented romantic friendship as an almost universal feature of a woman's life (and a girl's education was identified as the birthplace of this relationship). Ellis, in *Sexual Inversion*, included an appendix dedicated to "The School-friendships of Girls" wherein he emphasised consistently the frequency and scope of the phenomenon of romantic friendship. According to Ellis, school-girls between the ages of 12 to 19 or 20 were usually party to a romantic friendship, although romantic friendships were not confined to women of these ages, "but are common among any community of women or any age, say under 30, and are not unknown among married women[.]"⁴²

On the other hand, sexology characterised romantic friendship as sexual in nature. Ellis described those school-girl relationships, writing: "The 'flame' proceeds exactly like a love-relationship,"⁴³ and is "*a play of sexual love*,"⁴⁴ in which "there is an unquestionable sexual element,"⁴⁵ with "great pleasure being taken in close contact with another and frequent kissing and hugging."⁴⁶ In addition, the correspondence between friends—both evidence, and an important feature, of romantic friendships—was framed as lewd and obscene and the act of writing compared with masturbation. Ellis wrote that letters were "full of passion; they appear to be often written during periods of physical excitement and psychic erethisms, and may be considered ... a form of intellectual onanism, of which the writers afterward feel remorse and shame

⁴¹ Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 172-3.

⁴² Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, vol.2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 352.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 346, *emphasis his*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 350.

as of a physically dishonourable act.”⁴⁷ As a consequence, any primary female relationship—which very few girls or women were likely to pass through girl-hood without participating in—could be interrogated for a sexually deviant element. Thus, the educated woman was linked to deviant sexual behaviour: not only was she unnatural and unfit, she was a lesbian.

The effects of the ideological assault were measurable. By the Second World War, the intimate female friendship neared extinction. Stacey J. Olikier claims that “by 1934 one sociologist, Joseph Folsom, observed fewer girls’ ‘crushes,’ and less ‘homosexuality ... in the form of strong friendships,’ which, he maintained, had been predominant ... in the preceding fifty years.”⁴⁸ Romantic female friendship was now considered a guise for Lesbian love, an abominable perversion of innocent friendship, a treacherous subversion of heterosexual love, or a menace to the institution of marriage. Linda W. Rosenzweig relays the words of one American woman writing around 1920: “In my city some business women are hesitating to take apartments together for fear of the interpretation that may be put upon it.”⁴⁹

Despite this assault, women of the twentieth century still needed each other. First-wave feminism had achieved headway toward their freedom and equality, but much progress was yet to be made. Companionate marriage was not available to the majority of women. Marriage and motherhood and the abandonment of personal ambition still loomed large. Many women still chose to commit themselves to a single life supported, mutually, by a good female friend or lover. However, the dissemination of sexology and the homophobic culture which grew out of it forever changed the way female friends interacted with one another.

Thus, as Marianne Moore and Bryher were coming of age, women’s relationships with one another were becoming complicated. The intimate friendships which had, for generations, provided girls’ and women’s lives with intellectual, physical, emotional, and sometimes, at least, sexual depth and stimulation, could no longer be entertained without risking social and moral censure. Rosenzweig writes that “adolescents, college students, and young adults still wanted and needed female friends.”⁵⁰ However, “changing emotional standards, rising consumerism, a trend

⁴⁷ Ibid., 344.

⁴⁸ Stacey J. Olikier, *Best Friends and Marriage: Exchange Among Women* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 30.

⁴⁹ Rosenzweig, *Another Self*, 179.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 67.

toward reliance on expertise, the pressure of the heterosexual imperative, and the stigmatization of homosexuality—resulted in a revised script that structured their relationships in new ways.”⁵¹ Furthermore, the way a woman wrote about (and to) her intimate friends was shifting. Unless a woman was prepared to weather suspicions and accusations, she would refrain from passionate (literary) gestures of affection. She would not write to her friend using romantic language—Rosenzweig offers that “the genre of romantic love letters declined significantly” in the years after 1920.⁵² In other words, women were required to police their friendships with other women and the romantic friendship went underground.⁵³ This is one explanation why so few modernist women offer explicit textual descriptions of their intimate relationships with one another.

THE MODERNIST MILIEU

Just as the stigma of sexual deviance was landing a broad blow, modernist women like Marianne Moore and Bryher were entering adulthood. They found themselves navigating the changing social and political landscapes of Western society as well as the particular characteristics of the developing modernist sub-culture. Like others of their generation, modernist women were stakeholders—if not direct participants—in the efforts to achieve important social reforms. They sought independence from patriarchal control, and eschewed the Victorian form of marriage in favour of singledom, partnerships with other women, or unconventional marital arrangements. The work on sexology informed the ways they wrote/spoke about and lived with other women and opened up new ways they could think of their own (sexual) identities. Female modernists had to contend with the movement’s particular set of ideologies, however. Sometimes characterised as a “masculinist” movement,⁵⁴ modernism may have been sexually progressive, but that sexuality was largely

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Rebecca Traister explores the phenomenon of female singledom in the contemporary United States and discusses how significantly higher numbers of single women in the U.S. are relying on primary relationships with one another. See Traister, *All the Single Ladies*. An alternative reading of this phenomenon sees romantic friendships declining as lesbian relationships become increasingly confident and visible. See, for example, Newton, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman,” and Steven Seidman, *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁵⁴ Gabriele Griffin, ed., *Difference in View: Women and Modernism* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 9.

heteronormative (on the surface, at least) and was not necessarily feminist. Thus, (female) feminist and nonheteronormative modernists had to navigate dominant attitudes of misogyny and homophobia while simultaneously striving to produce experimental art.

Setting Up House Together

In addition to the support Moore and Bryher would have found in their (female) modernist community, they were also in good company when they chose to cohabitate with another woman. Domestic partnerships offered women an alternative to marriage and motherhood, an alternative that promised a sense of equality and the opportunity to pursue a life outside of the home. The domestic partner could shoulder some of the work of a marriage; such partnerships presented a substitution for the “conventional structure of two people alone in a relationship.”⁵⁵ As a subversion of the androcentric heterosexual model, the arrangement also threatened patriarchal order.

Many modernist women, married or not, depended on the support of a female partner and of the greater community of women in the movement. In community and in partnership, women like Moore could find the practical support they required so they could focus on their craft. Moore established a domestic partnership with her mother that, but for short interludes, lasted her lifetime. Moore’s mother offered Moore literary services and managed the household so the latter could dedicate her time to work.⁵⁶ Gertrude Stein had Alice B. Toklas who was her “social companion, secretary, and loyal friend.”⁵⁷ Radclyffe Hall had Una Troubridge as “facilitator, correspondent, [and] general manager[.]”⁵⁸ No doubt the intimacy Toklas and Troubridge offered Stein and Hall differed greatly from what Mary Warner offered Moore, but these relationships all feature an artist (who prioritised her work) and her companion.

⁵⁵ Roiphe, *Uncommon Arrangements*, 6.

⁵⁶ Linda Leavell, *Holding on Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 122-3, 128-9.

⁵⁷ Laurie Champion, ed., *American Women Writers, 1900-1945: a Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 319.

⁵⁸ Joanne Glasgow, ed., *Your John: The Love Letters of Radclyffe Hall* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 2.

In contrast, other female domestic partnerships within modernism were founded on mutual support as well as independence. Winifred Holtby, who felt strongly about the primacy of her relationship with Vera Brittain, still maintained that freedom—individualism—was a critical component:

I am torn between the exacting demands of love, and my invincible belief that no person should lay too heavy claims upon another. To let each one of one's beloveds feel completely free, even the most beloved of them all, to interpose no barrier of pity or tenderness between them and their destiny – that needs a little careful schooling.⁵⁹

Similarly, H.D. and Bryher were each other's most constant companions. Although Bryher managed some quotidian affairs such as finances (which suited her interests and experience), neither was subordinate to the other. H.D. and Bryher allowed and encouraged each other to pursue their work, to travel, and even to enjoy extra-relational affairs with other people. Other female domestic partnerships in the modernist community include Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier, and American publishers Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, among others.

The Modernist Woman and Nonheteronormative Identification

Given the attitudes the 'Men of 1914' held toward their female peers and the misogyny which pervaded the modernist movement,⁶⁰ it is understandable women sought the company and support of other women. This same-sex pairing is one reason, at least, that so many modernist women are identified as lesbian by contemporary criticism: their relationships were primary, demonstrated affect and sometimes featured erotic and sexual intimacy. Nevertheless, as I discussed in the introduction to this project, the women themselves rarely described their relationships, desires and identities according to sexological terminology. If modernist women sought to fit into the masculinist modernist milieu, then it is likely they would not always be forthcoming with descriptions and representations of feminine or nonheteronormative characteristics.⁶¹ For example, Benstock claims "for H.D., the

⁵⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, 121.

⁶⁰ Wyndham Lewis identified the pioneers of the movement as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. See K. K. Ruthven, *Ezra Pound as Literary Critic* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 65.

⁶¹ For further reading, see Renée Dickinson, *Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel: The Corporeum of Virginia Woolf and Olive Moore* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

patriarchal and heterosexual features of Modernism constituted a trap, forcing her to efface the issue of her own sexual difference[.]”⁶²

A saying emerged during the civil rights movement in America in response to accusations of communist ties: “It’s bad enough being black without being red, too.”⁶³ Similarly, a modernist woman might have thought it was bad enough being a woman within the movement without being thought a lesbian as well. Although, by the 1920s, sex “suddenly seemed to be overt and everywhere,”⁶⁴ according to Sheila Rowbotham, it was “implicitly framed within an assumption that heterosexuality was the norm.”⁶⁵ So, where we might expect a greater degree of acceptance of nonheteronormative expressions of identity within the modernist community, this was not necessarily the case. For example, William Carlos Williams was known for his liberal sexual attitudes (and his womanizing). However, Williams’ “sexual vitalism” was located within the context of “liberated heterosexuality” which allowed him to simultaneously “proclaim the morbidity of bisexuality” and nonheteronormative desires and identifications.⁶⁶

Williams’ attitude reflects a perplexing homophobia that seems directed at the symbolic gay and lesbian—the concept or threat of the invert—more than the actual subject. I see a similar stance reflected by Sisley Huddleston. Huddleston—a journalist and writer—travelled in a variety of European elite social circles and rubbed elbows with artists, bohemians, politicians and celebrities. In his memoir *Bohemian Literary & Social Life in Paris: Salons, Cafés, Studios* (1928), he demonstrates how homophobia stigmatised “signs” of the invert. For example, Huddleston recalled the problematics of Parma violets and the color green—both associated with inversion: “Parma violets were used as the symbol of the women’s relations; ... It was for a time regarded as equivocal to send Parma violets to a lady in Paris, just as green was almost an impossible colour in the nineties.”⁶⁷ Huddleston provides an example of how homophobia can effectually create prohibitions for the normative subject as well as the queer subject. In contemporary American society, for

⁶² Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 312.

⁶³ Henry Hampton, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (Michigan: Bantam Books, 1990), 337.

⁶⁴ Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶⁶ Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*, 199.

⁶⁷ Sisley Huddleston, *Bohemian Literary & Social Life in Paris: Salons, Cafés, Studios* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1928), 327. Ellis writes, “It has also been remarked that inverts exhibit a preference for green garments.” Ellis, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, 197.

example, a boy—whether he is gay or not—might avoid wearing the color pink—whether he would like to wear it or not—in order to escape being called “gay.”⁶⁸ Any action, language or object believed to symbolize or represent or code for nonheteronormativity becomes a site of proscription reflective of homophobic threat.

Huddleston’s commentary also reveals how attitudes toward nonheteronormative “behaviour” varied depending on its social context and whether or not the nonheteronormativity was concealed. Huddleston writes:

In other ages there have been acknowledged friendships between persons of the same sex, and sometimes these friendships have been an accepted fact, a sociological phenomenon, placed on a definite basis, artistic and moral. But I do not think they have ever been so boldly flaunted as to-day. That there should be tolerated special *cafés* in Paris is an affair of the police. What is serious is not that a handful of men and women should form a secret community in a society that is almost unconscious of them: what is serious is that writers and artists should publicly proclaim with complacency and sympathy the prevalence of—to use the current expression—the “love that dare not speak its name.”⁶⁹

Clearly, Huddleston was antipathetic to nonheteronormative subjects, which might signal a degree of cognitive dissonance; he considered himself a “Bohemian,”⁷⁰ the “Mr. Shakespeare” of Shakespeare & Company,⁷¹ and he had favourable impressions of Gertrude Stein, Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach.⁷² Was Huddleston aware that he found himself socialising with those who not only were sympathetic to the same-sex love he found so distasteful, but who loved that way themselves? Or was it that the homosexual and the lesbian depicted in the press and sexological treatises were so deviant and fantastical as to be incongruent with the actual subjects with whom Huddleston was acquainted? Perhaps nonheteronormative modernist women (and men) used the strategy of hiding in plain sight; was their same-sex love known but not articulated, and thus tolerable?

We know that there exist very few textual declarations of same-sex love or intimacy written in the early twentieth century which are not veiled or encoded. This can be explained partly by the homophobic atmosphere of the wider society—if not

⁶⁸ See Pip Cornall, “Men, Homophobia, and My Pink Helmet,” in *Voice Male: The Untold Story of the Pro-Feminist Men’s Movement*, ed. Rob Okun (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2014), 352-4.

⁶⁹ Huddleston, *Bohemian Literary & Social Life in Paris*, 328.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 238-9, 251.

the modernist milieu in particular—which positioned non(hetero)normative individuals as suspect and subject to a preoccupation with identification. For example, regarding poet and writer Mary Barnard, Ezra Pound was compelled to categorize her according to his personal taxonomy of female variants: Pound asked Barnard “whether she was ‘going to be lorelei, or matriarch or blue stocking’.”⁷³

Lillian Faderman explains that, by the 1930s (in America), “women’s love for women was inevitably ‘lesbian’ now – and patently sexual by definition.”⁷⁴ This assumption of (homo)sexuality is evident when Vera Brittain recalls her neighbourhood’s reaction to her unusual domestic arrangement—a part-time live-in husband and full-time live-in female companion. Brittain writes:

The unusual domestic arrangement which suited us so well gave rise, I was assured, to a plentiful crop of rumours. Chelsea is notoriously the home of the unconventional, but if most of its myths have as innocent an origin as those circulated about ourselves they are indeed tales told by an idiot, full of sound and fury. Our friends at any rate, appeared to be singularly unaffected by our local “reputation.”⁷⁵

The fact that nonheteronormativity could be wielded as a defamatory tool sheds some light on why so many modernist women—including Moore and Bryher—refused to identify themselves according to sexological terminology. Some artists, including Mary Meigs—a close friend of poet Elizabeth Bishop—put to paper their thoughts and opinions on these matters. Meigs recalls, “Elizabeth and I belonged to a generation of women who were terrified by the idea of being known as lesbians.”⁷⁶ While Meigs is somewhat cryptic about the reason for this fear, her statement likely reflects the sentiment of a significant constituency of women. Winifred Holtby’s conception of inversion did not correspond to how she saw herself, as a lover of both a man and a handful of women. She expressed her belief that it is the sexual consummation of same-sex love which is pathological, not the love itself. Commenting on Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Holtby wrote, “Radclyffe Hall has taught me a lot. She’s all fearfully wrong, I feel. To love other women deeply is

⁷³ Quoted in Ruthven, *Ezra Pound as Literary Critic*, 103.

⁷⁴ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 113.

⁷⁵ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Friendship* (Glasgow, GB: Fontana Paperbacks, 1981), 291-92.

⁷⁶ Gary Fountain and Peter Brazeau, *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: An Oral Biography* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 86.

not pathological. To be unable to control one's passions is."⁷⁷ Meigs' and Holtby's statements remind us to consider the ways that the sexological theories behind the terminology, and public perception of it at the time, likely mediated the ways subjects identified themselves. Both of these women loved other women, but either they did not see their own circumstances reflected in sexology's description of the "lesbian" or they chose not to position themselves within that identity and thus at the mercy of homophobic scrutiny.

There were, however, some women who did make use of the identifications "invert" and "lesbian." Hall adopted theories of inversion—as well as the identification—as they legitimised her same-sex desires and provided her with a framework around which to construct literal and literary representations of self. She is an example of how a dialectical relationship existed between theories of sexual inversion and the (sexual and gendered) expressions of inverted individuals. She found in Ellis' and Carpenter's work the material from which to construct a pro-inversion narrative as well as her own domestic arrangement. In fact, Hall and Lady Una Troubridge are a (sexology) textbook example of the heterosexual status quo maintained by the inverted pair. Although Hall adopted sexological theories, however, it would be unwise to assume this adoption equalled agreement. Esther Newton suggests that Hall's acceptance was closer to a compromise. Newton argues "Hall and many other feminists like her embraced, sometimes with ambivalence, the image of the mannish lesbian and the discourse of the sexologists about inversion, primarily because they desperately wanted to break out of the asexual model of romantic friendship."⁷⁸

Scholar Bonnie Zimmerman points to Natalie Barney as a modernist figure who was at the centre of the "first self-identified lesbian feminist community in Paris during the early years of the twentieth century."⁷⁹ In fact, Barney's salon—while host to a great number of heteronormative and nonheteronormative women alike—was a hub of same-sex entanglements. Barney's *Aventures de l'esprit* (1929) presents the

⁷⁷ Roiphe, *Uncommon Arrangements*, 279. Further evidence of Holtby's (latent) homophobia can be found in her "othering" of the homosexual male in her 1936 novel *South Riding*. See Gregory Woods, "The Other Other or More of the Same? Women's Representations of Homosexual Men," in *Difference in View: Women and Modernism*, ed. Gabriele Griffin (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 23-31.

⁷⁸ Newton, "The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman," 560.

⁷⁹ Bonnie Zimmerman, "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Literary Criticism" (1981) in *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Robyn Warhol-Down and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 48.

reader with a sketch of both Barney's home and a list of those individuals who visited there.⁸⁰ Barney and her circle were notorious as a Sapphist community;⁸¹ the same-sex love that was a feature of her group was by no means concealed. Barney was not reticent about her lesbian identity, and certain biographical features may explain her forthrightness. She was financially independent,⁸² and her economic security was not dependent on the maintenance of a particular persona, subject to approval by external forces. In addition, the community she constructed around herself provided her with a sense of belonging and acceptance. Perhaps these circumstances permitted Barney to inhabit unabashedly her lesbian identification.

In Bryher, we have an example of someone who held psychoanalytic and sexological theories in high regard, but who did not adopt sexological terminology to describe herself. Bryher enjoyed personal relationships with Freud, Ellis and other major players in the fields of psychoanalysis and sexology, and she favoured Edward Carpenter's work. Tirza True Latimer writes that "Bryher shared Edward Carpenter's belief that the borderline position occupied by members of the 'intermediate sex' represented an ideal middle ground—not completely estranged from nor completely implicated in the prevailing social schema—where polarized factions (racial, sexual, or political) might be led to make peace."⁸³ Despite her favourable attitude toward Carpenter's theories, Bryher did not appropriate the Uranian identification for herself. She did not call herself an invert, Urning or Uranian. And, when talking/writing about their relationship, Bryher (and H.D.) employed "conventional family delineations, calling each other cousins and distant relatives to outsiders."⁸⁴ For her part, H.D. named "Bryher her most intimate friend[.]"⁸⁵ We would be amiss, however, to assume that the use of these familiar and, arguably, benign identifiers betrays a reluctance on H.D.'s or Bryher's part to identify as lesbian, bisexual or invert where they might *wish* to do so. After all, H.D. had no problem identifying other lesbians (as such). She describes shopping for photos of Elisabeth Bergner for Bryher: "I enclose some of the

⁸⁰ See Melanie Hawthorne, "Clans and Chronologies: The Salon of Natalie Barney," in *A 'Belle Epoque'? Women in French Society and Culture 1890-1914*, ed. Diana Holmes and Carrie Tarr (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006.)

⁸¹ Tamara Levitz, *Modernist Mysteries: Perséphone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 419.

⁸² George Wickes, "Natalie Barney," in *Notable American Women: The Modern Period, A Biographical Dictionary*, eds. Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), 53.

⁸³ Tirza True Latimer, *Women Together/Women Apart: Portraits of Lesbian Paris* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 36.

⁸⁴ Annette Debo, *The American H.D.* (Iowa: The University of Iowa Press, 2012), 60.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

pictures, I finally got into the old dame's den, it was fearful, several other Lesbians buying other people[.]”⁸⁶ She explained in a letter to Bryher—with no attempt to censor her language—that Freud identified her as “that all-but extinct phenomina [*sic*], the perfect bi-.”⁸⁷ However, there is no evidence that H.D. adopted the term for herself.

Annette Debo writes that “contemporary critics clutch when faced with the astonishing lack of proper nomenclature with which to describe H.D.’s relationship with Bryher[.]”⁸⁸ This suggests there is a disconnect between the terms scholars are drawn to apply and the way the women themselves described their relationships. It may also be an indication that relationships like the one between Bryher and H.D. are not adequately represented by available terminology. It should not suggest that the women themselves failed to set a precedent. If they did not employ the “nomenclature” contemporary scholars might expect, we must consider the great number of factors which may have influenced their decision to do so.

Modernist Women in their Golden Years

The story of the identification of modernist women does not end in the modernist era. While literary modernism is understood to have given way to the Beat generation and post-modernism in the decades following World War II, many modernists themselves continued to work well beyond the fading movement. H.D. died in 1961, Sylvia Beach in 1962, Marianne Moore in 1972, Djuna Barnes in 1982, and Bryher in 1983. They all continued to work well toward the ends of their lives.

These women lived through the Second World War and watched as it further accelerated women's liberation, temporarily at least, as women flooded the public sphere in greater numbers than ever before and tasted an empowering independence unknown to their foremothers. WWII also ushered in more progressive attitudes toward women's sexual and social freedom. Although the 1950s saw Western nations stage concerted efforts to usher women back into the home, by the sixties, the pendulum of social progress began swinging away from social conservatism toward leftist social radicalism represented by the anti-war movement, the sexual revolution,

⁸⁶ H.D. to Bryher, March 15, 1933, in *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher, and their Circle*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman (New York: New Directions, 2002), 96.

⁸⁷ H.D. to Bryher, November 24, 1934, in Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 497.

⁸⁸ Debo, *The American H.D.*, 60.

the gay rights movement and second-wave feminism. In the midst of this social progress, modernist women continued to be of interest to their contemporaries. Some, like Marianne Moore, became celebrities of sorts. Others, like Djuna Barnes, withdrew from public life. Many modernist women, however, were sought out by journalists and historians who maintained an interest in the female relationships that had been so integral to their lives.

Although attitudes toward nonheteronormative desires and identification were shifting, modernist women continued to veil their same-sex identification and the nature of their relationships. When she was interviewed shortly before her death, Sylvia Beach referred to Adrienne Monnier consistently as her “French friend.”⁸⁹ Djuna Barnes, when asked about the nature of her relationship with Thelma Wood, explained “I’m not a lesbian, I just loved Thelma.”⁹⁰ Barnes told writer Darryl Pinckney in an interview that “she was never a lesbian, could never abide ‘those wet muscles’ one had to love to love women.”⁹¹

We might expect such progressive women to seize the opportunity to be more forthright in this emerging context of acceptance and sympathetic attitudes. However, we should consider that Steven Seidman identifies “the heyday of the closet era” as the decades between “roughly 1950 and 1980.”⁹² At that point, women like Moore, Bryher, Beach and Barnes were getting on in age. If they did not consider terms like “lesbian” or “invert” adequately described their relationships and their desires in the decades during which these terms emerged, it is unlikely they would subscribe to them in a climate when “coming out publicly as lesbian or gay carried a profound and abiding social, and indeed in the case of gay men, legal sanction.”⁹³ To suggest that they were “closeted” or otherwise afraid to “come out” and declare their love for other women overlooks the fact that they *did* declare their love for other women. But they did so in other words.

⁸⁹ Greta Schiller, *Paris Was a Woman* (New York: Zeitgeist Films, 1996).

⁹⁰ Andrew Field, *Djuna: The Formidable Miss Barnes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 101.

⁹¹ Darryl Pinckney, “Sweet Evening Breeze,” *New York Review of Books* (20 December 1984): 37.

⁹² Steven Seidman, *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 25.

⁹³ Joanne Winning, “Lesbian modernism: writing in and beyond the closet,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, ed. Hugh Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 54.

Hélène Cixous writes that there

have always been those uncertain, poetic persons who have not let themselves be reduced to dummies programmed by pitiless repression of the homosexual element. Men or women: beings who are complex, mobile, open. Accepting the other sex as a component makes them much richer, more various, stronger, and – to the extent that they are mobile – very fragile. It is only in this condition that we invent.⁹⁴

The personality Cixous describes can be found among the women of modernism: Marianne Moore, Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby, Gertrude Stein, Bryher, H.D., Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, Lady Ottoline Morrell, Elizabeth Bishop, Virginia Woolf, and Vita Sackville-West, to name a few. To varying degrees, each of these women confounds borderlines separating genders and sexual identities. Their movement within gender and intimacy is characterized by fluidity and an organic multi-dimensional development. They fashioned their identities during a century of social progress that saw them granted education in greater numbers, the vote, and legal access to birth control and abortion. They suffered personal losses during the World Wars, but also enjoyed the emancipation these conflicts afforded women on the home front. Theories of psychoanalysis and sexology gave them language with which to talk about sexuality, but saw their most intimate relationships subject to (homophobic) scrutiny. The particular artistic community of which they were a part required them to contend with its misogynistic male figureheads. It is in this sociohistorical context that women like Marianne Moore and Bryher (were) loved and supported (by) other women and created a literary legacy which has much to teach us about life, (same-sex) love, and (sexual) identity.

⁹⁴ Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays," in *The Feminist Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1997), 92.

THE MANY OMISSIONS OF MARIANNE MOORE

Marianne Moore once took a magnifying glass to the seeds of a papaya.¹ She was fascinated “first of all by the distribution and amethyst color, and then by the necks, set so they stood up like seed-pearls on stiff silk.”² Magnified, the seeds reminded her “of those little squares called ‘Sens-Sens’ that the drug-stores used to sell in tiny colored envelopes like miniature seed-packets[.]”³ Moore did not just eat the papaya. She scrutinized it. Every detail was observed, recorded and celebrated with words as delectable as the sweet tropical flesh they described. Moore did the papaya justice.

The historical Moore appears far less exotic than the fruit she once enjoyed. Renowned for her poetry and contribution to the modernist (literary) movement as a writer, editor and literary mentor, Moore achieved celebrity status in her later years and was dubbed “America’s favorite spinster aunt[.]”⁴ The fact that Moore remained unmarried and refrained from revealing any passionate relationships inspires critics to speculate on the nature and sometimes even the existence of her romantic desire. Dell Richards, in *Lesbian Lists* (1990), describes Moore as a lesbian poet (but provides no details to support his claim.)⁵ Cristanne Miller highlights Moore’s nonheteronormativity by suggesting she never “sought a sexual relationship with other women[.]”⁶ but that she embodied a “fluid gender identification[.]”⁷ Lewis Turco does not connect Moore’s singleness to a sexual identity, but describes her as a

¹ In this chapter, I have drawn on research I began as part of a Postgraduate Diploma in English and which culminated in “‘If There Is An Ocean, It Is Here’: Toward An Understanding of the ‘Veiled Mohammedan Woman’,” a research paper submitted to the Faculty of Arts, Department of English in 2010.

² Marianne Moore to Elizabeth Bishop, January 31, 1942, in *Selected Letters of Marianne Moore*, ed. Bonnie Costello (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 423.

³ Marianne Moore to Elizabeth Bishop, January 31, 1942, in *Selected Letters*, 423.

⁴ Ellen Levy, “Marianne Moore,” in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: American Literature*, accessed November 22, 2013, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-0108.xml>.

⁵ Dell Richards, *Lesbian Lists: A Look at Lesbian Culture, History, and Personalities* (Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Publications, 1990), 37.

⁶ Cristanne Miller, “Marianne Moore and H.D.: Female Community and Poetic Achievement,” in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (Michigan: National Poetry Foundation, 1990), 379.

⁷ Cristanne Miller, *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 127.

bachelor woman.⁸ Moore is described by Suzanne Juhasz as “opting for nonsexuality[.]”⁹ As I mention in my introduction, Moore has also been identified as a lesbian poet exhibiting gender fluidity,¹⁰ and as *not* asexual.¹¹ Regardless of the identifications critics choose to ascribe to Moore, the fact remains that there is no textual or historical evidence that suggests Moore ever engaged in a sexual relationship with anyone, and she doesn’t comment directly on her own sexuality. Moore never married. She lived with her mother until the latter’s death. Her emotionally intimate relationships were with woman-friends, her mother, and her brother. Although she had many long-term friendships and professional relationships with men, the common belief is that Moore did not engage in romantic relationships with men.

The absence of biographical evidence relating to Moore’s sexual preferences incites critics to turn to Moore’s poetics for clues about her desire. Sheila Kineke interprets Moore’s poetry as “sexually neutral” and as featuring an “asexual aesthetic.”¹² Kineke explains that Moore’s poetry avoided sexually explicit tropes and, as such, “deflected charges of feminine sentimentality.”¹³ The “sexually neutral” features of Moore’s poetry might also, according to Kineke, be described as representing the sexual default, which is to say, masculine.¹⁴ Similarly, Kineke qualifies Moore’s “asexual aesthetic” as her tendency to anti-sentimentality.¹⁵ Benjamin Kahan sees Moore’s as a “celibate poetics,”¹⁶ where he “reads celibacy as a sexuality, as an identity[.]”¹⁷ Furthermore, instead of understanding Moore’s celibacy as a lack of desire, Kahan positions celibacy *as* Moore’s desire. Both of these interpretations point to the absence of a definitive theory of Marianne Moore’s desire, and questions remain to be answered: Did Moore repress romantic desire, or did she

⁸ Lewis Putnam Turco, *Visions and Revisions of American Poetry* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1986), 50. At the time Turco wrote this work, it was less common for literary critics to examine their subjects in relation to a concept of queer gender identity.

⁹ Suzanne Juhasz, *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1976), 39.

¹⁰ Cristanne Miller, *Marianne Moore*, 97.

¹¹ See Zona, *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop & May Swenson*, 6; and Wilson, “El Greco’s Daughter,” 193.

¹² Sheila Kineke, “T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and the Gendered Operations of Literary Sponsorship,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 21, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 129.

¹³ Kineke, “T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, and the Gendered Operations of Literary Sponsorship,” 129.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Benjamin Kahan, “‘The Viper’s Traffic Knot’: Celibacy and Queerness in the ‘Late’ Marianne Moore,” *GLQ* 14, no. 4 (2008), 512.

¹⁷ Kahan, “‘The Viper’s Traffic Knot’: Celibacy and Queerness in the ‘Late’ Marianne Moore,” 509.

lack it? What features of Moore's life and writing have inspired critics to label her variously as a lesbian poet,¹⁸ as *not* asexual,¹⁹ as exhibiting gender fluidity,²⁰ as "prudish and unworldly[?]"²¹ What characteristics enabled her contemporaries to call her a prude/stuffed shirt,²² a hysterical virgin,²³ and a romantic?²⁴ Kenneth Burke said "I never saw a more sexual woman."²⁵

To construct an understanding of Moore's desire, and the events and circumstances behind her choices, is to examine many aspects of Moore's life and work: her Protestant moral/religious framework, her disapproval of the obscene, her conception of the marriage ideal, the (un)importance of feminism, her mother's modeled value for same-sex female relationships and disdain for heteronormativity, a discourse of spinsterhood versus fantasy of bachelorhood, her few intimate female relationships, and her calculated interactions with men (including her brother, Scofield Thayer, and Ezra Pound). These themes—appreciated together—contribute to a better understanding of Moore and the reason(s) for her 'singleness.' They suggest a deliberate abdication of romantic relationships and a rejection of heterosexual ones, in particular. Although one can be certain Moore eschewed heteronormative expectations in exchange for an exceptional existence, the larger picture of Moore's life and work is not a unified one. In the spirit of her poem "An Octopus," where she writes "complexities ... will be complexities / as long as the

¹⁸ Richards, *Lesbian Lists*, 37.

¹⁹ See Kirstin Hotelling Zona, *Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop & May Swenson: The Feminist Poetics of Self-Restraint* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 6, and Elizabeth Wilson, "El Greco's Daughter: Necessary Deflection in Marianne Moore's 'For February 14th' and 'Saint Valentine'," in *A Right Good Salvo of Barks: Critics and Poets on Marianne Moore*, ed. Linda Leavell, Cristanne Miller, and Robin G. Schulze (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 193.

²⁰ Miller, *Marianne Moore*, 97.

²¹ Joanne Feit Diehl, *Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore: The Psychodynamics of Creativity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 30. See also Brian Brodhead Glaser, "A Thought on Marianne Moore's Prudishness," in *Another Language: Poetic Experiments in Britain and North America*, ed. Kornelia Freitag and Katharina Vester (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008).

²² Edward Field, *A Frieze for a Temple of Love* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1998), 156.

²³ Hart Crane, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), 522.

²⁴ Wallace Stevens reviewed Moore's *Selected Poems* in 1935. "The review begins by commending the formal prosody of Moore and her preference for commonplace objects. The second half defends her as a romantic." See George S. Lensing, "The Early Readers of Wallace Stevens," in *Order in Variety: Essays and Poems in Honor of Donald E. Stanford*, ed. R. W. Crump (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses), 68.

²⁵ "Spotlight on Voices & Visions: Marianne Moore," documentary produced in 1988 by the New York Center for Visual History, 57:22, Kenneth Burke, 38:16, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.learner.org/catalog/extras/vvspot/Moore.html?pop=yes&pid=603>.

world lasts[.]”²⁶ certain contradictory elements destabilize what might otherwise seem well-founded conceptions of Moore. In particular, Moore’s commitment to her adaptation of Maria Edgeworth’s *The Absentee* (1812); her decades-long project—an unpublished novel—titled “The Way We Live Now”; the perplexing rift in her relationship with Scofield Thayer; and an omission on her headstone together suggest that another, previously unexplored, conception of Moore is both plausible and likely. Consequently, this chapter does not seek to align Moore with a particular category (or hybrid-category) of identification. Instead, the particularities of Moore’s desiring, creative and loving life take center-stage and stand alone, testifying to the complexity that is Moore’s—and every—life. Let us attempt to do Marianne Moore justice and take a magnifying glass to “the empress of observation” herself.²⁷

UNDESIRING AND UNROMANTIC?

Ezra Pound wrote that he could find only “traces of emotion” in the poetry of Marianne Moore.²⁸ Even contemporary critics “rarely acknowledge the emotional appeal of Moore’s poetry,” according to Linda Leavell.²⁹ Many of her poems describe nature or animals, but approach them from a scientific or empirical position. She writes about war and death, but not under a weighty shroud of grief. She treats the topic of marriage, but not through a romantic lens. Leavell claims the “most consistent theme through all of the reviews is that [Moore’s] poems come from the head rather than the heart.”³⁰ The reader of Moore’s poetry is not immediately rewarded with a sense of the inner life of the poet, unless that inner life is to be understood as sterile, calculated, and controlled, like the words she penned so carefully. William Carlos Williams, who knew Moore in both a personal and professional context, describes his impression of Moore’s process: “With Miss Moore

²⁶ Marianne Moore, “An Octopus,” in *Complete Poems* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1994), 75. In the notes to this poem, Moore attributes these lines to Richard Baxter’s *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, a religious reflection on life on earth and the heavenly hereafter.

²⁷ Josephine Jacobsen, *The Instant of Knowing: Lectures, Criticism, and Occasional Prose*, ed. Elizabeth Spires (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 30.

²⁸ Ezra Pound, *Instigations of Ezra Pound* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), 233, accessed August 21, 2016, <https://archive.org/details/cu31924027151723>.

²⁹ Linda Leavell, “Moore, Marianne (1887-1972),” in *American Poets and Poetry from the Colonial Era to the Present*, ed. Jeffrey Gray, Mary McAleer Balkun and James McCorkle (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2015), 412. See also Robin Schulze, *The Web of Friendship: Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 39.

³⁰ Linda Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 194.

a word is a word most when it is separated out by science, treated with acid to remove the smudges, washed, dried and placed right side up on a clean surface.”³¹ She has been described as belonging to the male-dominated convention of impersonal verse;³² she was “one of the boys[.]”³³ Leavell,³⁴ author of Moore’s latest biography, writes:

Never does she long for a lover’s embrace or for oneness with nature. She comes to distrust unifying metaphor as much as she does romantic love, preferring instead observation, differentiation, and the precise diction of science. Her poems repeatedly protest tyranny, egotism and “love in the mistaken sense of greed,” all forms of forced unity, whereas they praise the Herculean effort required to see with precision and to recognize individuality. In Moore’s oeuvre, “relentless accuracy” is both loving and liberating.³⁵

Leavell’s assessment of Moore’s poetics clarifies the position from which Moore’s poems emerge and sheds light on this guarded poet’s personal values. Moore’s commitment to illuminating and celebrating particularity aligns her artistic efforts with the academic efforts of this thesis. Moore was attuned to fascinating details in the natural world and was conscious of the singularity of her own life’s path.

One consequential element of Moore’s singularity lies in her abdication of romantically intimate relationships. When Leavell suggests Moore never longed to experience romantic love, and a superficial survey of Moore’s biographical details and an appraisal of her (published) poetic and prosaic oeuvre corroborates Leavell’s supposition that Moore was never interested in romantic love. But the woman at the heart of this matter scorned the superficial. Elsewhere, Leavell asserts that “when it comes to observing people rather than things or facts, Moore’s accuracy assumes a moral dimension.”³⁶ If one is to approach Moore—the subject—with the degree of

³¹ Quoted in Charles Tomlinson, ed., *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 57.

³² See, for example, Juhasz, *Naked and Fiery Forms*, 33-56. For an alternative interpretation, see Bonnie Costello, “The ‘Feminine’ Language of Marianne Moore,” in *Modern Critical View: American Women Poets, 1650-1950*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002).

³³ Juhasz, *Naked and Fiery Forms*, 35.

³⁴ Leavell has a long history of scholarship on Marianne Moore and is also more familiar than most with the contents of the Moore archives held at the Rosenbach Museum. Leavell’s work has been indispensable to this project.

³⁵ Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 165.

³⁶ Linda Leavell, “Marianne Moore Instructs Her Biographer: ‘Relentless accuracy’ versus ‘the haggish, uncompanionable drawl of certitude,’” *South Central Review* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 84.

accuracy which Moore—the poet—strove for, one must be “attentive to clues ... must narrow the choice, must strive for precision.”³⁷

MOORE’S FIRST LOVE

One is spoilt for choice when interpreting Marianne Moore’s decision to remain a bachelor-woman. Moore had many plausible reasons for avoiding matrimony ranging from her mother’s failed marriage, to her own masculine identification, to her dedication to her work. Much Moore scholarship brushes against the fact of her lifelong single status, but the extent to which Moore was affected by her choice has yet to be explored. Moore’s own reluctance to comment—in prose or in verse—on her lack of romantic love creates a thematic blank worthy of investigation. I argue Moore confronted her chosen celibacy and reaffirmed that choice under significant circumstances at least twice in her lifetime. Proving that Moore suffered a sense of lack or loss, however, necessitates a cautious and respectful approach balanced by a desire to interpret Moore’s omissions.

Reading between the lines—scrutinizing Moore’s silences—is the key to revealing the extent to which her singleness affected her. “Omissions are not accidents” is Moore’s opening declaration to her reader in her *Complete Poems* (1967).³⁸ A lesser-known phrase—one of Moore’s many ‘collected’ statements—is found on the back fly cover of her copy of Maria Edgeworth’s *The Absentee*. In faint and almost unintelligible handwriting, Moore wrote: “They do not know what feeling is who can express it in words.”³⁹ Taken together, these two ‘clues’ suggest that although Moore did not explore romantic love as a significant theme in her poetry or as an obvious feature in her life, this “omission” was not accidental or without exception.

Marianne Moore’s school-girl romantic friendship with Peggy (Margaret Mary) James is evidence of Moore’s capacity for passionate entanglement. The two met in 1906 when they were attending Bryn Mawr. Both girls were nineteen at the time. Moore described James, daughter of William and niece of Henry, as “a child

³⁷ Marianne Moore, interview with Donald Hall, *The Paris Review* no. 26 (Summer-Fall 1961), accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4637/the-art-of-poetry-no-4-marianne-moore>.

³⁸ Moore, *Complete Poems*, vii.

³⁹ Rosenbach Museum & Library, *The Absentee* folder, Marianne Moore, III:01:02

brought up on the hearth-rug” of two of her literary idols.⁴⁰ The relationship the girls shared was, according to Moore, an “*affaire de coeur*.”⁴¹ The feeling was mutual. James cared for Moore enough that her family had the impression of a “serious, intense friendship[.]”⁴² Their relationship was rife with the stuff of any love affair: excitement, passionate polar emotions, anxiety, exuberance and despair. Initially, Moore praised the other girl’s physical features and aspects of her character: “Peggy is a ‘darling’ pure and simple. I never have made the acquaintance of such a sweet child, in my life. I can never reconcile her fearfully intellectual appearance, and Vernon Whitford eyes with her perfect lack of artifice and experience.”⁴³

However, rifts in the budding relationship elicited ambivalence on Moore’s part,⁴⁴ and she fell victim to mood swings as the two girls drifted in and out of each other’s favour. Writing to a friend, Moore announced melodramatically, “[Peggy] is *nothing* to me,”⁴⁵ while to Mary Norcross—a close family friend—she wrote, “Peggy is perfectly charming, scintillating, quiet, witty and responsive.”⁴⁶ The relationship seems to have upset Moore’s usual eloquence, for in the same paragraph she erroneously omitted a word and concluded, stammering and stuttering: “I am very brief and affectionate in all my words, to the capriciously young animal (~~I was going to say stag!~~) (I am so puzzled I almost put quotations for brackets--) and am satisfied.”⁴⁷

By springtime, when Moore’s intimate friendship with James was all but over, she wrote to her mother and brother: “Peggy is a fair wave in my wake. ... I don’t want to ‘waste myself’ on her.”⁴⁸ When their friendship had fully cooled, Moore recalled the break-up matter-of-factly, describing James as “stupid.”⁴⁹ The word

⁴⁰ Marianne Moore to Marcet Haldeman, February 28, 1908, in *Selected Letters*, 39.

⁴¹ Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore and John Warner Moore, January 12, 1908, in *Selected Letters*, 30.

⁴² Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 495.

⁴³ Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore and John Warner Moore, October 24, 1907, in *Selected Letters*, 28. George Meredith, *The Egoist: Webster’s French Thesaurus Edition* (San Diego, CA: Icon Classics, 2008), 79-80. Vernon Whitford is a character in Meredith’s *The Egoist*.

⁴⁴ Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore and John Warner Moore, January 12, 1908, in *Selected Letters*, 29.

⁴⁵ Marianne Moore to Marcet Haldeman, February 28, 1908, in *Selected Letters*, 39.

⁴⁶ Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore, John Warner Moore and Mary Norcross, January 13, 1908, in *Selected Letters*, 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore and John Warner Moore, March 18, 1908, quoted in Leavell, “Marianne Moore, the James Family, and the Politics of Celibacy,” 227.

⁴⁹ Marianne Moore to Marcet Haldeman, May 17, 1908, in *Selected Letters*, 49.

“stupid” suggests Moore was bitterly disappointed and also reveals Moore’s notion of superiority. Moore felt herself in a position to pass a final qualifying judgment on James and, indirectly, the relationship the two once shared.

Moore’s relationship with James taught her about much more than her incompatibility with a particular individual. Coupling, then breaking, with James likely had a lasting effect on Moore’s career and her life. Almost thirty years later, in 1937, Moore expressed her disregard for school-girl friendships and cautioned her niece, Mary, against them.⁵⁰

After her falling-out with Peggy James, Moore processed the experience in a short piece she submitted to Bryn Mawr’s student publication, the *Tipyn o’Bob*. In “Pym,” written as a series of journal entries, she explores the obstacles faced by struggling writer Alexander, a Moore-like character. The reader learns of Alexander’s challenges: he has a disapproving uncle, an overbearing servant, a tiresome dog, a critical editor and his own exacting standards. Similarly, Moore—at the time of writing “Pym”—was dealing with her mother’s persistent interference in Moore’s most tiresome quotidian affairs as well as her disapproval of Moore’s devotion to writing.⁵¹ Moore worried that her work was not being well received by peer editors at the *Tipyn o’Bob*,⁵² and her English reader, Katherine Fullerton, had criticized her writing.⁵³ Thus, we might infer Moore’s identification with her main character given the similar experiences they shared in relation to their budding literary careers.⁵⁴

In the conclusion to the story, Alexander decides to “abjure” his editor,⁵⁵ his servant and his pet, and plans to inform his uncle he is resolved to succeed as a writer at all costs: “I must telegraph Uncle Stanford and *leave*.”⁵⁶ Alexander declares: “I here and now put off the semblance of dignity and for a short time ostentatiously consecrate myself to *toil*. . . . The portrait and my dark blue rug, with its all-over snail-shell pattern,” Alexander writes, “I shall take with me.”⁵⁷ The two possessions Alexander takes with him represent, I will argue, two resolutions—takeaway

⁵⁰ See Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, January 4, 1937, in *Selected Letters*, 377.

⁵¹ See Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 83.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ See Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore and John Warner Moore, February 19, 1907, in *Selected Letters*, 25.

⁵⁴ Leavell, too, reads Alexander as Moore’s fictional proxy. See *Holding On Upside Down*.

⁵⁵ Marianne Moore, “Pym,” in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. Patricia Willis (London: Faber, 1987), 16.

⁵⁶ Moore, “Pym,” 15. Emphasis hers.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

concepts—Moore makes as a budding writer. She commits to these resolutions unwaveringly for the rest of her life: celibacy and hard work.

The rug Alexander takes with him, with its “all-over snail-shell pattern,” represents Moore’s resolve to “*toil*.” Snails create their shell through constant effort. At Bryn Mawr, Moore struggled to express herself on paper. Creating something with which she was satisfied took countless hours and immeasurable effort. Like the snail creating its shell, Moore learned to sacrifice herself to the hard work that enabled her to create. Made of the same stuff as human fingernails, a snail’s shell provides it with a home and protection. The theme of “armour, weapons, protection, places to hide” is explored frequently in Moore’s poetry.⁵⁸ Moore was in the process of learning that, in order to strive to perfect her craft, she would need to protect her softer side from external assaults: people making demands on her time, the criticism of editors and reviewers. Her deliberate efforts to shield, conceal and encode her true self continue to challenge scholars.

The second material thing Alexander takes with him is the “portrait of an unknown lady in the green dress” with “dark slippery hair.” I propose the portrait represents Peggy James, who also had dark hair,⁵⁹ and serves as a reminder of the exacting nature of Moore’s relationship with James. Alexander’s (read: Moore’s) decision to bring it along symbolizes Moore’s resolve never again to submit herself to a romantic relationship.⁶⁰ The first journal instalment of “Pym” gives the impression that the portrait serves as a muse to the distracted Alexander: “I am thinking fairly hard. Things are beginning to materialize. I rest my eye fixedly upon my portrait of the unknown lady in the green dress. I watch an occasional diagonal of firelight splash a path across her dark slippery hair, across the zig-zag light parts in her dress, and over her hands. My words, I realize, are coming unusually well[.]”⁶¹

Bethany Hicok has suggested Peggy James served as muse to Moore based on

⁵⁸ Randall Jarrell, “Her Shield,” quoted in Victoria Bazin, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 148. For the complete essay, see Randall Jarrell, “Her Shield,” in *Marianne Moore: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 114-24.

⁵⁹ See photos of Peggy James in Susan E. Gunter, *Alice in Jamesland: The Story of Alice Howe Gibbens James* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

⁶⁰ Moore, “Pym,” 12. The portrait refers to “The Quiet Hour” by John White Alexander which Moore saw at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in 1905. See “Comment,” *Marianne Moore Newsletter* V, no. 1 (Spring 1981), 8.

⁶¹ Moore, “Pym,” 12.

this passage.⁶² I would argue the opposite, however. Unlike the other fictional counterparts that populate “Pym,” James is not represented by a *character*. She is represented by a painting, a two-dimensional object: inanimate, impotent. The portrait memorializes Moore’s relationship with James, and serves as a reminder that intimate relationships exact too high a price: possession. For James, intimate friendship may have involved a degree of codependence Moore was uncomfortable with. Before “Pym” appeared in the *Tipyn o’Bob*, and when their friendship was still active, James suggested Moore read Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Friendship,”⁶³ where Emerson writes: “Who hears me, who understands me, becomes mine,--a possession for all time.”⁶⁴ In contrast to Emerson’s musings on friendship, Moore believed the ideal friendship was one “that inspires . . . writing without making demands.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, Moore’s texts are “repeatedly interrogating the problematic of ownership and collection, of possession and possessiveness [.]”⁶⁶ If James was suggesting obliquely that their entanglement equalled mutual ownership, the sensitive Moore would have been chafed.

In the final journal entry of “Pym,” Alexander concludes: “My surroundings certainly have been decently congenial. . . . They prove to me, poor things (more satisfactorily than their animate associates) that I have a sympathetic side to me, and a faint suggestion of something more potential. And they are not an everlasting test of one’s bigness.”⁶⁷ Alexander embarks on his writing career with only his resolve, the portrait and the rug. Into her literary future, Moore took with her the memory of a demanding and disappointing relationship and the determination to arm herself against the obstacles she might face.

I argue that Moore determined from her relationship with James that her dreams for her future would be incompatible with romantic attachment. In “Pym,” Alexander writes: “In the effort to compass things in an original manner, however, anything can be made to come failure-end up. The effort of individual isolation, above

⁶² Bethany Hicok, “To Work ‘Lovingly’: Marianne Moore at Bryn Mawr, 1905-1909,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 23, no. 3-4 (2000): 490.

⁶³ Bethany Hicok, *Degrees of Freedom: American Women Poets and the Women’s College, 1905-1955* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2010), 39.

⁶⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Random House Publishing, 2000), 203.

⁶⁵ Linda Leavell, “Marianne Moore, the James Family, and the Politics of Celibacy,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 227.

⁶⁶ Wilson, “El Greco’s Daughter,” 204.

⁶⁷ Moore, “Pym,” 16.

all others. Nothing done for effect, is worth the cost.”⁶⁸ I interpret this passage to mean that Moore was determined to pursue a career as a writer and poet, but that to succeed in that endeavour would require her to forego romantic relationships and isolate herself. Her resolve to remain single was not a decision she made simply for “effect.”

Moore also incorporates a Rudyard Kipling quote into the story of Alexander’s artistic awakening: “God knows you can enter the game if you’ll only pay for the same, and the price of the game is a candle, one single flickering candle—”⁶⁹ The context of the quotation, in Kipling’s poem, is as follows:

Here is a horse to tame –
Here is a gun to handle –
God knows you can enter the game
If you’ll only pay for the same,
And the price of the game is a candle –
A single flickering candle!⁷⁰

Thus, Moore compares Alexander’s (read: her) act of defiant commitment to writing with life-threatening activities: horse-taming and gun-slinging. Furthermore, we might read the “cost” in the Kipling quote to represent the life Moore might otherwise have had: she enters the game and pays for her participation with her “single” life.

Young Marianne Moore correctly predicted that the cost of following her passion would be great. Thanks to her relationship with James, Moore became sensitized to the potential threat posed by romantic love. She learned, for example, how an emotionally intimate relationship can have a deleterious effect on a writer’s process and productivity. A year after her “affair” with James, Moore wrote from New York, “let nothing interfere with ‘my career’.”⁷¹ These words, penned when Moore was only twenty-two, formed the textual equivalent of a performative speech-act—a vow, an oath, a pledge to devote herself, forsaking all others, to her art. Moore

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Rudyard Kipling, *The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling* (Hertfordshire, GB: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), 370.

⁷¹ Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore and John Warner Moore, February 4, 1909, in *Selected Letters*, 58.

chose celibacy despite its costs—social illegitimacy and alienation, and embitterment.⁷² She continued to confirm this choice throughout her lifetime.

THE BACHELOR-WOMAN

Marianne Moore vowed “to keep faith with herself and remain outside the powerfully altering space of [nuptial] promises.”⁷³ Choosing to espouse her work and not another, Moore would be labeled a spinster, a term that gestures to the “socially marginal, yet potentially transgressive” older woman.⁷⁴ Spinsterhood was a common destiny as well as an attractive choice for some British and American women coming of age after the Great War. In England, a large number of eligible men were sacrificed on the battle field. Post-WWI census polls indicated that women outnumbered men; there were 1,096 women for every one thousand men.⁷⁵ It was a statistical fact that one and three quarter million women who wanted to marry never would.⁷⁶ In the United States, marriageable men were not lost to the war in the same proportion as they were in Britain. There were, nevertheless, women who dreamed of the domestic life of marriage and children and would never realize that dream.

The great number of unmarried women was referred to as the “Problem of the Surplus Woman” and opinions regarding it were divided. It was seen as a devastating phenomenon by some who decried the spinster’s drain on society’s resources and who claimed she would be unable to contribute biologically or economically. In the extreme, British philosopher Anthony M. Ludovici prophesied: “These disgruntled women will rise up ... and take over the world. They will slander and destroy their married sisters and all mankind. They will try to prove to the world that they can live without mates, and war will break out between the sexes.”⁷⁷ Others imagined the benefit of woman’s influence on spheres beyond the family. Maude Royden insisted

⁷² In a letter to Ezra Pound on July 31, 1946, Moore wrote, “Don’t be embittered. Embitterment is a sin—a subject on which I am an authority.” See *Selected Letters*, 461.

⁷³ Robin G. Schulze, “Injudicious Gardening’: Marianne Moore, Gender, and the Hazards of Domestication,” in *A Right Good Salvo of Barks: Critics and Poets on Marianne Moore*, ed. Linda Leavell, Cristanne Miller and Robin G. Schulze (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 80.

⁷⁴ Kathy Mezei, “Spinsters, Surveillance, and Speech: The Case of Miss Marple, Miss Mole, and Miss Jekyll,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 103.

⁷⁵ Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), xiii.

⁷⁶ Nicholson, *Singled Out*, xi.

⁷⁷ Anthony M. Ludovici, *Lysistrata, or Woman’s Future and Future Woman* (1927), quoted in Nicholson, *Singled Out*, 39.

spinsters could “transmute the power of sex and ‘create’ in other ways for our village, our city, for England, for the world, for anything you like.”⁷⁸

Just as in Britain, women in America were taking advantage of wartime changes which allowed them wider access to the workplace. Many seized the opportunity to remain employed after the war, and were happy to escape domesticity and child-rearing. On both sides of the Atlantic, single women were rejecting “spinster” as a descriptor, and appropriating the term “bachelor.” Such women were attempting to displace “spinster” and its negative connotations. A modern figure of agency, intelligence and independence, the “bachelor woman” was emerging. The bachelor woman would stand in stark contrast to the spinster caricatures of the miserly old-maid and the middle-aged woman pining after dreams of marriage and motherhood. Mary Scharlieb, author of *The Bachelor Woman* (1929), described her subject as “the one person to whom we all appeal in the tight corner and in the moment of emergency[.]”⁷⁹ According to Scharlieb, bachelor women “are individuals who by position and training, by their very freedom and their independence, are essential to the welfare of the nation.”⁸⁰ In London in 1930, a group of feminists held a Bachelor Girls Exhibition.⁸¹ They aimed to legitimate the existence of women who chose a path leading to something other (more?) than marriage and reproduction.

Unlike those who would have married given the chance, Moore chose her solitary path. Although she was not an outspoken feminist joining rank with other like-minded women whose singleness was paramount to a political act, she was nevertheless a bachelor woman. She admired Henry James, the “‘literary bachelor’ she adopted as her own model of identity.”⁸² To her mother and brother, she was Ratty, or Uncle Rat, the bachelor with literary aspirations from their beloved *The Wind In The Willows* (1908). Moore would not escape the term “spinster,” however. In 1942, the *Time* reviewer of *What Are Years* (1941) described Moore as both “the most accomplished poetess in the English-speaking world today” and “a greying, mobile-faced, almost reckless spinster” in the same sentence.⁸³ According to a 1953

⁷⁸ Maude Royden, *The Moral Standards of the Rising Generation* (London: League of the Church Militant, 1922), 4-5.

⁷⁹ Mary Scharlieb, *The Bachelor Woman* (London: Unwin, 1929), 71.

⁸⁰ Scharlieb, *The Bachelor Woman*, 76-77.

⁸¹ Alison Oram, “Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-war Feminist Discourses,” *Women’s History Review* 1, no. 3 (1992): 427.

⁸² Leavell, “Marianne Moore, the James Family, and the Politics of Celibacy,” 221.

⁸³ “Poetry,” *Time* 39, no. 10 (March 9, 1942): 90, *Academic Search Premier*, accessed March 20, 2014, EBSCOhost.

Time Magazine photographic essay, “Marianne Moore is a 65-year-old spinster who lives in Brooklyn, wears wide straw hats, is interested in everything from snails to steamrollers and is, in the opinion of many literary critics, the finest living American poet.”⁸⁴

Laced as it is sometimes with pity, sometimes with disdain, “spinster” has been a common denominator among descriptions of Marianne Moore. Regardless of a particular commentator’s intentions—or lack thereof—in using the term “spinster,” the fact remains that Moore’s singleness was a role unsanctioned by her patriarchal and heteronormative parent-culture. A married woman had wifely domestic duties and the rearing of children to occupy her time and energies. A single woman—whether labeled a spinster or bachelor woman—was a threat to patriarchy, she was a rogue figure, unfixed by social norms and therefore a threat to those norms. Some argue this remains the case a century later.⁸⁵

MOORE AND MARRIAGE

Several of Marianne Moore’s female friends and acquaintances heeded heteronormative expectations—at least superficially—and married, but with ulterior motives. By contracting a marriage of convenience, a woman could achieve independence from her family and, with the right partner and arrangement, also escape the confines of domesticity without attracting the attention she might if she remained single. Such a marriage could facilitate a woman’s non(hetero)normative lifestyle, but Moore objected to such marriages.

Moore was appalled when Bryher proposed to, and married, Robert McAlmon, a contract I touch on further in Chapter Two. Bryher described her motivation matter-of-factly in her autobiographical *The Heart To Artemis* (1963): “[McAlmon] wanted to go to Paris to meet Joyce but lacked the passage money. I put my problem before him and suggested that if we married, my family would leave me

⁸⁴ “Life Goes on A Zoo Tour with a Famous Poet,” *Life* (September 21, 1953): 202, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://books.google.co.nz/books?id=XUIEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA202&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁸⁵ See Jill Reynolds, *The Single Woman: A Discursive Investigation* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 54; Justin Charlesbois, *Gender and the Construction of Hegemonic and Oppositional Femininities* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 115; Rebecca Traister, *All The Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016).

alone.”⁸⁶ The union achieved the purpose Bryher set for it, but Shari Benstock suggests “the marriage was widely misunderstood,”⁸⁷ and fooled even those of their inner social circle. William Carlos Williams, “McAlmon’s close friend and publishing partner at *Contact* magazine in New York apparently thought McAlmon married for love[.]”⁸⁸

Moore’s abdication of romantic love and marriage made abstract concepts of both, which she refined and idealized. Her disapproval of convenient or unconventional marriage took several forms. To Scofield Thayer, Moore said “it was an outrage for anyone to marry Winifred Bryher in such a style so unromantic[.]”⁸⁹ Moore wrote to Bryher: “The canker in the whole situation [regarding marriages of convenience] I think, is that people who have no respect for marriage, insist on the respectability of the marriage contract.”⁹⁰ To Paul Rosenfeld, Moore said she “didn’t care for Mr. Cummings’ idea of life & especially of marriage—and for that matter, for other people’s idea of it. It just seemed to be a question of which could get the jointly acquired loot from the other without being shot or blackmailed.”⁹¹ Marianne Moore might have procured her own marital contract of convenience with similar benefits had she not held firm idealistic notions of marriage.

In a letter to Bryher, Moore suggests her ideal notion of marriage was inspired by the mythical pair Baucis and Philemon.⁹² The Greco-Roman myth describes a couple who had unknowingly entertained the gods. In return, the gods granted them a wish. They requested that when one of them should die, the other would die as well, neither desiring to live in the other’s absence. Baucis and Philemon’s marriage was characterized by the prioritization of their union above all else. Moore would have been hard-pressed to identify similar matches among the sometimes nonheteronormative couples around her. Her mother separated from her father before Moore was born, and, as a result, Moore never knew her father. Her brother privileged his relationship with his mother and sister despite his marriage to Constance Eustis; Constance was therefore excluded from the special language of the

⁸⁶ Bryher, *The Heart To Artemis* (London: Collins, 1963), 205.

⁸⁷ Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* (London: Virago Press, 1994), 358.

⁸⁸ Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank*, 358.

⁸⁹ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, April 4, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 152.

⁹⁰ Marianne Moore to Bryher, August 31, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 177-8.

⁹¹ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, May 4, 1928, in *Selected Letters*, 241. For years, E. E. Cummings had been carrying on an affair with Scofield Thayer’s wife, Elaine Orr Thayer, and fathered her child.

⁹² Marianne Moore to Bryher, August 31, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 177.

Moore family, and John Warner Moore went so far as to destroy the letters his sister sent him, in an effort to conceal this correspondence from his wife.⁹³ Beyond her family circle, Moore encountered estrangement, philandering husbands, subordinate wives, loveless and ill-matched alliances as well as the “complete sexual license” of the New York bohemians.⁹⁴

Moore was a self-confessed “ultra-anti-bohemian,”⁹⁵ so we might read “Marriage” as an oblique response to the free-love imperative of figures like Natalie Barney and Mina Loy and what she saw as a threatening gesture away from the family unit. In contrast, she delighted in the (non-marital) union of Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott whose domestic partnership lasted more than six decades. She prized her friendship with these men. In July 1923, Moore wrote to her brother describing Wheeler as “one of the most affectionate and one of the most self-effacing people I have ever seen” and Wescott as “his adoring beneficiary.”⁹⁶ The two men became a fixture in Moore's life; nearly forty-five years later, on her 80th birthday, Wheeler and Wescott would take her out for a night on the town.⁹⁷ Punctuated by “book[s] and red roses,”⁹⁸ “quail and strawberries,”⁹⁹ Wheeler and Wescott's partnership was a committed and mutually respectful one—according to Moore, a “bedrock” of “support and encouragement”¹⁰⁰—where each man was free to pursue his creative passions. The relationship between Wheeler and Wescott was the type Moore imagined as the ideal, inside or outside of legally sanctioned marriage.

Moore's poem “Marriage” must be included in any analysis of her views on the institution. The longest of all Moore's poems, it has garnered much scholarly attention and the resulting abundant and varying interpretations speak to the slippery nature of the poem's intent. Leavell initially suggests “Marriage” refers to Moore's

⁹³ Linda Leavell, “Marianne Moore, Her Family, and Their Language,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147, no. 2 (June 2003): 148.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New York: Tavis Parke Paperbacks, 2009), 179.

⁹⁵ Linda Leavell, “‘Frightening Disinterestedness’: The Personal Circumstances of Marianne Moore's ‘Marriage,’” *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 67.

⁹⁶ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, July 5, 1923, in *Selected Letters*, 200.

⁹⁷ *New York Times*, November 15, 1967. Beinecke, Gen Mss 97, box no. 127, series IV, folder no. 4448.

⁹⁸ Jerry Rosco, *Glenway Wescott Personally: A Biography* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 12.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

domestic partnership with her mother.¹⁰¹ Fiona Green claims it alludes to the Irish Act of Union,¹⁰² and David Bergman identifies Bryher and McAlmon's marriage as the poem's contextual trigger.¹⁰³ Moore frustrates critical interpretation when she writes in her notes on "Marriage" that the poem consists of "statements that took my fancy which I tried to arrange plausibly."¹⁰⁴ The poem's collagic construction results in a sort of intentional hybrid work, while the topic—marriage—disperses itself through its various voices.

I interpret the poem as an embodiment of Moore's dynamic philosophy of marriage. As I have indicated, Moore tended to borrow lines from external sources when constructing her poems. In doing so, she not only incorporated the meanings of the words—their sounds and syllables—she also grafted a measure of their context and intent. Exploring the original contexts of Moore's pirated lines adds metatextual meaning to her poem. For example, "Marriage" juxtaposes two contradictory responses to the institution which represent Moore's conflicting reactions to—if not beliefs about—marital union.

Moore gleans several lines in "Marriage" from Richard Baxter's *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, a religious reflection on earthly life and the heavenly hereafter. Baxter's text warns against the desires of the flesh, and the only marriage extolled is a Pauline union between Church and Christ.¹⁰⁵ Any other mention of marriage in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* is confined to the institution's function as a means of achieving salvation and propagating the species: "O Christians, if you did verily believe that your ungodly ... wife [or] husband ... should certainly lie for ever in hell, ... would not this make you address them day and night till they were persuaded?"¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, marriage legitimates procreation, but beyond this function, is no different from the relationship between a neighbour or parent.¹⁰⁷

Moore contrasts Baxter's celestial, spiritual representation of marriage when she characterises the union between Adam and Eve as a complex smattering of

¹⁰¹ Leavell, "'Frightening Disinterestedness': The Personal Circumstances of Marianne Moore's 'Marriage'," 74.

¹⁰² Fiona Green, "'Your Trouble is Their Trouble': Marianne Moore, Maria Edgeworth and Ireland," *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations* 1, no. 2 (1997): 76.

¹⁰³ Bergman, "Marianne Moore and the Problem of 'Marriage,'" 248.

¹⁰⁴ Marianne Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (New York: Viking, 1986), 271.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (Grand Rapids, MI: Generic NL Freebook Publisher), *eBook Collection*, EBSCOhost, accessed September 10, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 250.

emotions and motivations: “Unnerved by the nightingale / and dazzled by the apple, / impelled by ‘the illusion of a fire / effectual to extinguish fire,’ / / he stumbles over marriage, / ‘a very trivial object indeed’ / to have destroyed the attitude / in which he stood—.”¹⁰⁸ Perhaps Moore wished to juxtapose Baxter’s benign, dispassionate sort of matter-of-fact marriage to temper the passionate marriage she describes between Adam and Eve. Moore shows Adam to be “unnerved,” “dazzled,” and “impelled” by the fire of passion, a passion “‘as high as deep / as bright as broad / as long as life itself’” which induces him to “stumble over marriage.” Adam’s passion is contrasted with Baxter’s response to his God’s overwhelming love: “Shall I dare to contend in love with thee; or set my borrowed languid spark against the sun of love? Can I love *as high, as deep, as broad, as long* [emphasis added], as Love itself?”¹⁰⁹ Here, Baxter humbly expresses his indebtedness and yields to his Lord’s superior love. Moore’s Adam in “Marriage,” on the other hand, is motivated by the desires of the flesh which only then culminate in “the ritual of marriage.”¹¹⁰

I am also struck by some words which are Moore’s own and not collaged from an external source: “to have destroyed the attitude / in which he [Adam] stood – / the ease of the philosopher / unfathered by a woman.”¹¹¹ While Moore’s critique of marriage is the result of an ideological conflict, the last two lines manifest a biographical influence. Moore was raised by her separated mother—a woman neither widowed nor divorced. Observing her mother’s solitary plight, Moore’s view of parenthood was coloured from an early age. “Fathered” by a woman, Moore’s philosophy on marriage was not constructed with “ease.”

Moore further complicates interpretation of her poem when we understand her opinion of the *changeability* of views. In “Marriage,” Moore includes disparate and disagreeing voices in her poem; the words of Bryn Mawr dean M. Carey Thomas, Ezra Pound, Anthony Trollope and Francis Bacon converge and battle upon the same page.¹¹² Moore draws on their varied notions of marriage in order to construct and

¹⁰⁸ Marianne Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1994), 65.

¹⁰⁹ Baxter, *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*, 429. Moore adds “as bright” to her poem. There are several explanations for this variation. For example, Moore may have made the addition in order to balance the line’s meter and carry its alliteration. The change might be accidental: Moore kept many reading notebooks in which she copied phrases, some of which eventually appeared in her work—she may have copied the lines incorrectly.

¹¹⁰ Moore, *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*, 65.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Moore, *Complete Poems*, 271-2. Notes on “Marriage.”

complicate, requiring her careful reader to question her conception of “that most entrenched of all bourgeois institutions.”¹¹³

MOORE’S (UNPUBLISHED) LOVE STORY

Moore’s dedication to her work drove her non-normative life-choices and influenced her poetics, inspiring the notion she was unmoved by forces of desire and romantic love. She was nevertheless susceptible to the most formulaic of love-stories. Her poetry may have been modernist, her meter one of the most rigorous, but two of Moore’s lesser-known pursuits suggest that this “veiled Mohammedan woman” spent a long time concealing her desire for romantic love.¹¹⁴

Moore published a theatrical adaptation of Maria Edgeworth’s novel *The Absentee* (1812) in 1962 at the age of seventy-five. Moore’s *The Absentee: A Comedy in Four Acts* was printed by New York’s House of Books, but the play was never produced (as it posed significant casting and setting challenges). Bruce Henderson describes Moore’s work on *The Absentee* as an “act of restoration” which “probably appealed to her editorial sensibility,”¹¹⁵ and suggests that the Irish setting and theme of absenteeism “may also have been a powerful draw for Moore” who was of Irish descent.¹¹⁶ I feel Henderson’s explanation does not consider other motivating factors. For example, at the time Moore committed herself to the task of adapting *The Absentee*, she was still busy producing a good quantity of work. In fact, in 1966, she published *Tell Me Tell Me: Granite, Steel, and Other Topics*, a volume of original work.¹¹⁷ Moore would not likely have tackled Edgeworth’s novel merely for its appeal to her “editorial sensibility” and latent sense of Irish nationalism. I would argue Moore identified with *The Absentee*’s author and was seduced by its romantic plotline and that her interest in the novel was deep-seated, her commitment

¹¹³ See Elisabeth W. Joyce, “The Collage of ‘Marriage’: Marianne Moore’s Formal and Cultural Critique,” *Mosaic* 26, no. 4 (1992).

¹¹⁴ In a letter to H.D. on July 26, 1921, Moore referred to her collection *Poems* as a “veiled Mohammedan woman” and indicates that her mother came up with the comparison. See *Selected Letters*, 172. For a discussion of Moore and her poetics in relation to the image, see Sabine Sielke, *Fashioning the Female Subject: The Intertextual Networking of Dickinson, Moore, and Rich* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 88.

¹¹⁵ Bruce Henderson, “Marianne Moore and *The Absentee*: The Poet as Playwright,” in *Marianne Moore: Woman and Poet*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1990), 257.

¹¹⁶ Henderson, “Marianne Moore and *The Absentee*: The Poet as Playwright,” 258.

¹¹⁷ Marianne Moore, *Tell Me Tell Me: Granite, Steel, and Other Topics* (New York: Viking Press, 1966).

significant.

There are several biographical parallels between Marianne Moore and Maria Edgeworth that may have inspired Moore's identification with the latter. Like Moore, Edgeworth was a strong proponent of women's education and made a career of her literary skills. Edgeworth rejected a marriage proposal and chose a life of celibacy. Her most constant companion was her single parent (her father). There are also important similarities between Moore's unpublished novel "The Way We Live Now" and Edgeworth's *The Absentee*, which I will discuss shortly. These parallels speak to a vicariously achieved satisfaction in Moore's published adaptation.

In 1961, Moore was a somewhat notable American literary figure, and it appears she may have traded on her celebrity in order to secure publication for *The Absentee: A Comedy*. A letter from Marguerite Cohn of House of Books indicates she agreed to publish *The Absentee* prior to having read the script: "It was fine having that nice, long conversation with you and need less [*sic*] to tell you how very pleased I am that you are going to allow us to publish your play (The Absentee, I believe?)"¹¹⁸ In her response, Moore writes, "nothing could be worse for either of us than to p—— blindly [*sic*] publish what we find tedious. (I am something of a fatalist, however, about being hindered to succeed.) Possibly, my not inducing anybody to like my dramatization could result in my salvaging something that has point."¹¹⁹ Cohn's brief response does not address Moore's reservations: "I have your letter and can only say that I hope to publish THE ABSENTEE revised, unrevised or in any form that you feel satisfied with. Have a good summer."¹²⁰ Cohn's correspondence suggests she was interested, but not *too* interested. Moore, on the other hand, felt heavily invested, as evidenced by the great number of letters she wrote to House of Books throughout the writing/publishing process.

Based on the timeframe in which Moore undertook this project, it may appear she took to her reclamation of Edgeworth's work later in life. However, Moore's relationship with *The Absentee* may have begun many years prior. The evidence which follows has been gleaned from a variety of sources. In isolation, each element seems inconsequential. In concomitance, however, these elements reveal connections between Moore and *The Absentee* over a period of at least three decades.

¹¹⁸ Rosenbach Museum & Library, V:24:32.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

In Edgeworth's *The Absentee*, Brian, one of the principal characters, gives a speech to his mother in which he assures her that he will not soon marry, that "the honour of my family, your happiness, my mother, my father's are my first objects: I shall never think of my own till these are secured."¹²¹ A description of his mother's response follows: "Lady Clonbrony *heard only the sound of the words* [emphasis mine]."¹²² Consider, by comparison, an entry in one of Moore's Conversation Notebooks. Moore recalls her mother saying, "one can be a blameless bachelor and it is just a step [to?] Congrieve [*sic*]."¹²³ Moore responded:

Yes but
That's is all ~~I don't pay any~~ I am not listening
~~attention~~ to what you are saying.¹²⁴

In the two conversations—one between Moore and her mother, the other between Brian and his—there are points of contact which are difficult to overlook including themes of bachelorhood, intentional celibacy, and loyalty to family. Moore's response here only loosely resembles the description of Lady Clonbrony's reaction. However, in both cases, the subject demonstrates her refusal to acknowledge or accept the words she has been offered by her interlocutor. The significance of these comparable phrases lies in the chronology. The above entry in Moore's Notebook indicates that in 1935, more than twenty years prior to the publication of her adaptation, Moore may have been familiar enough with the content of Edgeworth's novel to recycle the words, if not in actual conversation, then in her reconstruction of that conversation.

This was also a time when Moore was focusing more attention on her novel, "The Way We Live Now," which had been a work in progress for many years. In a letter to her brother John Warner Moore, Marianne Moore discussed her progress on her novel and assessed its quality: her "story," she remarked, "holds the attention."¹²⁵ A work's ability to "hold the attention," according to Moore, was the mark of its

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, ed. Heidi Thomson and Kim Walker (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 68.

¹²³ I suspect Mary Warner Moore is referring to the play *The Old Batchelour* (1693) by William Congreve wherein the main character, an emphatic bachelor, unwittingly falls in love and finds himself entangled in a mess of deception and intrigue. See *The Comedies of William Congreve*, ed. Eric S. Rump (London: Penguin, 1985).

¹²⁴ Rosenbach Museum & Library, III:04:08.

¹²⁵ *Selected Letters*, ed. Bonnie Costello (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 336.

craftsmanship and success as a work of art. It was the criterion by which she measured her own work, and the work of others. In the preface to her 1950 compilation, *A Marianne Moore Reader*, Moore describes good practice, whether verse, prose or translation. She asks herself, “How would it seem to me if someone else had written it? Does it hold the attention?”¹²⁶ In her introduction to *The Absentee*, she borrows much from P.H. Newby’s introduction to the 1950 edition of Edgeworth’s novel, but closes with her own quintessential question: “Does it hold the attention?”¹²⁷

Moore submitted “The Way We Live Now” to Macmillan in 1939—she must have felt the work met this criterion. The publishers, however, rejected the novel and it remains unpublished to this day.¹²⁸ Moore suffered the blow graciously, but suffer it she did, nonetheless. After all, “The Way We Live Now” was a work Moore laboured to create over several decades. Writing outside her familiar genres of verse and essay criticism, Moore took pains to satisfy her stringent personal standards before risking rejection. She wrote to John Warner Moore about her work on the novel, “[I] am determined to keep my paws right on the bone,” “I’ve worked all afternoon on a few sentences.”¹²⁹ While she persisted and “turned elsewhere” seeking a publisher willing to take on her novel,¹³⁰ she was eventually forced to resign the manuscript to its fate.

In the wake of the rejection of her own novel, I suspect Moore saw her adaptation of Edgeworth’s novel as a work of reclamation,¹³¹ since the latter’s first attempt to publish *The Absentee* was rejected. Furthermore, a connection between the narrative in Edgeworth’s novel and the narrative of Moore’s unpublished novel demands we reconsider the work of our celebrated modernist poet because it reveals a deeply rooted, somewhat problematic parallel ideological connection which may shed light on this perplexing poet. From the woman who wrote that marriage requires “all

¹²⁶ Marianne Moore, *A Marianne Moore Reader* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), xiii.

¹²⁷ Marianne Moore, *The Absentee: A Comedy in Four Acts* (New York: House of Books, Ltd., 1962), iv.

¹²⁸ As of August, 2016, “The Way We Live Now” remains unpublished.

¹²⁹ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, November, undated, 1937, in *Selected Letters*, 336.

¹³⁰ *Selected Letters*, ed. Bonnie Costello (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 336.

¹³¹ Maria Edgeworth’s father insisted she submit her manuscript to Sheridan, despite her objection. Edgeworth told a correspondent that *The Absentee* was written for her juvenile audience, “not for them to act, but to hear.” When Sheridan rejected the manuscript for political as well as logistical reasons, she was pleased. See Emily Lawless, *Maria Edgeworth* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), 133-4, accessed March 31, 2014, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/lawless/edgeworth/edgeworth.html#X>.

one's criminal ingenuity to avoid![,]”¹³² we find a story, a conflict, which achieves its resolution within the institution of marriage.

In *The Absentee*, the star-crossed lovers Brian and Grace overcome all obstacles to their union and are free to marry in the end. In “The Way We Live Now,” Eloise is trapped by the affections of Camelford while she suppresses her desire for her close friend, Alec. In the end, however, she will reject Camelford and marry Alec. I propose Moore created in her novel a space where she could freely explore the heteronormative path she so staunchly avoided in her life and life's work. However, a closer look at the characterization in her novel reveals that the united couple Eloise and Alec do not represent Moore and some anonymous fictional lover. Instead, we find in Eloise and Alec projections of Moore and her brother John Warner.

Eloise is single, an artist and a poet. Like Moore, she pays particular attention to the natural world. When describing an illustration, she says, “[I prefer] the leopard-frog, I think; or maybe the tiger-moth. I take a good deal of interest in frogs; and this one had large rusty spots. It looked just like an ocelot.”¹³³ Both have an affinity for music by Bach, and Eloise's favourite stone, like Moore's, is the emerald. Further evidence of Moore's identification with Eloise is found in Moore's poem “What Are Years?” The poem was published in 1940 and some critics claim that it speaks out against the war.¹³⁴ However, it first appears as Eloise's poem during a conversation between Eloise and her suitor Camelford:¹³⁵ Eloise's “What Are Years?” is identical to Moore's with the exception of a single pronoun and some punctuation. Moore submitted her manuscript of “The Way We Live Now” for consideration in 1939, and she had been working on the draft since at least 1936, some time before England declared war, and even further removed from American intervention. Moore was trialing the title as early as 1927. She used it for a review she wrote of Sacheverell Sitwell's *All Summer In A Day*. This timeline confirms the poem was written before the war began.¹³⁶

¹³² Marianne Moore, “Marriage,” in *Complete Poems*, 62.

¹³³ Rosenbach Museum & Library, III:04:01, 81.

¹³⁴ See Jennifer Leader, “‘Certain Axioms Rivaling Scriptures’: Marianne Moore, Reinhold Niebuhr, and the Ethics of Engagement,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 51, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 316-340, and Kimon Friar, “The Action of Incurable Tragedy,” *Poetry* 64, no. 2 (May 1944): 86-107.

¹³⁵ Unpublished manuscript titled “The Way We Live Now” by Marianne Moore at the Rosenbach Museum & Library, III:04:03, 226.

¹³⁶ She wrote this review under the pseudonym Peter Morris (Peter was the name of a neighbour's cat which Moore memorialized in a poem by the same name.) See “Marianne Moore and Peter Morris: Facts and Speculations,” *Marianne Moore Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1977), accessed September 5,

John Warner Moore can be aligned with Alec through several shared viewpoints. In the opening chapters of the manuscript (which establish characterization), Alec says, “Every man owes the world a service; though he doesn’t owe it to the world; he owes it to God.”¹³⁷ In comparison, John Warner Moore desired “the family to be together ‘in service’.”¹³⁸ He believed, for example, “the great dreams of youth for worldly success are realized through unselfishness and service.”¹³⁹ Near the end of Moore’s manuscript, Eloise’s pacifism confronts Alec’s activism as he explains, “if a thief breaks into my house and is going to kill someone, I don’t just stand there and say ‘go ahead.’”¹⁴⁰ Moore, herself, was against the war, but only until her brother enlisted as a Navy chaplain, at which point she changed her perspective. If, as I argue, Eloise and Alec are projections of Moore and John Warner, I do not mean to suggest Moore harboured secret, incestuous desires. Instead, I believe Alec’s points of identification with John Warner are the result of Moore’s close relationship with her brother.

MOORE AND MILTONIC FRIENDSHIP

Moore and her brother shared the intimate details of their lives, and their thoughts and desires through their extensive correspondence. Their intensely devoted family unit provided the context for deep understanding. Moore knew no other man in the same way she knew her brother, making him a useful source for characterization. More importantly, the conclusion to “The Way We Live Now” is the expression and culmination of Moore’s desire to engage with the male other—John Warner included—in the perfect Miltonic friendship.

The Moore family were avid readers of Milton,¹⁴¹ who found the “perfect human relationship” in his friendship with Charles Diodati.¹⁴² Their friendship was

2016, <https://moorearchive.org/resources/newsletters/49:marianne-moore-newsletter-volume-1-number-1-spring-1977>.

¹³⁷ Moore, “The Way We Live Now,” III:04:01, 20.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Wilson, “Marianne Moore: *Observations*,” in *A Companion to Twentieth Century Poetry*, ed. Neil Roberts (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 430.

¹³⁹ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, January 4, 1937, in *Selected Letters*, 375.

¹⁴⁰ Moore, “The Way We Live Now,” III:04:03, 255.

¹⁴¹ In a letter home while at Bryn Mawr, Moore states that she could not wait to “lie on [her] couch and read ... Milton.” She walked about with Milton in her hand, and refers to his work as she would a familiar friend: “the weather is cold but fine as silk and I think I shall take Milton and go out.” Patricia Willis argues that “Milton was a companion of [Moore’s] adolescence, and his work a *vade mecum* of her college years.” See Marianne Moore to Mary Norcross, October 8, 1905, in *Selected Letters*, 12;

characterized by an intimacy which Gregory Chaplin describes as confounding “contemporary categories of sexual identities.”¹⁴³ When Diodati died, Milton prefaced his eulogy by writing that the two were “most intimate friends from childhood on.”¹⁴⁴ Chaplin sources Milton’s concept of the perfect relationship to Michel de Montaigne’s essay, “On Friendship” where Montaigne describes male friendship as “a general and universal warmth, all gentleness and smoothness, with nothing bitter and stinging about it,” and positions male friendship as superior to romantic love.¹⁴⁵ In Diodati, Milton found the Eros to his Anteros.

Moore may have yearned for a similar “coequal & *homogeneous* fire,”¹⁴⁶ an edifying relationship, one which could coexist alongside her commitment to her art. She encountered this sort of relationship not only by way of Milton, but through the sacred and secular literature in which her childhood was steeped. It was unlikely that Moore encountered examples of a “coequal” male-*female* friendship in the texts her family enjoyed.

Moore spent her early life with her mother and brother living in the home of her grandfather, John Riddle Warner, a Presbyterian minister. In a home where the Christian faith was both practiced and preached, Moore learned an appreciation for biblical texts which would later inform and permeate her own work.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, Moore would have been familiar with the quintessential biblical friendship between David and Jonathan who were “one in spirit,”¹⁴⁸ and who were contracted to one another in a sort of marriage: “Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*

Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore, May 9, 1907, in *Selected Letters*, 27; Marianne Moore to Mary Warner Moore and John Warner Moore, April 5, 1908, in *Selected Letters*, 47; Patricia Willis, “Marianne Moore and the Seventeenth Century,” in *A Right Good Salvo of Barks: Critics and Poets on Marianne Moore*, ed. Linda Leavell, Cristanne Miller and Robin Schulze (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 43.

¹⁴² Ibid., 267.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 272.

¹⁴⁴ Barbara Keifer Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 9.

¹⁴⁵ Gregory Chaplin, “‘One Flesh, One Heart, One Soul’: Renaissance Friendship and Miltonic Marriage,” *Modern Philology* 99, no. 2 (Nov. 2001): 281.

¹⁴⁶ Chaplin, “‘One Flesh, One Heart, One Soul’: Renaissance Friendship and Miltonic Marriage,” 282.

¹⁴⁷ Marianne Moore to Mary Norcross, October 8, 1905, in *Selected Letters*, 12; Moore writes, “I can hardly wait [to] read ... the Bible.” Marianne Moore to Ezra Pound, January 9, 1919, in *Selected Letters*, 123. Moore lists the minor prophets among the influences on her work.

¹⁴⁸ 1 Samuel 18:1

¹⁴⁹ 1 Samuel 18:3

was an important text in the Moore family. It provided Moore, her brother, and her mother the nicknames Rat, Badger and Mole, respectively.

These treasured texts offered only one form of desirable relations: friendship. Moore would have countenanced the thought that the perfect relationship would be one based on friendship. She prized her few close friendships, and took pains to nurture and guard them. Several of the relationships she formed in the years following her move to New York in 1918 would become lifelong friendships. Consider the following examples. Moore met Glenway Wescott and Monroe Wheeler in the fall of 1921 and the three would maintain their friendship until Moore's death.¹⁵⁰ Although Moore and H.D. attended Bryn Mawr at the same time, they didn't forge a friendship until they reconnected in 1920 when H.D. introduced Moore to Bryher. Theirs, too, became a lifelong friendship. Moore and Ezra Pound started a lifelong correspondence in 1918. They did not meet in person until 1969, but at that point, their friendship had already spanned half a century. Scofield Thayer was another literary figure with whom Moore began a close relationship in 1920. Their lives would remain interconnected until Moore's death in 1972.

MARIANNE MOORE AND SCOFIELD THAYER

Moore and Thayer—American poet and publisher—were fast friends. Their mutual love of poetry and respect for one another formed the basis of what would become a long-term relationship. This friendship is of particular interest to my project because, upon close examination, it suggests Moore may have desired—longed for—a romantic connection with Thayer—precisely the sort of desire Moore is not known for having. In the history of the Moore-Thayer relationship, there was a period of unusual closeness which lasted little more than twelve months. The mysterious circumstances of the collapse of their friendship confirm that Moore's celibacy was a position she chose to occupy, and that this position was hard-won.

Both Moore and Thayer were circulating in New York's literary scene, and Thayer was editing *The Dial*, when he and Moore met in the spring of 1920. He was a fan of her work and invited her to write a review for *The Dial*. Like some of her other literary acquaintances, Thayer hoped Moore would publish a collection of her

¹⁵⁰ Rosco, *Glenway Wescott Personally*, 22, 218.

poetry.¹⁵¹ At the time, Moore was still building her confidence as a poet, so Thayer's positive attention would have stroked her budding ego and bolstered her resolve.

Moore began meeting with Thayer one-on-one in September of 1920. Sometimes they would meet at *The Dial* offices, sometimes at the Benedick (a bachelor's residence), or even in a back-alley restaurant. These frequent encounters were likely congenial, but they inspired intense anxiety in Moore. She wrote to her brother about her visits with Thayer. On one occasion she described the effort she and her mother had gone to in preparing their apartment for Thayer. He was only coming to pick her up, but Moore was beside herself: "I was like a performing bear in my heroic exertions to get our things hid and dusted before the arrival of Scofield Thayer who had invited me to dinner with him."¹⁵² For days leading up to and following a meeting, Moore would lose her appetite. She describes how sharing tea with Thayer "rather knocked me out. ... My stomach has been as much use to me as a feather duster or a rim for spectacles without any glass in it."¹⁵³ Mary Warner Moore wrote reports to her son of Moore's encounters with Thayer. She describes Moore returning from a Monday tea: "he came home a wraith, and has not eaten a full meal since."¹⁵⁴

What was it about these rendezvous that so affected Moore? It is unlikely Thayer's literary and social status intimidated Moore. After all, without too much trouble, she had held her own in conversation and relationship with men in positions of artistic authority as early as 1915. Even before she became a regular participant in New York's literary scene, Moore relished her meetings with writers and artists such as Alfred Kreymborg and Alfred Stieglitz, describing them with enthusiasm.¹⁵⁵ For example, when Kreymborg invited Moore to dine with him and his wife at their home—after Moore had only just met him—she accepted, then spent the day touring New York, going from gallery to gallery. She did not have time to prepare for the impromptu dinner, but she gave no indication of being bothered. Moore's spontaneity

¹⁵¹ *The Egoist* would not publish her *Poems* until 1921. Nicole Davis, "Marianne Moore's Poet's Journey to *The Dial*," in *America – Meet Modernism! Women of the Little Magazine Movement*, ed. Barbara Probst Solomon (New York: Great Marsh Press, 2003), 97.

¹⁵² Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, September 19, 1920, in *Selected Letters*, 132.

¹⁵³ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, October 17, 1920, in *Selected Letters*, 135.

¹⁵⁴ "he" is not a transcription error in this quotation. Marianne Moore, her family members and close friends routinely referred to her with male pronouns. See Mary Warner Moore to John Warner Moore, February 1, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 120. Particularly stressful times had been known to rob Moore of her will to eat. Her lonely days at Bryn Mawr and exams, in particular, caused her to lose weight. As an adult, the folding of *The Dial* distressed her as well.

¹⁵⁵ See Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, December 12, 1915, in *Selected Letters*, 103, and Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, December 19, 1915, in *Selected Letters*, 107.

and optimism in this situation contrast starkly with the anxiety she felt about the few minutes Thayer would spend in her apartment when picking her up in 1920.

Furthermore, Moore had been confident and audacious enough to express her artistic opinions to “powerful” men such as Guido Bruno,¹⁵⁶ the self-titled “Barnum of Bohemia.”¹⁵⁷ Kreymborg, in his autobiography *Troubadour* (1925), writes that Moore’s “mellifluous flow of polysyllables ... held every man in awe.”¹⁵⁸

Thayer had an unconventional personal life, but I do not believe this threw Moore off her guard. When Moore met Thayer, he was married to Elaine Orr Thayer. The marriage that was supposed to render Thayer ‘harmless’, however, was unorthodox, featuring numerous (alleged) constellations of extramarital affairs. For example, Thayer’s wife was involved with his friend, poet E. E. Cummings. At the end of 1919, she gave birth to a daughter likely conceived with Cummings. Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, Cummings’ biographer, suggests Thayer not only felt no interest in his wife sexually, but that Thayer was sexually attracted to adolescent boys.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Sawyer-Lauçanno lists at least two female employees who became the focus of Thayer’s sexual pursuits.¹⁶⁰ Sawyer-Lauçanno’s biography paints a picture of a sexual deviant, and a man who could be abrasive and licentious, publicly cold and dismissive of his wife, the one person he was meant “to have and to hold.”

Moore’s descriptions of Thayer, in contrast, are of a thoughtful, attentive, deferential individual; “He is very quiet friendly polished and amusing,”¹⁶¹ wrote Moore. She perceived Thayer as a man possessed of qualities she prized: enthusiasm—gusto—and sincerity.¹⁶² He was gracious and humble enough to reconsider his opinion on a matter in light of Moore’s disapproval. She writes that after Thayer provided her with a newspaper clipping about the Bryher-McAlmon marriage, “I told Scofield how it was not funny to me and he said, ‘Yes it’s all very

¹⁵⁶ Marianne Moore quoting Alfred Kreymborg to John Warner Moore, December 19, 1915, in *Selected Letters*, 112.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, eds., *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 2 of *North America 1894-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 441.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green, eds., *Notable American Women: The Modern Period* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 492.

¹⁵⁹ Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *E. E. Cummings: A Biography* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2004), 140.

¹⁶⁰ Sawyer-Lauçanno lists Alyse Gregory and Thayer’s secretary Sophia Wittenberg as targets of Thayer’s attention. Sawyer-Lauçanno, *E. E. Cummings*, 183.

¹⁶¹ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, October 17, 1920, in *Selected Letters*, 135.

¹⁶² Marianne Moore to Bryher, November 29, 1920, in *Selected Letters*, 136; Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, April 4, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 152.

well for me to be amused looking at it from the point of view of an outsider.”¹⁶³

While Thayer could not pass up the opportunity to write about the Bryher-McAlmon situation, he guaranteed Moore “he would print nothing at all unless it was authorized by [Bryher]”—an uncharacteristic editorial assurance.¹⁶⁴ Before his column went to print, Thayer allowed Moore to review it. She objected to several points including his quotation of two statements Moore had made, and he agreed to remove them: “No; he said he thought not; that jokes told informally were ‘privileged’ and he would leave them out, neither would he refer to Sir John Ellerman as a ‘vigorous rooster’ since I objected to that though he liked the phrase.”¹⁶⁵ Moore admitted, “I had no right to say whether he should quote or not. I ran the risk of his repeating anything at all that I said.”¹⁶⁶ Thayer’s reaction, however, suggests—in Moore’s eyes at least—he was inclined to elevate principles of fairness and confidentiality above interests of ambition and profit.

The Scofield Thayer whom Moore describes seems the Dr. Jekyll to the Mr. Hyde presented by Sawyer-Lauçanno. Was Moore—the empress of observation—blind to some significant aspects of Thayer’s character and behaviour? If Moore had been aware of his romantic philandering, it is likely she would have mentioned it to her brother, if not to Thayer himself. Moore was not one to shy away from condemning a friend’s behaviour when she found it distasteful, immoral or unprincipled. For example, Moore objected to Elizabeth Bishop’s use of the word “water-closet” in her poem “Roosters.”¹⁶⁷ She warned the junior poet: “few of us, it seems to me, are fundamentally rude enough to enrich our work in such ways without cost.”¹⁶⁸ She frequently chided Ezra Pound for his anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism: “Ezra, you are intolerable, to defy me, about the Jews who are not mine alone but everybody’s benefactor; and foolish. And brazen, to risk a snipe at General Eisenhower who is, I think you should know, the best compound psychicaly [*sic*] whom we have had during our battered lives, and a real general.”¹⁶⁹ Moore, who took issue with the circumstances and “unromantic” nature of Bryher’s marriage of convenience to Robert McAlmon, wrote to Bryher: “I was displeased when I heard of

¹⁶³ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, April 4, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 152.

¹⁶⁴ Marianne Moore to Bryher, April 18, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 154.

¹⁶⁵ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, April 24, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 156.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ See Marianne Moore to Elizabeth Bishop, October 16, 1940, in *Selected Letters*, 404.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Marianne Moore to Ezra Pound, September 10, 1957, in *Selected Letters*, 549.

your being married to Robert. I felt that your daily intellectual formula and Robert's were not the same and I felt also, that Robert could not now or later grasp your motives for benefitting him and that was a disappointment to me[.]”¹⁷⁰ Thayer, however, appears to have escaped Moore's judgment.

If it was not his social status, his role in the literary community, or his risqué personal life that sent Moore reeling, what aspect of Moore's (early) relationship with Thayer could have caused her significant stress? Moore was acutely concerned with propriety; is it possible she may have intuited the hint of something other than professional and polite personal interest on Thayer's part? The fact he was married was enough to assure Moore's mother that the frequent unchaperoned meetings between Thayer and her daughter were harmless, despite the physical and psychological havoc they wreaked on Moore.¹⁷¹ Or did Moore, for her own part, harbor more than platonic feelings for Thayer? Was she interested in her friend romantically? Had she fallen in love? Such a suggestion is speculative. Nevertheless, Moore's life-writing—veiled, coded and censored as it is—provides a hint of evidence.

In the early part of 1921, Moore was writing about Thayer often, to her brother in particular. From what “Scofield” wore, to what he said, to the thoughtful things he did or bought for her, the food they ate, the restaurants they frequented, the décor of his home and office; Moore had much to say.¹⁷² Leavell reports that early encounters between Moore and Thayer even involved talk of “snuggling” which caused Moore “palpitations.”¹⁷³ However, by the Spring of 1921, Moore told her mother, “There is no such thing as Platonic friendship, and it isn't fair to a wife to see another woman as often as he sees me. If he were not married, though, I should be in a far worse plight, for then I should fear he was getting interested, and would be

¹⁷⁰ Marianne Moore to Bryher, May 3, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 158.

¹⁷¹ Leavell, “‘Frightening Disinterestedness’: The Personal Circumstances of Marianne Moore's ‘Marriage,’” 67.

¹⁷² Moore's inclusion of minutiae was not unusual. She had a tendency to describe scenes, individuals, and locations in detail; she would even transcribe conversations overheard and participated in as if verbatim.

¹⁷³ Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 184-5. Leavell describes a scenario: “‘I'm not snuggling,’ Thayer said as he sat down beside her. ‘Snuggling,’ she said, ‘takes two!’” In the notes to *Holding On Upside Down*, Leavell indicates that this dialogue appears in an early draft of “If I Were Sixteen Today” which Moore sent to Henrietta Holland and which is housed at the Rosenbach Museum & Library. Leavell suggests the dialogue represents an actual exchange between Moore and Thayer. See 409n184.2.

fooled.”¹⁷⁴ Mary Warner Moore relayed that conversation in a letter to her son on April 17, 1921: “Mr. Thayer was *not* just pursuing Rat for idle chat.”¹⁷⁵ This marked a turning point in Moore’s relationship with Thayer. From the end of April, mentions of Thayer become scarce, and where his name does appear in Moore’s correspondence, it is in a professional context. In June, Thayer sailed to Europe without saying goodbye and Moore never mentioned his departure. By then, her already slight frame was reduced to seventy-five pounds.¹⁷⁶

Based on the comments Moore made to her mother, as retold by Mary Warner Moore on April 17, it would seem Moore finally assessed her relationship with Thayer—or the context of a particular encounter—as inappropriate. They also *suggest* the ‘interest’ Thayer may have been developing was both unwelcome and one-sided. (Although, if Moore reciprocated romantic feelings, she might not have admitted to them to her mother.) Moore’s conclusion, however—if Mary Warner Moore’s transcription is verbatim—is both cryptic and somewhat unreliable: “If he were not married, though, I should be in a far worse plight, for then I should fear he was getting interested, and would be fooled.” Based on the sentence structure in this statement, the final clause might be understood “and [I] would be fooled” but Moore’s statement is just incomplete enough to be interpreted “and [he] would be fooled.” Did Moore mean that, if an unmarried Thayer were interested in her, she would feel made a fool of? Or that, if an unmarried Thayer were interested in her, she would be fooled to think otherwise? On the other hand, was Moore suggesting that Thayer would be fooled if he thought she returned his interest? In any case, interpreting the statement requires a leap on behalf of the listener/reader. Furthermore, the hypothetical situation Moore imagines hinges on Thayer’s marital status. At this stage, Moore was well aware of Thayer’s detachment from his wife, Elaine, and her relationship with E. E. Cummings. Thayer was a husband according to the law, but little more. Moore would have been naive to assume Thayer’s behaviour toward her—should he be “getting interested”—would be tempered by his marital vows.

It is critical, however, to consider the context and recipient of Moore’s statement. If Moore had romantic feelings for Thayer, she would certainly never tell

¹⁷⁴ Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 188.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

her mother. Moore avoided creating conflict within her family—and with her mother, in particular—at all costs. Andrew J. Kappel describes the Moores as a “closely-knit” family which barely tolerated extra-familial intimate relationships (Marianne Moore’s sister-in-law, Constance Moore, was a perpetual outsider).¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, Mary Warner Moore had strong anti-marriage conceptions probably due in part to her own devastating experience with the institution. Moore was therefore never encouraged—even at a younger age—to entertain her suitors or pursue a relationship with a potential mate. If Moore harboured desires for an intimate heterosexual relationship, she kept them secret. Moore’s response to her encounter with Thayer—regardless of her true feelings—could be understood as one of the many statements Moore made/wrote intending to appease her opinionated mother.¹⁷⁸

The nature of the relationship between Moore and Thayer has not garnered much critical attention. Thayer’s most recent biography includes no suggestion or evidence that Thayer and Moore shared anything beyond a working relationship. James Dempsey, author of *The Tortured Life of Scofield Thayer* (2014), quotes Thayer remarking retrospectively on his relationship to Moore. In 1922, Thayer wrote a letter to Alyse Gregory which Dempsey characterises as “full of spite, anger, and sadness.”¹⁷⁹ It included mention of his disappointment in Moore’s review of John Freeman’s *A Portrait of George Moore in a Study of His Work* (1922) which appeared in *The Dial*: “I also found the Marianne Moore contributions most disappointing. Her bit about that awful Freeman book was really for so intelligent a young woman pretty bad.”¹⁸⁰ You know I once thought of her in a certain connection. I guess in this case I thought to the right conclusion.”¹⁸¹ Parenthetically, Dempsey explains “that the ‘certain connection’ of which Thayer spoke was the editorship of *The Dial*.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Andrew J. Kappel, “The world is an orphan’s home: Marianne Moore on God and family,” in *Reform and Counterreform: Dialectics of the Word in Western Christianity since Luther*, ed. John C. Hawley (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 173.

¹⁷⁸ Moore “admits that she often made changes in her poetry to please her mother, and sometimes incorporated figures of speech her mother suggested.” See *Freshman English Program: Rhetoric, Handbook, Anthology*, ed. Cary B. Graham (Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1960), 372.

¹⁷⁹ James Dempsey, *The Tortured Life of Scofield Thayer* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2014), 120.

¹⁸⁰ Note: Moore was thirty-five years old at the time.

¹⁸¹ Dempsey, *The Tortured Life of Scofield Thayer*, 121, quoting the Dial/Scofield Thayer Papers at the Beinecke Library, collection 95, box 1, folder 33.

¹⁸² Dempsey, *The Tortured Life of Scofield Thayer*, 121.

Dempsey's inference suggests he does not suspect a personal or intimate relationship between Moore and Thayer. If archives of Thayer documents provide evidence of an intimate relationship, it is likely unsubstantial if, after researching Thayer's biography, Dempsey makes no mention of the two in a romantic capacity. The passage Dempsey quotes does, however, shed light on Thayer's evaluation of his relationship with Moore. "I once thought of her in a certain connection" may suggest that Thayer engaged with Moore on more than a strictly professional basis. If so, then when Thayer writes "I guess in this case I thought to the right conclusion," he makes a parallel between his assessment of Moore's review and his assessment of Moore's suitability as a romantic partner. He found her—or perhaps the conclusion to their close friendship— "disappointing." Furthermore, when Thayer states "I guess in this case I thought to the right conclusion" he insinuates it was *he* who prevented their "certain connection" from developing further. Thayer penned these words more than a year and a half after the spring of 1921. They imply that his relationship with Moore had, at one point, more than just a professional or friendly context.

Further evidence suggests Thayer entertained tender feelings for Moore long after their relationship reverted to a professional one. Thayer suffered from mental illness which deteriorated from the mid-1920s, and as his condition worsened, bouts of paranoia increased. He suspected some of his *Dial* staff of ill-intent, and sought to have them dismissed, but he never suggested Moore should be fired along with them. Furthermore, upon his death, Thayer bequeathed Moore an equal fourth of the \$7 million "'residue and remainder' of his property[.]"¹⁸³ The connection between the two was not a figment of Moore's active internal life, but was reciprocated, and compels further investigation into the events of the spring of 1921 which saw their relationship shift.

In April of 1921, according to Linda Leavell, "it was rumored that Thayer proposed marriage to Marianne."¹⁸⁴ Leavell suggests "Thayer's marriage proposal was still much on [Moore's] mind" while she was drafting her poems "An Octopus" and "Marriage" because she repeated the lines "men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it"—throughout the pages of her drafting notebook.¹⁸⁵ Leavell also mentions that William Carlos Williams' *Autobiography* includes a reference to some

¹⁸³ Ibid., 186.

¹⁸⁴ Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 189.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 200.

sort of proposal, although she concedes other scholars have dismissed the rumor.¹⁸⁶ Leavell also proposes that Moore's poem "People's Surroundings" features coded commentary on Thayer,¹⁸⁷ but she chooses not to go into detail or provide an analysis of the poem.

If Thayer proposed marriage to Moore, it is unlikely to have been a veiled sexual proposition. I make this supposition based on Moore's response to a previous (indecent) proposal. By the time Moore met Thayer, she already had experience rebuffing unwanted attention. Moore's response to Ezra Pound's advances demonstrates her ability to dismiss a grossly inappropriate affront while pre-empting permanent damage to a relationship.

Moore began corresponding with Ezra Pound in 1919 after he wrote to her in 1918 regarding poetry she submitted to *The Little Review*.¹⁸⁸ Pound's letters, however, were not confined to topics of poetry and publication. He called on the trope of the hypersexualized other when he asked if Moore was "a jet black ethiopian Othello-hued[.]"¹⁸⁹ Moore averted his innuendo and responded coolly with autobiographical facts: "contrary to your impression, I am altogether a blond and have red hair."¹⁹⁰ Despite her refusal to reciprocate his flirtation, Pound was undeterred. In February, 1919, he wrote a brazenly illicit addendum to a letter in the form of a poem which far exceeds what Mary Warner Moore had often objected to as "the saucy parts" of Pound's prose and verse. He wrote:

No. I had better leave you to Mr Kreymborg and Bill Williams
and leave off meddling in American matters

But I am so "confounded polygamous":
That exquisite cockleshell calls at so many ports;
the Cytheraeon carries my postbag;
and extra half yard of mind,
and extra milimetre [*sic*] of eye-lash: and behold me

¹⁸⁶ Leavell, "'Frightening Disinterestedness': The Personal Circumstances of Marianne Moore's 'Marriage'," 65n5.

¹⁸⁷ Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 198-99.

¹⁸⁸ See *Selected Letters*, ed. Bonnie Costello (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 119.

¹⁸⁹ Ezra Pound to Marianne Moore, December 16, 1918, Rosenbach Museum and Library, V:50:6. In an as-yet unpublished examination of this letter, Elizabeth Wilson explains that Pound was referring to the line "black but beautiful" which appears in Moore's poem "Black Earth." Wilson suggests Pound "puns on Moore's name—the Ethiopian; the Moor." See Elizabeth Wilson, *Poetry and the Trace: The Pound Addendum: Ezra Pound's Response to Marianne Moore's 'Black Earth'.*

¹⁹⁰ Marianne Moore to Ezra Pound, January 9, 1919, in *Selected Letters*, 122.

even upon the threshold of your Presbyterian stair-turn

my lechery
capable of all altitudes [*sic*];
no cerebrality being too tenuous
no heights of the Paradiso too frigid;
no air too vitreous, too discrete,
too separatist in its tendency.

I, Manichean, you a Malthusian of the intellect

I so the counfounded [*sic*] intruder and disturber of
the Hortus Inclusus¹⁹¹

Pound's intent is clear and would have left any unsuspecting recipient staggering. Moore showed careful calculation and restraint in the wake of this offense, however. She waited over four months before posting a response, and in it, refrained from alluding to the affront. In fact, in five decades of correspondence with Pound, Moore never mentioned it even once. Instead of humouring the literary lynchpin who had promoted the work of Yeats, Joyce, Eliot and Hemingway, Moore chose to ignore his advance. As Pound put it, "so much for the Muses."¹⁹² "Chère Marianne" was set on drawing the boundaries of their relationship.¹⁹³ Moore not only subverted Pound's sexual objectification of her, she laid the foundation for a largely congenial and mutually respectful relationship. Had her response been any different in that crucial moment, it would seem unlikely that, fifty years later, their relationship should have culminated in the moving exclamation, "Oh, Ezra" and "Oh, Marianne."¹⁹⁴

Moore's response to Pound makes her rift with Thayer all the more perplexing. Could Thayer's transaction with Moore have surpassed even Pound's "lecherous" addendum? What could have transpired which resulted in the cessation of the relationship they had shared to that point and which left Moore "faint with starvation[?]"¹⁹⁵ I would argue Moore was not offended by Thayer in the way Pound likely offended her in his addendum. Most likely, Moore was romantically indifferent

¹⁹¹ Marianne Moore to Ezra Pound, January 9, 1919, Rosenbach Museum and Library, V:50:6.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ George Bornstein, "Pound and the Making of Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. Ira Bruce Nadel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 37.

¹⁹⁵ Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 189.

to Pound, and so his advance needed merely to be tactfully negotiated. In contrast, I suspect Moore was in love with Thayer, and this made all the difference.

SCOFIELD WRITES TO MARIANNE: “TO THE ACTING EDITOR OF *THE DIAL*”

I propose that poems written by Moore and Thayer, subsequent to the spring of 1921, may represent a sparse and sporadic literary exchange stemming from that turbulent (alleged) proposal. Thayer’s unpublished poem “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*” may be read as an instalment in their cloaked poetic conversation. It is a poem of autobiographical interest, according to the description of papers included in the Dial/Scofield Thayer collection at the Beinecke Museum,¹⁹⁶ but seems to have been ignored by scholarship on Thayer.¹⁹⁷ It has not been discussed in relation to Marianne Moore, despite being all but addressed to her in name, but I believe “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*” sheds some light on the Moore/Thayer relationship. Moore was the only “acting editor” of *The Dial*. (Gilbert Seldes, Kenneth Burke and Alyse Gregory all worked in the capacity of managing editor.) Perhaps since the details of the relationship between Moore and Scofield have seemed and remained obscure, Thayer’s poetry has not been considered a relevant source of insight into Moore. In the context of the abrupt termination of their close friendship, and with the (alleged) proposal in mind, I read the poem as an explanation—an apology, even—for whatever part Thayer played in the decisive encounter. Furthermore, if we understand the title as “To [Marianne Moore],” we see that the poem contains an unattributed reference which may reflect on the nature of what, exactly, transpired between them.

The first stanza of “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*” is written in the present tense and stages the immediate context of the poem. The speaker describes how his words are penned in a rude and imprecise process. In contrast, when he submits those words to “the Acting Editor,” he does so “without faltering”:

¹⁹⁶ See the biographical information submitted by the Beinecke at their website, accessed April 12, 2014, http://drs.library.yale.edu/HLTransformer/HLTransServlet?style=yul.ead2002.xhtml.xsl&pid=beinecke:dial&query=dc.identifier:%22beinecke*%22&clear-stylesheet-cache=yes&hlon=yes&big=&adv=y&filter=&hitPageStart=251&sortFields=fgs.title%20asc&view=over.

¹⁹⁷ As of April 12, 2014, I have been unable to find any existing scholarship relating to “To the Acting Editor of the *Dial*” or “To One Who Was Betrayed” (unpublished), also described in the Dial/Scofield Thayer papers overview as autobiographical.

I turn my verse on an ancient wheel
Which squeaks and goes lopsided and askew.
I write my verses on a board of deal
And without faltering I send them you.¹⁹⁸

The second stanza summarizes the current “damaged” condition of the poet’s heart:

My heart is tousled and my heart is wan,
My heart has broken bread with bitter things,
And like the damaged carcass of a swan
It lies along scarred waters and broke wings.

I interpret the following six stanzas as Thayer’s summary of his actions, intentions and feelings toward Moore:

[NOTE: This unpublished poem is under copyright. Due to copyright constraints, the remainder of this poem has been omitted from this digital version of my thesis. I have been unsuccessful in locating individuals responsible for granting reproduction permission. Digital copies of this poem can be requested from the Beinecke Library and are located in the Dial/Scofield Thayer Papers, YCAL, MSS 34 V, box 67, folder 1802.]

With language borrowing both biblical and military tones, perhaps this is a representation of how Thayer “assaulted the immoderate,” “the immaculate,” Moore. He sought to conquer (or perhaps annex) her in the spirit of well-meaning but foolish love. Having failed, he must live with the consequences of his endeavour. Apologetics follow: a man of the world, he experienced “so much, and ... suffered more[.]” In his damaged condition, he made mistakes and fled, concluding the affair “remotely.”

The final stanza returns to the present tense with the poet reflecting on the situation at the heart of the poem—“me and ... you.”

Remote those times; remote that painted woe;
For now I turn me verse,¹⁹⁹ and mail it you.

¹⁹⁸ Beinecke Library, Dial/Scofield Thayer Papers, YCAL, MSS 34 V, box 67, folder 1802.

¹⁹⁹ Thayer uses the word “me” and this is not an error. The word “me” appears in both his handwritten copy and the typed copy of the poem. Note that, with conventional grammar, this line might read “For now I turn *my* verse, and mail it *to* you.” It might also be standing in for “myself” as in “I’m going to get *me* some cheese.”

I question not whereto blue aeons go,
Nor why my heart should squeak, and lop askew.

He refrains from lamenting passed time or interrogating present feelings. He does, however, compare his emotions with his verse which, like the “ancient wheel” of the first stanza, “squeaks and goes lopsided and askew.”

The undated confessional poem, with its less-than-cryptic title, may gesture to the intimate relationship Thayer and Moore once entertained. In the context of the rift that occurred between them, it is tempting to imagine the poem reveals actual details of the event. However, the existence of a “special” relationship between the two has, as Leavell writes in “‘Frightening Disinterestedness’,”²⁰⁰ rarely been considered, let alone investigated. As previously discussed, Moore appears to have coded any written details pertaining to the nature of her relationship with Thayer. Moore is not listed among Thayer’s romantic pursuits. As far as I have been able to determine from existing scholarship, the “certain connection” between them has not been described as an affective one.

“To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*,” I contend, is both poetry and poetic epistle. Moore, after all, in her capacity at the magazine, would have received correspondence addressing her in this way. If Thayer needed to express something to Moore, he would not have done it by posting a letter to her at home. Those acquainted with Moore and her mother knew that Mary Warner Moore sometimes opened, and more often than not read, her daughter’s incoming (and outgoing) letters. Had Thayer wished to send Moore a message without alerting Mary Warner Moore, it would need to be coded or concealed, both to bypass detection by other parties and to avoid offending Moore further.

In addition, if Thayer were appealing to Moore, he might do so by imitating her poetic method of pastiche. Moore is known to use a collage technique in her poetry; she borrows lines, phrases, expressions from disparate sources. Some of her poems are published with accompanying notes identifying the origins of quoted material. The content of “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*” is, however, for the most part, unique (insofar as any collection of words can be said to be unique) with two exceptions. The words “my heart is wan” from stanza two can be found in Madison

²⁰⁰ Leavell, “‘Frightening Disinterestedness: The Personal Circumstances of Marianne Moore’s ‘Marriage’,” 65.

Cawein's "In Shadow,"²⁰¹ but an analysis of this late nineteenth-century poem does not suggest a thematic connection to Thayer's and Moore's circumstances. The sixth stanza, though, begins: "It had lain down with Sorrow[.]" This line reveals something more. The words "lain down with sorrow" appear in a novel by John Hastings Turner titled *A Place In The World* and published by Scribner's Sons in 1920.²⁰² I suspect Thayer borrowed these words expressly in order to signal to Moore a reference to a (fictional) kiss fraught with conflict.

Although Thayer does not attribute the phrase ("lain down with Sorrow") to *A Place In The World*, and there is no hard evidence proving Thayer read the text, it is likely he was familiar with it. Reviews of Turner's novel were printed in *The Bookman* and *America*, both New York-based magazines. *The Publishers' Weekly*, which targeted publishers and literary agents like Thayer, described *A Place In The World* as an "exceptionally interesting book." Furthermore, *A Place In The World* was reviewed in several publications Thayer was likely to peruse, such as *The Nation*, a New York weekly magazine, because it featured work by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (both of whom Thayer solicited for contributions to *The Dial*).

A Place In The World is a novel about Iris Iranovna—an articulate, confident Russian immigrant to London—and follows her relationship with Andrea Bakaroff—her admirer and would-be fiancée. There are parallels between the protagonists and Thayer and Moore. Consider the following: Andrea is a man who would like to marry Iris, if "for [her] conversation alone."²⁰³ She is "a fencer with words, Andrea is outmatched by her at every point."²⁰⁴ Like Iris, Marianne Moore is credited with having a strong command of words.²⁰⁵ Iris is independent and makes life choices based on her convictions—she capitulates for and to no one. "I'm going to live my own life," she tells Andrea, "and I'm not going to attempt to change my nature."²⁰⁶ Like the established relationship between Moore and Thayer, "Andrea and Iris met on common ground[.]"²⁰⁷ Andrea pursues Iris' affections (and hand in marriage), but he recognizes his efforts are met with ambivalence. He admits, "You would respect me

²⁰¹ Madison Cawein, "In Shadow," *Fetter's Southern Magazine* 1 (1892): 223, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://books.google.co.nz/books?id=sls3AQAAMAAJ&q=%22my+heart+is+wan%22&dq=%22my+heart+is+wan%22&hl=en&sa=X&ei=LN5MU8bVDYbykAX7m4GIDQ&ved=0CDUQ6wEwAg>.

²⁰² John Hastings Turner, *A Place In The World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920).

²⁰³ Turner, *A Place In The World*, 15.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁰⁵ Recalling Kreyborg's comments in his autobiography *Troubadour*.

²⁰⁶ Turner, *A Place In The World*, 56.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

much more if I had the strength of mind to ignore you.”²⁰⁸ There is also much that distinguishes Iris from Moore,²⁰⁹ but the parallels between the two—and between Andrea and Thayer—are significant enough to inspire a closer look at the exchange in the novel which includes the words: “It had lain down with Sorrow.”

Andrea, who has been pursuing Iris with romantic intentions, expresses frustration with her:

“You sometimes make me very angry, Iris,” he murmured. “You are beautiful and you are clever, but your life has led you into places where nothing is priced at its right value. You are extravagant of youth, and you do not seem to realise that life is not a question of minutes but of years.” He broke off and regarded her almost paternally.

“You have never had a real sorrow,” he said.

“I do not want one,” she answered.

He got up from his chair and turned towards the door.

“Black is quite as valuable as white,” he said. “Both of them separate the myriad colours of life, and give them to us in their real values. You cannot understand the morning till you have lain down with sorrow.”²¹⁰

Then they kiss. Instigated by Iris, this kiss manages to emasculate Andrea and leave him feeling out of control, which “was above all things what he hated in others; yet it was quite true that he had been taken off his balance.”²¹¹ Andrea then attempts to steady himself: “‘I’ve been in most places, Iris,’ he said; ‘I’ve seen a great deal; I am what they would call a man of the world, but—but I never----’ He broke off.” Andrea, a self-proclaimed “man of the world,” is surprised to be rattled by the woman he loves whom he also considers somewhat trivial.²¹² In “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*,” Thayer positions himself as a man of the world, a man whose heart *has* “lain down with Sorrow, slept with Grief, / Made composition with the ways of Man” and who has, presumably, been rattled by his final significant exchange with Moore.

“To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*” has never been published.²¹³ I can neither confirm nor deny that Thayer sent it to *The Dial* for consideration. There is simply no evidence. As such, I cannot claim with certainty that Moore read the poem. If she had, however, she would have found it difficult—if not impossible—to read herself as

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 28.

²⁰⁹ Iris is not afraid to create scandal, she is a “wicked little Russian.” Turner, *A Place In The World*, 59

²¹⁰ Turner, *A Place In The World*, 29.

²¹¹ Ibid., 30.

²¹² Ibid., 29.

²¹³ As of August 12, 2016.

someone other than the intended recipient of “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*.” If Moore read the poem, would she have recognized the concealed allusion to Turner’s novel and the scene between Iris and Andrea? She might have—*The Dial* included a publisher’s ad for Turner’s *Simple Souls* in 1918, describing him as “the literary discovery of the year.”²¹⁴ Moore was a reader of *The Nation*, where *A Place In The World* was reviewed.²¹⁵ Whether or not Moore would have recognised the allusion is, perhaps, somewhat irrelevant, according to her own philosophy of poetic interpretation: in 1935, Moore asserted the “enigma must be clear to the author, not necessarily to us.”²¹⁶ Unless explicit evidence surfaces detailing the final intimate exchange(s) between Moore and Thayer, uncertainty will remain the only certainty.

“To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*” indicates that scholars like Leavell—who have suspected something akin to a marriage proposal—have reason to pursue such lines of inquiry. Furthermore, the question of how staunchly Moore avoided intimate relationships with others becomes more insistent; if the Moore/Thayer relationship has been unexamined, could there be others? How was Moore—“America’s favorite spinster aunt”—susceptible to, and/or the recipient of romantic interest? How might we read Moore’s desire and gender identification in the context of a (hetero) entanglement? The Moore/Thayer relationship could also provide a new context for the interpretation of Moore’s poetry. As I mention in my introduction, Moore scholars sometimes rely on biographical clues to decode Moore’s poetry. If “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*” indicates the possibility of an intimate relationship between Moore and Thayer, other approaches to the interpretation of Moore’s work—which reflect this possibility—may be justified.

A brief survey of Thayer’s small body of poetry reveals, for example, potential literary exchanges with Moore’s poetic oeuvre. In the summer of 1921, *The Dial* published Moore’s “When I Buy Pictures.” In it, the speaker assesses the value of objects she considers possessing. In the context of her relationship with Thayer, I venture to interpret this poem presenting the conditions under which Moore would accede to possessing or acquiring Thayer. One criterion the speaker identifies is that the potential possession “must not wish to disarm anything; nor may the approved /

²¹⁴ Advertisement for Charles Scribner’s Sons publications, *Simple Souls* in *The Dial* 45 (October 19, 1918): 282.

²¹⁵ In fact, Moore received a less-than-flattering review in *The Nation* from Mark Van Doren. See Annette Debo, *The American H.D.* (Iowa: The University of Iowa Press, 2012), 43.

²¹⁶ Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, 328.

triumph easily be honoured--”²¹⁷ I am inclined to read in these lines a further rebuff of Thayer’s advances that spring. If Moore were to consider “possessing” or acquiring Thayer by engaging in a romantic relationship with him, or by accepting his (alleged) proposal, he “must not wish to disarm.” Thayer, however, seems to have greatly disarmed Moore. Furthermore, should his advance have succeeded—for “the approved / triumph” “may”—the “triumph” would not “easily be honoured” by Moore, who would likely require her suitor to reform his unconventional ways.

According to Robin G. Schulze, Thayer was quite familiar with “When I Buy Pictures.”²¹⁸ In 1926, *The Dial* published Thayer’s “On An Old Painting of Portsmouth Harbor.” The title of this poem—referencing a painting (read: picture)—recalls Moore’s “When I Buy Pictures,” and, in fact, contains lines borrowed from Moore’s title; in Thayer’s poem, the speaker expresses the opinion that “There is no sense in *buying pictures* / And swimming them across the sea; / The sun and moon have laid old strictures / On what a continent shall be.”²¹⁹ If Thayer is responding to Moore’s “When I Buy Pictures,” and if “buying pictures” represents the acquisition or possession of the desired other, I interpret these lines to suggest Thayer recognized the mismatch their relationship was, and would have turned out to be. In other words, there would have been “no sense” in acquiring Moore and taking her with him overseas.²²⁰ The differences/distances/spaces between them were as ancient/powerful as the celestial bodies and as fixed as the greatest land masses.

MARIANNE WRITES TO SCOFIELD: “MARRIAGE”

²¹⁷ Marianne Moore, “When I Buy Pictures,” in *Complete Poems*, 48.

²¹⁸ Thayer was, perhaps, more familiar with “When I Buy Pictures” than any of Moore’s contemporaries. According to Robin Schulze’s notes to the poem, it was Thayer who handed over a copy to Bryher and H.D. for publication in *Poetry*, a version which differed from the one Moore submitted to *The Dial* and which appeared only a short time before. See *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924*, ed. Robin G. Schulze (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 256.

²¹⁹ “On An Old Painting of Portsmouth Harbor,” *The Dial* 80 (June, 1926): 465, *emphasis mine*.

²²⁰ Letters from Charles Demuth to Thayer suggest the latter may have spent some time in London before heading to Berlin. See Charles Demuth to Scofield Thayer, February 28, June 3, 12, 24, and July 3, 1921, *WorldCat*, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.worldcat.org/wcpa/servlet/DCARead?standardNo=1566397804&standardNoType=1&excerpt=true>.

Moore's "Marriage," and its publication context, may also conceal a significant post-script to the relationship between Moore and Thayer.²²¹ Leavell describes the publication context of "Marriage" as one of two "barbs of Marianne's wrath" directed at Thayer.²²² Moore allowed Monroe Wheeler to publish "Marriage" in *Manikin*, a magazine so small Thayer was not even aware it *was* a magazine. It was an unusual choice, for, at the time, Moore published almost exclusively in *The Dial*; between April, 1920, and January, 1925, twelve of sixteen poems she published in serials were published in *The Dial*. According to Schulze, "Thayer and [Sibley] Watson had come to view Moore as an exclusive *Dial* product, an arrangement they validated by paying her on many occasions double their usual rate per page for her verse," and *The Dial* had, at the time, the greatest subscription list of any little magazine to publish Moore's work (to that date.)²²³ By publishing in *Manikin*, Moore forfeited the exposure and substantial fee *The Dial* would have paid her for the publication of such a lengthy piece (at 288 lines). The fact that Moore chose to publish such a significant poem in a little-known chapbook, as opposed to in *The Dial*, was a move not lost on Thayer. "Scofield turned white at sight of *Manikin*,"²²⁴ Monroe Wheeler told Moore. "Thayer was stunned" that the poem appeared in a magazine he had never even heard of.²²⁵

"Marriage" may have caught Thayer's attention initially through its unexpected location in *Manikin*, but its subject likely caused him a double-take. As I mentioned previously, the topic of marriage was one Moore and Thayer debated often. For example, Bryher's marriage of convenience to Robert McAlmon provoked discussions between them where subliminal tensions were also likely at play. It was fallout from the Bryher/McAlmon union that provided the context for a conversation where, according to Moore, "We haggled till half past seven much to my discomfort. Mole was in despair at my not coming home and Scofield had an engagement to dine with somebody but refused to drop the matter with more dispatch so he was probably put to the embarrassment of apologizing."²²⁶ Whether or not Thayer did, in fact,

²²¹ Leavell, for example, suggests Moore published "Marriage" in Monroe Wheeler's *Manikin* in order to inflame Thayer. See Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 202-4.

²²² Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 199.

²²³ Robin G. Schulze, "Moore's Poems in their Publication Contexts: A Publication Biography," in Marianne Moore, *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907-1924*, ed. Robin G. Schulze (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 458.

²²⁴ Quoted in Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down*, 203.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Marianne Moore to John Warner Moore, May 1, 1921, in *Selected Letters*, 156.

propose to Moore, discussions of marriage featured in their relationship in the Spring of 1921. “Marriage” can be considered Moore’s addendum to their previous exchanges. By the time Moore was drafting “Marriage,” gone were the days when she and Thayer risked putting out their family and friends for the sake of a good debate. Moore’s poem would have to substitute for actual conversation.

“Marriage” gave Moore the final word on the subject where she and Thayer were concerned. A section of the poem supports my contention that Moore and Thayer may have embedded correspondence in their poetry. In “Marriage,” the following lines stand out:

‘I am such a cow,
if I had a sorrow
I should feel it a long time;
I am not one of those
who have a great sorrow
in the morning
and a great joy at noon’²²⁷

This unattributed quotation recalls Thayer’s line in “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*,” “It has lain down with sorrow,” which recalls Andrea’s accusation of Iris in *A Place In The World* (1920), “You have never had a real sorrow, ... You cannot understand the morning till you have lain down with sorrow.” In *A Place In The World*, Andrea faults Iris for what he perceives as her lack of profound feeling—the experience of sorrow. In “To the Acting Editor of *The Dial*,” the speaker’s lamentations express a similar assessment and hypervaluation of emotions and experiences (represented by bitterness, damage, scars, brokenness, assault, war, defeat, horror, suffering, sorrow, grief, foolishness, loss and woe). In contrast, Moore’s “Marriage” emphasizes the complexity of its subject as well as concomitant principles, values, beliefs, emotions and feelings, which culminate in the seeming mutual exclusivity of “Liberty and union[.]” Moore includes the above lines and underscores the absurdity of oversimplifying human emotion. Cristanne Miller concurs, suggesting “Marriage” “builds to this indirect insistence on the complexity of living affectionately, sharing a life ... remembering that even the strongest emotions may be followed quickly by their opposite.”²²⁸ Unlike Andrea and Thayer

²²⁷ Moore, “Marriage,” in *Complete Poems*, 69.

²²⁸ Miller, *Marianne Moore*, 119.

who both privilege polarized feeling, Moore chooses to emphasize complexity and multiplicity.

MOORE IN MEMORIAL: COMPLEXITY IN PERPETUITY

A recent article in *The New Yorker* states Marianne Moore “acted as though everyone had the wrong ideas about things that, in fact, they’d never thought about: jerboas, or pangolins, or plumed basilisks.”²²⁹ I am inclined to think Moore knew that jerboas and pangolins and plumed basilisks were far from the minds of most people. Her work brings seemingly banal topics to the fore and treats them with care, presenting them as accurately and precisely as possible. Moore suggests that the unusual, the unlikely, the unsung, has as much to offer as the fantastic, the favourites. Marianne Moore has been celebrated as a modernist force. Her vast oeuvre has been scoured, her archives scrutinized, for details that shed light on a woman known for her guarded reticence. Moore’s method pushes her critic/student/scholar/admirer to look harder, work harder, try harder, until you get it right—and then look again.

It is true that there is no textual or historical evidence that suggests Moore engaged in a *sexual* relationship with an individual of either gender. It is true Moore never married. It is true Moore lived with her mother (until the latter’s death). It is true Moore’s emotionally intimate relationships were with her mother, and her brother. Although she had many long-term friendships and professional relationships with men, it is true Moore did not *openly* engage in romantic relationships with men (or women). Moore stated to D.H. Lawrence that “a mind with mere truth as a standard rather than veracity, insists every step of the way that veracity also includes the possibility of an opposite situation.”²³⁰ In light of this statement, I must consider “the possibility of an opposite situation” to those seeming facts listed above. In other words, Moore encourages the notion she *could have* engaged in a sexual relationship. She *could have* married and lived with someone other than her mother. She *could have* had emotionally intimate relationships with others. She *could have* engaged in romantic relationships with men (or women). This line of inquiry reflects a queer universalist model by looking beyond the details that are readily available and the

²²⁹ Dan Chiasson, “All About My Mother,” review of *Holding On Upside Down* by Linda Leavell, *The New Yorker* 89, no. 36 (November 11, 2013): 72.

²³⁰ Marianne Moore to D.H. Lawrence, June 22, 1929, in *Selected Letters*, 249.

particular identitarian framework that requires singularities be sacrificed for the cohesion of the particular. In other words, when Moore is read as asexual, nonsexual, or lesbian, the possibility for a more nuanced understanding of her desires and identification may not be pursued. The above propositions represent the potentiality of an interpretive theory which sets aside labels and celebrates contradiction and complication. Furthermore, the *could have* in these statements provides two avenues of interpretation: *could have* in the sense that evidence may exist that she *did*, or, *could have* in the sense she had the opportunity, but chose not to—deliberately.

On November 6, 1947, Marianne Moore made a decision that would see one of her most important life choices chiselled in stone. To the mason Mr. George Meals, Moore wrote instructions for the design of her mother's—and her own—headstone:

... it would be best to have my name engraved
MARIANNE CRAIG MOORE
THEIR DAUGHTER
 below my mother's as planned, but to leave a space for a line beneath it
 (*above my date of birth*) were a line ever to be inserted there, designating
 marriage.²³¹

Marianne Moore was sixty years old at the time.

The headstone that was crafted to her instructions stands today in the Gettysburg National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The Vermont marble memorial reads:

MARY WARNER
DAUGHTER OF
 JOHN R. WARNER
AND
 JENNIE C. WARNER
WIFE OF
 JOHN M. MOORE
 APRIL 11, 1862 – JULY 9, 1947

²³¹ Marianne Moore to George Meals, November 6, 1947, in *Selected Letters*, 467.

MARIANNE C. MOORE
DAUGHTER OF
JOHN M. AND MARY W. MOORE

NOV. 15, 1887 – FEB. 5, 1972

The blank panel preceding Moore's dates of birth and death is the space she requested "were a line ever to be inserted there, designating marriage." On the final product, the empty space is conspicuously blank: the edges are sharp and the relief is raised. The effect is unnerving, giving the sense that the engraving is incomplete, disrupting the unity and finality of such a lasting artefact. Moore would have considered this arresting result.²³² The headstone that survives Moore and indicates her final resting place must read exactly as she had intended. Clive Driver, former literary executor of Moore's estate, calls it a "great mystery" that Moore had the stonecutter leave a space for the name of a husband.²³³ Benjamin Kahan, for his part, describes it an "act of monumentality" which "suggests the culmination of Moore's attempt to live celibacy as a nonstigmatized identity."²³⁴ Similarly, I read the empty rectangular field not as an allowance, but as an omission. And "omissions are not accidents."²³⁵

Moore's most tangible omission declares for posterity she was "wife of" no one, and this was no accident. She chose—and continued to choose—her work as her life-partner. She did not marry for love or any other reason; this choice was great enough for Moore to make of it a monument. The particularities of Moore's life—when one strives for "relentless accuracy"—reward the inquirer with details which brings one closer to unveiling this "veiled Mohammedan woman." They discourage the appropriation of facts as truths, and truths as veracity. Settling for less than the singularity that results from these particularities does not do the papaya justice.

²³² In "No Swan So Fine," (1932) she explores the capacity of inanimate objects to survive even the most noble of proprietors.

²³³ "Spotlight on Voices & Visions: Marianne Moore."

²³⁴ Kahan, "'The Viper's Traffic Knot': Celibacy and Queerness in the 'Late' Marianne Moore," 529.

²³⁵ Moore, *Complete Poems*, vii.

BRYHER – IN RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF FREEDOM

Bryher (née Annie Winifred Ellerman) is a lesser-known figure in the modernist movement. Nevertheless, she was a dynamic character in the legendary literary circles of London and Paris. The modernist movement was a fitting backdrop to Bryher's coming-of-age at the turn of the twentieth century. She answered the modernist call to "make it new" by reinventing herself. She changed her name, transformed her appearance by cultivating a masculine image, and forged a nonheteronormative relationship with poet Hilda Doolittle—H.D.

During her lifetime, Bryher witnessed two World Wars, survived the Blitz on London, saw the dawn of second-wave feminism and the sexual revolution. She travelled extensively, was a frequent flyer in the early years of commercial air travel, risked her safety to smuggle refugees from the Nazis, and used her considerable wealth to improve the lives of those around her. She seized upon adventure wherever she found it until she died at the age of ninety. Her life reads like a best-selling work of fiction, complete with complicated webs of love and marriage, unmatched wealth, psychological intrigue, globetrotting, wartime bombing, and just a hint of the supernatural.

Bryher's publication history spans more than half a century, from 1914 when she self-published a collection of poetry, until 1972 when her WWII memoir *The Days of Mars* was released. Her oeuvre is extensive and diverse, including film, criticism, poetry, nonfiction essays, historical fiction, memoir, translations, educational texts, and fictional autobiography. Not only did Bryher write across multiple genres, her topics were varied, from girl-pages in Elizabethan drama to emigration in a near-future dystopia; from an autobiographical coming-of-age story set in the newly-tamed American west, to a Swiss social revolution during the eighteenth century. But if there is one strong cord weaving its way the length of her dramatic life and disparate body of work—one consistent value and desire she held from her earliest years until her final moments—it is Bryher's love affair with freedom.

The word "freedom" and its variants appear dozens of times in Bryher's work, and in several contexts. A sampling includes: "All she had ever wanted was to be

free[.]”¹ “If it were sinful to choose freedom, she would choose sin.”² “I was in love with freedom.”³ “Liberty meant freedom for the women[.]”⁴ “What compensation could there be for loss of freedom?”⁵ “The thought that filled his head was freedom.”⁶ “Freedom was at the basis of being[.]”⁷ “Their soul was ... the imagination of a child joined to the freedom of a boy.”⁸ “Freedom: she wanted freedom.”⁹

Bryher’s obsession with freedom did not stem from a position of racial or classist discrimination, as she was a white British woman and the daughter of the richest man in England, shipping magnate John Ellerman. But Bryher was born a girl in the Victorian era, and she would become a person with nonheteronormative desires and transgender expression. Thus, despite her position of relative privilege, Bryher knew well the oppression of patriarchal heteronormativity.

Bryher’s desire for traditionally masculine pursuits conflicted with the reality of her subordinate sex. She was acutely aware of the disadvantage she faced in accordance with her assigned sex, and she struggled against female stereotypes and expectations from a young age. In this chapter, I take my cue from Bryher’s friend and peer, Marianne Moore, and I examine the particularities of Bryher’s desires and identification as expressed in her life-writing and published texts.

The protagonist of Bryher’s historical novel *The Player’s Boy* (1953) asks: “Why should we be kennelled into squares, as if life were the checkerboard of a universe incapable of change?”¹⁰ As I suggest in my introduction, Bryher has been “kennelled” into some identifications she never ascribed to in her lifetime. She has been identified as transgender,¹¹ a sexual invert,¹² a platonic lesbian and as experiencing gender dysphoria.¹³ I contend that by setting aside these frames of identification, we may be better positioned to read something new in Bryher’s life which may inform our understanding of her own identification. In the second part of

¹ Bryher, *Beowulf* (New York: Pantheon, 1956), 102.

² Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), 63.

³ Bryher, *The Days of Mars: A Memoir, 1940-1946* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), 121.

⁴ Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud*, 74.

⁵ Bryher, *Bryher: Two Novels, “Development” and “Two Selves,”* ed. Joanne Winning (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 136.

⁶ Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud*, 48.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁸ Bryher, “The Girl-Page in Elizabethan Literature,” *Fortnightly Review* (March 1920): 452.

⁹ Bryher, *Two Novels, “Development” and “Two Selves,”* 53.

¹⁰ Bryher, *The Player’s Boy* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2000), 89-90.

¹¹ McCabe, *Bryher: Female Husband of Modernism*.

¹² McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism*, 136.

¹³ Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, 303; Winning, *The Pilgrimage of Dorothy Richardson*, 69.

this chapter, I survey a selection of Bryher's texts—*The Player's Boy*, *Visa for Avalon* (1965), and *The Colors of Vaud* (1969)—with an eye to the theme of freedom from oppression, looking as well to Bryher's interrogation of gender norms. In particular, I respond to what I read in Bryher's *Beowulf* (1956) as a desire to be freed from any frame of reference which may serve to "kennel" her into a particular square. I argue *Beowulf* is a work of subversive fiction which imagines a gender-blind social framework where a subject's value is divorced from intersections with race, class, age, and—in particular—gender and desire. In light of *Beowulf*, I will propose a model for critical appreciation of historical subjects which stems from Bryher's ideal of freedom.

BRYHER'S BIOGRAPHY: FREEDOM DENIED

In 1960, Sylvia Beach wrote to friends: "Bryher is on a fishing boat in the roughest seas she could find."¹⁴ Bryher was sixty-five years old at the time. Bryher had always been drawn to wild waves as well as the sailor's life of transience and adventure. In her memoir, *The Heart to Artemis* (1963), she explains, "It never occurred to me until I was fifteen that I could be anything but a sailor[.]"¹⁵ Bryher identified with masculinity from an early age. She struggled against the narrow set of ideal qualities expected of a Victorian girl-child, the limited scope of experience afforded women in domestic settings, and the constraint of female fashion. Bryher's father provided her with all the exotic, international travel and literary stimulation a child could dream of, but her privilege did not spare her the physical, social and psychological limitations imposed upon her.

The Good Girl (1832) is an illustrated American children's book which is a general example of Victorian gender norms. It details behaviours and characteristics expected of a "good girl." Its author explains that a proper girl child "is never noisy nor troublesome" but "likes to sit by her mother, and sew, or knit."¹⁶ Girls were meant, in Bryher's own words, to aspire to "immobility and silence and of never having a thought in one's head."¹⁷ Bryher was not like "the good girl." She explains,

¹⁴ Sylvia Beach to Jackson and Marthiel Mathews, June 18, 1960, in *The Letters of Sylvia Beach*, ed. Keri Walsh (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 298.

¹⁵ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis* (London: Collins, 1963), 9.

¹⁶ John Metcalf, *The Good Girl* (Wendell, MA: John Metcalf, 1832), 5-6, *HathiTrust*.

¹⁷ Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud*, 63.

“My family were truly frightened of the free-thinking little monster that had emerged in their midst[.]”¹⁸

Bryher was just as ill-suited to the female destiny of marriage and domesticity. Nancy, a character who is a representation of Bryher, appears in three works of biographical fiction: *Development* (1920), *Two Selves* (1923) and *West* (1925). In *Two Selves*, Nancy explains how she watched as girls who felt imprisoned within the domesticity of their childhood homes opted for marriage; “Girls married to escape.”¹⁹ This move served only “to create the same situations over again.”²⁰ Sophie, a principal character in *The Colors of Vaud*, explains she would rather perform the most mundane clerical tasks “than to fold up sheets for a lifetime and put them in a press and hear the news when it was stale because of cooking the supper.”²¹ In both cases, Bryher presents a wife’s duty to home and hearth in a less-than-flattering light.

Bryher was especially vocal about her contempt for the physical constraints of female fashion. Victorian girls’ clothing, like women’s fashion at the time, was excessively restrictive and impeded activities such as climbing trees, running and jumping. “Clothes were a nightmare,”²² exclaims Bryher. She recalls “the stiff dresses” and “the burden” of her long hair—“To this day I feel intense pity for any child I see with long hair.”²³ The boisterous play that Bryher longed to engage in was hampered by layer upon layer of fabric; only boys could run unfettered by skirts and climb trees without getting their hair caught in the branches. A photo taken of Bryher in 1912, when she was eighteen, shows her in a long white dress, white boots, a coronet of leaves atop waist-length hair, and a brow-furrowing scowl. She captioned the photo, “Self in bad temper.”²⁴

Nancy explains, “Be a girl and there were always barriers.”²⁵ Nancy voices Bryher’s frustration: “Oh to be a boy and have the world. What was the use of existence to a woman, what compensation could there be for loss of freedom?”²⁶ Patricia C. Willis confirms, Bryher’s “life as a young woman in England distressed

¹⁸ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 160.

¹⁹ Bryher, *Two Novels*, “*Development*” and “*Two Selves*,” 264.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud*, 74.

²² Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10, 21.

²⁴ Bryher, *Self in Bad Temper*, 1912, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Gen Mss 97, box no. 114, folder no. 4004.

²⁵ Bryher, *Two Novels*, “*Development*” and “*Two Selves*,” 164.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

her to the point of eruption.”²⁷ How could Bryher reconcile her yearning for adventure, action and freedom when these experiences were denied her sex? What options did Bryher have apart from abandoning her hopes and dreams in favour of gender conformity? She decided to escape. So, after Bryher was released from the “confinement” of her boarding school education,²⁸ once she was old enough to be granted some degree of autonomy, she fled. In 1918, Bryher expressed her desire to “run away to America, live on what I can earn myself, and have adventures.”²⁹ Two years later, at the age of twenty-six, Bryher sailed to the United States with H.D., the woman with whom Bryher would spend the next forty years.

For Bryher, the U.S. represented a land of freedom unhampered by the rigidity of Victorian tradition. Her conception of the “New World” was necessarily influenced by the colonial ideals of beginning anew, of trying again, and of escaping persecution. She even “seems to have seen the United States as somehow sexually freer.”³⁰ In *The Heart to Artemis*, Bryher writes: “America was my first love affair.”³¹ In the States, Bryher sought freedom from the limitations which had so affected her early development. She distanced herself geographically from parental influence as well as the sensibilities and expectations of the British elite. Bryher also began to deconstruct the subordinate femininity to which she had been expected to subscribe and she set about fashioning her masculine presentation. She began wearing trousers and more masculine styles,³² and she cut her hair. For Bryher, cutting her hair was a significant act of rebellion which coincided with her urgent need to escape her circumstances and represented an assertion of her desire for freedom. Bryher recalls: “no single act in my life gave me pleasure greater than having my hair cut short in 1920.”³³ Bryher’s pleasure was located in the physical liberty she experienced after ridding herself of her heavy locks.

The bob was a popular style in the twenties. In *Fashioning Sapphism* (2000), Laura Doan explains that a severely short-cropped hairstyle was very much in vogue

²⁷ Patricia C. Willis, “A Modernist Epithalamium: Marianne Moore’s ‘Marriage’,” *Paideuma* 32, no. 1-3 (2003): 266.

²⁸ Willis, “A Modernist Epithalamium: Marianne Moore’s ‘Marriage’,” 266.

²⁹ Bryher to Amy Lowell, November 28, 1918, quoted in Hanscombe and Smyers, *Writing For Their Lives*, 73.

³⁰ Meryl Altman, Review of *The American H.D.* by Annette Debo, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 237.

³¹ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 160.

³² See Annette Debo, *The American H.D.* (Iowa: The University of Iowa Press, 2012), 138.

³³ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 10.

and not yet the embodied code for lesbianism suggested by some scholars.³⁴ Bryher associated the act with accessing freedoms typically reserved for men. In *Development*, Nancy links short hair with geographical mobility and intellectual development. Nancy wishes her friend Anne (a Marianne Moore-like character) would “travel, allow her mind to ‘flower’, and cut her hair short.”³⁵ Sheila Rowbotham confirms that the “new women ... cropping their hair, found they could walk through cities unmolested. Masculine styles were consequently at once the badge of a geographical mobility and marked the social arrival of the new woman in men’s zones.”³⁶ Bryher also celebrated the cropped hairstyle as a characteristic of progressive, adventurous and passionate women. In her WWII novel *Beowulf*, Evelyn is energetic, fun-loving, unmarried and flourishing with the new opportunities presented to women in the absence of men. Evelyn’s curmudgeonly elderly neighbour decries the New Woman’s behaviour and appearance: “In a well-ordered world, girls would not tear down the stairs to business, clattering like a fledgling man-at-arms in a leather coat without even the pretence of a cap on short, smooth hair.”³⁷ Angelina, another character in *Beowulf*, is a socialist and feminist activist who also sports a short hairstyle: “Angelina always had such a smart haircut.”³⁸ “How much better she looked now that she had had it cropped,”³⁹ muses Angelina’s partner, Selina.

Bryher found pleasure in the short, liberating hairstyle, but she also understood this superficial alteration to her appearance could have unintended consequences. Bryher explored her mother’s hypothetical response to her lopped locks in *Two Selves*. Nancy asks her mother, “Couldn’t I have my hair cut short?,”⁴⁰ to which Nancy’s mother responds, “How can you say such a wicked thing? After all the hours I’ve spent brushing it is that all you care about me?”⁴¹ Bryher was Hannah Glover’s only daughter, so she couldn’t help but consider how the move might be received by her mother, the person charged with facilitating Bryher’s passage from girlhood to womanhood. By cutting her hair, Bryher committed a “wicked” and

³⁴ Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), xiv.

³⁵ Debo, *The American H.D.*, 65.

³⁶ Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso), 42.

³⁷ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴⁰ Bryher, *Two Novels, “Development” and “Two Selves,”* 208.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

personal affront, and severed herself symbolically from the femininity her mother had invested in her, and expected of her.

In 1934, Bryher described her masculinity as a process of development. In a letter to H.D., Bryher recalled a conversation with English analyst Barbara Low: “I am apparently considered by the group as their Radcliffe [*sic*].”⁴² This identification seems to have pleased Bryher: “I rather like the new conception of me and I was asked seriously about my trousers. I think by the time I get to be eighty I’ll be just right.”⁴³ Photos of Bryher document the progression of her masculine presentation which culminates in the image of a confident, self-possessed individual with slicked-back silver hair and a neat dress-shirt. When Bryher began her transformation toward masculine presentation in 1920, she sought a twofold freedom. First, she was absconding from the ideals of feminine presentation which had caused her such frustration and inspired such disdain. Second, she came nearer to presenting herself in line with the gender as which she had always identified.

Despite the corporeal independence Bryher exercised from her twenties onward, she still found herself at the mercy of systems of gender oppression which prevented her from achieving economic security and autonomy. Bryher was acutely aware that, without achieving social legitimacy by marrying, she could never be certain of her financial future, as her father would only then grant her control of her inheritance. She had first-hand knowledge of the precarious position of unwed women, because Bryher was born out of wedlock. She and her mother were legally protected only when Bryher was in her early teens and her mother married her father. Until then, Hannah Glover was an unwed mother to a bastard daughter and would have faced a number of social sanctions should her relationship to John Ellerman fail. When she became Mrs. John Ellerman, Glover attained financial security and the protection of social mores.

Bryher likely escaped some of the stigma attached to illegitimate births because of her family’s wealth. I cannot confirm whether Bryher’s status was common knowledge among wealthy Londoners. It may not have been, because it appears that John Ellerman preferred a more private lifestyle over moving among

⁴² Bryher to H.D., November 5, 1934, in *Analyzing Freud: Letters of H.D., Bryher, and Their Circle*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman (New York: New Directions Books, 2002), 447. The “group” refers to the British Psycho-Analytic Society, of which Low was a member.

⁴³ Bryher to H.D., November 5, 1934, in Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 447.

high society.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, her younger brother was the first legitimate child born to her parents and, as a male, also became heir to the greater portion of the Ellerman fortune. Much to Bryher's dismay, he was—by virtue of his sex—automatically involved in the running of the family business, while she—by virtue of her sex—was excluded. Most likely as a result of her illegitimate birth, Bryher's very existence went unacknowledged when, in 1934, *The Annual Register* published Ellerman's obituary: "He married, in 1908, Miss Hannah Glover, by whom he had one son, who survived him."⁴⁵

Bryher, like her mother, was financially dependent upon John Ellerman. That changed for Bryher when, in 1921, she married Robert McAlmon (to whom she proposed the day after they met). When she became Mrs. Robert McAlmon, she gained more control over her financial circumstances, became eligible to inherit, and could travel without a chaperone. She remained married to McAlmon until 1927, although the two spent little time together during their marriage, which was not consummated. Bryher explains that they "were divorced in 1927 but could have got [*sic*] an annulment just as easily except that this was a longer and more expensive procedure."⁴⁶ Theirs had been more a mutually beneficial contract than a marriage. According to Bryher, McAlmon "wanted to go to Paris to meet Joyce but lacked the passage money. I put my problem before him and suggested that if we married, my family would leave me alone."⁴⁷ Bryher gained a great degree of freedom from parental oversight, and McAlmon took advantage of the union to ingratiate himself with the Paris arts scene and further his career—Bryher funded his magazine *Contact*, and later his Contact Publishing.

Bryher married McAlmon in order to achieve some financial freedom as well as freedom of movement. Bryher's marriage to Kenneth Macpherson, which took place shortly after she divorced McAlmon in 1927, also achieved for Bryher a practical asset as well as something otherwise unachievable. Upon marrying McAlmon, an American, Bryher had lost British citizenship. When she wed Macpherson, her citizenship was reinstated. Furthermore, their marriage allowed for Bryher's (and Macpherson's) adoption of H.D.'s daughter, Perdita, which, in a

⁴⁴ Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989), 73.

⁴⁵ M. Epstein, ed. *Annual Register: A Review of Public Events at Home and Abroad, For Year 1933* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), 127, accessed May 1, 2016, ProQuest ebrary.

⁴⁶ Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis*, 205-206.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

roundabout way, secured Bryher's relationship with H.D. Their long-term intimate relationship was, by social standards, illegitimate. Like Bryher's male identification, her same-sex desire represented an identity that was outside the heteronormative frame of patriarchal structures. Bryher had no lawful claim to H.D., no civil contract binding one to the other. By marrying Macpherson (who was H.D.'s sometimes lover) and adopting H.D.'s daughter,⁴⁸ Bryher managed to orchestrate a scenario which bound them inextricably in the eyes of the law and society. She also ensured that she would not be pushed from H.D.'s life on account of the latter's intimate relationship with Macpherson. Both times she married, Bryher felt she had no option but to use the tools of heteronormative patriarchy in order to achieve her desires.

David Edward Rose describes philosophy's traditional characterization of free will partly as "the freedom to satisfy desires: I am not free when I am inhibited from acting as I would have done had the other agent not been present. So, I am free when I can satisfy my desires with no external intervention and not free when I am unable to satisfy my desires."⁴⁹ Bryher did not enjoy the freedom to satisfy her desires. As a child, she was prevented from moving her body as she wished. She could not realistically aspire to the future she desired for herself. Even her thoughts were policed; Bryher recalls her family "did their best to discourage [her] 'morbid ideas.'"⁵⁰

Rose explains the second characteristic of free will "as freedom of choice: I am free when I can transcend and negate any external determination. So, I am free when I can choose which amongst the set of my pressing desires I wish to act upon and am not free when suffering from addiction, psychological manipulation or when I am coerced."⁵¹ Bryher did not have freedom of choice. As an adult, she did not have political or economic autonomy, by virtue of her sex. Bryher could not participate in the political processes and systems which promulgated her subordination until the age

⁴⁸ It might have been possible for Bryher to adopt Perdita on her own account, had the adoption been her only goal. The British Adoption Act of 1926 allowed unmarried women and men to adopt. See Pat Thane, "Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century England," *Women's History Review* 20, no. 1 (2011): 18.

⁴⁹ David Edward Rose, "Hegel," in *The Routledge Companion to Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Gerald Gaus and Fred D'Agostino (New York: Routledge, 2013), 116.

⁵⁰ Bryher, *The Heart To Artemis*, 160.

⁵¹ Rose, "Hegel," 116.

of thirty. She could not choose to remain unmarried without risking her economic security. She was economically dependent upon the goodwill of her father and found it necessary to marry. Bryher's marriages to McAlmon and Macpherson are often described as strategic marriages, but they could just as accurately be described as marriages resulting from indirect social and economic coercion—they represented a conscious manoeuvring within and manipulation of the constraints of heteropatriarchy. Furthermore, as I discussed in my introduction, same-sex desire and transgender identification were condemned as pathological. Ultimately, Bryher felt she could not choose to openly and unabashedly embody her desire for women and her gender identity. Therefore, despite the privilege of her class, race and ability, Bryher was not free.

BRYHER'S PROJECT: FREEDOM FROM OPPRESSION

In his book *The End of Protest* (2016), Micah White—co-founder of the Occupy movement—describes revolutionary tactics. White explains that effective revolutionaries are able to act and think in both fast and slow temporalities. Their reaction to an opportune moment is “ultrafast in relation to the status quo ... before older, slower structures notice.”⁵² Their perspective also “traces the continuity of struggle back to the earliest days of antiquity and into the furthest stretches of what is to come.”⁵³ Bryher was this sort of revolutionary. In 1933, Bryher rallied her readership with an activist manifesto published in *Close-Up*: “The future is in our hands for every person influences another.”⁵⁴ She had long anticipated the war that was brewing, and she did not waste time before acting on behalf of those people for whom lethal danger was imminent. Her passion for liberty and adventure inspired her to help smuggle refugees from Hitler's regime, and over one hundred people were delivered from Hitler's clutches by way of Bryher's Swiss home, Kenwin. Thus, Bryher was able to act decisively and hastily in the name of freedom. Her oeuvre, on the other hand, reveals a consistent commitment to the pursuit and protection of freedom as her characters suffer under various forms of oppression. Thus, according

⁵² Micah White, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2016), 188.

⁵³ White, *The End of Protest*, 189.

⁵⁴ Bryher, “What Shall You Do in the War?,” in *Close Up: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), 309. First published in *Close Up* 10, no. 2 (June 1933).

to White's theory, her oeuvre might work "in ways designed to spark epiphanies in the minds of the next generation."⁵⁵ In this section, I examine Bryher's *The Player's Boy*, *Visa for Avalon*, and *The Colors of Vaud* for their treatment of oppression and theme of freedom, then examine *Beowulf* for the ways it relates, in particular, to oppressive structures aimed at gender and desire.

The Player's Boy (1953)

Since Bryher equated freedom with the life of a boy, it is no surprise that many—though not all—of her historical novels' protagonists are male. Bryher's historical fictions always feature either a male protagonist or a mixed cast of diverse characters, but never a female heroine. Her male protagonists live in the midst of significant political and social upheaval. They experience adventure and exercise agency that would simply be out of reach of female counterparts. Despite not sharing their sex, Bryher imbues her male heroes with autobiographical elements. In *The Player's Boy*, Bryher explores the struggles and successes of James Sands, an Elizabethan man who plays the woman's part in travelling stage troupes. Diana Collecott suggests that "Bryher wrote into the part of James Sands her own youthful desire 'to be a boy and have the world'."⁵⁶ The protagonist fights against social conditions which prevent him from pursuing his dreams—dreams which, despite his sex, parallel Bryher's: "I am tired of being a virtuous maid in a white robe – I wish I could be a page."⁵⁷

In *The Player's Boy*, Sands finds himself in the role of Bellario in Francis Beaumont's *Philaster*. Bryher first read *Philaster* at the age of fifteen when she came across *The Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1821).⁵⁸ At this time, Bryher was confronting "her social construction as a woman."⁵⁹ In *The Player's Boy*, Bryher revisits her first encounter with *Philaster* and the revelation that "a girl's part on the Elizabethan stage had been played by a boy."⁶⁰ She plays fast and loose with Elizabethan gender-bending; Bellario is a woman posing as a page-boy, so Sands is a

⁵⁵ White, *The End of Protest*, 189.

⁵⁶ Diana Collecott, *H.D. & Sapphic Modernism, 1910-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 243.

⁵⁷ Bryher, *The Player's Boy*, 64-65.

⁵⁸ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 37.

⁵⁹ Collecott, *H.D. & Sapphic Modernism, 1910-1950*, 243.

⁶⁰ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 100.

man playing a woman playing a man. In other words, Bellario cross-dresses, but Sands criss-crosses between genders, exemplifying again and again the act of performativity Judith Butler explains in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). “Performativity is thus not a singular ‘act,’” explains Butler, “for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms[.]”⁶¹ Sands performs his own masculinity, a performance made obvious by his subsequent performances of femininity performing masculinity and back again. Despite his dramatic ability to drift between genders and his tireless efforts to improve his social and economic standing, Sands finds himself consistently defeated by a rigid class system which offers few opportunities to those in poverty. Bryher’s representation was true to the historical condition of Elizabethan players’ “boy girls” who “had to put up with the disadvantages of both sexes and they never did, did they, get any reward for their pains.”⁶² With little hope of escaping his circumstances, Sands rails against the false values of wealth and talent, philosophizing, “It was neither land nor gifts that were important, but how we used them; why should we be kennelled into squares, as if life were the checkerboard of a universe incapable of change?”⁶³ Similarly, Bryher felt that, despite her wealth and talent, she was still subject to the social and physical confines of her assigned sex. Through James Sands, she imagines and (re)enacts the performativity of gender, but in the end, the neat squares of the checkerboard hold fast.

Visa for Avalon (1965)

The very title of this novel suggests a flight from oppression. In *Visa for Avalon*, a mysteriously motivated Movement has swarmed the seaside town of Trelawney and a handful of citizens, concerned for their safety, successfully apply for visas to the utopian island nation of Avalon. The two principle characters—Lilian Blunt and Robinson—are both getting on in age, but are willing and eager to leave all they know and fly for the unknown Avalon in hopes of finding freedom.

⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 12.

⁶² Bryher to May Sarton, quoted in Collecott, *H.D. & Sapphic Modernism, 1910-1950*, 244n70.

⁶³ Bryher, *The Player’s Boy*, 89-90.

Margaret Atwood discusses *Visa for Avalon* in her recent work *In Other Worlds: SF and The Human Imagination* (2011).⁶⁴ She describes the novel as the Kafkaesque musings of an elderly Bryher which reveals “the sadness of getting older and finding yourself surrounded by young people who don’t understand what you’ve lived through or even what you’re talking about.”⁶⁵ Indeed, this speculative novel presents a portion of the younger population as a menacing group of unquestioning followers—the Movement has a youth component reminiscent of Chairman Mao’s young Red Guards or the *Hitlerjugend*. Bryher attempts to free her mature protagonists from the ageism they sometimes face. Lilian Blunt, for example, makes an effort to navigate the bureaucratic labyrinth in order to save her home from being bulldozed. The Movement government official in charge of her case “hated dealing with these elderly women, they had no collective training and all that mattered to them was sentiment.”⁶⁶ Blunt, however, eventually defies the image the official has of her, first by setting her sights on Avalon, second by rebuking a sense of mandatory sentimentality for her lost home and confessing to adventurous (Bryher-like) dreams: “I wanted to be out on the Seven Seas, I never wanted to be in Rose Cottage at all.”⁶⁷

The novel is based on Bryher’s experience of the foreshadowing of World War II. As Bryher did in the thirties, *Visa for Avalon* cautions against ignoring practical political tactics like the suspension of personal freedoms, the implementation of mass surveillance and the vilification of intellectual liberty. It also warns against the psychological consequences of the suppression of desire and inquiry. Bryher draws on her experience of the two World Wars and projects them upon some unidentified future:

Mankind was telling itself the same story over again. It could not bear its hidden desires to be uncovered and if one came to the surface, some repressive movement rose to fight it. To be free was to be responsible but the people who were driving Lilian and [Robinson] into exile, dreaded personal decisions more than slavery. How ironical life was! They now possessed a knowledge of the inner workings of the mind no other centuries had known and it was precisely against such understanding that the revolution was directed.

⁶⁴ Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 174-183.

⁶⁵ Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 179.

⁶⁶ Bryher, *Visa for Avalon* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2004), 12.

⁶⁷ Bryher, *Visa for Avalon*, 144.

Anything but wisdom was the slogan they would chalk up on the walls.
Search, except within narrow limits, was a new word for sin.⁶⁸

I would argue *Visa for Avalon* also responds to Bryher's disappointment in the lack of progress in the fight for gay rights and the surge of vitriolic legal assaults perpetrated by Western nations against their nonheteronormative citizens in the 1950s and '60s. (Recall that Steven Seidman argues that the "closet era" stretched from the fifties to the eighties.⁶⁹) In the early part of the twentieth century, Bryher felt optimistic that medical (sexological and psychoanalytic) treatises would, in the wake of their popular dissemination, enlighten the public and inspire tolerance, empathy, acceptance, even fraternity. L. C. B. Seaman writes that it was "in the 1920's that it first became fashionable to talk sagely of the dangers of sexual 'repression' and of the undesirability of 'inhibition'."⁷⁰ Nevertheless, by the sixties, Bryher had observed the "anti-homosexual purges" of the American McCarthy era.⁷¹ In Britain, in the 1950s, "the number of convictions for homosexuality reached a new zenith" and thousands of men were being incarcerated each year for suspected homosexual offenses.⁷² If we read the passage above in light of rampant homophobic oppression, we see Bryher berating the culture that cannot "bear its hidden [homosexual] desires to be uncovered" and which systematically imposes legal sanctions "to fight" them. Bryher insists that "increased knowledge of the inner workings of the mind" should result in the individual freedom to take responsibility for—to claim, to assert—one's desires. Instead, she sees the narrowing of the boundaries of possibility for human embodiment and expression, and a religio-medico-legal attack on that which is (not such) "a new word for sin." Furthermore, the post-WWII era saw "an intensification of the themes of familialist discourses" which emphasized the traditional nuclear family featuring the wage-earning husband and father and the unpaid housewife and mother.⁷³ The unconventional family structure of which Bryher was a part and which

⁶⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁶⁹ Steven Seidman, *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 25.

⁷⁰ L. C. B. Seaman, *Post-Victorian Britain: 1902-1951* (London: Methuen, 1966), 119.

⁷¹ Andrea Friedman, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy: The Lavender Scare, Gossip, and Cold War Politics," in *When Private Talk Goes Public: Gossip in American History*, ed. Kathleen A. Feeley and Jennifer Frost (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 203.

⁷² Florence Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe Vol. I & II* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2006), 263.

⁷³ Dana L. Cloud, *Control and Consolation in American Culture and Politics: Rhetorics of Therapy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1998), 58.

emerged from the “intellectual mood” of the 1920s was a complete misfit with the ideals lauded in the later half of the century.⁷⁴ Even contemporary legal reforms struggle to accommodate non-nuclear family configurations.⁷⁵

Perhaps, as Atwood imagines, Bryher wrote *Visa for Avalon* while exclaiming, “Wait! Wait! I have just this one very important message I need to get across!”⁷⁶ The message is not a new one for Bryher, however. *Visa for Avalon* presents Bryher’s readership with yet another exquisitely crafted novel which emphasizes the unequivocal value of freedom:⁷⁷ the freedom to age without discrimination, the freedom of intellectual pursuit, the freedom to be responsible for and responsive to one’s (hidden) desires.

The Colors of Vaud (1969)

In *The Colors of Vaud*, the reader finds an entire generation stewing in discontent. In the eighteenth century, the citizens of Vaud toil under Bernese rule until young revolutionaries overturn Bernese authority. As in *Visa for Avalon* and *Beowulf*, this text features a cast of characters in a collection of vignettes. Generally, the text speaks of the injustice of classist oppression, the danger of autocratic rule, the necessity of revolution and the harsh reality of post-revolutionary discontent. *The Colors of Vaud* presents several disadvantaged characters, including Philippe, an orphan who has become embittered and vengeful because of the treatment he has received over the course of his life. He muses that fraternity among mankind will never be achieved, but nevertheless maintains hope that “Liberty and Equality, both were possible[.]”⁷⁸ In *The Colors of Vaud*, Bryher emphasizes the persistent nature of gender inequality. Even in the post-revolutionary state, where all citizens are (supposedly) considered equal, the members of the female sex continue to occupy a position of subordination. The novel features Madame Perrin and Sophie, both of whom are disadvantaged by their sex. Madame Perrin is at the mercy of her brother-in-law as a widowed foreigner. Sophie, her daughter, is a young girl disillusioned by gender discrimination. She complains to her cousin Antoine: “We [women] are serfs.

⁷⁴ Seaman, *Post-Victorian Britain*, 119.

⁷⁵ See Fiona J. Kelly, *Transforming Law’s Family: The Legal Recognition of Planned Lesbian Motherhood* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, 2011).

⁷⁶ Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 175.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁷⁸ Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud*, 21.

You [men] use us when necessary and otherwise treat us like dolls.”⁷⁹ She laments the (lack of) opportunities available to her as the daughter of a widowed émigré.

In Sophie, Bryher once again presents her reader with a fictionalized self. Half a century after Bryher wrote about Nancy in *Development* and *Two Selves*, she describes another feisty young girl with a thirst for adventure and a disdain for the limitations of her sex. Like Nancy and the young Bryher, Sophie “should like to be a merchant and visit strange lands.”⁸⁰ Her dreams of adventure are quashed when she finds herself banished to a miserable boarding school reminiscent of Bryher’s Queenwood, the institution Bryher describes as “a hated English school.”⁸¹ Throughout the text, Sophie expresses her thirst for freedom. She is willing to sacrifice her virtue for the liberty she considers essential: “If it were sinful to choose freedom, she would choose sin.”⁸² She seeks liberation from oppression founded in gender inequality and decries the fact she may never be a merchant but merely a sea captain’s wife.⁸³ She finds the hallmarks of female domesticity tedious and imagines a male clerk’s menial tasks infinitely preferable to those of a woman. Sophie rebels against convention and the ruling Bernese. At a liberation rally, Sophie shouts, “‘Liberty for us all!’ It did not matter to Sophie that her voice was lost in the uproar, nobody could reprove her for being noisy today. It was not just wearing a cockade, this was the opening of the gates. Liberty meant freedom for the women as well as the men to learn, talk, ride, just as Antoine had done[.]”⁸⁴ When freedom from the oppressive Bernese landowners comes to her Swiss canton, Sophie revels temporarily in the illusion of her own liberation but is soon confronted by the fact that she cannot seize it as a member of the female sex. “If only she had been a boy ... It was unfair, all life was unfair if one were a Sophie and not an Antoine or a Philippe.”⁸⁵

At the time of publication, Bryher was an elderly woman, and she had seen feminism achieve much progress during her seventy-five years.⁸⁶ In the early decades

⁷⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁸¹ Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud*, 62, and Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 68.

⁸² Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud*, 63.

⁸³ Ibid., 32.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 134.

⁸⁶ Perdita—H.D.’s biological daughter, and Bryher’s adopted daughter—apprenticed on a sailing ship in the early thirties and enjoyed an experience Bryher had always dreamed of but which was denied her as a girl. I imagine Bryher beaming with pride when she wrote to Conrad Aiken that Perdita “insists she is going to sea in a windhammer.” See Bryher to H.D., April 30, 1933, and Bryher to Conrad Aiken, August 27, 1933, in Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 224, 373.

of the twentieth century, Bryher counted among a cohort of “modernist women who wrote” and who, according to Elizabeth Podnieks, “were exiled within male-centred literary movements” such as modernism.⁸⁷ When she could, Bryher supported female artists and writers financially. In the post-WWII years, veterans struggled to find employment and they clashed with the new female workforce. Women, who had gotten a taste for working outside the home, were now the target of a campaign to usher them back inside it. In *The Days of Mars*, Bryher writes, “I have always been a feminist if that word means fighting for women’s rights, and I glory in it. The bombs in both wars made no distinction as to sex and if the women had cracked up either time, our history would have been very different.”⁸⁸ Bryher understood on a personal level that the fight for women’s freedom from patriarchal oppression was far from complete. As an individual, Bryher had all the advantage one could hope for: the freedom of British citizenry, considerable financial independence, and the social influence her economic circumstances afforded her. Nevertheless, there remained the fact of her assigned biological sex, and, therefore, she would forever fall under the category of “exquisite British lady practitioner,”⁸⁹ suffering the corresponding stigmas and stereotypes of the “fairer sex.”

Bryher was convinced that global freedom would only be achieved if freedom of thought were preserved at all costs. In *The Colors of Vaud*, Sophie comes to recognize that, despite the liberation of her male comrades, she remains oppressed: “Then is there never to be freedom?”⁹⁰ Her confidante replies, “Yes, when we have more knowledge.”⁹¹ Knowledge production, inquiry, intellectual exchange—Bryher placed them at the foundation of freedom: “It is for you and me to decide whether we will help to raise respect for intellectual liberty ... , or whether we all plunge, in every kind and colour of uniform, towards a not to be imagined barbarism.”⁹² Bryher illustrates a binary which positions “intellectual liberty” at one pole and “not to be imagined barbarism” at the other.

Bryher penned these words after visiting H.D. in Vienna. She was there between the fourth and seventeenth of June, 1933. H.D. broke off her analysis with

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Podnieks, *Daily Modernism: The Literary Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart, and Anaïs Nin* (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2000), 72.

⁸⁸ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 35.

⁸⁹ Charles A. Brady, “The British Novel Today,” *Thought* 34, no. 4 (Winter 1959/1960): 521.

⁹⁰ Bryher, *The Player’s Boy*, 130.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Bryher, “What Shall You Do in the War?,” 309.

Freud on the twelfth of June. At the same time, tensions erupted as the Austrian government took action against the Nazi presence. Bryher and H.D. were in the capital during a week of “Nazi terror in the streets of Vienna” as Hitler’s forces reacted to Austrian retaliatory efforts.⁹³ It would be six years before England declared war on Germany, before it would become clear to Western powers that Hitler and his Nazi regime sought to revoke freedom on a global scale. Bryher’s words of warning—her years spent raising awareness of the impending conflict—proved fruitless. By September 1939, Hitler’s Germany had long been waging a campaign against freedom—freedom of thought, freedom of religion—and had been carrying out its death sentence. Despite the danger, Bryher summoned her courage and determination and returned to London where she would survive the Blitz, continue to “raise respect for intellectual liberty” and write *Beowulf*.

Beowulf (French Translation, 1948, in English, 1956)

During the Blitz on London, George Orwell insisted that “only the mentally dead are capable of sitting down and writing novels while this nightmare is going on.”⁹⁴ During the eight months between September 1940 and May 1941, the Blitz tested “civilian morale, subjecting people to prolonged raids, disruption of services, and destruction of property and life.”⁹⁵ Casualties during those months exceeded fifteen thousand, and the bombings left nearly one and a half million Londoners homeless.⁹⁶ Despite Orwell’s bold statement, some modernist writers continued to work at that time. Vera Brittain, for example, who had suffered significant trauma from her experiences of the First World War, wrote that the sight of bombed-out areas of London made her “feel too sick for words.”⁹⁷ Yet Brittain wrote *England’s Hour: An Autobiography 1939-1941* (1941) “not only during the war but in the midst of it”⁹⁸; however, “nothing of this fearful tone and nightmarish landscape appeared

⁹³ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope’s Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.’s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 288.

⁹⁴ George Orwell, “London Letter,” *Partisan Review* (March-April 1941) quoted in John Rossi, “‘My country, right or left’: Orwell’s Patriotism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. John Rodden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 91.

⁹⁵ Amy Helen Bell, *London Was Ours: Diaries and Memoirs of the London Blitz* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 4.

⁹⁶ Bell, *London Was Ours*, 4.

⁹⁷ Quoted in Bell, *London Was Ours*, 42.

⁹⁸ Vera Brittain, *England’s Hour: An Autobiography 1939-1941* (London: Continuum, 2005), xii.

there.”⁹⁹ And in 1944, before the war had officially come to an end, Bryher finished writing *Beowulf*—a novel about the Blitz written during the Blitz.¹⁰⁰

Beowulf centers on a tea house—the Warming Pan—and its proprietors—Angelina and Selina—all based on actual London counterparts.¹⁰¹ Sylvia Beach remembers that Bryher “observed everything when she visited ‘The Warming Pan’ teashop in the London Blitz days—and, as *Beowulf* proves, nothing escaped her.”¹⁰² Through a series of vignettes, the reader is introduced to the many characters who represent a cross-section of London society: an elderly widower, a retired serviceman, a wealthy socialite, a waitress, small business owners, bureaucrats, a secretary, a working-class spinster, a country housewife, a New Woman, and a young soldier.¹⁰³

Beowulf was favourably received upon its publication in England in 1956, praised primarily for its authentic depiction of Londoners during the Blitz. Marianne Moore reviewed *Beowulf* for *The Saturday Review of Literature*. Moore states that *Beowulf* “is not only a close-up of war but a documentary of insights, of national temperament, of primness and patriotism, sarcasm and compassion, of hospitality and heroism, a miniaturama [*sic*] of all the folk who stood firm.”¹⁰⁴ The documentary quality of *Beowulf* is what other reviewers have praised as well. Mary O’Hara insists that “nothing will ever be written that depicts with more clarity a people’s epic struggle against a common enemy.”¹⁰⁵ The few mentions of *Beowulf* in recent years

⁹⁹ Bell, *London Was Ours*, 42.

¹⁰⁰ Patrick Gregory, “Introduction,” in Bryher, *The Player’s Boy* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2000), xv.

¹⁰¹ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 12. It is worth mentioning that Angelina and Selina may be composites of Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach, to whom the novel is dedicated. Their names start with the same letters, and Angelina and Selina share some characteristics with Monnier and Beach, as well as with H.D. and Bryher.

¹⁰² Sylvia Beach, *Shakespeare and Company* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956), 99–100. Note, *Shakespeare and Company* was first published the same year as *Beowulf*. Beach would have been familiar with the text either by way of its French translation, which was published in 1948, or directly in manuscript form from Bryher.

¹⁰³ It should be noted that *Beowulf* is listed among Bryher’s post-war historical novels in the Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. (See Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, s.v. “Bryher,” accessed February 8, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Bryher>). It should not necessarily be classified with her other historical works such as *Coin of Carthage*, *The Player’s Boy*, *Roman Wall*, *Visa for Avalon*, *The Fourteenth of October* and *Ruan*, however, because, at the time of authorship, the events were her present, not her past. I argue it should be read alongside other works of autobiographical fiction such as *West*, *Development* and *Two Selves*. Although there is no one character that represents Bryher, the astute reader will find aspects of her personality and experience distributed between characters.

¹⁰⁴ Marianne Moore, Review of *Beowulf*, by Bryher (Pantheon Books), in *The Saturday Review of Literature* 39 (1 September 1956): 11, reprinted in Marianne Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1987), 488.

¹⁰⁵ Mary O’Hara, “Carefully Etched Vignettes: Courage in a British Tea Room,” Review of Bryher, *Beowulf*, in *The Pittsburgh Press*, Sept. 9, 1956, accessed February 6, 2016,

extol it for its accurate portrayal of the British during the Blitz. Andrea Zemgulys praises the novel as an “important contribution to the study of fiction of the Second World War, examining the complex and varying mindsets of those living under the inhuman conditions of civilian bombings[.]”¹⁰⁶ In *Kirkus Reviews*, *Beowulf* is described as having “an immediacy and a sharp etching in the presentation of people who seem to be caught candid and unaware by the author[.]”¹⁰⁷

Besides being listed as “additional reading” in Yvonne M. Klein’s *Beyond the Homefront: Women’s Autobiographical Writing of the Two World Wars* (1997),¹⁰⁸ *Beowulf* has received very little contemporary critical attention. Moore presaged the book’s relatively inconsequential fate when she compared it to one of its characters, Colonel Ferguson, a retired serviceman whose offers to contribute to the military effort are persistently declined. “Like the Colonel’s return,” Moore, whose own writing was “informed by an ... ethos of service,”¹⁰⁹ writes that “Bryher’s work is always an offer of services.”¹¹⁰ Whether those services are solicited or appreciated is another thing entirely.

Beowulf keeps to the theme of freedom which is consistent throughout Bryher’s oeuvre, and the novel touches on ideological clashes between feminism and neo-Victorianism, and reinforces the value of open-mindedness and intellectual liberty. More interesting, perhaps, is the treasure trove of subtle nonheteronormative codification in the novel. *Beowulf* is, I argue, a subversive work of speculative fiction which imagines a scenario where a subject’s value and freedom are divorced from relational positionality (mother, wife, spinster, etc.) as well as (nonheteronormative) desire or gender identity. Finally, *Beowulf* suggests a framework for examining historical subjects which privileges individual specificity over taxonomic affiliation.

Freedom and the Warming Pan

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=53kbAAAAIBAJ&sjid=NE4EAAAAIBAJ&pg=1954%2C2057165>.

¹⁰⁶ Andrea Zemgulys, Review of *Visa For Avalon* by Bryher, *Modern Language Studies* 35, no.1 (Spring 2005): 93.

¹⁰⁷ Review of Bryher, *Beowulf*, *Kirkus Reviews*, accessed February 8, 2016, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/bryher-3/beowulf-6/>.

¹⁰⁸ Yvonne M. Klein, ed. *Beyond the Homefront: Women’s Autobiographical Writing of the Two World Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 248.

¹⁰⁹ Cynthia Hogue, *Scheming Women: Poetry, Privilege, and the Politics of Subjectivity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 73.

¹¹⁰ Marianne Moore, Review of *Beowulf*, reprinted in Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, 488.

In *Beowulf*, Selina Tippet and Angelina Hawkins are partners and proprietors of the Warming Pan tea house in London. Air raids are frequent, and all the characters deal with terror, destruction and death. Nevertheless, in keeping with the famous slogan, they all endeavour to “keep calm and carry on.” Selina focuses her attention primarily on keeping the business afloat despite declining patronage, and she strives to maintain the quality of her wares despite the challenges posed by food rationing.

Before becoming a self-employed businesswoman, Selina served as a paid companion to a curmudgeonly elderly woman who surveilled and criticized Selina’s every move. She could, however, escape to her local tea house on occasion for an hour or two when she could enjoy communal anonymity with her tea and scones/squares/sandwiches. Therefore, tearooms “had a special meaning for Selina. She associated them with freedom.”¹¹¹ She defends her own establishment, the Warming Pan, because it is “useful” in that it facilitates intersection.¹¹² It is a site which accommodates all classes and enables its patrons to inhabit the space without enforcing the strict social mores which were observed in other private establishments. The Warming Pan is thus “a symbol of eternal freedom.”¹¹³ In a London tea house, a patron could arrive without a reservation and need not consider a particular code of dress.¹¹⁴ The factory munitions worker could enjoy a scone while wearing work clothes. The affluent socialite could revel in sweets and sandwiches. The impoverished widower could order a pot of tea, enjoy an endless supply of boiling water and the shelter of a warm and dry establishment, and sit as long as he liked. The factory munitions worker, the affluent socialite and the impoverished widower could sit one next to the other at the bench overlooking the street.

Bomb shelters, too, were spaces which accommodated anyone who sought them out. The final scenes of *Beowulf* take place in a bomb shelter where the many characters converge while their homes and workplaces are being shelled. These spaces did not discriminate based on race, class, gender, or age.¹¹⁵ By focusing the novel’s action on a primary setting such as a tea house, and concluding it in a bomb

¹¹¹ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 24.

¹¹² Ibid., 28.

¹¹³ Ibid., 190.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁵ Note, “ability” is absent from this list of identifiers. Many disabled and elderly, as well as children and pregnant women, were evacuated to the countryside during the Blitz.

shelter, Bryher creates a narrative space where all of the characters enjoy equal ground and freedom regardless of social standing.

The New Woman and the Neo-Victorian

In *Beowulf*, Bryher provides her reader with repeated contradiction between persistent neo-Victorian values and feminist progress. Bryher saw feminism as indispensable in its efforts to secure women equal rights. As Philippe suggests in *The Colors of Vaud*, freedom and equality go hand in hand,¹¹⁶ so if feminism was fighting for women's equality, it was also fighting for their freedom. Bryher spent a lifetime evading and negotiating the inequality and limitations imposed on her sex. It follows that *Beowulf* should feature the conflicts between individual subjects and Victorian gender stereotypes. Evelyn (Eve)—who has left her family and rural home for a clerical job in the city—rants: “People talked about progress, but when you came down to happenings and not articles in the press, the same old Victorian life went on. They accepted the Warming Pan because it belonged to the kitchen, was domestic, but her own job was taboo. There was nothing people hated more than independence.”¹¹⁷

The contradiction between feminist and neo-Victorian values is represented by Horatio Rashleigh and Eve, both lodgers in the apartments above the Warming Pan.¹¹⁸ The first lines of *Beowulf* establish conflict between the older generation rooted in Victorian sensibilities and the new generation and its New Woman: Rashleigh complains of his upstairs neighbours, “Those wretched people had turned on the radio again.”¹¹⁹ Horatio Rashleigh is a septuagenarian and painter who has already survived the Boer War and the Great War. He represents those elderly for whom the suffering of national instability, food shortages and rations, and intimate combat with the enemy were familiar and who now carried on with domestic life despite the horror of the Blitz. Rashleigh's life is assaulted equally, it seems, by blackout regulations, lack of funds, the nightly barrages of the Blitz, and Eve. Eve is a gender-bending New Woman with an affinity for swing music and a penchant for eschewing gender convention (she pays the bill after tea and cakes with her soldier friend, Joe).¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Bryher, *The Colors of Vaud*, 21.

¹¹⁷ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 175.

¹¹⁸ Evelyn's surname is not mentioned.

¹¹⁹ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

For Rashleigh, the Victorian age was a golden era. In his mind, it was a “well-ordered world” he pines for like a romantic painting in “pastel shades.”¹²¹ He had the company of his now-dead wife, and he recalls with fondness a more respectful younger generation. He even found the music more edifying. Although Rashleigh is a secondary character in *Beowulf*, Bryher chooses his perspective to be the first from which her reader enters the text. In the first paragraph of *Beowulf*, Bryher achieves the presentation and subversion of a gender stereotype in just one (long) sentence. Rashleigh, who is waiting on the allowance he receives from his cousin, remarks, “Naturally, he never expected a woman to be punctual, but Agatha, his cousin, was really exasperating; it was often the seventh of the month before she remembered to mail him his little cheque; it made life so difficult.”¹²² The word “naturally” functions in two ways. First, it establishes the extent of Rashleigh’s sexism, his belief that women are naturally tardy and cannot be expected to keep to fixed deadlines. Second, “naturally” recalls psychoanalytic and sexological language which was used to describe deviant behaviour as “unnatural” and normative behaviour as “natural.” Rashleigh’s sexism is undermined by the fact that he is being supported financially by his female cousin; the role of provider is reversed from the male to the female and his subsistence depends on the work and wage of a woman. This subversion sets the precedent for further challenges to gender norms.

Rashleigh describes Eve’s descent past his room as she tears “down the stairs to business, clattering like a fledgling man-at-arms in a leather coat without even the pretence of a cap on short, smooth hair. ... Forty years ago Eve would have been taught to creep past his door had a necessary errand called her forth early in the morning.”¹²³ Rashleigh and Eve represent two starkly different demographics, and Horatio’s sexist expectations, his old-fashioned taste in music and art, seem to support a sustained conflict between the opposition positions of “old” and “new.” However, despite his age and his surly disposition, Bryher bestows upon Rashleigh the gift of self-reflection and a hint of open-mindedness. Although his first reaction to Eve is negative and condescending, he quickly assumes a paternal stance and concedes “perhaps the child had not really meant to be rude[.]”¹²⁴ He reflects further on his

¹²¹ Ibid., 10.

¹²² Ibid., 9.

¹²³ Ibid., 10-11.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 11.

attitude toward the young woman and asserts “there [is] no vice more intolerable than intolerance[.]”¹²⁵

Bryher’s personal childhood experience with the Victorian age, which Rashleigh recalls so fondly, was a painful negotiation of her family’s insistence that she conform to the expectations of her sex. Eve—with her short hair, masculine attire, exuberance and ideals, seizing what power she can negotiate for herself—recalls Bryher’s younger self. Perhaps Rashleigh represents Bryher’s father and mother (who died in 1933 and 1939, respectively), and her desire for them to open their minds, interrogate their own intolerance and accept her as she was. Despite being in his seventies, Rashleigh finds the fortitude to examine his own prejudices and preconceptions, which doesn’t seem to have been the case for Sir John and Lady Hannah Ellerman.

Bryher and the Ellermans

According to Susan Stanford Friedman, Bryher’s parents disapproved of her difference:¹²⁶ her outspokenness, her masculine presentation, and her intimate friendship with H.D. In the Ellerman family, Bryher felt the need to conceal her identity and her desires. Even into her forties, when Bryher controlled her own finances and enjoyed professional celebrity, the emotional support of H.D., and the confidence that comes with life experience, she felt the need to downplay her masculine presentation as well as her relationship with H.D. for the sake of her family’s conditional approval. Both women took steps—sometimes elaborate—in order to create the illusion of distance in what was a very close relationship. For example, H.D. offered to send her daily letters to Kenneth Macpherson first, and Macpherson could then send them on to Bryher, giving the impression the letters were from Macpherson in the first place. H.D. suggested this scheme, “as it is this sort of thing that sometime upsets mama, makes things so hard for you[.]”¹²⁷ Bryher and H.D. also tended to take separate accommodations when visiting the Ellermans presumably in order to appease Bryher’s parents.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 229n3.

¹²⁷ H.D. to Bryher, May 1, 1933, Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 229.

Furthermore, Bryher tempered her masculine presentation when meeting with her family. Despite projecting a tone of self-assurance and boldness in her autobiographical fiction, her correspondence, and her photographic representation, Bryher remained unable to embody her (masculine) self in the company of her family. Instead, she “dressed up” in feminine clothing, albeit with great reluctance. Perdita (H.D.’s biological daughter and Bryher’s adopted daughter) recalls how Bryher, upon visiting her family, “tried to conform to the role of dutiful daughter – dolled up, dressed up. In fact they called her Dolly[.]”¹²⁸ Clearly, Bryher felt she needed to inhabit a different, more conventional persona within her family. Winifred,¹²⁹ it seemed, was less the confident caretaker, enabler, patron, avant-garde intellectual, artist, philanthropist, and more the (female) second-fiddle sibling who femmed-up and stifled her strong opinions. For example, in 1933, she was so convinced that England should take an immediate armed stance against Nazi aggression that she shifted her political affiliation from Whig to Tory based on this opinion.¹³⁰ But Bryher was aware of her father’s sexist views,¹³¹ and these likely prevented her feeling empowered to share her controversial ideas. So, when among her family, Bryher mostly kept her opinions to herself.¹³² Such reticence contrasts starkly with her unabashed forthrightness during the war, when she hand-distributed her own war-time leaflet, a poem she wrote rebuking “Authority” for its stupidity regarding the food rationing system. Bryher describes handing it around to Londoners, proselytizing: “Some seemed uneasy as I pressed it into their hands, others got the message.”¹³³ Bryher had many traits in common with a zealous religious convert. She did what she felt compelled to do in order to reach as many as possible with her message. Once war broke and the Nazi raids brought the conflict to the home front, Bryher saw herself “as a cabin-boy trotting along the ruins of London, fists clenched, battle-ready, a unit among a million[.]”¹³⁴ In the Ellerman family, however, Bryher was reduced to towing the line.

¹²⁸ Perdita Schaffner, “Running,” *The Iowa Review* 16, no. 3 (1986): 8.

¹²⁹ Beach, *Shakespeare and Company*, 100.

¹³⁰ Bryher to H.D., May 18, 1933, in Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 289.

¹³¹ Bryher confided to H.D., “Dada . . . hates women in business[.]” See Bryher to H.D., May 23, 1933, in Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 312.

¹³² Bryher to H.D., May 18, 1933, in Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 289.

¹³³ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 27.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

Bryher's visits with her family renewed her zeal for freedom, and I imagine her tossing her hairpins and shedding her skirts enthusiastically when her visits with the Ellermans came to an end. She probably wished her family could echo Selina Tippet's resolute conclusion that "We old folks have got to march with the times."¹³⁵ Confronted with the (self-imposed) responsibility of inspiring open-mindedness and acceptance, Bryher would have shared Eve's exasperation when she cries, "Was there no way of persuading people to be tolerant, to let each other alone?"¹³⁶ However, the task of persuading those whose minds are shut resolutely is an exercise in futility.

Coding: The Bulldog

The jacket cover on Pantheon's 1956 printing of *Beowulf* features an illustration of a wrinkled, flat-faced, wide-legged bulldog and represents the plaster dog nicknamed Beowulf which takes pride of place in the Warming Pan at Angelina's request. Once again, Bryher imbues her fiction with fact. She describes seeing the inspiration for the novel's namesake in *The Days of Mars*: "I went out gloomily one morning with my basket to get our rations and saw a huge crater at the end of Basil Street. Somebody had fetched a large plaster bulldog, ... and stuck it on guard beside the biggest pile of rubble. At that moment *Beowulf*, my war novel, was conceived."¹³⁷

The bulldog named Beowulf combines a number of codes and references, one of which links the canine to Bryher herself. Animal totems often became nicknames among friends in H.D. and Bryher's circle. For their parts, H.D. was "Kat" and Bryher was "Fido." Fido-Bryher felt particularly attached to the real-life Warming Pan because she found it a warm and accepting space. She revelled in the happy invitation she found upon her first visit to the tea house. Bryher recalls, "There was a large notice, *Dogs Welcome*, hanging on the door and as I am to those, but only those, who know me intimately, Fido, I felt at ease and knew that I should not be hustled out to eat from my bowl somewhere under the stairs."¹³⁸ Bryher's playful language betrays a weightier suggestion. Fido represented Bryher's male identification,¹³⁹ and

¹³⁵ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 11.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹³⁷ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 13.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁹ When using the pseudonym "Fido," Bryher would sometimes also refer to herself with third-person masculine pronouns. Kenneth Macpherson and H.D., too, sometimes used male pronouns for Bryher in their correspondence. For example, in a letter to H.D., Macpherson writes, "Fido somewhat subdued,

since her identification did not match the sex she was assigned at birth, she felt herself a perpetual misfit. Not one to dismiss the writing on the wall,¹⁴⁰ Bryher would have read a double-entendre in the innocuous notice. She likely interpreted it as welcoming her instead of relegating her gender identity to “somewhere under the stairs.”

Bryher also allies herself with the bulldog breed in *Two Selves* where, in a neat and sensuous description, she brings together symbols of both herself and H.D.: “The plane trees shook into leaf; hyacinths spiked the sharp green lawn. A bulldog scrunched under the low park railing to leave audacious paw marks over the dewy grass.”¹⁴¹ H.D. is represented by hyacinths—she “refers to Hyacinth in poetry, fiction, and essays; and she often signed herself Hyacinth in correspondence with Bryher”¹⁴²—so Bryher presents her canine counterpart engaged in an enthusiastic inhabiting of the landscape that represents H.D. This scene becomes animated with meaning only when the reader is aware of whom the hyacinth and the dog represent.

In *Beowulf*, the plaster bulldog’s name alludes to both the hero of the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon epic poem of the same name, and to the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, who rallied the country, saw its people through to victory, and who came to be known as the British Bulldog.¹⁴³ However, the bulldog also signals a queer presence in the text by conjuring the women of the fin-de-siècle lesbian subculture. Beatriz Preciado describes the coevolution of the French bulldog and the nonheteronormative woman:

Fabricated at the end of the nineteenth-century, French bulldogs and lesbians co-evolve from being marginal monsters into becoming media creatures and bodies of pop and chic consumption. ... The history of the French bulldog and that of the working queer woman are tied to the transformations brought on by the industrial revolution and the emergence of modern sexualities. ... Soon, the so-called French bulldog became the beloved companion of the ‘Belles de nuit,’¹⁴⁴ being depicted by artists such as Toulouse Lautrec and Degas in Parisian brothels and cafes. [The dog’s] ugly face, according to conventional beauty standards, echoes the lesbian refusal of the heterosexual canon of

.... Clever dog! Enjoying himself where possible[.]” Kenneth Macpherson to H.D., May 15, 1933, in Friedman, ed., *Analyzing Freud*, 278.

¹⁴⁰ I am referring here to the hallucinations of the images on the wall that H.D. and Bryher experienced at Corfu in 1920. See Robert Morley, *The Analysand’s Tale* (London: Karnac, 2007), 91-93.

¹⁴¹ Bryher, *Two Novels, “Development” and “Two Selves,”* 184.

¹⁴² Eileen Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 96.

¹⁴³ See Emrys Hughes, *British Bulldog: His Career in War and Peace* (New York: Exposition Books, 1955.)

¹⁴⁴ Prostitutes.

female beauty; its muscular and strong body and its small size made of the *molosse* the ideal companion of the urban *flâneuse*, the nomad woman writer and the prostitute. [By] the end of the nineteenth century, together with the cigar, the suit or even writing [itself], the bulldog became an identity accessory, a gender and political marker and a privileged survival companion for the manly woman, the lesbian, the prostitute and the gender reveler [in] the growing European cities. ... Lesbian writers Renée Vivien and Natalie Clifford Barney and Colette, as well as modernist writers such as Catulle Mendès, Coppée, Henry Cantel, Albert Méral and Léon Cladel gathered together with bulldogs at La Souris. ... Representing the so-called dangerous classes, the scrunched-up faces of the bulldog, as those of the manly lesbians, were part of the modern aesthetic turn. ... By the early 1920s, the French bulldog had become a biocultural companion of the liberated woman and writer in literature, painting, and the emerging media.¹⁴⁵

We can support this reading of the bulldog when we consider the ways Bryher incorporates dogs in her texts. Rashleigh, for example, hopes Miss Johnson—a woman from whom he hopes to elicit financial support—“was not one of those aggressive women who centered their lives on dogs.”¹⁴⁶ A “cat-lady” is characterized in contemporary pop culture as a single woman who has filled the man-shaped void in her life with feline companions. In *Beowulf*, the spinster’s pet is a dog. (“There were no children in the park, not even an old maid with her dog.”¹⁴⁷) The woman (whose primary relationship is *not* with a man) who owns a dog is a threat, or, perhaps because she is threatening she owns a dog. In *Two Selves*, another bulldog makes an appearance. This time, in the context of the dialogue, the dog does not seem to represent Bryher, in particular, but the bohemian antithesis to the demure and doting housewife and mother. When Nancy discusses with her mother the possibility of acquiring a French bulldog, her mother replies, “Exotic creatures. But they say they are safe with children. I wonder though what makes you have such queer tastes.”¹⁴⁸

By alluding simultaneously to two (hetero) heroes—one enjoying pride of place in Britain’s canon of classic literature, the other a position of political power and international fame—as well as the companion and icon of the (mannish) lesbian, Bryher demonstrates the instability of the signifier/signified relationship. One signifier: the bulldog Beowulf. Three very different signifieds: Beowulf (the Scandinavian hero), Churchill and the lesbian. Bryher, who eschewed all sexological

¹⁴⁵ Beatriz Preciado quoted in Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 303-304n1.

¹⁴⁶ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 13.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴⁸ Bryher, *Two Novels*, “*Development*” and “*Two Selves*,” 274.

identification, suggests that signifiers such as “lesbian” or “invert” are fluid and have the potential to represent a number of possible subjects and, for that reason, should perhaps be divested of some degree of the value her contemporaries were placing on those terms.

Eschewing Lesbian Identification

The characters Selina Tippet and Angelina Hawkins are single women, old enough to be termed “spinsters.” They run a business together, live together in the apartment above their tea house, and share a bank account—a nest egg for their future. These facts suggest commitment and longevity. Terms of endearment such as “my dear” and “my lamb” indicate tender feelings and emotional attachment.¹⁴⁹ Recalling the subversive symbol of the bulldog, Selina is described as “a ladylike and gentle bulldog.”¹⁵⁰ Angelina is characterized in explicitly masculine terms: “In Angelina you saw an elderly Englishman, smoking a pipe and strolling about a plantation.”¹⁵¹ Patrons of the Warming Pan acknowledge their partnership.¹⁵² Theirs is clearly a co-dependent relationship. Certainly, it was more common for women to team up during the war in the absence of men. However, female friends and domestic partners could become the subject of gossip and speculation. Virginia Nicholson writes that in the inter-war years, “many women innocent of anything more sinister than sharing a church pew found themselves the subjects of hostile insinuation.”¹⁵³

Looking to *Beowulf*’s female partnership for overt expressions of same-sex female love is a fruitless endeavour. There are no references to the extensive taxonomy of terms which could designate same-sex desire. Instead, an understated intimacy prevails. During Bryher’s lifetime, the term “lesbian” was a site of dynamic and multiple representations, and Bryher chose not to employ it to identify herself—or Angelina and Selina. As I explore in my introduction, the concept of the lesbian (or, female invert) was tied to various manifestations of the socially transgressive

¹⁴⁹ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 96, 192.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵³ Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 181-2.

female, from the woman seeking higher education,¹⁵⁴ to the suffragette,¹⁵⁵ to the unwed and childless (by choice).¹⁵⁶ The lesbian was also characterized as predatory—whether as the school-mistress who targets helpless and hapless female students,¹⁵⁷ or as the sexually aggressive lesbian “vampire” who preys on heterosexual women.¹⁵⁸ Scientific and medical discourses presented lesbianism as pathological, a deviation from “normal” heterosexual relations and desires. Lillian Faderman imagines a hypothetical “woman who found herself passionately attached to another female.”¹⁵⁹ This woman, coming of age in the early twentieth century, “could not – or she refused to – recognize her love for another woman in the sexologists’ descriptions of lesbianism.”¹⁶⁰ Although, as Martha Vicinus points out, late nineteenth-century sexologists aimed for “a stable sexual identity for everyone[,]” and the “psychomedical discourse” they produced “gave lesbians a wider choice of vocabulary[,]” they effectively presented “a narrower choice of roles.”¹⁶¹ And this choice of roles was fashioned to mimic the heterosexual male/female binary.

Even among the educated avant-garde of the European modernist movement, the figure of the lesbian could be simultaneously inconsequential, laughable and infuriating. Thus, the narrative of lesbian identity available to Bryher and her cohorts was rife with (potentially) problematic associations with a number of political, social, medical and legal agendas. In addition, women who loved women had to reconcile themselves to a category of identification which was claimed by others with whom they might not (have wanted to) affiliate themselves. For example, Julie Mullard, who had a long-term relationship with writer Mary Renault (1905-1983), claimed that, in South Africa, “only the really flamboyant types will admit to being lesbian, very

¹⁵⁴ See Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull, *The Lesbian History Sourcebook: Love and sex between women in Britain from 1780 to 1970* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 129-154.

¹⁵⁵ Martha Vicinus, “Feminists and sex: how to find lesbians at the turn of the century,” in *Perspectives on Feminist Political Thought in European History: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Tjitske Akkerman and Siep Stuurman (New York: Routledge, 1998), 197.

¹⁵⁶ Alison Oram, “Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-war Feminist Discourses,” *Women’s History Review* 1, no. 3 (1992): 418.

¹⁵⁷ See D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2001).

¹⁵⁸ Sherrie A. Inness, *The Lesbian Menace: Ideology, Identity, and the Representation of Lesbian Life* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 6.

¹⁵⁹ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 3.

¹⁶⁰ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 3.

¹⁶¹ Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 173.

unattractive.”¹⁶² Renault, for her part, “refused the term ‘lesbian’ as descriptive of her relationship or of herself.”¹⁶³ Sylvia Beach—whose intimate partner was Adrienne Monnier—referred to Monnier in an interview as her “French friend.”¹⁶⁴ She also described famed lesbian Natalie Clifford Barney as “an amazon” who “was charming, Many of her sex found her fatally so, I believe.”¹⁶⁵ Mary Meigs, an American-born painter and writer, explains, “I belonged to a generation of women who were terrified by the idea of being known as lesbians[.]”¹⁶⁶ Interestingly, Meigs points to an anxiety of “outing” by association. She explains: “One of the side effects of lesbians’ fear of being known to the world was our fear of being known to each other, so that a kind of caution was exercised ... that no longer seems necessary today.”¹⁶⁷

Jodie Medd suggests in her recent work *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism* (2012) that male homosexuality is read as the “(open) secret of the nineteenth century” and fits within the Foucauldian power/knowledge model whereby there “is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.”¹⁶⁸ Medd posits that lesbian love, by contrast, does not fit this power/knowledge model. Instead, it fits “more within models of interpretation, reading, and fantasy” where the “pleasure – and the danger – lie in the suggestion, speculation, and unknowability of these extraordinary allegations, which entice the (implicitly masculine) imagination in fantasies that spiral between fear and desire.”¹⁶⁹ Medd explains “that the pleasure of lesbian suggestion comes not so much from the satisfaction of locating or speaking the unspeakable ‘truth’ of female (homo)sexuality, but more from the pleasurable anxiety of epistemological uncertainty that invites the work of imaginative fantasy—particularly as this fantasy functions in male-dominated legal and legislative realms.”¹⁷⁰ The anxiety Medd refers to seems to have played out

¹⁶² Lillian Faderman, “Afterward,” in Mary Renault, *The Friendly Young Ladies* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 289.

¹⁶³ Faderman, “Afterward,” 289.

¹⁶⁴ Greta Schiller, Andrea Weiss, Frances Berrigan and Juliet Stevenson, interview with Sylvia Beach, *Paris Was a Woman* (London: Peccadillo Pictures, 2004).

¹⁶⁵ Beach, *Shakespeare and Company*, 114.

¹⁶⁶ Mary Meigs, entry in *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: An Oral Biography*, ed. Gary Fountain and Peter Brazeau (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 86. Meigs was of the same generation as Elizabeth Bishop, for whom Marianne Moore was an important mentor.

¹⁶⁷ Meigs, entry in *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop*, ed. Fountain and Brazeau, 86.

¹⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 27. Quoted in Jodie Medd, *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 12.

¹⁶⁹ Medd, *Lesbian Scandal and the Culture of Modernism*, 13.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

among some of the men in Bryher's circle. For example, William Carlos Williams—who admitted to having feelings for H.D. at one point—described an outing with Bill Bird where the latter made a joke about a passing pair of peasant girls, calling them “country lesbians.”¹⁷¹ The joke was at Williams' expense, he explained, because he had “grumbled” that “the practice was universal.”¹⁷² Williams, though married, was a known womanizer. No doubt he found the concept of women finding pleasure solely in other women an affront. He may even have sympathized with the man he recalls who, while attending a social call at Natalie Barney's and finding himself dancing alone in the midst of female pairs, promptly “took out his tool and, shaking it right and left, yelled out in a rage, ‘Have you never seen one of these?’”¹⁷³ *Beowulf* does not assuage the anxiety represented in these accounts, but refrains from designation or discussion of (same-sex) desire. In other words, Bryher does not present her reader with an overtly lesbian sexuality which, otherwise, might inspire a homophobic, misogynist reaction and foreclose on her reader's access to her message of freedom (from identificatory discrimination). Instead, all desire remains covert in the sense that sexual desire *of any kind* does not feature in the text.

What *Beowulf* Doesn't Do

A century ago Bryher felt the sting of gender inequality. She witnessed her male cohorts exercise a freedom she could not readily access as a woman. She was also acutely aware of the narrative reserved for society's queer individuals, and it was a story of pathology and criminality. It comes as no surprise, then, that the sense of feeling trapped and persecuted manifests in Bryher's fiction. Her characters pursue freedom from oppressive social circumstances. In *The Player's Boy* James Sands tries in vain to climb the social ranks and escape poverty. The characters in *Visa for Avalon* flee a political movement which is dismantling their rights and freedoms. In *The Colors of Vaud*, revolutionaries overthrow their landlords and Sophie struggles fruitlessly against the subordination of her sex. *Beowulf* breaks somewhat from this formula. The characters in the novel are living through the Blitz on London. They do not, however, seek an escape from the terror, destruction and death of the bombing;

¹⁷¹ William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1948), 230.

¹⁷² Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, 230.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 229.

they “Keep Calm and Carry On.” While the characters do not seek to secure their own personal freedom from their circumstances, Bryher provides them with an exceptional and radical liberty by way of the novel’s structure, a liberty which relates directly to the gendered and homophobic oppression Bryher faced in her own life.

As a scholar interested in Bryher’s exploration of gender and sexual identity—which took place prior to both the sexual revolution and the gay rights movement—I must read not only for what *is* said in Bryher’s text, but for what goes *unsaid*. In *Beowulf*, the reader is confronted by an exclusion. Adrienne Monnier remarks, in the preface to *Beowulf*’s French translation,

Noterai-je ici que l’amour ne joue aucun rôle dans *Béowulf*? On dirai que la plupart de ses personnages, les femmes principalement, n’en ont jamais entendu parler et que, de ce fait, ils seraient incapables de tomber amoureux, comme dit La Rochefoucauld dans une de ses maximes. Même les jeunes gens ne montrent pas qu’ils en soient troublés ou curieux.¹⁷⁴ [Note that love plays no role in *Beowulf*. We might say that most of the characters, the women in particular, have never heard talk of it and are, subsequently, incapable of falling in love as La Rochefoucauld says in one of his maxims. Even the young people do not appear to be troubled by or curious about it.]

In *Beowulf*, Bryher excludes romantic love from the narrative and this exclusion releases her characters from stereotypically gendered roles as well as from being qualified based on their relationships. Bryher creates a work of speculative fiction which imagines individual agency divorced from sex, gender, and sexual desire. *Beowulf* presents a picture of what it might look like if sex, gender, and sexual desire were irrelevant.

In *Beowulf*, the characters are in relationships, but their relationships have little effect on their actions or thought. Rashleigh worries about his finances, Ferguson does what he can to support the war effort, and Angelina is preoccupied with her latest political endeavours. Without romantic love and sexual desire as elements of the plot, the characters execute a degree of agency that might not otherwise be possible. To clarify, the narrative does identify the relationship status of the characters, but does not elaborate beyond basic facts. For example, the reader learns that Adelaide Spenser is married, Rashleigh is a widower, Colonel Ferguson is

¹⁷⁴ Adrienne Monnier, Préface, Bryher, *Béowulf*, trans. Hélène Malvan (Paris: Mercure de France, 1948), 14, my translation follows.

a bachelor, and Selina and Angelina are spinsters and business partners. The plot, however, is relatively indifferent to these details.

Bryher further interrupts the intersection of relationship and individual in her naming of Selina. Occasionally, Bryher refers to Selina simply as “Tippett” or “The Tippett.” By removing the honorific “Miss,” Bryher removes Selina’s affiliation to the patriarchy. As “Tippett,” Selina cannot represent the lack, the undesirability, or suspicious unattachment that a middle-aged “Miss” still suggested in the 1940s.

A title offers at-a-glance information which can serve to qualify an individual, a woman in particular, whose title reflects her relationship to a man and may change over the course of her lifetime. Bryher knew firsthand what it meant for a “Miss” to become a “Mrs.” She was acutely aware of the effects of one’s title and its ability to (dis)enfranchise, improve status, afford opportunities, sanction behaviour. Bryher knew all too well how one’s worth might be appraised through a name, as she was linked directly to a famously wealthy masculine authority. Even after she named herself, she could not expect to achieve a satisfactory degree of dependence without marrying and assuming yet another name and another direct link to a masculine figure, thereby suffering the erasure of her prior identity. Although her marriages to McAlmon and Macpherson were strategic alliances, as a woman, she could not enter these arrangements and keep her “own” name. Of the names she used during her lifetime—including Annie Winifred Ellerman, Mrs. Robert McAlmon, Mrs. Kenneth Macpherson, Winifred Bryher and Bryher—most were reflective of her status in relation to men. When Bryher named herself, she severed symbolic relational ties and created a new identification. She gave herself a gender-ambiguous name which, besides keeping secret her sex when printed on a book cover or in the by-line of an article, helped her sustain her masculine identification. As someone who valued freedom, independence and adventure above all else, Bryher resented that her freedom and social security were inextricably linked to her connections with men. As “The Tippett,” Selina is temporarily severed from the diminished status of an unmarried woman, from the figure of the infantilized “miss” or the frighteningly barren spinster.

Because romantic ties in *Beowulf* are relegated to the background, the characters do not have to act, think or speak in ways that reflect their role as wife, spinster, mother, etc. As a result, corresponding gender stereotypes have no purchase. The spinsters are not miserly, the mothers are not doting or over-protective, the

working-class girls are not crass and simple, and the wives are not nags or teetotallers. In *Beowulf*, Bryher presents a cast of characters who are at the center of their own stories. There is no qualifying commentary directed at the relationship status of any of the characters in the novel. If the reader were to ignore the relationships characters have with one another, not much is lost. For the most part, the characters in *Beowulf* are occupied by other concerns, a fact which exemplifies the uncharacteristic degree of agency the characters are able to exercise in the absence of a focus on romantic love. For example, Eve is a young single woman, but is not concerned with her singleness despite the fact that, at that time, eligible women far outnumbered eligible men.¹⁷⁵ It would be plausible for Eve to spend at least some of her energy worrying about finding herself a mate. Instead, she exudes confidence and independence. Her actions are not dictated by social norms which might demand she present herself in a lady-like fashion (“She really could not bother if this did pull her coat out of shape,”¹⁷⁶) defer to male company (“Anywhere you say, Eve, so long as there’s food,”¹⁷⁷) or occupy a role of feminine inferiority (Rashleigh asserts “Eve ought not to gallop in, treating that boy with her ... as if they were equals.”¹⁷⁸) Instead, when Eve meets with her friend Joe, she exhibits an aura of independence and self-satisfaction.

Compare Eve with Louie Lewis of Elizabeth Bowen’s World War II novel, *The Heat of the Day* (1948). Lewis is a woman in her late twenties whose husband is stationed in the colonies. While he is away, she is exploring London—her new city. Lewis comes from a small seaside town and, without her husband, she strives in vain to ground herself in the city. She searches for someone to imitate, someone who seems to have a course to follow.¹⁷⁹ Generally, she lacks certainty, self-knowledge and a sense of grounding.¹⁸⁰ She wanders the city unchaperoned and engages in brief, illicit, if not anonymous affairs. This awkward, promiscuous country- cum city-girl is the ideal subject for the influence of mass-media and the propaganda campaign. In fact, within the newspaper pages intended for mass-consumption, Lewis finds “ideas”

¹⁷⁵ In the post-war years, women so outnumbered men that it was common for hundreds of “woman seeking husband” ads to be placed per week in papers such as the *Matrimonial Post and Fashionable Marriage Advertiser* and the *Matrimonial Times*. See Nicholson, *Singled Out*, 88.

¹⁷⁶ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 126.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (London: Vintage, 1998), 15.

¹⁸⁰ Bowen, *The Heat of the Day*, 11, 18, 21.

and messages which she believes are directed at her;¹⁸¹ “dark and rare were the days when she failed to find on the inside page ... an address to or else account of herself.”¹⁸² Her identity is defined by her relationships, and in their absence, she is malleable to external influences; she is “a worker, a soldier’s lonely wife, a war orphan, a pedestrian, a Londoner, a home- and animal-lover, a thinking democrat, a movie-goer, a woman of Britain, a letter writer, a fuel-saver, and a housewife.”¹⁸³ Were it not for Lewis’ relationship to her absent husband, she would have little motivation to propel her London life.

When romantic relationships and corresponding roles are irrelevant, however, as they are in *Beowulf*, so too are the hierarchical configurations such relationships inspire. The women in the text are not subject to objectification or subordination by male characters. In fact, if the Bechdel test is applied,¹⁸⁴ *Beowulf* passes with flying colors. The novel therefore fosters equality between the many very different characters. This equality is symbolized by the tea house which welcomes everyone, and the bomb shelter which protects everyone, and by the war which implicates everyone. Bryher extends the theme of equality to the relationship between Angelina and Selina; she portrays their relationship with the same degree of indifference as she does the other relationships in the text. There is no textual evidence to confirm that theirs is a sexually intimate relationship, but sexual intimacy does not feature in any of the relationships. Instead, this same-sex relationship is just as important—or unimportant—as the other relationships. Bryher proposes a scenario where sexual and romantic affiliations as well as object choice are matter-of-fact and immaterial. She treats sexual identity and gender as superfluous to identity and agency during an era that was framing sexuality *as* identity.

Bryher presents Angelina and Selina’s relationship as matter-of-fact, devoid of intrigue and subversiveness. They do not invite speculation from other characters and they need not feign familial ties (as Bryher sometimes did) in order to legitimize their partnership and commitment to one another. If Bryher imagines a sexually intimate relationship between Angelina and Selina, she does not present it as conspicuously

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 153.

¹⁸² Ibid., 152.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ The Bechdel test is a feminist tool which assesses the active presence of female characters in a work of fiction and was created by Alison Bechdel. A work passes the Bechdel test if it (1) it contains at least two named female characters (2) who have a conversation (3) about something other than a male character.

nonheteronormative. As a point of interest, when Bryher described bidding farewell to the “real life” Angelina and Selina when they left London for the countryside, she adopted the same strategy of not drawing undue attention to their clearly co-dependent relationship. Bryher wrote that, in 1944, “we said goodbye to Selina and her partner. ... It was impossible to open a new restaurant in wartime so they were going to the country to look after an aged relative.”¹⁸⁵ In *Beowulf*, Bryher describes Angelina and Selina as “partners” in life and in their proprietorship of the Warming Pan. In this factual account, Bryher confirms the real-life Angelina and Selina are partners in more than just business as well. Their commitment to their “partnership” makes of them a unit. Is it Angelina’s or Selina’s relative they plan to care for? It does not seem to matter. Instead, Bryher presents the two as permanently and mutually entangled.

Publication Problems

Bryher found it difficult to secure publication for *Beowulf* in England.¹⁸⁶ Correspondence pertaining to the publication of the novel housed at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library reveals Bryher’s concern over the title. Her agent corresponded with several different publishers in the fifties and wrote that “Bryher seems to feel the title ought to be changed.”¹⁸⁷ She quotes Bryher’s reasoning, which would have come to her via a letter:

We lost a lot of readers in France with the title Beowulf. Petrie [Dorothy Townshend Petrie Carew] screams to me that I should not use it. (She only just scraped through her Anglo Saxon at Oxford.) I do think myself it is not a good title when most people do not know who Beowulf was. I would very much urge changing the title. The Warming Pan sounds ordinary, would The Bulldog do, no, suggests Churchill too much, but really I do not think Beowulf is a good title for the general public.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 144-5.

¹⁸⁶ *Beowulf* was printed in a French translation as *Béowulf* with a preface by Adrienne Monnier in 1948. See Bryher, *Béowulf*, trans. Hélène Malvan (Paris: Mercure de France, 1948.)

¹⁸⁷ Unnamed author to Kurt (surname unknown), January 25, 1956, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Gen Mss 97, box no. 77, series II, folder no. 3008. Jean Burton, author of *Sir Richard Burton’s Wife* (New York: Knopf, 1941) corresponded with some publishers on Bryher’s behalf. I cannot surmise who penned the above words as no return correspondence is housed at the Beinecke.

¹⁸⁸ Unknown author to Kurt (surname unknown), 25 January 1956, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Gen Mss 97, box no. 77, series II, folder no. 3008.

Despite Bryher's strong feelings to the contrary, the agent proceeds to recommend that the title *Beowulf* be kept. When *Beowulf* was finally printed in English in 1956, the manuscript had been complete for over a decade.

In *The Days of Mars*, Bryher explains she encountered resistance because the British did "not want to remember."¹⁸⁹ Bryher remarks, "It was a documentary ... of what I saw and heard during my first six months in London" and the English "had had enough of war."¹⁹⁰ Bryher's agent explores another theory, writing, "And it is true, I think, that the British as a whole do not much care for anything which borders on even polite naturalism nor for novels that deal with the middle and lower classes."¹⁹¹ The latter's theory is refuted by the publication of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* which features Louie Lewis and her female housemate Connie, both middle- or lower-class women. If Bryher is correct in her assumption, then the publication of *Beowulf* in 1956 confirms Caroline Merz and Patrick Lee-Browne's assertion that in "the 1950s a new era was beginning, and by the middle of the decade the 'post-war' era could truly be said to be over."¹⁹² By the 1950s, the austerity (rationing, economic controls) which had been a feature of British life and a lingering reminder of the consequences of war came to an end.

However, if Bryher believed that her text was denied publication because the publishing trend was to avoid war-time novels in general, a brief survey of novels treating the British experience of WWII published during and immediately after the war contradicts Bryher's hypothesis. Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* was published in 1942, J.B. Priestley's *Daylight on Saturday* and James Hanley's *No Directions* in 1943, Norman Collins' *London Belongs to Me* in 1945, Patrick Hamilton's *Slaves of Solitude* in 1947, Rosamond Lehmann's collection *The Gipsy's Baby & Other Stories* and Henry Green's *Back* in 1946, and Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* in 1948. Some are set further from the nightly bombings of the Blitz than *Beowulf*, either by distance or in time, but all are comparable. Furthermore, Bryher managed to secure publication in France in 1948. Surely, the French had had enough of war as well, but Mercure de France still published one hundred copies of *Béowulf*.

¹⁸⁹ Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 15.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁹¹ Unknown author to (unknown first name) West (most likely Rebecca West), August 4, 1956, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Gen Mss 97, box no. 77, series II, folder no. 3008.

¹⁹² Caroline Merz and Patrick Lee-Browne, eds., *Post-War Literature: 1945 to the Present Day* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 2003), 14.

Certainly, it cannot be argued that it was the inclusion of a same-sex pair that prevented *Beowulf*'s publication. Novels featuring lesbians, invertes and views sympathetic to sexual "deviants" were nothing new. Consider Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer* (1927), Compton Mackenzie's *Vestal Fires* (1927) and *Extraordinary Women* (1928), Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936), to name just a few. Post-war publications include Mary Renault's *Friendly Young Ladies* (1944), and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). Perhaps *Beowulf* was *non grata* not for what it described, but for what it did not. Perhaps, like the darkly humorous conclusion to the text, the novel's insinuations made British publishers uncomfortable. Perhaps it is because Bryher presents a utopian perspective where queer and normative not only coexist but enjoy equal treatment.

In Marianne Moore's poem "Marriage," she devotes most of the text "to the almost inevitable failure of heterosexual marriage," but "she does allow finally for the 'rare' possibility of a relationship of such 'simplicity' and 'disinterestedness' that 'the world hates' it, a relationship the 'essence' of which is 'Liberty and union / now and forever'."¹⁹³ In *Beowulf*, Bryher presents a cross-section of British society with a same-sex intimate pair at the helm. This relationship is characterized by "simplicity" and "disinterestedness" and permits its partners "Liberty and union." If Moore's musings are true to life, then the relationship between Angelina and Selina is one that "the world hates" and that British publishers—not inclined to such strong feelings—kindly refused to publish.

Seventy years ago, Bryher wrote *Beowulf* suggesting an individual's sex, gender, and whom that individual has sex with, should not be focal points. In her preface to the French translation of *Beowulf*, Adrienne Monnier remarks, "Les noms des choses, dans la langue anglaise, ne sont ni au féminin ni au masculin, ils n'ont pas de genre, ce qui est beaucoup plus sensé et beaucoup plus reposant."¹⁹⁴ [The names of things, in the English language, are neither feminine nor masculine, they are

¹⁹³ Linda Leavell, "Marianne Moore, the James Family, and the Politics of Celibacy," *Twentieth Century Literature* 49, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 236.

¹⁹⁴ Monnier, "Préface," in Bryher, *Béowulf*, 14-15. My translation follows.

genderless, which is much more sensible and simple.] Bryher would have preferred the male/female binary be disregarded, not only in language, but in everyday identification. It was, after all, her sex which prevented her pursuing a life of adventure and freedom. But Judith Butler points out the near impossibility of escaping sexual distinction; from “It’s a girl!” and “It’s a boy!” we are relentlessly gendered.¹⁹⁵ Bryher, for her part, tries to show us what it would look like if we didn’t talk about sex.

Selina contemplates how she and Angelina should act in light of the “extraordinary events” of the nightly raids.¹⁹⁶ “‘The best thing to do, Angelina,’ she had repeated twice to her partner the previous evening, ‘is to go on as if everything were absolutely normal. The staff copies us unconsciously and in that way we are influencing not just Ruby, Timothy, and the customers but perhaps hundreds of people.’”¹⁹⁷ Bryher presents Angelina and Selina’s same-sex relationship as normal, despite its deviance from the hetero status quo. Bryher—like Selina—believed “Life ought to be generous, . . . wildly generous.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, Bryher’s unique treatment of their partnership may have the effect of enlarging possibility. Jacques Derrida “imagines the (im)possibility and the seductiveness of such a sexuality:

‘What if we were to reach, what if we were to approach here (for one does not arrive at this as one would at a determined location) the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating? The relationship would not be a-sexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the binary difference that governs the decorum of all codes, beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond bisexuality as well, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which come to the same thing.’”¹⁹⁹

Bryher insinuated in much of her work that gendered categories and gender expectations are a nuisance at best and a severe restriction in her case. Bryher battled the strictures and expectations of gender. She fought—literally and figuratively—against oppressive identification. Bryher chose to identify consistently—in public and in private—as masculine, she chose to spend most of her life with H.D., and she chose

¹⁹⁵ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 232.

¹⁹⁶ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 22.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁹⁹ Jacques Derrida, interview with Christie V. McDonald, quoted in Nelly Furman, “The Politics of Language, Beyond the Gender Principle?,” in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Methuen, 1985), 75.

not to identify as lesbian, transsexual, inverted, or a member of the “third sex.” When such identifications are assigned to her, we are denied an interesting conversation that seeks to explore why she did *not* identify with those terms. Bryher might have us read her outside of frameworks which privilege questions of sexual desire and gender identity *except* to read the facts of her boyhood and her love for H.D., to read her story of struggle against sexism and homophobia, to heed her persistent demand for freedom and for us “to be tolerant, to let each other alone[.]”²⁰⁰ Virginia Woolf suggests the (un)importance of sex to the understanding of a subject when she writes, “Orlando had become a woman there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity.”²⁰¹ Bryher, for her part, takes the position that, “our age makes us to some extent” and if one is “in love with a boy or a girl or a flower, what did it matter to me? I was in love with freedom.”²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Bryher, *Beowulf*, 136.

²⁰¹ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), 67.

²⁰² Bryher, *The Days of Mars*, 121.

CONCLUSION

Names are in people, people are in names.

- H.D. *Hermione*

While doing graduate studies at the University of Auckland, I tutored a course on Life Writing. The course allowed students various topics and forms of expression, and their work was often of a personal nature. One student, whom I will call Sarah, wrote of her challenging transition to life in New Zealand after emigrating from a foreign country as a child. Sarah described a painful and confusing incident which took place at the school playground: She and another girl had been playing happily together when the bell rang for the end of recess. Sarah gleefully took hold of her new friend's hand and they headed back to class. As they ran hand-in-hand, an older student called out: "Look, those girls are holding hands. They're lesbians!" Sarah's new friend tore her hand away, took a step back, and responded, "I'm not a lesbian. She was holding my hand first. *She's* a lesbian."

Sarah explained in her piece that, at the time, she had no idea what a lesbian was. What she was able to gather from the experience was that a lesbian was a girl who held hands with another girl, and that being a lesbian was a bad thing. This anecdote exemplifies in the most basic sense how a particular behaviour might be attributed to a particular category of identification: if a girl holds hands with another girl, she is a lesbian. Conversely, the absence of that particular behaviour corresponds to another, opposite category of identification: if a girl does not hold hands with other girls, she is not a lesbian.

In this case, Sarah was so affected by the event that, subsequently, she was careful to avoid displays of affection to members of the same sex. She denied herself the possibility of a mode of intimate expression because that expression fell under the jurisdiction of an *other* particular identification. In other words, the intimate act of hand-holding was prohibited by Sarah's identification as *not* lesbian and her desire to avoid homophobic scrutiny. The machinations of heteronormativity are seen here to identify and condemn particular behaviours and desires as non-normative and thereby limit their scope.

Work in the area of queer studies consistently problematizes such binarial conceptions of (sexual) identity by summoning notions of multiplicity and dynamism.

In regards to gender identity, sexual identity and desire, queer studies scholars concur that the subject of their work implicates a high degree of variability and flux. David V. Ruffolo explains how “queer theories challenge heteronormative practices that attempt to maintain collective identity groups that are unable to account for a multiplicity of differences.”¹ Madhavi Menon asserts “queer theory cannot and does not provide a road map for desire; instead, it follows the intractability of desire, even to its unravelling.”²

However, historical literary scholarship which implicates nonheteronormative subjects is not always executed in a way that mirrors the multiplicity of desires and identifications insisted upon by queer theory. In fact, when historical literary studies examine nonheteronormativity, they necessarily historicise nonheteronormativity. According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “an unfortunate side effect of this move has been implicitly to underwrite the notion that ‘homosexuality as we conceive of it today’ itself comprises a coherent definitional field rather than a space of overlapping, contradictory, and conflictual definitional forces.”³ This practice has inspired scholars such as Laura Doan to imagine new methods of “queer critical history” which, according to Debra A. Modellmog, require “the historian to be attentive to his or her *purpose* for writing[.]”⁴ If the scholar’s focus implicates nonheteronormative subjects, “equity and social justice,”⁵ should be one such purpose. For as long as the gap between queer theories and the lived experiences of actual subjects (like Sarah) remains, scholarship rooted in queer theory should consider the ways it might expand the scope of the possible.

This study has been founded upon a desire to illuminate particular ways of living, identifying and desiring, and demonstrate the many ways nonheteronormative subjects challenge contemporary conceptions of identity and desire. I have focussed my work on a sample of women from the literary modernist movement because this cohort of individuals presented their readers with bold reflections on the nature of gender identity and sexual desire. They recognized that a subject could/should not be bound between gendered borders. Virginia Woolf wrote that “nature, ... has further

¹ David V. Ruffolo, *Post-Queer Politics* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 29.

² Madhavi Menon, “Sheer Quakes,” *Berfrois*, July 6, 2011, accessed February 18, 2013, <http://www.berfrois.com/2011/07/madhavi-menon-queering-the-bard/>.

³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 45

⁴ Debra A. Modellmog, “Modernism and Sexology,” *Literature Compass* 11, no. 4 (2014): 268.

⁵ Ruffolo, *Post-Queer Politics*, 38. Ruffolo identifies as critical to the project of queer studies.

complicated her task and added to our confusion by providing not only a perfect rag-bag of odds and ends within us – ... – but has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stitched together by a single thread.”⁶ H.D. mused, “I am not man, / I am not woman; / I crave / you / as the sea-fish / the wave.”⁷ Their preoccupation with precision and the signifier/signified relationship made them acutely aware of the function and nature of terminology. D.H. Lawrence wrote, “Man is a changeable beast, and words change their meanings with him, and things are not what they seemed, and what’s what becomes what isn’t, and if we think we know where we are it’s only because we are so rapidly being translated somewhere else.”⁸

I have sought to explore the lives and works of Marianne Moore and Bryher with the purpose of identifying how the particularities of their sociohistorical location, partnership choices, oeuvre thematics, and gender expression combine in singular identities which cannot be adequately described by contemporary notions of gender and sexual identity. Joanne Winning says that the “central difficulty” of such an analysis “is that it requires working across different discursive and disciplinary boundaries.”⁹ Judith Halberstam, too, recognizes the need for an interdisciplinary approach.¹⁰ My work has thus necessarily incorporated work in the areas of history, queer, lesbian and women’s studies, social science and literary studies.

My work has also aimed to implement a pluralist and pragmatic method in regards to terminology. Linda Leavell explains that “the pluralist understands that truth is various and the pragmatist that it is tentative. The pragmatist gains knowledge not by explaining the universe with a single belief system but by seeking exceptions to one’s beliefs and keeping an open mind.”¹¹ I have implemented this pluralist pragmatism by avoiding the application of sexological terminology (because the subjects of my study did not employ the terms themselves). I rejected the identificatory imperative despite the fact it was a counterintuitive and challenging approach because the subjects of my study, Marianne Moore and Bryher, and many of

⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), 37.

⁷ H.D. “Sigil,” in *H.D.: Collected Poems, 1912-1944*, ed. Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1986), 296.

⁸ D. H. Lawrence, *Pornography and Obscenity* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929), 6.

⁹ Joanne Winning, “Lesbian Sexuality in the Story of Modernism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 218.

¹⁰ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 12.

¹¹ Linda Leavell, *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 217.

their cohorts, chose to eschew sexological terminology. Moore once quipped “disregarding gender [is] something I have always done!”¹²

Instead of aligning Moore and Bryher with particular categories of identification, my aim has been to combine the particularities of their lives into a singular representation of subjectivity. Stephen Heath explains how, in a project focussed on description and understanding, “the latter brings the order of the norm to the variety recognized in the former but that variety can also come back on the norm – since there is the variety, there cannot be any norm or the norm is, simply, the variety.”¹³ Moore and Bryher embody this variety.

In avoiding the use of identificatory terminology, I have attempted to honour Moore’s and Bryher’s self-determination with the awareness that “No field of human enterprise, no system for the production of meaning lacks the magic stamp of men’s naming, and literary history is no exception.”¹⁴ Applying a name has the effect—desired or otherwise—of assigning a subject to a category of difference. According to Monique Wittig, “any system that sets up social categories of difference does so in order to create distinct groups, which, on the basis of these perceived differences, can then be placed into a relationship of inequality or social conflict.”¹⁵ By avoiding the use of categorical terminology, I have attempted to buffer my subjects from discourses which position them within such conflict.

Furthermore, the fact of the unknowability of historical subjects has prevented me from laying too heavy an interpretive hand on their lives. Virginia Woolf describes the insidious, manipulative potential of studies which set their sights on past subjects:

Here is the past and all its inhabitants miraculously sealed as in a magic tank; all we have to do is to look and to listen and to listen and to look and soon the little figures – for they are rather under life size – will begin to move and to speak, and as they move we shall arrange them in all sorts of patterns of which they were ignorant, for they thought when they were alive that they could go where they liked; and as they speak we shall read into their sayings all kinds

¹² Marianne Moore to William Carlos Williams, January 27, 1952 in *Selected Letters*, ed. Bonnie Costello (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 497.

¹³ Stephen Heath, *The Sexual Fix* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 55.

¹⁴ Domna C. Stanton quoted in Ann Rosalind Jones, “Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine,” in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn (London: Methuen, 1985), 99.

¹⁵ Dianne Griffin Crowder, “Universalizing Materialist Lesbianism,” in *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*, ed. Namascar Shaktini (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 66.

of meanings which never struck them, for they believed when they were alive that they said straight off whatever came into their heads.¹⁶

Similarly, Judith Butler illustrates the fact of irresolvable disconnect between a (literary) historian and the historical subject:

Since I cannot truly understand this person, since I do not know this person, and have no access to this person, I am left to be a reader of a selected number of words, words that I did not fully select, ones that were selected for me, recorded from interviews and then chosen by those who decided to write their articles on this person.... So we might say that I am given fragments of the person, linguistic fragments of something called a person ...¹⁷

Given the challenge of describing and understanding the lives of Moore and Bryher, I have succumbed to the fact of their ultimate unknowability. In prioritising an approach which differs somewhat from work in the area of nonheteronormativity in literary modernism, I am acutely aware of what Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “the bossy gesture of ‘calling for’ an imminently perfected critical or revolutionary practice that one can oneself only adumbrate.”¹⁸ My motivation has not been to revolutionise critical practise and my intention has not been to denigrate the important work of so many scholars who dedicate their lives and work to the study of modernist women.

In many ways, this project has been an essay—*essai*—in the most basic sense of the word. It has been a trial, an endeavour, an attempt to produce a work which might contribute to a renewal of the ways we understand ourselves. Valerie Traub writes that, “despite the categories we inhabit, our knowledge of ourselves as individuals as well as within group identities is vexed, uncertain, in continual and oft-times painful negotiation. Quite simply, we do not know who and what ‘we’ are, or how we might go about defining ourselves beyond the reaction formations conceived under the influence of heterosexism and homophobia.”¹⁹

Marianne Moore and Bryher were subject to such reductive and restrictive social dynamics. They contended with psychoanalytic and sexological discourses

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, “I Am Christina Rossetti,” in *The Common Reader, Second Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), 237.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 68.

¹⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 8.

¹⁹ Quoted in Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer history* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 41.

which would have them reduced to their desiring and identificatory functions. Moore, however, persisted in her struggle against these frameworks by dedicating herself to her work, enthusiastically claiming her refusal to marry, and by rejecting any romantic relationships which might draw too greedily from her stores of energy and time. The evidence of Bryher's commitment to freedom is found in her oeuvre and in the brave rescue operations she participated in during World War II. Bryher struggled against gender expectations throughout her lifetime, and imagined that an escape from such restriction could be found only in the freedom to exercise subjectivity regardless of identificatory designations.

In *The Journal of a Feminist* (1913-14), Elsie Clews Parsons wrote:

The day will come when the individual... [will not] have to pretend to be possessed of a given quota of femaleness and maleness. This morning perhaps I feel like a male; let me act like one. This afternoon I may feel like a female; let me act like one. At midday or at midnight I may feel sexless; let me therefore act sexlessly.... It is such a confounded bore to have to act one part endlessly.²⁰

The day Clews Parsons imagined is, perhaps, imminent. I hope that this project, like the works and lives of Moore and Bryher, might serve, in a small way, to hasten its approach.

²⁰ Quoted in Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2010), 45.

APPENDIX A

FINDING LESBIANS IN HISTORICAL TEXTS?

In 1895, Oscar Wilde provided a courtroom interpretation of Lord Alfred Douglas' line, "I am the love that dare not speak its name[.]"¹ Speaking under duress, and using the only rhetoric that his Victorian peers might sanction, Wilde insisted such a love "was beautiful, it was pure, it was noble, it was intellectual[.]"² It was

that between an elder and younger man, as between David and Jonathan; such love as Plato made the basis of his philosophy; such as was sung in the sonnets of Shakespeare and Michael Angelo; that deep spiritual affection that was as pure as it was perfect. It pervaded great works of art like those of Michael Angelo and Shakespeare. Such as 'passeth the love of woman.'³

Wilde's pragmatic eloquence—with its need to persuade—uses historicity and purity as his defense. However, Wilde does not *name* this love. He defended himself against the name he had been given and a name he did not use (during the trial)—sodomite.

TROUBLE WITH WORDS

At the fin-de-siècle, sexologists, psychoanalysts, medical doctors, and lawmakers were engaged in an exercise in naming. Their work focused on nonheteronormative desire and gender and sexual identification. They produced a lexicon of terminology which served to organize and regulate sexual discourse and practice. These diverse designations, however, were not synonymous. "Tribade," for example, did not mean the same thing as "lesbian." Each term carried "a whole system of unquestioned ... assumptions ... [which] can be understood only on the basis of a historical analysis."⁴

The term "lesbian" has a complex etymology. To identify when, exactly, the term was used to indicate a woman-*desiring* woman sexual subject remains at issue,

¹ Lord Alfred Douglas, "Two Loves," *The Chameleon* 1, no. 1 (1894): 25-28.

² Michael William Thomas Howe, Oscar Wilde, Charles Grolleau, and Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas, *The Shame of Oscar Wilde: From the Shorthand Reports* (California: 1906), 59.

³ Howe, et al, *The Shame of Oscar Wilde*, 58-59.

⁴ Erwin J. Haeberle, "Introduction," in *The Birth of Sexology: A Brief History in Documents*, 6th World Congress of Sexology, May 22-27, 1983, Washington D.C.

but the first traceable use of the word “lesbian” to indicate a woman who engages in sexual *contact* with another woman was, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, John S. Billings in his *National Medical Dictionary* (1890).⁵ Before the 1890s, the word “lesbian” identified an inhabitant or product of the Isle of Lesbos.⁶ The term had yet to acquire the sexual, political and identitarian connotations it has today.

As an originary moment for the contemporary usage of “lesbian,” Billings’ 1890s text is problematic, however. First, Billings’ entry is for “Lesbian love,” not “lesbian.” Here, the word “lesbian” is qualifying the word “love” in the same way the words “maternal” and “marital” can also qualify love. Billings’ adjectival use of “lesbian” resembles pre-1890 uses of the word. A certain wine, a certain marble, a certain illness, a certain love is qualified as lesbian. “Lesbian” in Billings’ dictionary can be read as a secondary characteristic of love, not the characteristic of an exclusively female subject. The lesbian subject is not defined in Billings’ text.

The second problem with suggesting Billings’ dictionary as the first contemporary usage of the word “lesbian” lies in its definition. Billings defines

⁵ “lesbian, adj. and n.,” *OED Online*, June 2011, Oxford University Press, accessed July 21, 2011, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/Entry/107453?redirectedFrom=Lesbian>. I make the distinction between sexual desire and sexual behaviour here. Mary E. Wood points out that, “according to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Lillian Faderman, and others, nineteenth-century American cultural norms allowed middle-class white women a physical intimacy that became connected to deviant identity only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Michel Foucault and historians influenced by his work have claimed that before the 1880s and 1890s homosexuality was conceived of not as identity but as behaviour.” See “‘With Ready Eye’: Margaret Fuller and Lesbianism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature,” *American Literature* 65 (1993): 2.

⁶ A mid-nineteenth-century review of maestro Pacini’s opera *Saffo* substitutes “la Lesbienne” for the proper name, “Saffo,” in the same way sculptor Camille Claudelle might be called “la Parisienne.” Lesbian marble is black, Lesbian wine was said to be “perfectly harmless” and unlikely to “produce intoxication.” In an ode, Horace “tells his friend ... that he might drink a hundred glasses of this ‘innocent Lesbian’ without any danger to his health or reason. ... as it would neither affect the head nor inflame the passions, there was no fear that those who drank it would become quarrelsome.” The inhabitants of Lesbos—male *and* female—were notorious for their debauchery: “*Les habitants [sic] [de Lesbos] étoient si débauchés, à ce qu’écrivent quelques Auteurs Grecs, que parmi eux il n’y avoit presque point d’homme qui ne fût le mari de toutes les femmes, et presque point de femme qui ne fût la femme de tous les hommes.*” [The inhabitants of Lesbos were so debauched, according to certain Greek Authors, that among them there was hardly a man who wasn’t the husband of all the women, and hardly a woman who wasn’t the wife of all the men.] They even had a disease associated with a particular debauchery named for them. See G. de Molènes, “Revue Musicale,” vol. 1 of *Revue des deux mondes* (Bruxelles: Bureau de la Revue des Deux Mondes, 1842), 680; “Ancient Statues,” *The Civil Engineer and Architect’s Journal* 2 (Nov 1839): 434; Benjamin Parsons, *The Wine Question Settled: In Accordance with the Inductions of Science, and the Facts of History* (London: John Snow, 1841), 65; See “Lesbien, -ienne,” *Complément du Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* (Bruxelles: Adolphe Wahlen et Compagne, 1843), microfilm, 574. See also “adj. et s. Habitant de l’Île de Lesbos. Les *Lesbiennes* sont célèbres par leurs débauches. Qui appartient à Lesbos ou à ses habitants. See also *Le Journal des Sçavans, pour l’année* (Paris: P. Witte, 1705), 611, accessed August 22, 2016, <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=b8gUAAAAQAAJ&dq=Le%20Journal%20des%20S%C3%A7avans%20pour%20l%E2%80%99ann%C3%A9e%201705&pg=PA340#v=onepage&q=lesbienne&f=false>.

“Lesbian love” as “Tribadism.”⁷ Tribade comes from the Greek *τρίβειν*, meaning “to rub,” and refers to a woman who engages in genital contact with another woman.⁸ *Œuvres du Seigneur de Brantôme* (1779) defines tribades as women “*qui ne veulent pas souffrir les hommes mais s’approchent des autres femmes*” [who would rather not endure the presence of men, but who seek the company of other women] such that, if married, they “[font] des cornes à” [cuckold] their husbands.⁹ Despite the fact that tribadism is considered non-penetrative, it still constitutes cuckoldry. The term “tribade,” designating a particular practice, can be found in countless texts including dictionaries,¹⁰ books of erotica,¹¹ and pseudo-medical texts dating back to the sixteenth century.¹² Billings, however, ignores prior uses and definitions of the word and defines “Tribadism” as “copulation of one female with another, the clitoris being used as a penis.”¹³ Billings conflates this female-female practice with the masculine act of penetration. He reframes what might otherwise be understood as an exclusively female act which renders phallic penetration redundant (except in the context of procreation). Equating “Lesbian love” with this definition of “Tribadism,” Billings

⁷ John S. Billings, “Lesbian love,” *The National Medical Dictionary: Including English, French, German, Italian, and Latin technical terms used in Medicine and the collateral sciences, and a series of tables of useful data*, vol. 2 K to Z (Philadelphia, PA: Lea Brothers & Co., 1890), 47, accessed August 22, 2016, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t5z60t363>.

⁸ “tribade, n.” *OED Online*, June 2011, Oxford University Press, accessed August 4, 2011, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/Entry/205718?redirectedFrom=tribade>.

⁹ Pierre de Bourdeille, *Oeuvres du Seigneur de Brantôme*, vol. 3 (London, 1779), 220-1, accessed August 9, 2011, <http://books.google.co.nz/books?id=ZRMUAAAAQAAJ&dq=tribades&pg=PA221#v=onepage&q=tribades&f=false>.

¹⁰ “clitoris, anat.,” *Nouveau Dictionnaire de Médecine & de Chirurgie*, vol. 2 (Paris: Chez Hérisant le Fils, Libraire, 1772), 158, accessed August 9, 2011, <http://books.google.co.nz/books?id=NSosWi0StvC&dq=tribades&pg=PA158#v=onepage&q=tribades&f=false>.

¹¹ Honoré Gabriel Riquetti de Mirabeau, *Errotika biblion* (Rome: Imprimerie du Vatican, 1783), 97, accessed August 9, 2011, <http://books.google.co.nz/books?id=mr9bAAAAQAAJ&dq=tribades&pg=PA97#v=onepage&q=tribades&f=false>.

¹² In 1561, Andreae Tiraquelli writes a commentary on the customs of conjugal marital relations in *Ex Commentaris in Pictonum Consuetudines, Sectio, de Legibus Connubialibus, et Iure Maritali* and includes verse which he attributes to tribades: “*Tribades que dicte ... Ipsarum tribadem tribas Phileni, / Recte quam futuis uocas amicam.*” See Andreae Tiraquelli, *Regii in curia Parisiensi Senatoris, Ex Commentaris in Pictonum Consuetudines, Sectio, de Legibus Connubialibus, et Iure Maritali* (London, 1561), 232, *Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum Digitale Bibliothek*. See also M. de Lignac, *A physical view of man and woman in a state of marriage: with anatomical engravings*, vol. 2, trans. (London: Vernor and Hood, 1798), 93, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, Gale, University of Auckland - ECCO, accessed August 9, 2011, http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=auckland_ecco&tabID=T001&docId=CW107220115&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

¹³ Billings, “Lesbian love,” 693.

eliminates any distinctions between the two terms and attempts to superimpose the model of male penetration upon the tribade's sexual behaviour.

FINDING (THOSE) LESBIANS

Today, scholars interested in exploring the (literary) history of that “love that dare not speak its name” (and the many names used, in effect, to describe it) may find their work stymied by the subject innominacy Wilde exemplified in 1895. Such innominacy, tied as it is to the politics of self-naming, may have served to insulate historical subjects from discrimination, isolation, abandonment, or prosecution, but it may also thwart those whose discourse depends on the naming of such subjects. Finding and naming historical subjects who embody same-sex desires and practices can appear useful to scholars who work within a paradigm of recuperation.

The labour involved in successfully situating lesbian individuals in pre-modern times is evident in the titles of the following texts. *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (1999) suggests same-sex female love was concealed in earlier periods.¹⁴ *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (1997) gestures to the desire to seek the folkloric historical homosexual figure and thus “excavate a past” for homosexual individuals.¹⁵ The abysmal marginality occupied by sexually deviant individuals is explored in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (1987).¹⁶ *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* (1988) implies subversive sexual texts have been resuscitated.¹⁷ These texts are interested, in part, in highlighting the earliest appearances of the term “lesbian.” It is no coincidence, then, that each of the above-mentioned texts refer to an instance where a source from the eighteenth century promises to name a group of British women engaged in same-sex congress “lesbians” in much the same way the term is applied today. However, this investigation will reveal that the source, in fact, does no such thing. Inadequate

¹⁴ Elizabeth Susan Wahl, *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Rictor Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual: Queer History and the Search for Cultural Unity* (London: Cassell, 1997).

¹⁶ George Sebastian Rousseau and Roy Porter, *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

¹⁷ Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* (London: Secker & Warberg, 1988).

research practices—enabled by the imperative to name—have resulted in the reproduction of this error within contemporary scholarship.¹⁸

Emma Donoghue's *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (1993) is a focal point in the story of how this identificatory error has been repeated. In her work, Donoghue strives to establish the existence of British lesbians from 1668 to 1801. She describes having to “trawl widely, follow hunches and browse almost at random in a variety of genres [... in search] of lesbian love.”¹⁹ She intuitively senses a silence, a suppression of signs, an underground presence, traces of which can nevertheless be read. She laments that “mentions of lesbian love in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts are hardly ever signalled as such[.]”²⁰ Donoghue is not suggesting seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts rarely feature same-sex female love. If this were the case, *Passions Between Women* would be a significantly shorter text. In fact, Donoghue was so overcome by the number of texts *describing* “passions between women” that she chose to limit her study to those texts printed in Britain between 1668 and 1801.²¹ When Donoghue writes that “mentions of lesbian love ... are hardly ever signalled as such,” she means they are hardly ever *named* lesbian. Same-sex female love is labelled, instead, tribadic, sapphic, hermaphroditic, and unnatural, and often categorised as romantic friendship. Donoghue, however, finds these designations unsatisfying.

In *Passions Between Women*, Donoghue uses “lesbian” as “an umbrella term for those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century concepts” such as tribade, hermaphrodite, romantic friend, sapphist and tommy, and applies it in their place.²² Donoghue acknowledges the challenge involved in discussing historical subjects according to such a complex set of terminologies, and chooses to use the term “lesbian” in place of some terms which were more specific to the historical locations in which Donoghue finds her subjects.

Donoghue's choice to use “lesbian” as an umbrella term could be contested by arguments based in historicism. Namascar Shaktini, for example, insists that although “lesbianism as energy, desire, practice, or situation has no doubt already existed

¹⁸ This, despite the fact the vector of queer studies is shifting its aim from questions of identity to a focus on the meanings of particular acts and practices.

¹⁹ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 9.

²⁰ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 9.

²¹ Ibid., 1.

²² Ibid., 7.

everywhere, it has only recently come into existence as a word/concept.”²³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Lillian Faderman also make this distinction and “firmly imply or openly assert that none of [these relationships] could be lesbian.”²⁴ A same-sex desiring woman, prior to the late nineteenth century, could not have identified herself as a lesbian; the observing party could not have identified her as a lesbian. She was a tribade or an anandrine or *une fricatrice*, or known according to any number of the multiple signifiers indicating same-sex female love, but not a lesbian—not then. These arguments reflect the historicist notion of anachronicity. Alan Bray argues that describing an individual of a prior historical period as “being or not being ‘a homosexual’ is an anachronism and ruinously misleading.”²⁵ Bray takes issue with the application of a term he considers contemporary—homosexual—to historical individuals who pre-date its inception. Similarly, Kathryn R. Kent suggests it is “anachronistic to apply contemporary standards of lesbian identity to women in a period in which the term [lesbian] ... did not even exist.”²⁶ Neither Bray nor Kent are attempting to deny lesbians and homosexuals an identification with historical figures whose desires they share. They are, however, claiming that contemporary discourse about same-sex-desiring historical individuals should utilise a concurrent lexicon; they are arguing for semantic and semiotic precision in the discussion of same-sex love.

Donoghue has one silver bullet in her arsenal with which to combat the historicist argument. She identifies “lesbian” as “the rarest of those early words” used to describe same-sex female love,²⁷ but claims to have found it used in the period (1668-1801) only once, in *England und Italien* by Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz.²⁸ And five scholarly books—*Passions Between Women*, *Invisible Relations*, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, *Sexual Underworlds*, and *Eros Revived*—all refer to the same eighteenth-century account, claiming it as evidence of the existence of lesbians

²³ Namascar Shaktini, “The Critical Mind and *The Lesbian Body*,” in *On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays*, ed. Namascar Shaktini (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 157.

²⁴ Kathryn R. Kent, *Making Girls Into Women: American Women’s Writing and the Rise of Lesbianism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 3-4.

²⁵ Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 16.

²⁶ Kent, *Making Girls Into Women*, 4.

²⁷ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 7.

²⁸ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*. In fact, her book details two instances of the use of the word “lesbian.” First in William King’s poem *The Toast* (1732), then in Archenholz’ travel book. In King’s text, the word lesbian is used as it was in Billings’ 1890 dictionary, in conjunction with “love”, making “lesbian” adjectival. See *Passions Between Women*, 3, 260.

(read: self-identifying, women-desiring women) prior to 1890.²⁹ The passage in question, in English, is reproduced as follows:

There is no limit to libidinousness [*sic*] in London. There are females who avoid all intimate intercourse with the opposite sex, confining themselves to their own sex. These females are called Lesbians. They have small societies, known as Anandrinic Societies, of which Mrs. Y..., formerly a famous London actress, was one of the presidents. These Lesbians offer up their unclean sacrifices at these places, but their altars are not worthy of the secret groves where Dionne's doves were united in love; all they deserve is a thick veil to obscure them from the sight of men.³⁰

In the passage above, the author seems to provide—by means of a firsthand account which is otherwise unsubstantiated—evidence for the existence of a lesbian subculture, an “Anandrinic Society” practicing in England in the late 1700s.

Archenholz's value to critics is as an eighteenth-century eye-witness who establishes a moment of naming in which validation for the term “lesbian” can supposedly be found: “These females are called Lesbians.” In naming same-sex female love, the text appeals to contemporary critical imperatives to establish an etymology of nonheteronormative love. Archenholz seems to reveal an originary moment which might make possible the naming of that which, known by so many names, might now be accorded singular status.

The contemporary texts featuring this account do not elaborate on the context of the passage, however, either within Archenholz's larger work *England und Italien*, or in regard to the particular conditions of its publication. In fact, every scholar who cites the passage does so without mention of its context. Peter Wagner, in his work on eighteenth-century erotica, writes: “Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, a German traveller, recorded the existence of ‘Anandrinic Societies’ and the prevalence of lesbianism among actresses in late eighteenth-century London.”³¹ Wagner recycles this passage again in “The Discourse on Sex – or Sex as Discourse.”³² Donoghue,

²⁹ See Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, 177; Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, 204; Peter Wagner, “The Discourse on Sex – or Sex as Discourse: Eighteenth-Century Medical and Paramedical Erotica,” in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, ed. George Sebastian Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 59; Wagner, *Eros Revived*, 41; Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 242.

³⁰ Quoted in Iwan Bloch, *A History of English Sexual Morals*, trans. William H. Forstern (London: Francis Aldor, 1936), 425. See Figure 1.

³¹ Wagner, *Eros Revived*, 41.

³² Wagner, “The Discourse on Sex – or Sex as Discourse,” 59.

who identifies Mrs Y as “Mary Anne Yates,” includes the quotation as evidence of a lesbian network. She writes:

[Archenholz’s] report reads as follows: ‘There are females who avoid all intimate intercourse with the opposite sex, confining themselves to their own sex. These females are called Lesbians. They have small societies, known as Anandrinic Societies, of which Mrs. Y_, formerly a famous London actress, was one of the presidents.’³³

Rictor Norton, describing the notoriety of several eighteenth-century actresses in *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, explains: “Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz who travelled to England in the 1780s reveals that there was a club of lesbians or [an] Anandrinic Society in London[.]”³⁴ Elizabeth Susan Wahl, like Norton, provides a sketch of “members of the [theatrical] demimonde” and “their alleged lesbian proclivities.”³⁵ Wahl paraphrases what she gleans from Donoghue’s text: how the actress Mary Anne Yates was “suspected of leading an ‘Anandrinic’ Society[.]”³⁶ Archenholz’s passage also makes an appearance in Iain McCalman’s entry on “Homosexuality” in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*. McCalman claims that “[t]he German traveller Johan [*sic*] Wilhelm von Archenholz commented on the existence of *male* homosexual ‘Anandrinic clubs’ and on the prevalence of lesbianism in late-eighteenth-century London.”³⁷ D. S. Neff provides his readers with a source who “presents vivid portraits of ‘Anandrinic Societies’ throughout London, in which ‘Lesbians offer up their unclean sacrifices’ in rituals that deserve to be ‘obscur[ed] ... from the sight of men[.]’”³⁸ In *European Sexualities* (2007), Katherine Crawford describes homosexual subcultures and their social customs. She writes that while women had little access to the capital and privacy necessary to create their own same-sex groups,

³³ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 242.

³⁴ Norton, *The Myth of the Modern Homosexual*, 204.

³⁵ Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, 177.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Iain McCalman, “Homosexuality,” in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 547, emphasis mine. I am inclined to suspect McCalman is mistaken when he describes the Anandrinic club as a group of male homosexuals. McCalman’s use is oxymoronic.

³⁸ D. S. Neff, “Between *Clinamen* and *Tessera*: Female Homophilia in *Gerusalemme Liberata* and *Christabel*,” *Literature Interpretation Theory* 10, no. 3 (1999): 207-8.

one report of a rough female equivalent of a molly house has surfaced, and it is very late. Johann von Archenholtz [*sic*] visited England, publishing his account of his travels in 1787 as *England und Italien*. He commented: ‘There are females who avoid all intimate intercourse with the opposite sex, confining themselves to their own sex. These females are called Lesbians. They have small societies known as Anandrinic Societies, of which Mrs. Y--, formerly a famous London actress, was one of the presidents.’³⁹

Unmentioned, however, in these reproductions of Archenholz’s remarkable statement is a publication history that indicates how his work has been carried through various publishing houses and languages. Nor is there mention of its relationship with the sexologist Iwan Bloch, which I shall detail shortly. The term’s remarkably early appearance should inspire a thorough investigation in order to verify its existence and evaluate its credibility. However, to my knowledge, I am the only scholar to have followed the words to their original context. The scholars listed above have unfortunately and unwittingly permitted mistranslation, misunderstanding and, ultimately, misidentification.⁴⁰

ARCHENHOLZ’S *A PICTURE OF ENGLAND*: PUBLICATION CONTEXT

Archenholz, a Prussian captain, wrote his five-volume work detailing his travels during the 1780s, when the German reading public demanded and devoured accounts of that foreign land *Großbritannien*. Germans were fascinated by British society, its *freyheit*, its religious customs, its government and its people. Archenholz describes an England that “differs so greatly from all other countries in Europe, that it seems as if this curious island does not belong to our part of the world, but to the South Seas.”⁴¹ Tales of this “exotic land” were so popular that by the 1780s, “the trickle of travelogues published on England had grown to a torrent.”⁴² The market

³⁹ Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities: 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207.

⁴⁰ I am obliged to admit that my own discovery of the original context of the phrase in question relied in part on several digitization projects which have been underway in recent decades. My access to digital texts led me to pursue an obscure microfilm copy of Archenholtz’s original text, *England und Italien*. Furthermore, the scholars I list above may well have determined that, should they undertake the task of locating the original source, the efforts involved would exceed the perceived value of such an endeavour.

⁴¹ Quoted in Alison E. Martin, *Moving Scenes: The Aesthetics of German Travel Writing on England, 1783-1830* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2008), 5.

⁴² Martin, *Moving Scenes*, 6.

was so saturated with travel writing that one ambassadorial secretary noted at the time, “It seems rash to wish to increase further the number of works on England[.]”⁴³

Texts were in fierce competition with one another. In order for a particular publication to claim space apart from the deluge of books, it had to offer something more—it had to have market appeal. With England established as an exotic locale, her people could be represented as markedly other and existing within a space of extremes: the English criminal more corrupt and immoral than the German criminal; the English sex trade more lewd and depraved; the English woman more beautiful and beguiling. These were topics—more carnal and at the edge of propriety—that a travel account might include in order to compete in a saturated market.

The steadily increasing competition within the European travelogue market and the concomitant response of individual writers is well illustrated in the treatment of “the Englishwoman.” Painted in most texts with a flattering hand, the Englishwoman emerges as a sort of demi-goddess. Gebhard Friedrich August Wendeborn’s *A View of England* is a relatively early variant. Printed in 1785, it featured a modest yet enticing description of the Englishwoman: “the [female] sex in England is praised for its beauty; and I really believe, that in no country are so many fine women to be met with as in England.”⁴⁴ In 1787, as the market was growing, Archenholz, in *England und Italien*, upstaged Wendeborn’s genteel depiction:

Of all the remarkable objects which England offers to the eye of a foreigner, no one is more worthy of his admiration, than the astonishing beauty of the women.

It produces such a surprising effect, that every stranger must acknowledge the superiority of the English ladies over all others. The most exact proportions, an elegant figure, a lovely neck, a skin uncommonly fine, and features at once regular and charming, distinguish them in an eminent

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Gebhard Friedrich August Wendeborn, *A View of England: Towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 1, trans. Gebhard Friedrich August Wendeborn (Dublin: William Sleater, 1791), 305, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, Gale, University of Auckland – ECCO, accessed August 22, 2016, http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=auckland_ecco&tabID=T001&docId=CB129149264&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE. The German version of this text was published in 1785: Gebhard Friedrich August Wendeborn, *Der Zustand des Staats, der Religion, der Gelehrsamkeit und der Kunst in Grosbritannien gegen das Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2 (Berlin: ben C. Spener, 1785), *The Making of the Modern World*, Web, accessed August 22, 2016, <http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/mome/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=MOME&userGroupName=learn&tabID=T001&docId=U109932624&type=multipage&contentSet=MOMEArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>.

degree. Their private virtues also render them capable of enjoying all the felicity of the marriage state.⁴⁵

Archenholz's assessment of the British woman concurs with Wendeborn's; both rank her beauty above that of other women. Yet Archenholz goes a step further by using language that specifies physical attributes and introduces (by inference) the notion of physical intimacy. His comment on the Englishwoman's "private virtues" is ambiguous enough to escape reproof yet suggestive enough to spark the prurient reader's imagination, while still reinforcing the sanctions of marriage. In the context of Archenholz's preceding comments, I suspect he is suggesting the Englishwoman is capable of finding pleasure in sex. He frames this capacity as a "private virtue" in contrast with those "public virtues" prized in the "genteel woman" such as purity, piety, submissiveness and domesticity.

Archenholz's description of the Englishwoman was, however, overshadowed by that of a young, ambitious writer, Nikolai Karamzin. Karamzin's portrayal of the Englishwoman surpasses in its sensuous and suggestive detail those of Wendeborn and Archenholz. In *Letters of a Russian Traveller* (1790), Karamzin wrote:

Yes, my friends! England can be called a land of beauty, and the traveler who is not captivated by the youthful-looking Englishwomen ... the traveler who can view their charms with indifference must have a heart of stone. I wandered about the streets here for two hours just to feast my eyes on the women of Dover, and I say to every painter, 'If you have not been in England, then your brush has never portrayed perfect beauty.'

Englishwomen cannot be compared to roses. No. Most of them are pale. But this pallor bespeaks deep sensibility, and endows their faces with a pleasing freshness. A poet might call them lilies touched with the scarlet tints of heaven's rose-colored clouds. With each languid glance they seem to say, 'I know how to love tenderly.'⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, *A Picture of England*, trans. (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1791), 216, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, Gale, University of Auckland – ECCO, accessed August 22, 2016, http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=auckland_ecco&tabID=T001&docId=CW124814156&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE. The German volume of this text was published in 1787: Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, *England und Italien*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Buchhandlung, 1787), 68, accessed August 22, 2016, <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=fGv0VToiuqgC&dq=England%20und%20Italien&pg=PR3#v=onepage&q=England%20und%20Italien&f=false>.

⁴⁶ N. M. Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveller, 1789-1790: An Account of a Young Russian Gentleman's Tour Through Germany, Switzerland, France and England*, trans. Florence Jonas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 261-2.

Where Archenholz maintains a subject-focused description of the Englishwoman's features, Karamzin permits his reader to share in his position as voyeur. Through Karamzin's text, the (male) reader is invited to gaze upon the women of Dover and receive in turn their "languid glance[s]." Karamzin's final sentence, like Archenholz's, also gestures toward the Englishwoman's sexuality, but Karamzin explicitly imbues her glance with the erotically charged "I know how to love tenderly." Karamzin suffuses his text with provocative innuendo: "One man with three women! How terrifying or how jolly!"⁴⁷ A reader thus experiences English life vicariously through such lightly veiled descriptions; Karamzin's books—and Wendeborn's, and Archenholz's—trade on his reader's appetite for tales of exotic/erotic England.

Given the fiercely competitive publication context in which Archenholz wrote *England und Italien*, it would be inappropriate to regard his account as accurate and unbiased.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

In this section, I will examine the passage from Archenholz's *A Picture of England* as it is reproduced in Donoghue's *Passions Between Women* (because this is where it appears to have garnered most of its attention from contemporary scholars).⁴⁸ I will examine the language used (in this English translation) and attempt to situate the passage, briefly, in its terminological and sociohistorical context.

The word "anandrinic" is not part of the present-day lexicon of terms used to describe groups of same-sex female lovers.⁴⁹ The permutation closest to anandrinic is the word "anandrous" which comes from the Greek *ἀνανδρ-ος*, meaning "husbandless, without males."⁵⁰ Historical texts, French texts in particular, do contain references to the word. "Anandryne" is found in Alfred Delvau's *Dictionnaire Érotique Moderne* (1864) and is defined as a "*femme qui n'aime pas les hommes, ou au moins leur préfère les femmes pour se livrer au libertinage et à la fouterie*" [woman who does not love men, or at least prefers to engage in debauchery and

⁴⁷ Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveller*, 261-74.

⁴⁸ See page 162 of this document.

⁴⁹ At the time of writing, variations of the word "anandrinic"—"anandryne" and "anandrynic"—are not found in the *OED* despite its presence in this (con)text.

⁵⁰ "anandrous, adj.," *OED Online*, June 2011, Oxford University Press, accessed August 20, 2011, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/view/Entry/7066?redirectedFrom=anandrous>.

fornication with women].⁵¹ *Fouterie* derives from the Latin verb *futuo*, “to have intercourse with, screw (a woman)[.]”⁵² *Libertinage*, in Delvau’s dictionary, means “*talent particulier, science particulière pour faire jouir les femmes*” [particular ability, particular science with which to bring women pleasure].⁵³ Arthur Dinaux’s entry for “La Secte Anandryne” provides, in contrast to Delvau’s more general use, a description of a unique group. In *Les sociétés badines, bachiques, littéraires et chantantes* (1867), Dinaux writes of “une prétendue société de femmes, présidée par Mademoiselle Raucourt, qui prenait le nom de Secte Anandryne, et qui avait ses statuts, ses assemblées et ses honteux mystères” [an alleged society of women, led by Miss Raucourt, called the Anandrine Sect, which had its decrees, its meetings, and its shameful mysteries].⁵⁴

Parallels between Dinaux’s description of *la Secte Anandryne* and Archenholz’s account of the Anandrinic Society are close enough to suggest Archenholz’s influence on Dinaux, but would be difficult to prove. Both *la Secte Anandryne* and Anandrinic Society, exclusively female, are presided over by a named or partially-named female figure: Mademoiselle Raucourt/Mrs Y. The activities of Mademoiselle Raucourt’s *Secte* remain a mystery to the male observer who is denied admission. Consequently, the activities of *la Secte* are *honteux*.

The accounts of the Anandrinic Society and *La Secte Anandryne*, each with their woman leader and their private, presumably domestic, setting recall the model of the salon. The salon, presided over by a strong female figure, was, to some extent, a subversive space. Situated within the domestic realm—often a setting for the control and containment of women—the *salonnière* could “achieve considerable personal influence.”⁵⁵ She often wielded sufficient power to advance the standing of men (and women) within society. Still, the *salonnière* achieved her power thanks, in part, to her participation in the normative institution of marriage. Most *salonnières* were married

⁵¹ Alfred Delvau, “anandryne,” *Dictionnaire Érotique Moderne* (Paris: Domaine Français, 1997), 44.

⁵² John C. Traupman, *The New College Latin and English Dictionary* (New York: Bantam, 2007), 192.

⁵³ Delvau, “fouterie,” *Dictionnaire Érotique Moderne*, 193.

⁵⁴ Arthur Dinaux, “Anandryne (La Secte),” *Les sociétés badines, bachiques, littéraires et chantantes : Leur histoire et leurs travaux : Ouvrage posthume de M. Arthur Dinaux*, vol. 1, ed. Gustave Brunet (Paris : Librairie Bachelin-Deflorenne, 1867), 34, accessed August 22, 2016, <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=ZWxDAQAAMAAJ&dq=Les%20soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9s%20badines%2C%20bachiques%2C%20litt%C3%A9raires%20et%20chantantes&pg=PR2#v=onepage&q=Les%20soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9s%20badines,%20bachiques,%20litt%C3%A9raires%20et%20chantantes&f=false>.

⁵⁵ Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, *Writing the Orgy: Power and Parody in Sade*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 59.

women, and gained social status through “the birth, wealth, and rank of their husbands.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, as a female-dominated space, the salon was a means of establishing a kind of female authority. The salon was a space where men (artists and academics, politicians and philosophers) and women both sought to secure wider social acceptance. Besides wielding the power to “make or break a reputation[,]”⁵⁷ the *salonnière* sanctioned topics for discussion, and the salon became a place where institutions like marriage could be radically examined.⁵⁸

By gathering sans men under the leadership of a woman, the all-female “anandrinic” groups contested male hegemony, yet these accounts, as late-nineteenth-century publishers knew, fed a male audience’s interest in sexual variation. Archenholz condemns the activities of the Anandrinic Society. Not privy to their society, and therefore incapable of relating in any detail what occurs at “these places,” Archenholz concludes that the Society and its improprieties must needs be concealed from men. Archenholz’s text addresses his male reader, and the fact that the Anandrinic Society and its activities are shielded from the male gaze only adds interest.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF “THESE LESBIANS”⁵⁹

Archenholz’s eighteenth-century observation hitch-hikes its way across nearly 250 years of scholarship, despite the particular context of its production and the moral frame within which it is ensconced. Archenholz’s text makes its English-language twentieth-century debut in 1934, but not before appearing (in its original German) in Iwan Bloch’s *Das Geschlechtsleben*. Bloch was a German sexologist, a contemporary of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfeld. Bloch, in *Das Geschlechtsleben*, drew on and quoted material from Archenholz’s *England und Italien* (which was published first in German in Leipzig in 1787 and again in English by Edward Jeffery in London in 1789 and P. Byrne in Dublin in 1790 as *A Picture of*

⁵⁶ Frappier-Mazur, *Writing the Orgy*, 59.

⁵⁷ Erica Harth, “The Salon Woman Goes Public ... or Does She?” in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 188.

⁵⁸ Suellen Diaconoff, *Through the Reading Glass: Women, Books, and Sex in the French Enlightenment* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 179.

⁵⁹ See Table 1.1

England.)⁶⁰ It is via Bloch's *Das Geschlechtsleben* that Archenholz makes his way into the twentieth century.

In 1934, Richard Deniston translates Bloch's *Das Geschlechtsleben* into English for Falstaff Press. The English title of *Das Geschlechtsleben* under Falstaff Press is *Sex Life in England Illustrated*. In 1936, William H. Forstern translates Bloch's *Das Geschlechtsleben* for Aldor Press as *A History of English Sexual Morals*. Scholars today wanting access to an English translation of Archenholz's report use Forstern's translation of Bloch citing Archenholz. Wagner cites it as his source for Archenholz's passage.⁶¹ Donoghue, too, points to this "twentieth century translation."⁶² Norton gestures to Donoghue's text as his source but does not indicate a particular page or chapter. Wahl does mention Donoghue's *Passions Between Women* as suggesting the association between actresses and lesbian practices, but she does not provide a specific source for her information.⁶³ McCalman (who reads Archenholz describing *male* Anandrinic clubs where all other critics refer to an all-female group) does not disclose the textual source of his information. His unique allegation, which cannot be verified, may contribute to contemporary misunderstanding of the term "anandrinic." In the case of Neff's article, the words he cites are identical to those attributed to Archenholz, but Neff mistakenly attributes them to one Johann Christian von Hüttner.⁶⁴ Crawford, in her text, quotes Donoghue who quotes Forstern's translation of Bloch quoting Archenholz.

Not having read Archenholz's phrase in its original context, the scholars listed above cannot assess the passage within its greater text. Where Archenholz decries "wanton libidinousness" [*sic*] in London within a morally judgmental frame and insists that the women and their behaviour "deserve" to be concealed from view, scholars present the passage as an objective, factual account. Unaware of both the censorious and the prurient bent of Archenholz's passage, scholars focus on what appears to be

⁶⁰ Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, *England und Italien*, vols 1-3 (Leipzig: Buchhandlung, 1787); *A Picture of England*, trans. (London: Edward Jeffery, Pall-Mall, 1789), accessed August 22, 2016, <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=DLQuAAAAMAAJ&dq=a%20picture%20of%20england&pg=PP11#v=onepage&q=a%20picture%20of%20england&f=false>; *A Picture of England*, trans. (Dublin: P. Byrne, 1790).

⁶¹ Wagner, *Eros Revived*, 330n65. Wagner actually cites Iwan Bloch's *Sexual Life in England Past and Present*, the title given to Forstern's translation in its 1938 Francis Aldor publication, its 1958 Arco Publications/Rodney Books publication, and its 1965 Transworld publication, where Wagner cites the latter.

⁶² Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 242. Donoghue cites *A History of English Sexual Morals*, Forstern's translation, published in 1936 by Aldor Press.

⁶³ Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, 308n16.

⁶⁴ Neff acknowledged this error in correspondence with me.

documented evidence of the eighteenth-century existence of lesbians. The market that produced travelogues, with its investment in creative elaboration and the embroidery of rumour, is not taken into account. The conditions of the passage's appearance in twentieth-century texts—including its journey through questionable translations of a second-hand reference—remain unacknowledged. The veracity of Archenholz's account is not challenged. Of the scholars listed above, only Donoghue mentions having made an effort to find "[t]hese females" in their original context in Archenholz's text.

In the note to her Archenholz quotation, Donoghue indicates that the passage originates from J. N. [sic] von Archenholz's *England und Italien*, volume 1, pages 269-270, published in Leipzig in 1787. Donoghue cites the account in the same way it is cited in (Forstern's translation of) Bloch's *Das Geschlechtsleben, A History of English Sexual Morals*.⁶⁵ She adds that she has "been unable to find this passage in the English translations of Archenholz printed in the late eighteenth century."⁶⁶ She is referring to the two English translations of *England und Italien* printed in London in 1789 and Dublin in 1790. However, these English translations were not made from the German original, but from the French translation, *Tableau de l'Angleterre* (1788). *Tableau de l'Angleterre* is, itself, far from a faithful translation of Archenholz's text. It is an abridged, condensed version of the original. Donoghue was unable to find the passage in question in the two eighteenth-century English versions because it is not printed in them, and that is because it is not included in *Tableau de l'Angleterre*. *England und Italien* is the only text which contains a reference to "these females [who] are called Lesbians." And it is here, in its original German, that Bloch locates the passage in question.

Archenholz's *England und Italien* was printed in Old German Fraktur script which, in itself, may complicate a contemporary reading. Few hard copies of the text exist, and digital facsimiles exhibit signs of age. Individual characters are no longer distinct; they are often smudged and unclear, making decoding a chore and digital search functions nearly impossible. Pagination errors are also potentially troublesome. Early- and late-modern texts like *England und Italien*—and its French and English counterparts—were constructed by individual movable type pieces and often feature errata at the hand of print craftsmen. Volume 2 of *England und Italien* contains one of

⁶⁵ Donoghue, *Passions Between Women*, 295n.40.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

these mistakes: pages 252 and 253 are followed by page 524, then 255 through 270. In the more reputable twentieth century English translation by Forstern, Bloch's footnote to Archenholz's passage locates "these females" on pages 269-270 of *England und Italien*'s first volume. On these pages, however, there is no mention of the Lesbian sect led by the furtive Mrs. Y--. "These females" are not where they are supposed to be. In fact, Bloch made an error in his footnote when attributing the passage to volume 1. The passage appears in volume 2 of *England und Italien*. In this volume, Archenholz writes on English morality. In chapter ten, he recounts a list of affluent prostitutes and describes the English aversion to pæderasty. At the close of this chapter, he writes of London's lust and luxuriance ("*Ueppigkeit und Wollust*"). On pages 269-270, we find the original passage. The scholarly texts mentioned above feature this passage for the purpose of establishing the named existence of lesbians. However, these females, according to Archenholz, are not called Lesbians (*Lesben*), they are called Tribades: "*Solche Frauenzimmer werden Tribaden genannt.*"⁶⁷

THE CREATION AND PERPETUATION OF AN ERROR

How does the shift from "Tribades" to "Lesbians" occur? Bloch's translated work mediates between Archenholz and the contemporary scholars who cite this passage. Like *England und Italien*, Bloch's *Das Geschlechtsleben*—the German text upon which its English translations and their numerous reprints and editions are based—is the product of a particular social and cultural milieu and subject to the imperatives of the movement of which it was a part. Bloch wrote *Das Geschlechtsleben* at the turn of the twentieth century as part of a literary repertoire concerned primarily with English sexual-moral history. In *Das Geschlechtsleben*, in his chapter on homosexuality,⁶⁸ Bloch reproduced Archenholz's words exactly: "*Solche Frauenzimmer werden Tribaden genannt.*"⁶⁹ Bloch was interested in the historicity of the documents he cited, not in updating a lexicon; tribades did not become lesbians on his watch. However, unless contemporary scholars can access Bloch's German text, they must refer to the two English translations of *Das*

⁶⁷ Archenholz, *England und Italien*, vol. 2, 269-270. See Figure 1.1.

⁶⁸ See Figures 1.2-3

⁶⁹ See Dr. Eugen Dürhen [pseud. Iwan Bloch], *Englische Sittengeschichte* (Berlin: L. Marcus, 1912), microfilm, 53-54. See Archenholz, *England und Italien*, vol. 2, 269-270.

Geschlechtsleben. It is in the publication context of these translations that we may find the motivating factor for exchanging the term “tribades” for “lesbians.”

Murray J. White and Stephen Marcus both claim the twentieth-century translations of *Das Geschlechtsleben* are unreliable. White suggests the “credibility of writers who write about sexual-moral history and who quote from translations of Bloch must be seriously doubted” as they do so, he believes, “with a candour born of lazy ignorance.”⁷⁰ These writers, he quips, are “literary scallywags who write about what Bloch wrote about sexual-moral history.”⁷¹ White asserts both English translations of *Das Geschlechtsleben* are “cheeky composites of heavy-handed abridgements and bold mistranslations” which bear “little resemblance to original source material.”⁷² Marcus, like White, identifies Bloch’s work’s ill-treatment in translation:

This work [*Sex Life in England Illustrated*] purports to be a translation of Iwan Bloch’s *Das Geschlechtsleben in England*, ... but it is nothing of the kind. The 1934 English-language version of Bloch’s work is so mangled as to be virtually indescribable: it was something of a translation, something of an abridgment, and something of an altogether new creation.⁷³

The translations White and Marcus refer to are the 1934 translation by Richard Deniston for Falstaff Press, and the 1936 translation by William H. Forstern for Aldor Press. Falstaff printed a limited 3,000 copies of what it titled *Sex Life in England Illustrated*. Aldor titled its translation *A History of English Sexual Morals*, then called its 1938 reprint *Sexual Life in England: Past and Present*. The Forstern translation is

⁷⁰ Murray White, “The Legacy of Iwan Bloch (1872-1922),” *New Zealand Psychologist* 1, no. 1 (1972): 28, 25.

⁷¹ Ibid., 29. If I am prepared to reproduce White’s scathing criticism of these translations as well as the practices of contemporary scholars who use them, I must point out that *Das Geschlechtsleben* is also the subject of some controversy. For example, Peter Fryer accuses Bloch of stealing Henry Spencer Ashbee’s research. Stephen Marcus believes “large portions of *Das Geschlechtsleben in England* are made up of outright and unacknowledged cribbing from Ashbee’s three-volume bibliography.” See Henry Spencer Ashbee, *Forbidden Books of the Victorians*, ed. Peter Fryer (London: The Odyssey Press, 1970), 1; Stephen Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (Ealing, UK: Corgi, 1966), 78. It is true that Bloch refers to several texts which are also listed in Ashbee’s bibliographies of erotica. However, most of the chapters in *Das Geschlechtsleben* deal with topics other than literature. Fryer and Marcus may rightly suspect Bloch’s use of Ashbee’s work, but they do not elaborate on the specifics of Bloch’s alleged plagiarism; they provide their reader with no textual evidence or examples to support their claims. See Dürhen [Iwan Bloch], *Englische Sittengeschichte*, microfilm, xi; Ashbee, *Forbidden Books of the Victorians*, 208-39.

⁷² White, “The Legacy of Iwan Bloch (1872-1922),” 26-7.

⁷³ Marcus, *The Other Victorians*, 78.

used in all subsequent printings.⁷⁴ Forstern's is also the translation that Wagner et al (in)directly cite in their texts and is arguably more reliable than the Falstaff version, although some scholars, like Roy Porter and Gordon Rattray Taylor, fail to signal the differences between the heterogeneous texts,⁷⁵ leading their readers to believe *Sex Life in England Illustrated* and *A History of English Sexual Morals* are, for all intents and purposes, the same texts when, in fact, they are significantly different.

The "new creation" Marcus refers to was Richard Deniston's translation for Falstaff Press.⁷⁶ Falstaff Press was "one of the most successful mail-order erotica businesses of the 1930s."⁷⁷ Falstaff's literary repertoire bid for the attention of a market of lay readers interested in both sexological publications and illicit or censored novels,⁷⁸ and the Press endeavoured to satisfy the demands of its curious customers with fictional and sexological texts which had "obvious prurient appeal."⁷⁹

Falstaff Press was founded by Benjamin Rebhuhn after he was released from federal prison for selling prohibited erotica. Under Rebhuhn's leadership, Falstaff Press "gave special prominence to the work of Iwan Bloch[.]"⁸⁰ Although *Das Geschlechtsleben*'s content was sexological and so geared toward a scientific readership, it lent itself to the sort of creative editing at which Falstaff Press excelled. With a focus on homosexuality, sadism, masochism and sexual perversion,⁸¹ and with no competing English translation to speak of, *Das Geschlechtsleben* was vulnerable to Falstaff's repackaging. Falstaff often replaced benign and scientifically "sterile" titles with more enticing versions in order to better attract the attention of readers less

⁷⁴ Iwan Bloch, *Sexual Life in England, Past and Present*, trans. William H. Forstern, (illus.) (London: Arco Publications/Rodney Books, 1958); Iwan Bloch, *Sexual Life in England Past and Present*, trans. William H. Forstern (London: Transworld, 1965).

⁷⁵ See Roy Porter, "The Literature of Sexual Advice Before 1800," in *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality*, ed. Roy Porter & Mikulàs Teich (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 152, and Gordon Rattray Taylor, *Sex In History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1953), 317n13.

⁷⁶ Named for the character in Shakespeare's *King Henry IV* for whom the "desire of gratifying the grosser and lower appetites ... is the ruling and strongest principal." See William Richardson, *Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff and on His Imitation of Female Characters* (London: J. Murray, 1788), 11, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, Gale, University of Auckland – ECCO, accessed August 22, 2016, http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=auckland_ecco&tabID=T001&docId=CW116257815&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE.

⁷⁷ Jay A. Gertzman, *Bookleggers and Smuthounds: The Trade in Erotica 1920-1940* (Pennsylvania: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999), 41fig8.

⁷⁸ White, "The Legacy of Iwan Bloch (1872-1922)," 28.

⁷⁹ Gertzman, *Bookleggers and Smuthounds*, 73.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁸¹ Dürhen [Bloch], *Englische Sittengeschichte*, microfilm, vii.

interested in scientific value than erotic appeal. Another of Bloch's texts, *Beiträge zur Aetiologie der Psychopathia Sexualis (Contributions to the Ethnological Studies of Sexual Psychopathology)*, became *Anthropological and ethnological studies in the strangest sex acts in modes of love of all races illustrated, oriental, occidental, savage, civilized*.⁸² This lengthy and comprehensive title (reminiscent of nineteenth-century narrative tags in books and paintings) added a measure of faux-historical legitimacy to the re-vamped work. *Das Geschlechtsleben* underwent a similar transformation in its Falstaff translation. Presented to the English-reading market as *Ethnological and cultural studies of the sex life in England illustrated as revealed in its erotic and obscene literature and art; with nine private cabinets of illustrations by the greatest English masters of erotic art*,⁸³ it was also supplemented with "descriptive chapters on, and excerpts from, erotica ... including Frank Harris' *My Life and Loves* and Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*."⁸⁴

Falstaff's *Sex Life in England Illustrated* contains no footnotes, however, and in no way reflects the textual organization of *Das Geschlechtsleben*. While *Sex Life in England Illustrated* contains a bibliography nearly identical to that in *Das Geschlechtsleben*, one is hard-pressed to find the listed works put to use within the text. Although the Falstaff bibliography includes Archenholz's *England und Italien* as a source, there is not one mention of Archenholz or his work between the pages of *Sex Life in England Illustrated*. In other words, Falstaff erotically charged the title, supplied provocative illustrations, and filled the pages with a generous helping of its own words. This "translation" contains very little of Iwan Bloch's work at all. Simply put, Falstaff manipulated Bloch's sexological work in order to seduce a target market.

Unlike Falstaff, Aldor Press did not deal primarily in erotica. Their intent for translating and publishing Bloch's text was a scholarly one; their purpose, as they

⁸² Iwan Bloch, *Anthropological and ethnological studies in the strangest sex acts in modes of love of all races illustrated: Oriental, Occidental, savage, civilized*, trans. Ernst Vogel (New York: Falstaff Press, 1935), accessed August 22, 2016, <https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=ZSYeAQAAMAAJ&q=Anthropological+and+ethnological+studies+in+the+strangest+sex+acts+in+modes+of+love+of+all+races+illustrated:+Oriental,+Occidental,+savage,+civilized&dq=Anthropological+and+ethnological+studies+in+the+strangest+sex+acts+in+modes+of+love+of+all+races+illustrated:+Oriental,+Occidental,+savage,+civilized&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewj-gY2yjOjOAUEJpQKHdb9C88Q6AEIGjAA>.

⁸³ Iwan Bloch, *Ethnological and Cultural Studies of the Sex Life in England Illustrated as Revealed in Its Erotic and Obscene Literature and Art With Nine Private Cabinets of Illustrations By the Greatest English Masters of Erotic Art*, trans. and ed. Richard Deniston (New York: Falstaff Press, 1934).

⁸⁴ Gertzman, *Bookleggers and Smuthounds*, 193. Frank Harris was an American publishing mogul. *My Life and Loves* was an autobiography "in which Harris mixed lurid sexual reminiscences with a catalog of name-dropping self-adulation." See Jonathon Green, *The Encyclopedia of Censorship, New Edition*, rev. Nicholas J. Karolides (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2005), 367.

stated it, was to provide “the starting point of an adequate literature on the history of English morals.”⁸⁵ Unlike Deniston, Forstern did not perform any sweeping editorial functions in his translation.⁸⁶ While Forstern’s translation is preferable to Deniston’s in that it more closely resembles *Das Geschlechtsleben* in both content and construction,⁸⁷ it is in this text where the “*Tribaden*” become “Lesbians.” Why did Forstern make this choice? Tribades, like lesbians, were discussed in books published around the same time as *A History of English Sexual Morals*.⁸⁸ Thus, it is unlikely Forstern was simply exchanging an out-of-date term for a more contemporary one.⁸⁹ However, I am—to my knowledge—the only contemporary scholar interrogating Forstern’s choice.

STONES LEFT UNTURNED, AND “LESBIAN” AS A SIGNIFIER

This lack of critical attention to this translation error could be explained by two scenarios. Perhaps no one is interested in verifying the eighteenth-century textual origins of this identification of “lesbians.” After all, in the 1970s—when White penned his biting remarks about the translations of *Das Geschlechtsleben* and scholars who use them—Iwan Bloch was a little-known sexologist. His obscurity may have permitted the mistranslations and abridgements of *Das Geschlechtsleben* to occupy their place and present themselves as authoritative works without contestation. However, by the late eighties, as the momentum of lesbian and gay studies increased, Bloch was recognized for the influence he had on his professional contemporaries and became known as “the European sexologist whose work ... influenced Freud.”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Bloch, *A History of English Sexual Morals*, x.

⁸⁶ For the most part, his translation reflects the content of *Das Geschlechtsleben*. That said, Forstern’s version is still an abridgment; Aldor’s version translates both volumes of *Das Geschlechtsleben* with the exception of its last two chapters on lending libraries and sexual reform.

⁸⁷ In 1972, White wrote that “no authoritative English translations have yet been made” of *Das Geschlechtsleben*. White admitted that Bloch was “relatively unknown in contemporary psychology,”—which was true in the 1970s—but maintained an “optimistic hope” that “an enterprising publisher will give us definitive translations of Bloch’s most important writings.” See White, “The Legacy of Iwan Bloch (1872-1922),” 25-8.

⁸⁸ See William Josephus Robinson, *Our Mysterious Life Glands and How They Affect Us* (New York: Eugenics Publishing Company, 1934), 142, 279, accessed September 21, 2016, https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=BbnfAAAAAMAAJ&dq=editions:Edg_MluwW4sC&redir_esc=y.

⁸⁹ A basic GoogleBooks search with the term “tribade” retrieves 18 results for works published between 1930 and 1940 (four in languages other than English). The term “lesbian” also retrieves 18 results in that time frame, which suggests the terms were relatively equally represented.

⁹⁰ A. Damien Martin and Emery S. Hetrick, “The Stigmatization of the Gay and Lesbian Adolescent,” in *Psychopathology and Psychotherapy in Homosexuality*, ed. Michael W. Ross (New York: Hawarth Press, 1988), 163.

Alongside Freud, Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfeld, Bloch has been identified as a founder of sexology and the one who “coined the term sexual science (Sexualwissenschaft)[.]”⁹¹ However, in spite of this renewed interest in Bloch’s work, there has yet to be the publication of an authoritative translation of *Das Geschlechtsleben*.

The second scenario which may permit the perpetuation of this translation error is one in which no one *wants* to verify the account because it serves a purpose as it is. Certainly, as I have pointed out, it has been employed in various contemporary scholarly texts interested in identifying early (textual) evidence of lesbian existence. And so “these lesbians” remain where “these tribades” should be, and contemporary academics continue to reuse and recycle this “bastard translation.” Only Donoghue, who was intrigued by such an early (1787) use of the word “lesbian,” attempted (and failed) to verify the source. Thus, the unique publication conditions of *England und Italien*, the moralising and salacious frame within which “these females” were presented, and the notoriety of *Das Geschlechtsleben*’s English translations, are never brought to the fore.

I believe the reproduction of Archenholz’s mistranslated passage is evidence that the contemporary scholarly machine prioritizes the naming and situating function of an historical account of the emergence of lesbian identity concomitant with the naming of that “lesbian.” Had *Das Geschlechtsleben*’s translator translated “*Solche Frauenzimmer werden Tribaden genannt*” as “These females are called Tribades” instead of as “These females are called Lesbians,” the passage would certainly not have been used to support late twentieth-century claims about lesbian identity—as Valerie Traub states, “tribades [are] not *lesbians*[.]”⁹² The historical moment where description of a behaviour shifted to a self-affirming sexual identity with social, cultural and political consequences, remains elusive. That such a moment exists at all—one that can be distinguished from preceding and following historical moments—is doubtful.⁹³ Nevertheless, value has been invested in finding evidence which supports the chronological mapping of a particular group of desiring

⁹¹ Ira L. Reiss, “Trouble in Paradise: The Current Status of Sexual Science,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 18, no. 2 (May 1982): 98.

⁹² Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 220, emphasis hers.

⁹³ See Joan Copjec, *Supposing the Subject* (London: Verso, 1994), ix.

individuals (lesbians) instead of in the examination—and celebration—of singular appearances of nonheteronormative subjects.

Paul Bové describes terms “that are finally more important for their function, for their place within intellectual practices, than they are for what they may be said to ‘mean’ in the abstract.”⁹⁴ “Lesbian,” I believe, is one of these terms. The term “lesbian”—and other designations such as homosexual, invert, tribade—entered the lexicon as reactive productions. In other words, they are primitive tools which allow us to discuss historical subjects characterised by a multiplicity that might otherwise frustrate such discussion. These particular terms are meant to represent specific subjects, but, in most cases, do not issue from the subjects themselves. The term “lesbian” has been produced from within culturally sanctioned sites of power, and *may* reflect a desire to submit their referents to an organizational imperative. This compulsion can be read in Archenholz’s and Bloch’s moral framing of the sexual variant.

The imperative of contemporary works to identify and designate the earliest lesbian subjects contributes to the “progress of narrative queer history, but also [to a] sense of queer identity in the present.”⁹⁵ For this reason, the tale of the “Lesbians” Archenholz allegedly observed is folded beneath several layers of scholarly appropriation, in “authoritative” and “touchstone” texts.⁹⁶ The tale has been left undisturbed, I suspect, because it identifies fore-figures who can be included in a historical chronology tracing the existence of self-identified women-desiring women. Where naming is “a performative act organizing what it enunciates[.]”⁹⁷ the name lesbian functions as retrospective performativity. Scholars name, and that naming creates what it names. But, instead of creating what it names in the present and for the future, it is reinscribed upon historical individuals, acting upon the unwitting subject of the naming. As this naming becomes “a repetition and a ritual,” within the scholarly apparatus, it “achieves its performative effects through its naturalization in

⁹⁴ Paul A. Bové, *Mastering Discourse: The Politics of Intellectual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 2.

⁹⁵ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 8.

⁹⁶ See Lisa A. Freeman, review of *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801*, by Emma Donoghue, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30, no. 3 (1997): 322.

⁹⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 155.

the context of the [academic] body.”⁹⁸ In this way, the “lesbian” is always already there, even when she isn’t.

⁹⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2008), xv.

Figure 1.1 Quotation of Archenholz Passage, in William Forstern's translation of Iwan Bloch's *Das Geschlechtsleben*

HOMOSEXUALITY

However, should you disbelieve that I have heard this from her own mouth, let me inform you that she overheard your entire conversation in the bathroom and gave me a detailed account of it, not omitting your witty descriptions of all our friends at Court, and the improper couplet you recited to this lovely girl, also how you finally lured poor Miss Temple into the trap which you only set her in order to see her charms.'

The author of *Satan's Harvest Home* (London, 1794) dealt with London's Lesbians of the eighteenth century. At that time Lesbian love was called 'game of flats', which probably meant a special mode of sexual intercourse between women. This 'new kind of sin', so widespread among ladies of high social position, was said to be just as common in Twickenham as it is in Turkey.

Hüttner writes about the occurrence of homosexual practices at girls' boarding schools¹, while Archenholtz even records the existence of Lesbian clubs².

'There is no limit to libidinousness in London. There are females who avoid all intimate intercourse with the opposite sex, confining themselves to their own sex. These females are called Lesbians. They have small societies, known as Anandrinic Societies, of which Mrs. Y. . . .³, formerly a famous London actress, was one of the presidents. These Lesbians offer up their unclean sacrifices at these places, but their altars are not worthy of the secret groves where Dionne's doves were united in love; all they deserve is a thick veil to obscure them from the sight of men.'

¹ ' . . . And these inexperienced young creatures, full of sensuality, are left together without any supervision whatever, especially when they are in bed, and they spend their time reading obscene novels or in even more shameful amusements that are unmentionable.' Hüttner, *Sittengemälde von London* (London Morals), pp. 183-4.

² Archenholtz, *England*, Vol. I, pp. 269-270.

³ This was most probably Mrs. Yates of the Drury Lane Theatre (d. 1787).

Da in London Ueppigkeit und Wollust keine andern Gränzen, als die der Möglichkeit kennen, so giebt es auch hier Frauenzimmer, die allem vertrauten Umgange mit dem männlichen Geschlechte entsagen, und sich bloß zu dem ihrigen halten. Solche Frauenzimmer werden Tribaden genannt. Sie formiren auch kleine Societäten, die man Anandrinische Gesellschaften heißt, wovon Mrs. Y***, eine vor einigen Jahren berühmte Schauspielerin der Londner Bühne, eine Vorsteherin war. Hier bringen diese Tribaden ihre unreinen Opfer, aber ihre Altäre sind nicht würdig jenes Hains, wo sich Dionens Tauben gatten, sondern verdienen, daß eine dicke Finsterniß sie vor den Augen der Menschen verdecke.

Ende des zweiten Theils.

Figure 1.3

Quotation of Archenholz's Passage, in Iwan Bloch's *Englische Sittengeschichte*

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Mädchen ein sonnpassendes Kouplet zuwendeten — wiedann die arme Temple in die Falle ging, die Sie ihr nur gestellt, um ihre Reize durch den Augenschein kennen zu lernen.“

Aus dem 18. Jahrhundert berichtet der Verfasser von „Satan's Harvest Home“ (London 1749) über die Londoner Tribaden. Die lesbische Liebe führte damals den Namen „Game at Flats“, womit wohl eine eigentümliche Art des geschlechtlichen Verkehrs zwischen Weibern bezeichnet werden sollte. Diese „neue Art der Sünde“, die unter Frauen von Stande sehr verbreitet sei, werde sowohl in Twickenham als in der Türkei geübt.¹⁾

Hüttner erwähnt das Vorkommen homosexueller Praktiken in weiblichen Kostschulen²⁾ und Archenholtz macht sogar Mitteilungen über die Existenz geheimer tribadischer Klubs.³⁾

„Da in London Ueppigkeit und Wollust keine anderen Grenzen als die der Möglichkeit kennen, so giebt es auch hier Frauenzimmer, die allem vertrauten Umgange mit dem männlichen Geschlechte entsagen, und sich bloss zu dem ihrigen halten. Solche Frauenzimmer werden Tribaden genannt. Sie formieren auch kleine Sozietäten, die man Anandrinische Gesellschaften heisst, wovon Mrs. Y...⁴⁾, eine vor einigen Jahren berühmte

¹⁾ „Satan's Harvest Home“ S. 51.

²⁾ „Dazu kommt noch, dass man diese unerfahrenen Geschöpfe, die noch ganz Sinnlichkeit sind, ohne Aufsicht beieinander seyn lässt, vorzüglich um die Zeit, da sie im Bett seyn sollten, wo sie sich dann mit dem Lesen schlüpfriger Romane, oder andern die Sinne noch mehr empörenden Belustigungen, die man nicht ohne Erröten nennen kann, und welche die ersten Quellen der Gesundheit des Geistes und Körpers vergiften, beschäftigen.“ Hüttner „Sittengemälde von London“ S. 183—184.

³⁾ J. W. v. Archenholtz „England“ Bd. I, S. 269—270.

⁴⁾ Es ist dies wohl Mrs. Yates vom Drury Lane-Theater († 1787).

Figure 1.4

Quotation of Archenholz's Passage, in Iwan Bloch's *Englische Sittengeschichte*, Continued

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Schauspielerin der Londoner Bühne, eine Vorsteherin war. Hier bringen diese Tribaden ihre unreinen Opfer, aber ihre Altäre sind nicht würdig jenes Hains, wo sich Dioneus Tauben gatten, sondern verdienen, dass eine dicke Finsternis sie vor den Augen der Menschen verdecke."

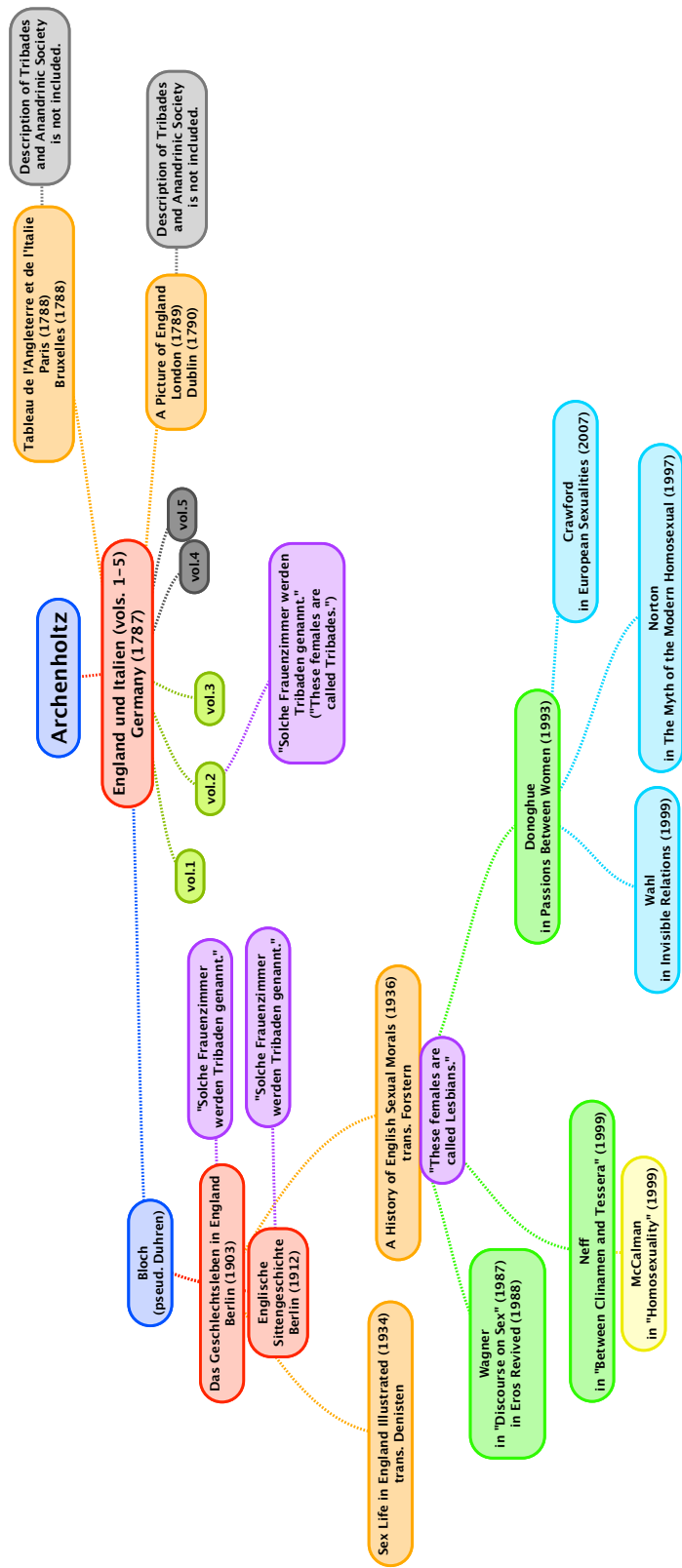
Am 5. Juli 1777 wurde in London eine Frau zu 6 Monaten Kerker verurteilt, die sich, als Mann verkleidet, schon drei Mal mit verschiedenen Frauen verheiratet hatte.¹⁾

Gegenwärtig ist nach Havelock Ellis die Tribadie besonders unter den Londoner Theaterdamen und Prostituierten verbreitet. Ein Freund machte ihm über die betreffenden Verhältnisse in den grossen Theatern und Singhallen Londons die folgende Mittellung:

„Leidenschaftliche Freundschaften zwischen Mädchen, von den unschuldigsten Beziehungen bis zu den ausgebildetsten Formen lesbischer Liebe, sind unter dem Bühnenpersonal sehr häufig, sowohl bei den Schauspielerinnen, wie auch bei den Choristinnen und Ballettänzerinnen, die wohl besonders dazu neigen. Das Durcheinander in den Ankleideräumen, in denen die eng zusammengepferchten Mädchen oft stundenlang Pausen abwarten müssen, aufgeregt und unbeschäftigt, giebt reichliche Gelegenheit zur Entwicklung solcher Spielarten des Gefühls. In fast allen Theatern findet man einen Kreis von Mädchen, die von den anderen gemieden werden oder sich von ihnen isolieren und die für einander die grenzenloseste Anhänglichkeit zeigen. Die meisten kokettieren auch gern mit dem anderen Geschlecht, aber ich kenne ein paar unter ihnen, die nie

¹⁾ P. Mantegazza „Anthropologisch-kulturhistorische Studien über die Geschlechtsverhältnisse des Menschen“ Jena o. J. S. 98.

Table 1.1 Following the Trail of "These Lesbians"



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