

“Go for the failure”: Modernist Feminist Failure and the Fiction of Vita Sackville-West,
Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Jean Rhys

by

Alicha Lynn Starr Keddy

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English Language and Literature

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

© 2019, Alicha Lynn Starr Keddy

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the gendered and often contradictory representations of women's failure in the fiction of Vita Sackville-West, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Jean Rhys who, I argue, each critique and expand the possibilities of modernist aesthetics and feminist expression through their depictions of the politics and pleasures of women's failure. I bring these authors together because they differ significantly in their aesthetics, feminist interventions, and relationship to "high" modernism. These differences enable them to challenge the modernist canon in distinct ways, and reveal how the institutional formation and biases of "modernism" have failed them. My reading of failure takes up Jack Halberstam's recuperative reading in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), where failure is re-read as a queer and feminist subversion of heteropatriarchal expectations. However, I problematize a purely affirmative ideal of failure by examining narratives of both liberating and oppressive failure. Sackville-West and Warner create protagonists who enthusiastically embrace failure as an alternative source of identification that is less bound to patriarchal ideals and norms of domination; as such, these protagonists carve out their own livable spaces—no matter how fleeting or compromised—within oppressive structures. In contrast, Rhys depicts failure as a decisively destructive social identifier thrust upon marginalized women who lack the social power to recuperate that label into a feminist identification. By putting constructive and devastating accounts of "failed" women in dialogue, I assert that embracing failure is a privileged form of feminist resistance. In turn, these authors critique the material conditions of women's subjugation in the early twentieth century at the same time that they challenge literary modernism and early feminism. These authors willfully "fail" literary conventions for

their own political and aesthetic aims, and their protagonists “fail” and expand the possibilities of early feminist discourse through their ambivalent and even resistant approaches to first-wave feminist orthodoxy. Ultimately, this dissertation examines not only the narrative possibilities of women’s failure but also the debates about the meanings of modernism and feminism, from the early twentieth century to today.

Acknowledgements

As I sit down to write these acknowledgements, I am overwhelmed by all the people who have helped me get to this point. If I were to properly thank everyone for all of their intellectual, emotional, and material support, then these acknowledgements would be as long as this dissertation. So, what follows is just a tiny portrait of my immense gratitude.

I begin by expressing my profound thanks to Dr. Jodie Medd, without whom this project would not exist. Thank you for being a champion of my work from the start, even when my confidence wavered. Thank you for your generous and incisive feedback, for expanding my thinking about modernism and feminism, and for your patience and enthusiasm. Over the years, you have supported both my intellectual and personal growth, and in so doing, have demonstrated the truly transformative impact of feminist mentorship. Being your student has been a privilege and a pleasure.

I would also like to gratefully acknowledge Dr. Dana Dragunoiu and Dr. Adam Barrows, who have similarly supported my work from the start. Dr. Dragunoiu: thanks for your generous and sharp feedback, and for your willingness to help me work through intellectual problems. Dr. Barrows: thanks for your enthusiastic feedback and for introducing me to Sylvia Townsend Warner. Because of you both, this dissertation is stronger and more nuanced thanks to your willingness to read early drafts, suggest texts, and meet with me to discuss my ideas.

I also wish to thank Dr. Erica Delsandro and Dr. Danielle Kinsey for generously agreeing to be my external examiners and for taking the time to read this dissertation and participate in the defence.

I am also grateful for my colleagues and friends who have been on this journey

beside me, and who have made it a pleasure. Kim Sigouin: thanks for sharing your wealth of modernist expertise and for always taking the time to assist me, even amidst your own work demands. You have celebrated my successes and reassured me during times of anxiety. I have benefitted immeasurably from our many stimulating conversations, stress-relieving adventures, and from all the laughs. I cannot imagine doing this without you. Similarly, I gratefully recognize Bridgette Brown, who has been an endless support and inspiration. You helped me find my footing as a new mother and academic, and you always miraculously managed to find the time to read my work even as you faced your own tight deadlines. Thanks for your constant encouragement, good cheer, and for always checking in with me. I am delighted that we started and will finish this degree together. Thanks also to Chris Doody for helping me with all things academia-related, and Melissa Pullara for her editorial eye and for babysitting Nora in the early days.

There are many other people in the department who I wish to acknowledge, including Adrien Robertson and Shaun Stevenson for their friendship, Dr. Barbara Leckie, Dr. Brian Johnson, and Dr. Julie Murray for being wonderful and good-humoured grad supervisors, and Judy Katz, Lana Keon, and priya kumar for patiently helping me solve innumerable administrative problems and for all the stress-relieving chats. I am also indebted to the phenomenal educators who care for my daughter, thus enabling my partner and me to do our work, and I am grateful to Dr. C for all the tea.

I am also deeply grateful to my family, who have never wavered in their support of my intellectual growth, even when it took me halfway across the country from them. Linda Keddy, Janice Larade, Donna Keddy, Dennis Larade, Amanda Collins, Michael Collins, Karen Collins, and Audrey Power: thanks for encouraging me to be bold, to keep

writing, and to work hard. Thanks for celebrating my successes and for cheering me on when I felt depleted. To my furry writing companions: thanks for your gentle presence.

Finally, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to my partner Sean and our daughter Nora. Sean: thank you for unceasingly supporting me throughout this degree, all while finishing your own Ph.D. and navigating the challenges of early parenthood. Your enthusiasm for my work, attentiveness during times of stress, and your intuitive knowledge of when to come forward to help, and when to step back to let me figure things out on my own, have enabled me to take on this challenge. Thanks for modelling to our daughter what a feminist partnership looks like. The last few years have gone by in a sometimes-chaotic blur of research and childcare, but there is no one else I could—or would—do this with but you. And to Nora, the greatest influence on this dissertation: even if you cannot see it, you are written into every page. Your embryonic kicks punctuate my early writing; the rhythms of my Warner chapters were formed around your calls for milk and comfort; my ideas about Sackville-West were quickly distilled so I could pick you up from childcare early, as we both got used to our new routine; and the despair of the Rhys chapter was mitigated by your joyful demands for dance parties, library trips, and visits to the park. I am proud that I finished this dissertation, but I am infinitely prouder of you.

Financial support for this project has generously been provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, the Gordon J. Wood Scholarship, and the Beattie-Haines Graduate Scholarship in English.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| Abstract..... | ii |
| Acknowledgements..... | iv |
| Table of Contents..... | vii |
| Introduction: Failure, Feminist Modernism, and the Women’s Canon..... | 1 |
| Chapter One: “Such a hint of independence was an outrage, almost a manifesto”: Reluctant Feminism and Re-Writing the Modernist <i>Künstlerroman</i> in Vita Sackville-West’s <i>All Passion Spent</i>..... | 30 |
| “‘There was surely a discrepancy somewhere’”: Early Feminism & Political Ambivalence..... | 37 |
| “‘She retained, however, a conviction’”: Troubling the Language of Resistance..... | 48 |
| “‘Anyhow, why should I accept other people’s ideas?’”: Ripening the <i>Künstlerroman</i> | 54 |
| “‘now she felt safe’”: Feminist Mentorship & The Artistic Self..... | 64 |
| “‘Achievement was good, but the spirit was better’”: Re-reading Artistic Failure..... | 73 |
| Chapter Two: Going for it: Slow Resistance, Feminist Fantasy, and Failure in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s <i>Lolly Willowes</i>..... | 78 |
| Disappointingly Charming Reviews and a Bewitched Public..... | 85 |
| “‘ <i>Feme sole</i> ...and <i>feme couverte</i> , and all that sort of rot’”: Failing Feminism..... | 89 |
| “‘She had no thoughts’”: Failing Modernist Aesthetics in Search of New Expression..... | 98 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| “the clue to the secret country of her mind”: Conscious Transformation and WWI..... | 104 |
| “her thoughts were elsewhere”: Plotting against the Ideal Housewife..... | 110 |
| “She had not come...to concern herself with the hearts of men”: Romancing Great Mop..... | 115 |
| 1920s Realism and the Interventions of Warner’s Failed Feminist Modernism..... | 122 |
| Chapter Three: “Hers was the liberty of a fallen woman”: Privileged Resistance and the Politics of Failure in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s <i>Summer Will Show</i>..... | 125 |
| “Her narratives never rest content”: Courting History and its Political Potentials... | 127 |
| “a world policed by oughts”: Subverting Narrative and Social Expectation..... | 131 |
| “destiny and death had combined”: Nascent Feminism & the Anxiety of Freedom..... | 136 |
| “that irrefutable force and logic of a different existence”: Desire & the Privileges of Failure..... | 144 |
| “Caspar had already been swallowed up:” Race, Tragedy, and the Limits of Failure | 155 |
| “Whether I die first or survive you, I lose you”: Loss and the Cost of Freedom..... | 168 |
| Chapter Three: “I had a shot at the life I wanted. And I failed”: Stagnation, Indifference, and Jean Rhys as a Feminist (Modernist) Killjoy in <i>After Leaving Mr Mackenzie</i>..... | 172 |
| “Because she could not imagine a future, time stood still”: The Stagnation of Failure..... | 182 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| “he had been really afraid of her”: Moving Through Rhys’s Affective World..... | 191 |
| “a hope that was a stealthy pain”: Emotional Agency & Conditioned Indifference | 202 |
| “Nobody had noticed anything”: The Aesthetics of Rhys’s Ethical Address..... | 210 |
| Epilogue | 221 |
| Works Cited..... | 227 |

Introduction **Modernism, Feminism, and Failure**

For twenty years, writers and lovers Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland were monitored by Britain's Security Service MI5 because of their involvement in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). When Judith Bond and Mary Jacobs combed through the mass of letters, unpublished miscellany, and fragments of previously classified MI5 documents spanning from 1935-1955, they produced a remarkable account of this period of surveillance. They describe how MI5 officers intercepted Warner and Ackland's correspondence, spied on their daily activities, and monitored the visitors to their Dorset home.¹ The two were aware of this extended surveillance, and would cheekily reference it in letters. "Have you thought," wrote Ackland to Warner in 1948, "how pleasant it must be for the MI5 man who reads our correspondence, to have our innocent domestic bliss to study...[?]" (*I'll Stand By You* 223). Warner and Ackland were energetic CPGB members. Among their services to the party was Ackland's offer of her car, Warner's efforts to secure lodging for anti-fascist intellectuals, fundraising initiatives, and their own financial support. They also offered "rural rest-cures" (45) in their home to beleaguered members, and each contributed to propaganda campaigns.

Notably, their propaganda was distinctly literary. Ackland would insert slips of paper into library books with exhortations like "Miners? Read Zola's *Germinal!*" or with lists of recommended books followed by the directive to "Demand these books from your local library!" (46). Warner, meanwhile, took a less direct path to disseminating her

¹ Some of the MI5 material on Warner and Ackland remains classified, so Bond and Jacobs' article is an incomplete picture of this period based on their access to publicly available documents and unpublished miscellany.

propaganda. Bond and Jacobs argue that Warner was “aware of the need to smuggle her political message *incognito* to her readers” (46). She balanced more direct and empathetic appeals like “organizing exhibitions of children’s drawings to show the effect on them of the trauma of war or the distress of poverty” (45) with literary writing competitions, where she encouraged working-class readers of the *Left Review* to produce their own propaganda, the goal of which was “to develop their critical skills by requiring entrants to write and circulate critiques of each other’s propaganda stories” (46). Ever savvy, Warner felt that her work with the British Medical Aid Committee during the Spanish Civil War provided “considerable sentimental press value,” and she even saw propaganda opportunities in a children’s book about London that she was commissioned to write (46). Warner was dedicated to getting her message out to as many people as possible, evidenced by her choice to use both direct and subtle propagandistic appeals in an array of contexts. Her choices also reveal her belief in literature’s ability to promote empathy, co-operation, and critical thinking (at least within party-approved parameters).

Warner’s investment in literature as a powerful propaganda tool is unsurprising given the clear political underpinnings of her fiction. And yet, despite Warner and Ackland being known to MI5 as “literary ladies” (54), Bond and Jacobs found no evidence that their published writing was ever investigated (54-55). Given the time and resources MI5 put into their surveillance, this disregard of Warner’s literary work is astonishing. Warner’s fiction explores a number of “subversive” themes including feminism, lesbianism, communism, and rejections of religion and the monarchy. What is more, her modest fame and regular contributions to *The New Yorker* ensured a wide audience. MI5 went to otherwise extraordinary lengths to closely surveil Warner and

Ackland. Telegrams they sent were first routed through codebreakers, local hotel keepers were intimidated into keeping tabs on the guests Warner arranged lodging for, and Ackland was stalked long enough for a police officer to give MI5 a lengthy description of her appearance, complete with discomfiting references to her “good teeth” and “shapely legs” (41). Since MI5 was interested in the subversive people and ideas that Warner and Ackland were smuggling into Dorset, it is confounding that they did not worry about what subversive ideas were leaving the county. Warner only had modest influence amongst her country set. She had a much larger impact in her literary career, where she subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) embedded her politics in works read by people all over England. Overlooking her literary work, then, was a dismissal of her most prevalent propaganda opportunity. However, when we read MI5’s treatment of Warner through the wider lens of contemporary approaches to women’s modernist writing (and its subsequent institutional formation), we see that MI5’s dismissal of her writing is utterly predictable. Indeed, we might even read it as a microcosm of the early modernist canon’s refusal to recognize the work and influence of women modernists.

Modernism

Over sixty years after her surveillance, Warner’s fiction continues to puzzle scholars because her generic unpredictability and early popularity does not quite fit into our expectations of modernist literature. The problem of Warner signals a wider issue within the ongoing work of modernist field formation and in the long, slow history of reclaiming women’s writing and expression. This slow history of recuperation is also exacerbated by the impossibly complex and often debated meanings of “modernism” itself. As such, any

attempt to reclaim an author as “modernist” is instantly undermined by a field bound by such an indefinite term. For decades now, modernist scholars have been as self-conscious about modernist field formation as canonically high modernists were about their aesthetics. In *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea* (2015), Sean Latham and Gayle Rogers confront the definitional failures of modernism by opening their historiography of the field with the provocative declaration that “there is no such thing as modernism” (1). Specifically, they write that there is “no singular definition capable of bringing order to the diverse multitude of creators, manifestos, practices, and politics that have been variously constellated around this enigmatic term” (1). This definition—or refusal of a definition—is reassuring because it releases scholars from the responsibility and anxiety of pinning down a precise description of modernism. This, in turn, allows us to look back at what is fruitful about the exclusive mid-century canon while working within the more inclusive canon of the new modernist studies. A flexible, even nebulous definition, also implies future expansions and thus acknowledges that scholarly inquiry on “modernism” and everything it represents will necessarily surpass any institutional definitions.

The field has overwhelmingly shifted in recent decades, and along with the ongoing and sometimes turbulent discussions about who and what counts as “modernist” is a discussion of how scholars can incorporate marginalized, lesser-known, and popular writers into the field in a meaningful way. In their influential 2008 *PMLA* article “The New Modernist Studies,” Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz observe that an “expansive tendency” (737) has defined modernist studies in the last few decades. The timelines and locations of modernism have expanded through temporal and spatial shifts, and the “vertical” expansion, as they call it, has challenged almost everything about the

old canon. This vertical expansion is evident in our extended canon, in the reassessed boundaries between high modernism and popular culture, and in the dismantling of the analytical approaches of new criticism, since modernist studies has “extended to matters of production, dissemination, and reception” (738).² In their introduction to *Bad Modernisms* (2006), Mao and Walkowitz describe the new modernist critical approach as one attentive to “a pluralism or fusion of theoretical commitments” which accounts for “continuities and intersections across the boundaries of artistic media, to collaborations and influences across national and linguistic borders, and (especially) to the relationship between individual works of art and the larger cultures in which they emerged” (2). As a result of these expansive boundaries and analytical techniques, many authors—predominantly women and other marginalized writers—have been enthusiastically received by a refreshed canon that previously excluded them.³ However, despite this expansion and the capacious definitions of modernism through which we write, when an author is not securely canonized, scholars still find themselves prefacing their analyses with a defence of why a particular author, or text, should be considered modernist. This is particularly true of women writers, and authors whose fiction was commercially successful. The tension inherent in this justificatory labour is that it inevitably reinforces the impossible sense that “modernism” is a coherent and uniformly defined movement at the same time that it reasserts that women and popular writers are inherently removed

² Anne Fernald observes that Mao and Walkowitz under-emphasize the importance of women in their authoritative statement on the field. Fernald notes that “gender appears in the essay as one of many elements in a list of worthy pursuits slightly to the side of what excites the authors” which effectively “suggest[s] that it is still intellectually acceptable to conceive of gender as an add-on rather than a defining piece of our experience of the world” or as a “constitutive category of modernism” (230).

³ One prominent example of this is the astonishing increase in Jean Rhys studies in recent years. Rhys’s rise in distinction is clustered around her fiction’s complex engagement with gender, race, sexual politics, and postcolonial discourses which is precisely the complicated material that new modernist studies prizes.

from that legible centre.

What little scholarship there is on Warner or Vita Sackville-West, for instance, often begins with a vigorous introduction to the author as well as an appeal for why their fiction should be categorized as modernist. Robin Hackett begins her chapter on Warner by detailing the history of her “halting revival,” where “critics writing about Warner have repeatedly had to explain who she was, catalogue her many accomplishments, and exclaim over her absence from literary history” (84). Like Hackett, David Medalie finds himself justifying his study of Sackville-West. He begins his article by explaining how “definitions of modernism have been robustly contested and more flexible understandings have emerged,” but then almost immediately defends his inclusion of her as a modernist, writing that in “no way is Sackville-West’s novel technically experimental; its modernist elements lie rather in its exploration of gender and gender politics” (12). This justificatory impulse is largely because the default definition of modernism is still entrenched in the aesthetics of authors like Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf.⁴ As a result, many authors and different approaches to modernism are often implicitly cast as lesser modernisms when they do not perform the traditionally expected kinds of aesthetic, stylistic, or political work. Crucially, though, it is not merely that modernism has long been associated with the aesthetics of a few artists, but that— with the notable exception of Woolf since the 1970s—it was deliberately gendered male both by its prominent male writers and then by those who institutionalized modernism.

⁴ Scholars no longer define modernism solely by its formal complexity, but the influence of the early canon’s emphasis on abstraction and elitism remains. As late as 2000, Peter Childs’ definition in *Modernism* insisted on the primacy of the movement’s high aesthetics and difficulty. He does acknowledge that there are multiple and sometimes contradictory definitions of modernism, but then writes that “the best focus remains a body of major writers (James, Conrad, Proust, Mann, Gide, Kafka, Svevo, Joyce, Musil, Faulkner in fiction; Strindberg, Pirandello, Wedekind, Brecht in drama; Mallarmé, Yeats, Eliot, Pound, Rilke, Apollinaire, Stevens in poetry)” (2). Remarkably, Childs’ list of major authors contains no women.

The authors in my study are part of the growing chorus of women modernists who are currently being critically revived, and who continue to confound the old (mis)conception of modernism as a primarily masculine movement. In particular, I study Vita Sackville-West, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Jean Rhys, who each challenge the field in distinct ways through their feminist and aesthetic explorations of failure. My thinking about failure is inspired by Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), where failure is re-read as a subversive and potentially liberating social and political identity. I argue that Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys conjoin an exploration of the pleasures and politics of women's social failure with a dissenting modernist aesthetic that strategically "fails" the ideals of high modernism. This, in turn, helps them work within and against the constraints of high modernist form and style to expand the parameters of feminist modernist expression. These authors challenge many of the hallmarks of modernist convention: Sackville-West re-writes the male *künstlerroman*, Warner challenges the capacity of streams-of-consciousness to represent interiority, and Rhys disrupts the apparent freedom of *flânerie*. With the exception of Rhys, they also challenge traditional understandings of what counts as "modernist" in terms of style and popularity since Sackville-West and Warner were bestselling authors whose aesthetics superficially seem unencumbered by the trends of high modernist prose. My analysis, though, shows that Sackville-West and Warner prove that clarity is not the same thing as a lack of aesthetic or political rigour, as their work contains striking interventions into modernist expression. However, by revising and resisting high modernist norms, these authors inadvertently prefigured the conditions for their own canonical dismissal.

Unavoidably, the unstable meanings of modernism have failed authors and critics

alike. I contend that these authors revise “modernist convention,” while also admitting that my discussion of modernism as a comprehensive movement will inevitably be contradictory and ultimately fail, as it has failed so many others. I argue that the authors in this study rework modernist convention as if there is a coherent consensus of what those conventions are. I assert that Warner is a modernist even though she rebuffed modernism as a trend (Joannou ii). Furthermore, I critique the modernist canon at the same time that I try to create space within it for under-read women writers. Though the term “modernism” barely coheres to offer an intelligible definition, it nevertheless delineates a major field of study—for scholars and students—that more marginalized writers should be recognized within. In recent years, Rhys studies have dramatically increased, but Sackville-West and Warner remain neglected authors. Still, they are important voices within the modernist canon because they politicize and transform women’s “failures” into a feminist practice and critical narrative strategy. Sackville-West’s, Warner’s, and Rhys’s explorations of failure offer rich encounters with their textual, social, and political worlds as they challenge high modernist aesthetics, early feminist orthodoxy, and the limited social conditions of women’s lives in the early twentieth century.

To resist reasserting modernist norms that privilege the high brow over the low, I have intentionally put into conversation authors who have vastly different relationships to the aesthetic centre of high modernism. As such, they challenge the field in distinct ways to reveal how the institutional formation and biases of “modernism” have failed them. Sackville-West published several bestsellers with the Hogarth Press, but her relationship with Virginia Woolf has always overshadowed her work. Warner began her literary

career as a wildly successful author—her 1926 debut *Lolly Willowes* was the inaugural selection of the American Book-of-the-Month club—but gradually alienated popular audiences and modernists alike as her work became increasingly politically radical. Jean Rhys, meanwhile, is the most conventionally “high” modernist of the authors I am studying and was recognized as such by members of the modernist elite. However, unlike Sackville-West and Warner, she wrote and published in obscurity for most of her career, despite her relationship with Ford Madox Ford which gave her access to influential networks of modernist production. These authors are significant not only for the narratives of failure and feminist critique that they produce, but also because they reveal the ideological and scholarly preferences that have long sustained modernist study to the exclusion of women’s writing.

Feminist Modernism

The gendered politics of literary modernism and its subsequent institutional formation are complex and often contentious. In *After the Great Divide* (1986), Andreas Huyssen argues that “[m]odernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other; an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture” (vii). The modernists, Huyssen contends, conceived of mass culture as a stereotypically feminine contaminant: “subjective, emotional and passive” (46). Indeed, many literary modernists were antagonistic to mass culture and women alike, and certainly misogyny and open hostility to women and women’s writing is evident in the work of authors like Marinetti, Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, among others. Modernism’s “masculinist misogyny,” as Marianne DeKoven calls it, “resulted in the combination of

misogyny and triumphal masculinity that many critics see as central, defining features of Modernist work by men” (212). Tim Armstrong, meanwhile, argues that this misogynistic tendency was exacerbated by male modernists who “understood creative activity in terms of masculine aggression and spermatocytic fecundity” (41). According to this view, women inherently lacked the necessary capacities to produce and participate in modernism, and were thus subject to sexist treatment and erasure.

Though influential male modernists espoused “masculine aesthetic values” (Lamos 55), their work was often enabled by the labour of women. Noting women’s involvement in modernist production, Armstrong argues that if “we conceive of modernism in terms of the network rather than the iconoclasm, women move closer to the centre” (41).⁵ Armstrong is right to adopt a more holistic view of women’s involvement in modernist history. However, when we also account for women’s patronage, editing, and publishing expertise—in addition to their many literary contributions—we see that they do not merely “move closer to the centre” of modernism.⁶ Instead, they stand directly inside that centre, since the material support of women enabled the production of the major male authors and texts of the period. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas’s famous salon, for example, offered a space of stimulating conversation and debate among famous authors and artists like Hemingway, Pound, Joyce, Fitzgerald, Picasso, and Matisse (Mellows). Olivia Shakespear, Nancy Cunard, and Harriet Shaw Weaver are among the numerous women patrons that financially supported Pound, Lewis, and Joyce,

⁵ For more on women’s literary networks see Victoria Bazin, Bonnie Kime Scott, Bruce Clarke, and Maroula Joannou, among others.

⁶ Armstrong’s hesitance to assertively claim women’s centrality to the movement is frustrating, because foundational feminist critics thoroughly established this history—of women’s influence in modernist writing, editing, networking, patronage, and production—decades ago. See, for example, Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985), Shari Benstock’s *Women of the Left Bank* (1986), Gillian Hanscombe’s *Writing for their Lives* (1987), and Jayne Marek’s *Women Editing Modernism* (1995).

respectively (*Refiguring* Scott 84, 103). And Joyce's publication history is famously indebted to the typically under-acknowledged labour, expertise, and financial support of both Weaver and Sylvia Beach.⁷

These hosts, patrons, and publishers are just a few of the many “midwives of modernism,” to use Bonnie Kime Scott's term, who “contributed their own writing and experience, as well as literary connections and hospitality” in the movement's formation (*Refiguring* 55). Meanwhile, women writers were also supporting one another, as Victoria Bazin argues, since “[t]here were pockets of power accumulating in the associations established among and between women writers” (35). This rapid glance demonstrates that women played a central role in the ideological formation, production, and dissemination of modernism and stood at the centre of its making alongside towering figures like Pound, Fitzgerald, and Joyce. Little digging is required to find these women, since feminist scholars have been slowly accumulating a mass of texts and readings that re-establish women's historically vital positions within the movement for decades. Despite this consistent effort, though, little has changed and these recuperative projects continue to be needed—as we see in the “Out of the Archives” section of the new

⁷ *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) was serialized by Weaver in the *Egoist* which, notably, is a literary magazine with a distinctly feminist pedigree, since it was founded by Dora Marsden and was a progression of her feminist weeklies *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman*. This feminist legacy, and the fact that the magazine was largely run and edited by women, was a source of contention for T.S. Eliot. Scott argues that “Eliot had been restive about working for female editors and with female colleagues at the *Egoist*” and cites a remark that Eliot made to Pound proving his frustration with the magazine's women editors: “I struggle to keep the writing as much as possible in Male hands, as I distrust the Feminine in literature, and also, once a woman has had anything printed in your paper, it is very difficult to make her see why you should not print everything she sends in” (qtd. in Scott *Refiguring* 125). Scott also points out Eliot's habit of using dehumanizing language when discussing Weaver with Pound, referring to her as “The Weaver” or “it” (125). In addition to his misogyny, Eliot notably conflates Pound's editorial role at the *Egoist* with ownership, which we see in Eliot's insistence to Pound that the *Egoist* is “your paper” (125). Pound was certainly a major figure in the magazine, and he was one of the forces that turned it from an explicitly feminist weekly into a literary magazine (a move that gradually alienated Rebecca West), but Scott suggests that his involvement in the magazine is one of the many examples of Pound insinuating himself into modernist networks to advance his own ideas and those of his friends (84-87).

Feminist Modernist Studies journal—because women’s involvement in modernism has consistently been elided in favour of men’s achievement.

Despite the blatant misogyny of many modernist men, it would be reductive to suggest that during its formation, modernism was a movement fractured by a gendered divide. Rather, that great divide occurred when the movement was canonized. In reality, men and women frequently collaborated: Pound famously championed the work of H.D., Eliot mentored Djuna Barnes, Stein was as much a convener of modernist men as she was a mentor to them, the Bloomsbury group was filled with men and women who supported one another’s work, and even the misogynistic Futurists supported women’s suffrage (Armstrong 42).⁸ However, this history was denied, Lisa Rado argues, during modernism’s “selective canonization” in the 1950s and 1960s, when a select group of male writers were elevated “to an unassailable literary elite” at the expense of women’s involvement (4). Rado describes this canonization process as a deliberate and “massive cultural ‘forgetting’” within English departments “that repressed the existence of central female modernists” (4). Of course, women were not the only writers expelled from modernist history. Women and men of colour were disregarded entirely, modernists outside of America or Europe were ignored, and male members of the Bloomsbury group were deemed suspect because of their associations with Woolf and were thus “subjected to homophobic dismissal” (*Refiguring* Scott 80). Though the stubborn influence of the mid-century canon still lingers, feminist scholars since the 1970s have worked to

⁸ DeKoven argues that “male Modernists intermittently realized” that “feminists were in fact just as committed to overthrowing the Victorian ideal of closeted, domesticated, desexualized, disenfranchised femininity as they were to overthrowing its attendant cultural ideal of high moral insipidity” (215). She cites Lewis’s *Blast* as an example of a space that was misogynistic but also occasionally supportive of women’s rights, like when the magazine published a brief but “heartfelt” piece in support of Suffragettes: “‘We admire your energy. You and artists are the only things (you don’t mind being called things?) left in England with a little life in them’” (*Blast* qtd. in DeKoven 215).

incorporate those authors initially disregarded during the canon's early formation.

Sara Ahmed writes that “[c]itation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before” (15), and our increasingly nuanced and politically oriented canon owes an enormous debt to the pioneering work of feminist scholars from the 1970s-1990s who helped reclaim women's expression and decentre the assumed pre-eminence of male writers. During this period of immense productivity, women's writing was exhumed from the archives. Feminist and women-run presses like Virago, Persephone, and Kitchen Table: Women of Colour Press re-centred the historical and contemporary voices of women, people of colour, and lesbians in the publishing industry. The power of foundational texts by women of colour like *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) by Alice Walker, and *Sister Outsider* (1984) by Audre Lorde introduced intersectional nuance into the humanities. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar edited the monumental *Norton Anthology of Women's Literature* (1985), and Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism* (1990) fortified the burgeoning field of women's modernism. Meanwhile, Shari Benstock, Marianne DeKoven, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Rita Felski, Susan Stanford Friedman, Jane Marcus, Elaine Showalter and many others were expanding both the possibilities of modernist inquiry and feminist literary criticism. This essential work provided space for the foundations of the modernist canon to be rethought, and unsettled prevailing conceptions of modernism as a masculine movement. By 2007, Scott—a leader in recovering women's modernism—declared that in “the first decade of the twenty-first century, gender is most interesting as a system connected with and negotiated among various cultural identifiers” (*Gender in Modernism 2*) and not

simply as a topic in itself.

If this re-telling of women's canonization and modernist history seems exceedingly familiar, that is because it is. Feminist scholars have been recounting this background for decades to historically situate and then hopefully remedy the neglect of women modernists; and yet, this work remains necessary because women's modernism is still too often treated like an appendage to the more pressing work of the master canon. In recent years, Anne Fernald, Cassandra Laity, and Urmila Seshagiri have indicted the field for its consistent inattention to women writers and for its half-hearted gestures to rectify that history. Notably, Scott's 2007 assertion that the importance of women's writing and feminism was no longer taken for granted was not naïvely optimistic. She also issued a warning to feminist scholars to stay vigilant, because "issues of gender can repeat themselves, and we are best equipped if we keep a running history and draw from cumulative experience" (7). Fernald and Seshagiri each show how necessary this vigilance is in their running histories of new modernist studies. Writing in 2013, Fernald argues that "one hallmark of the new modernist studies has been its lack of serious interest in women writers" (229). She also notes the paradox where "work on women writers abounds but definitions of modernist studies consistently neglect [and] underserve women" (230). In 2017, Seshagiri expands on Fernald's examination of the field and identifies the "aporia between feminism's vitality for modernism, on the one hand, and the scholarly neglect of that vitality, on the other hand" (n.p.). She cites a number of reasons why this neglect persists, including the "worlding" of modernism which "shows us how one disciplinary process of expansion and inclusivity can overwhelm another," a complacency among feminist inquiry itself which "has privileged philosophical and

theoretical approaches to gender and sexuality over the still-necessary subject of women's modernism," and a continued bias by the leading modernist journals to publish critical work about famous modernist men instead of women.⁹

The "lack of serious interest in women writers" shown by our leading journals is likely more a product of habitual inattention than deliberate marginalization, although we do not have to look far to find examples of blatant sexism within the humanities. In a 2013 interview, David Gilmour—an author and professor at the University of Toronto—caused international outrage when he said he refused to teach women writers, with the exception of Woolf. In his astonishingly prejudiced statement, he succinctly revealed his racism, sexism, and homophobia when he insisted "I only teach the best":

Unfortunately, none of those happen to be Chinese, or women. Except for Virginia Woolf. And when I tried to teach Virginia Woolf, she's too sophisticated, even for a third-year class. Usually at the beginning of the semester a hand shoots up and someone asks why there aren't any women writers in the course. I say I don't love women writers enough to teach them, if you want women writers go down the hall. What I teach is guys. Serious heterosexual guys. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Chekhov, Tolstoy. Real guy-guys. Henry Miller. Philip Roth"

⁹ By the summer of 2017, Seshagiri noted that *Modernism/modernity (M/m)* had yet to publish a special issue, roundtable, or archival feature about a woman author. By contrast, there had been 14 special editions dedicated to a single male author or critic, with Joyce and Eliot each receiving three. In 2013, Anne Fernald similarly examined *Modern Fiction Studies* from 1994-2013 and found that it only did marginally better, by publishing four special editions on women's writing. However, it was not until 2013 that they first published a special issue dedicated to feminist approaches to women's writing. As of late 2019, *M/m* has yet to publish a special issue on women's writing or feminism, and *MFS* has not published another. This is not meant as a condemnation of the quality of scholarship or politics of these journals; rather, pointing out these disparities highlights how women's writing and feminist scholarship only seems urgent to those of us doing the work. These gaps in our discipline have been highlighted by feminists for decades, but little sustained change seems to come from those conversations. However, Fernald recently joined *M/m* as a co-editor, which hopefully signals a deepened commitment by the field to take seriously modernist women's writing, the vital history of feminism, and feminist scholarship.

(Hazlitt).

Gilmour makes his disdain for women, people of colour, and members of the queer community abundantly clear here (and his subsequent apology did little to dispel the controversy),¹⁰ but what is particularly revealing about his response is how he deliberately relegates women's writing to a lower rank in academe. If students want women writers, he espouses, they will not find them in a class about the "best" authors. Gilmour's comments suggested that women's writing is contained within the university in niche classes with lesser prestige, but when the new *Feminist Modernist Studies* journal was being promoted online, another male scholar argued that women's writing and feminist inquiry has been dominating the humanities for decades.

This conversation occurred on an online Modernist Studies Association forum when the inaugural issue of the *Feminist Modernist Studies* journal was promoted in 2017. The announcement was accompanied by free access to the "Editor's Introduction: toward feminist modernism" written by Cassandra Laity. In the introduction, Laity argues that the journal is necessary because "a full-scale, feminist modernist recovery has yet to occur" and recounts how when the burst of feminist productivity constellated around French feminism ended in the 1990s, the overall interest in feminist modernism also faded. The journal announcement and Laity's introduction were enthusiastically received, although the first comment in reply was from a male academic who seemed to question both the title of the introduction and the need for a feminist modernist journal to exist: "Toward? I thought there had been little else for decades?" The ensuing comment thread

¹⁰ In his apology, Gilmour deepened the controversy when he claimed that his interviewer Emily Keeler entrapped him into making compromising statements "to make a little name for herself or something" and then admitted that he was only apologizing because his publisher was concerned that women would not buy his new book (O'Toole).

featured female scholars articulating their dismay of his dismissal, and of him insisting that a prominent French feminist from the 1980s had accomplished this work long ago. Though the women scholars repeated what the introduction makes clear (that the “heydey” of feminist inquiry *ended* with the French feminists), the male academic disregarded them and Laity’s introduction with his final reply: “Ah. ‘Back to Feminist Modernisms.’ I see.” I linger over this conversation because his remarks suggest that emphasizing feminist modernisms is a regressive scholarly endeavour, since feminist modernism takes the academy “back” rather than forward in our pursuit of knowledge. By his estimation, the work of recuperating women writers and re-reading modernism through a feminist lens is complete; our efforts are *passé*.

At the risk of overexerting my feminist killjoy nature in this introduction, I draw attention to these easy targets of feminist ire because both scholars baldly (and publicly) express sentiments that many feminists feel are often implicit in our discipline. They also illustrate the pervasive sense that “feminism/gender appears oddly ‘everywhere and nowhere’” (Laity 1). For some, women’s writing and feminist methodologies are neatly contained in less prestigious university classes down the hall. To others, they are gratingly inescapable. The history of women’s modernism, as I have recounted, is long and uneven which contributes to this sense, by some, that the work has already been done. For those of us who do the work of feminist modernist inquiry, though, we know that we are just beginning. We also know, as Seshagiri explains, that the “sobering lesson of our own historical moment, powerfully applicable to modernist studies, is that feminism’s gains—political, material, artistic, civic—require sustained vigilance” (n.p.). Feminist modernism is essential to the growth of our discipline, but it is also part of the

much broader cultural efforts happening right now to position women's voices and experience within every part of contemporary life.

Failure in Feminist Modernism

My analysis of failure in Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys thus enters here, into the still shifting ground of new modernist studies, and is invigorated by the swell of feminist modernist inquiry which insists upon women's centrality in the movement, rather than relegating their voices to a disciplinary side interest. In particular, my project takes up the challenge set by Fernald in 2013 to unabashedly approach women's modernism without first "measuring every writer against the landmarks" of our discipline. My work is also animated by her pronouncement that "[i]t will never be enough to simply note that a writer is neglected. Instead, scholars must show how a forgotten or understudied text helps challenge or advance the field" (231). Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys, I argue, advance our field in diverse ways through their varied explorations of the aesthetic and feminist potentials of women's failure.

As a line of critical inquiry, failure in modernism is not new. Many modernists were conscious of the failures of language, expression, and of their contemporary political and social climates; as a result, scholars have long examined the aesthetics of failure in modernism.¹¹ We can also read failure as a symptom of the movement's ambition. As David Ball contends, modernism "can be best understood in terms of its

¹¹ See, for example: Andrew Ross's *The Failure of Modernism: Symptoms of American Poetry* (1986), Ewa Plonowska Ziarek's *The Rhetoric of Failure: Deconstruction of Skepticism, Reinvention of Modernism* (1996), and David Ball's *False Starts: The Rhetoric of Failure and the Making of American Modernism* (2015). These monographs establish the lengthy history of scholarly interest in modernism and failure, but there are also many articles exploring this interest. In particular, see Matthew Sandler's "Gertrude Stein, Success Manuals, and Failure Studies" (2017) in which he considers how modernism's interest in failure is currently being mapped onto the "terrain of American life" (192) under neoliberalism.

failed imperatives, the inexecutable goals it sets out for itself” including its “desire to divorce itself from popular culture” and “establish a radically new beginning in literature” (17). Thinking with and through the recent re-vision of failure and its gendered and queer dimensions, my work departs from primarily aestheticized or movement-oriented examinations of modernist failure and instead explores the various political, material, *and* aesthetic strains of failure running through Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys. Their narratives contain “failures” of high modernism and early feminist convention, along with narrative representations of the possibilities and consequences of women’s social failure. As such, their explorations of failure enable them to push forward the representational and political boundaries of both modernism and feminism.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam argues that failure offers a counterintuitive pathway into alternative ways of doing, being, and knowing. It also presents us with multiple opportunities: readings of failure disrupt old models of knowledge production, the negativity of failure can illuminate the structures that undergird the seemingly intractable inequality of our world, and embracing failure as an identity (especially when it is socially imposed) contests the norms of our capitalist heteropatriarchy. Halberstam’s study is also invested in “disciplinary transformation” (7), as they examine children’s media and stoner movies alongside traditionally academic studies of queer visual art, fiction, and surveys of critical theory.¹² Halberstam insists that

¹² While Halberstam’s study is one touch-stone of the reorientation of queer and feminist theory toward a politics of negativity and refusal, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that anti-disciplinarian studies like this come from privileged places within the academy. Only people ensconced within academia who have significant cultural and academic capital are celebrated for taking down our institutions by mixing an analysis of Jamaica Kincaid with *SpongeBob SquarePants*. This is not to say that Halberstam’s work is not important, but rather that their study of failure—both inside and outside academia—demonstrates the uneven ground of scholarly discourse, where precarious academics tend to stay within the settled boundaries of their disciplines because there are greater stakes for them than simply a poor reception of

failure is not just one thing or experience: it encompasses all manners of forgetfulness, passivity, refusal, fleeing, unbecoming, and losing—both inside and outside the academy. Halberstam shows us that sometimes failure is the accumulation of social pressure brought to bear on a person. Other times it is the product of personal will, or the will of a marginalized group to reorient themselves in relation to their oppression. Failure can be a defiant assertion; failure can be a breakdown.

Halberstam's ideas have been productively taken up by scholars across numerous disciplines, including visual arts studies, children's literature, cultural studies, and sports studies. Within the field of feminist modernism, Anne Cunningham is the most prominent scholar of failure, as she uses Halberstam in her compelling reading of negative femininity and radical passivity in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark* (1934). However, a number of scholars have also illuminated privileged oversights and contradictions in Halberstam's work. Madelyn Detloff, for instance, draws attention to the "illusion" that "one can 'opt out' of the social systems that we find ourselves in" (39) and in her review of the book, Tara Mulqueen argues that "Halberstam succumbs to a certain paradoxical law of success, in which by avowing failure, the book cannot itself ever be seen to fail" (n.p.). Liora Elias, meanwhile, shrewdly identifies how Halberstam fails to recognize that "failure is a privilege that not everyone might be able to afford" (1964). Some of the claims in *The Queer Art of Failure* about the built-in exclusions and violence of normativity are uncontroversial, while other claims about our options for resistance need further nuance. Even so, Halberstam's book is an entry-point into a larger conversation about the experience and enforcement of normativity, and of the possibilities and

their work, while tenured professors or celebrated public intellectuals can take big and controversial swings.

consequences of resisting cultural models of success and belonging.

Specifically, I take as the theoretical impetus for this project Halberstam's claim that failure can be recouped into a liberating identity. Here, Halberstam relocates failure from the realms of theory and aesthetics to the sphere of lived experience, and as such their approach offers something new to the scholarly interest in modernism and failure. However, my readings account for both the liberating promises of failure that Halberstam discusses, alongside the shortcomings of such an approach identified by scholars like Detloff and Elias. When theorizing the radical potential of failure, Halberstam contends that failure can acquire a productive—and importantly subversive—critical capacity as a source of resolute identification. This is because failure can be read as an escape from the disciplinary mechanisms of society that regulate behaviour and norms (3). Failure has distinctly gendered dimensions, too, since “feminine success is always measured by male standards, and gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, [since] not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures” (4). Within the logics of failure, female passivity can also be recouped, as passivity can “offer an anti-social way out of the double bind of becoming woman and thereby propping up the dominance of man within a gender binary” (144). As a critical lens, meanwhile, failure requires us to “untrain ourselves so that we can read the struggles and debates back into questions that seem settled and resolved” (11) and to reread “the remnants of alternative possibilities” left behind by “dominant history” (19).

Failure is a broad critical framework, but it is not all-encompassing. I read failure in the contours of modernist canonicity, early feminist ambivalence, and in the material experiences of women's lives that these authors draw from. I identify failure as a feminist

narrative practice in Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys's modernism, and I assert that failure is also a critical tool that scholars can use to re-evaluate understudied and underappreciated women's writing like theirs. Failure in my usage is not a broad catch-all term. It is a critical apparatus that helps reveal some of the ideological, political, and gendered contradictions that underpin women's modernist fiction and the world they lived and worked in. Furthermore, Sackville-West's, Warner's, and Rhys's explorations of failure are not homogenous. Rather, they showcase a plurality of representational approaches to failure's social and aesthetic possibilities.

Sackville-West's and Warner's protagonists enthusiastically embrace failure as an alternative source of identification that is less bound to patriarchal ideals and norms of domination. By failing social standards of femininity, propriety, and class, these protagonists carve out their own livable spaces within oppressive structures—however melancholy or fleeting those livable spaces might be. As a counterpoint to these positive accounts of failure, and in contrast to Halberstam's generally recuperative study, I examine Rhys's representation of the consequences of being an unwilling failure. Warner begins the work of problematizing the freedoms of failure, but Rhys insists that wielding the political dimensions of failure is a privileged form of resistance, demarcated by a specific set of ideological and material conditions that provide space for some people to fail and thrive, while others are marked for failure and death. Specifically, Sackville-West's and Warner's protagonists are wealthy white women who gain social freedom and a personally satisfying notoriety from their failures. Rhys's protagonists, by contrast, are poor and nationally-othered women whose suffering is only exacerbated by failure. Rhys thus reminds us that only people with social power can use their failures and

nonconformity to challenge the status quo.

Although there are obvious feminist themes in these authors' works, Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys are not unambiguously feminist authors. Instead, they variously disavow, complicate, and refute early feminism in their works and interviews. The protagonist of Sackville-West's *All Passion Spent* (1936) repeatedly dismisses the movement and mocks feminists for their "imagined martyrdom" (164); in *Lolly Willowes*, Warner undermines the ostensible freedom of the New Woman and suggests that first-wave feminism is just another institution that imposes restraints on women's lives; and Rhys's protagonists often identify with their oppressors more than with other women or their advancement. Meanwhile, Sackville-West considered herself a humanist rather than a feminist (Glendinning xiv), and Rhys repeatedly stated in interviews that she and her fiction were not feminist, such as when she told David Plante that she was "not at all for women's lib" (40).

Of course, the feminism of today is entirely different from the feminism of their time, which is why I am careful to situate their perspectives within the shifting contours of early feminist discourse. However, the nuanced feminism of today equips us with tools to navigate the contradictory (anti)feminism of these authors. In fact, we might consider them "bad feminists" in the vein of Roxane Gay, who recently opened the doors for feminists to acknowledge their contradictions and failures in service of personal growth and the growth of our necessarily messy and dynamic movement. Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys resist what Gay calls "essential feminism," which like the essentialism of the gender binary, suggests that there are "right and wrong ways to be a feminist and that there are consequences for doing feminism wrong" (304). These authors often—and

even willfully— “do” feminism wrong, but the consequence of this bad feminism is a better understanding of the contradictions and negativity that underpins the generally progressive narrative of feminist history.

However, the feminism these authors engage with is white Western feminism which has a long history of racist and phobic tendencies. The voices and unique struggles of women of colour, queer women, and working class or poor women were largely excluded from feminist activism during this period (and are still too often overlooked today). As such, when I write about feminism during this period it is with the awareness that this is an exclusive feminism with distinct limitations and problems. This historically exclusive feminism is also why my reading of Warner’s *Summer Will Show* is so vital, because that novel injects a more nuanced understanding of oppression into this dissertation, as well as into broader discussions of feminist modernism. While I argue that Warner is attuned to a nascent intersectional feminism in *Summer Will Show*—with its positive depiction of a lesbian relationship and its sympathy to class struggle—it nevertheless relies on racist tropes to advance the personal and political growth of its white, upper-class protagonist. As such, Warner demonstrates the progressive limits of early feminism. Finally, though the influence of early feminism is clear in these authors’ work, they primarily engage with popular feminist discourses rather than formal activism. In particular, they respond to popular feminist figures like the New Woman, Suffragists/ettes, and the Working Girl. They also respond to the assumptions that accompany women who identify as “feminist.” My dissertation thus intersects with these popular figures and conversations about early feminism, while recognizing that there are

more social and political aspects of feminism during this period than what I alight on in my exploration of feminist failure.

Chapter Organization

The first chapter of my dissertation analyzes Vita Sackville-West who occupies the unique position of being both well-known and utterly neglected, since outside of her famous relationship with Virginia Woolf, there is very little scholarly attention paid to her substantial oeuvre. My reading of *All Passion Spent* (1931) repositions Sackville-West as an important modernist in her own right, as I examine how her novel grapples with the tensions of early feminism while also re-imagining the modernist trope of the failed male artist. I situate the novel's reluctant feminism within early twentieth-century feminist developments, and I argue that despite the novel's repeated dismissals of feminism, its exploration of women's subjugation and ambition is indebted to feminist discourse. Indeed, I argue that Sackville-West creates a feminist *künstlerroman* that challenges the male youthfulness of modernism (Renk 319) by representing a woman's artistic journey in old age, and by depicting the social and material barriers that thwarted her youthful ambition. The tangible barriers that Lady Slane faces in her artistic journey stand in stark contrast to the ideological, spiritual, and artistic barriers that the artists represented by Joyce, Eliot, and Pound have to overcome. Lady Slane never sets brush to canvas; instead, she muses about her life and how her dreams were perennially deferred by family obligations. In the end, Lady Slane tries to retroactively re-make her marriage into its own kind of art, and so Sackville-West's exploration of the elderly woman artist upends the traditional male *künstlerroman*, but also what counts as art. Though Lady

Slane never produces any tangible art, she does encourage her great-granddaughter to pursue her dreams rather than defer to marital expectations. With this, I argue that Sackville-West foregrounds the vitality of feminist mentorship in enabling alternative pathways for women's lives.

My second chapter also examines what kinds of lives are made possible by women who step off the expected pathways of womanhood and propriety. In my reading of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willows* (1926), I investigate Warner's multivalent representation of the narrative and political uses of failure. Using Rob Nixon's ideas about "slow violence," I argue that Warner stages a slow resistance through Laura Willows' social failures—like her refusal to marry and her passivity—which gradually amass to enable her escape from her patronizing family at the age of forty-seven. On the surface, Laura appears to embody many of the most damaging stereotypes of women: she is almost impossibly passive, has no thoughts of her own, is impractical, and wastes her time. Through her subtle aesthetic choices, though, Warner proves that these are qualities socially imposed on Laura as a woman, rather than innate expressions of her femininity. Laura has no thoughts because her thinking is stifled by her subjugation, and she pursues no ambition because the bustling city has no place for people like her who prefer to nurture the earth. With her strategic use of non-thinking and pastoral settings, I argue that Warner expands the options of modernist feminist expression through her subtle subversions of modernist aesthetics. I also explore how Warner challenges—or "fails"—early feminist orthodoxy by undermining the New Woman and by challenging the common view of the home as the site of women's subjugation.

While Laura's resistance is slow, I explore in chapter three the effects of a

dramatic and sudden embrace of failure in Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936). The novel advances many of the themes of *Lolly Willowes* including the freeing possibilities of women's social failure, the joys of domesticity, and the problems of forced marriage and maternity. However, the scale of *Summer Will Show* is much larger, as it takes place during the 1848 French Revolution. Its politics are more complex, too, as it begins as a Victorian-style pastoral, but gradually morphs into a tragic communist polemic. Here, Warner complicates the white, middle-class feminism of her earlier novel by introducing a nascent intersectional awareness of the different barriers that racialized and poor women face. Given this nuance, my reading of *Summer Will Show* is where I complicate wholly liberating readings of failure. Warner also complicates such liberating accounts by juxtaposing the varied experiences of failure between her white, upper-class protagonist Sophia Willoughby and her unclassed, Jewish lover Minna Lemuel. Sophia's and Minna's experiences of failure are fatally different, and as such Warner proves that embracing failure is a privileged form of resistance available to only an advantaged few. However, I press the limits of Warner's emergent intersectionality in my analysis of the troubling racial politics that structure her representation of Caspar, Sophia's biracial half-cousin from the West Indies.

In my final chapter on Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1930), I advance my arguments about the privileges of failure by examining the bleak existence of Julia Martin who is socially cast as a failure and suffers immensely as a result. Julia neither chooses failure, nor can she recuperate it into a feminist identification. Rather, Rhys depicts failure as a kind of social and psychic stagnation with irrevocably damaging consequences, since Julia's failures banish her to the margins of society and enable others

to dismiss her suffering and despair. Using the feminist affect theories of Sara Ahmed, I analyze how negative affects permeate the text, and I read how Julia's misery travels between her and those around her. I also investigate how negative affect travels to the reader through Rhys's feminist killjoy approach to modernist aesthetics. I argue that through the novel's unrelenting despair and its occasional slippages into second-person perspective, Rhys implicates her readers into the suffering of the novel; as such, she makes an ethical appeal to her reader to not ignore Julia's suffering like everyone else. Rhys also evacuates the figure of the *flâneuse* of any readerly joy or detachment, as she shows that Julia's city wanderings are a symptom of her failure rather than an expression of her freedom. Rhys establishes that for those without social power, the experience of failure is wholly damning. Through this bleak depiction, Rhys also insists that those with privilege have an ethical responsibility to witness and mediate the suffering of others.

Ultimately, what I see in Sackville-West's, Warner's, and Rhys's fiction is a concurrent effort to expand and work within both the confines of high modernism and within the confines of being a woman in the early twentieth century. These authors consider what it means to fail as a woman and the myriad ways that women can be labeled a failure by their refusals to participate in oppressive systems. They imagine what alternative lives are reached through failure, but they also explore who benefits and who suffers from that identity. And by failing gendered expectations, the protagonists in these novels highlight the oppressive social and political apparatuses of the early twentieth century. Because these authors resist easy identifications with modernism and feminism, they also nuance the potentials of feminist and modernist criticism by existing within the grey areas of our discourses. Indeed, the complicated approaches these authors take to

modernism and feminism—variously revising, contesting, and eschewing aspects of the movements—makes them important contributors to the renewed efforts to revitalize the historical and political voices of modernist women.

Chapter One

“Such a hint of independence was an outrage, almost a manifesto”: Reluctant Feminism and Re-Writing the Modernist *Künstlerroman* in Vita Sackville-West’s *All Passion Spent*

“What would you have done with your life, Lady Slane, had you not married that very delightful and disconcerting charlatan?”

Paradoxically, my dissertation on modernist feminist failure begins with a study of the prolific and hugely successful popular writer Vita Sackville-West. To compound the paradox, Sackville-West never considered herself a feminist—in fact, she rather bristled at the designation—and her work has rarely been considered modernist. Born into nobility, Sackville-West was an accomplished novelist, poet, and columnist. She was also a travel writer and celebrated gardener, but she is primarily remembered in relation to famous English houses and famous English lovers. The only child of the third Baron Sackville, Sackville-West grew up at Knole House, one of the largest country houses in England which has been in her family’s possession since the early seventeenth century. To her great sorrow, primogeniture prevented her from inheriting Knole, so when her father died the title and house were passed onto her cousin. She never fully recovered from the loss of Knole, but she did go on to live in another great house, Sissinghurst Castle, which she and her diplomat husband Harold Nicolson bought in the 1930s. There, the two built the now famous Sissinghurst Gardens, which is likely the most famous and respected of Sackville-West’s accomplishments, as the gardens are prized for their beauty and complexity, and remain a popular public attraction. Sackville-West is also notorious for her affairs with socialite Violet Keppel (later Violet Trefusis) and, of course, Virginia Woolf. Her protracted and tumultuous relationship with Keppel caused turmoil in their

respective families and tantalized the gossip press, while her relationship with Woolf tends to overshadow her literary merits within English departments.¹³ Even Sackville-West's marriage to Harold Nicolson is famous, as their son Nigel Nicolson compiled and edited his parents' letters and journals to publish *A Portrait of a Marriage* in 1973. The book was published posthumously, since its subject matter—dealing not only with their marriage, but frankly with their various same-sex affairs—made for controversial material at the time of its publication (Johnston 126). Nevertheless, the book was a major popular success and was adapted into a mini-series by the BBC in the 1990s.

The fame, gossip, and public attention paid to Sackville-West's personal affairs has generally overshadowed her position as a modernist, but alongside the compelling public record of her life is that same life filtered through modernist associations. Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), famously referred to as “the longest and most charming love letter in literature” by Nigel Nicolson (218), fictionalizes much of Sackville-West's life, including her childhood at Knole and her relationship with Violet Keppel. Indeed, it is modernism that transforms Sackville-West's loss of Knole. Louise DeSalvo writes that although “Vita could not legally inherit Knole, Virginia Woolf gave it to her memory for as long as there will be readers of *Orlando*” (205). Sackville-West's memories of her aristocratic childhood and her family history are woven into her novel *The Edwardians* (1930), while her vision of the Sissinghurst Gardens is forever preserved in the 1931 poem “Sissinghurst,” dedicated to Virginia Woolf, which was one of the last works hand-

¹³ Blanche Wiesen Cook argues that Sackville-West and Woolf's relationship was “protected from slander and scandal by generations of aristocratic lineage, family money, and the strengthening power of all the love and friendships in queer old Bloomsbury” (719). Sackville-West's class shielded her and her lovers from social ruin, but she remained a literary liability. While members of the Bloomsbury group were assembling defenses of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well Of Loneliness* (1928), Woolf wrote to Sackville-West that they were “collecting signatures—not yours, for YOUR proclivities are too well known” (*Letters* 520).

printed at the Hogarth Press (DeSalvo 198, Barkway 245).

In fact, most of Sackville-West's work was published by the Hogarth Press, modernism's most famous publishing house. Sackville-West's name became synonymous with the press in the 1920s and 1930s; indeed, she and Virginia Woolf "were the authors most associated with the Press in the public's eye" (235). As Stephen Barkway observes, their relationship was mutually beneficial, since Sackville-West's "name and popularity gild[ed] the Press and in return its name...add[ed] literary distinction to hers" (237). Sackville-West's popularity is underappreciated for its impact on modernist history, though, as she did more than "gild" the press. Sackville-West's *The Edwardians* (1930) was the Woolfs' first major bestseller, and Leonard Woolf wrote that bestselling novels like hers enabled the press to "subsidize less successful but worthwhile publications" (Barkway 240 & 235). Unfortunately, there is no specific record of whose texts were published thanks to subsidies from her book sales.¹⁴ What we do know for certain is that Sackville-West occupies an uneven, and perhaps unique, position within the modernist canon and modernist history. She was a producer of middlebrow modernism and was long associated with one of the most famous modernist presses; in fact, her success at the press seems to have supported other modernists. However, despite Sackville-West's contributions, in literary circles she remains less known for being a writer and modernist contributor than for being a socialite and muse.

The set of contradictions that form Sackville-West's place in modernist history—being both famous and overlooked, modernist and not modernist—echoes the

¹⁴ Although the developing work of the Modernist Archives Publishing Project (MAPP) may soon be able to give more concrete details on this. MAPP is a large-scale, internationally-funded and coordinated digital humanities archive of modernist publishing data. Phase 1 of the project focuses on the Hogarth Press.

contradictory nature of her 1931 novel *All Passion Spent* which is explicitly feminist while rebuking mainstream feminism and is a *künstlerroman* at the same time that its artist never actually produces any art. *All Passion Spent* is a disarmingly complex novel. It has all the elements of the most successful popular fiction with its jaunty tone, brisk pace, and satisfying ending, but its primary investment is in feminist critique and modernist adaptation. Like the other works I study, Sackville-West explores the effects of women's social failure; however, she does something different from Warner and Rhys by making her protagonist Lady Slane (whose pre-married name was Deborah Lee)¹⁵ eighty-eight. Rather than assert her feminist resistance in youth or middle-age, Lady Slane's resistance occurs near her death when, newly widowed, she moves away from her family to a small cottage in the English countryside and refuses to be near young people because they remind her "of the terrible effort the poor creatures will have to make before they reach the end of their lives in safety" (68). Lady Slane does not idealize or long for youth, nor does she resent it; instead, she pities how her grandchildren's lives will be governed by social expectation rather than their own desires.

The effect of Lady Slane's freedom coming in old age is that we fully see how her life and autonomy were swept up into the current of social expectation, where marriage and maternity overtook her ambition to become a painter. From her new home in Hampstead Cottage, she revisits with a critical eye the memories of her youth and glittering marriage to Henry, the First Earl of Slane, who was a former Viceroy of India and British Cabinet Minister. While she is critical of Henry and of how his political

¹⁵ When Lady Slane remembers her youth, she thinks of herself as Deborah, and the narrator follows suit. Otherwise, she and the narrator use her married title. When discussing her, I follow the novel's prompts: in her life pre-marriage, I refer to her as Deborah, and in her life post-marriage, I refer to her as Lady Slane.

position reduced her to his consort, she approaches her memories not only with dissatisfaction and anger, but also with sympathy and tenderness. David Medalie writes that the “implication” of Lady Slane’s mixed feelings about Henry is “clear: where there is no equality, love cannot be wholly benign. Instead it becomes in itself an insidious form of oppression—and because it *is* love—the most difficult of all to combat” (19). Though widowhood eventually frees her from this oppression, by then it is too late, and instead of an artist’s life, she is left with her memories and mixed feelings. Ultimately, ambivalence defines Lady Slane’s life. We see her struggle with her profound love of her family, but also with how she felt trapped by them and unable to pursue an artistic career. While she is highly critical of her husband’s dominance, she is mostly critical of the whole social structure that allowed Henry a family and career while she could only have the family.

Ambivalence is also the affective structure by which Lady Slane navigates contemporary feminism: her musings about family life and women’s subjugation are undeniably feminist, and yet she repeatedly distances herself from feminism or intentionally misuses the word to displace its meaning away from women’s resistance. In this way, we can read this ambivalence as being part of the novel’s “structure of feeling” in Raymond Williams’s sense, where “art is never itself in the past tense. It is always a formative process, within a specific present” (129). The specific present of *All Passion Spent*’s feminism is one of turmoil and great change for women’s rights, where competing groups were at odds with one another, and where artists like Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf, who we interpret today as being indisputably and boldly feminist, were more comfortable with the language of humanism and human rights rather than

feminism and women's rights. We can also locate the novel's feminist ambivalence in terms of what Lauren Berlant calls "the structure of solidarity," where "we are free to be ambivalent about whole sets of things while attending to the transformation of the thing/scene/problem that has *brought us together*" (87). Lady Slane's feminist critiques gesture toward a hope for social transformation and solidarity with other women seeking alternatives to family life. In fact, the novel ends in feminist transformation when Lady Slane grants her great-granddaughter the confidence to live an artist's life instead of marry; however, the novel remains undeniably ambivalent—if not occasionally hostile—to early twentieth-century feminism, which nevertheless remains the political backdrop in which the novel's feminist critiques can be made. There is a fruitful tension, then, in the ways that the novel negotiates the competing uses and formulations of early feminism, in its insistence that Lady Slane is "no feminist" (164), and in its undeniably feminist politics. In the end, Sackville-West tries to transcend the messy politics of early feminism, and she does this, in part, by locating the novel's feminism primarily within a conversation about artistic production. Sackville-West explores the many ways that men are given easier access to an artistic life than women, but she also repeatedly suggests that what prevents people from pursuing their dreams is not a matter of gender inequality, but rather a result of the difference between the "worker" and the "dreamer" (164).

Sackville-West was not the only female modernist pondering questions of women's artistic expression and access. Virginia Woolf and May Sinclair, for instance, explored in their fiction the near impossibility of being a female artist in a world where familial and social expectations flatten a woman's access to and experience of making art. What makes Sackville-West's novel a noteworthy contribution to this discussion is

that she does something different with her failed female artist by imagining her in old age, and by making feminist mentorship a central part of her protagonist's artistic growth. Sackville-West opens up multiple avenues of feminist exploration by making her protagonist eighty-eight. From the importance of feminist mentorship, to the ageist assumptions about older women's lack of complex interiority, the infantilization of women, and the mixed feelings associated with widowhood, Sackville-West centers her story and social critiques around the experience of one of the most marginalized figures in society: the old woman. With this, Sackville-West also gives herself space to create a feminist dialogue within Lady Slane herself, as she meditates on her life and considers all the ways that her ambition was thwarted by social pressure and familial obligation.

As this brief sketch suggests, *All Passion Spent* is dense with feminist and modernist interventions. My focus on the novel will thus examine three of its most salient interventions: its sometimes vexed and vexing engagement with contemporary feminism and gender politics, its representation of older women and the way it resists the male youthfulness of modernism (Renk 319), and its revision of the modernist *künstlerroman* in its challenge of the trope of the failed young male artist. This final point is where the novel's feminism most keenly intersects with the interests of other modernists like Woolf and Sinclair, because these artists challenge modernism's preoccupations with the production of art and representations of gender by narrating the social barriers to women's artistic production. Sackville-West's challenge to the *künstlerroman* is also the point at which she produces a feminist novel in spite of herself. By dwelling on how Lady Slane's dreams are deferred by family obligation, Sackville-West foregrounds the very real material conditions of women's artistic failure, which is a much different and

less idealized artistic failure than the existential and linguistic failures we see in the lives of the young male artists in works by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce.

“There was surely a discrepancy somewhere”: Early Feminism & Political Ambivalence

After remembering with frustration how Lady Slane’s new husband, Henry, had been a key player in the “general conspiracy to defraud her of her chosen life,” the narrator is quick to note that despite these feelings, “she was no feminist” (164). The shift in political tone is sudden and sharp, if not a little bewildering. Just pages before this assertion, Lady Slane makes explicit feminist critiques of the lack of career options for women, their socially enforced passivity, and the restrictive institution of marriage. In the latter critique, Lady Slane pointedly expresses her regret that upon marriage she is expected to “fore[go] the whole of her own separate existence” while Henry’s life would go on as it had always been, except that in “acquiring her,” he was “merely adding something extra” to his life (160). Her disavowal of feminism following these assertions might initially seem puzzling to contemporary readers, but it makes perfect sense given the historical present of the novel’s publication. Considering the tumultuous place of feminism in public and modernist discourse, as well as Sackville-West’s status as a gentlewoman, her reluctance to write a character explicitly aligned with the movement—and, indeed, to label herself a feminist—becomes understandable. This reticence is also characteristic of the ambivalence that threads together the novel’s interests: Lady Slane yearns for feminist advances because they would have enabled her to pursue her life’s ambition of becoming a painter, and yet the formidable power of feminism is that it would transform not only how women are treated and viewed in society, but also how she

would understand herself. To parse her ambivalent feminism, then, it is essential to examine the complex history of early twentieth-century feminism. The point of this is not to debate whether or not the novel is feminist—it clearly is by today’s standards—or to discern what Sackville-West’s *real* politics were (as a number of biographical scholars have done excellent work on this front).¹⁶ What interests me about the novel’s politics is how its feminism adeptly reflects the contested politics of its time. That is, the novel acts as a time capsule of early feminist contradictions and efforts. This, in addition to Lady Slane’s curious investment in converting the term “feminist” into a signal of regression, makes the novel a compelling and conflicted addition to the feminist modernist canon.

With all of its waves, factions, and ever-shifting interests, Western feminism has always been a complex and often contested series of movements and ideologies. This is perhaps no truer than in the first decades of the twentieth century when discussions of British women’s suffrage, education, and rights were becoming increasingly prominent in political and public discourse. During this time, women gained the right to vote, had access to more educational and employment opportunities, and the occasionally controversial figures of the “New Woman” and “Working Girl” became the role models for independent young women. These developments were not neatly progressive, though. Legislative reform was often stalled, or shelved entirely, because of war or economic crises, the employment gains many women made during the wars were lost when soldiers returned home, the marriage bar persisted well into the twentieth century—which made it

¹⁶ For Sackville-West’s definitive biography see Victoria Glendinning. For notable memoirs and collections assembled by her relatives, see Nigel Nicolson and Juliet Nicolson. For scholarly inquiries into her life and politics, see Georgia Johnston, Carol Ames, Louise DeSalvo, and Michael Rosenthal, among others.

legal for employers to fire married women¹⁷—and it was not until the Education Act of 1944 that the government began paying for primary and secondary school fees, thus giving poor and working-class children access to education.

While many different groups were organizing for women's increased rights in both the public and private spheres, these groups sometimes had competing approaches.¹⁸ Millicent Fawcett's National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and Emmeline Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), for instance, famously took two completely different approaches to achieving the vote. Implicit in their competing approaches were also "rival constructions of womanhood" (Trodd 4). Summarizing these differences, Anthea Trodd observes that the NUWSS upheld an "ideal of the rational, well-educated woman working with, and on an equal footing with, men" which was opposed "by Mrs Pankhurst's troops who combined violent demonstration with extravagant displays of femininity" (4). The opposed methods of these groups reveal the larger fracture between women fighting for the vote, where activists began identifying themselves as either peaceful "suffragists" associated with the NUWSS or militant "suffragettes" associated with the WSPU. Indeed, the formation of the WSPU in 1903 signalled how some women activists were "losing patience with [the] lack of progress"

¹⁷ The marriage bar was meant to "buttress the notion of a women's [sic] 'natural' role" (8) and "to ensure that married working women did not become a norm" (Holloway 97). The marriage bar was relaxed during the world wars, but women were typically fired at war's end; it was unevenly enforced well into the century. After WWI, though, marriage was not always an option for heterosexual women who wanted to marry because so many men had died in the war; additionally, suffragism and a burgeoning feminist movement provided other options to women besides marriage, so by the interwar years, the figure of the "working girl" emerged. The "working girl" was a controversial figure as she represented a young woman "who had escaped from family life to a life of independence and (very modest) hedonism and consumerism" (18), and she was charged with being "irresponsible, hedonistic, and promiscuous" (Trodd 19). The "New Woman," by contrast, was a more sedate feminist ideal. Emerging in the Victorian Era, the New Woman was educated, but was not necessarily employed.

¹⁸ Among many other authors, Lucy Delap, Gerry Holloway, Ellen Jordan, Selina Todd, and Anthea Trodd have written impressive and comprehensive accounts of women's employment and educational history, women's movements in Britain, and early global feminist formations.

from the NUWSS which is why the suffragettes turned to militancy to dramatize “their philosophy of ‘deeds not words’” and hopefully speed progress (Liddington and Crawford 101). As suffrage groups advocated for “rival constructions of womanhood” in their respective methods for achieving the vote, they publicly played out what it meant to be a woman. Trodd summarizes the divide between the groups simply: this was a matter of “Old Feminist” approaches clashing with “New Feminist” efforts (4). However, while we might now identify all suffrage groups as feminist, it is essential to not conflate the two.¹⁹ Lucy DeLap criticizes the historical impulse to do so, and argues that it is “anachronistic to treat suffrage as coterminous with feminism” because the period “must be seen as a time of division and conflict between ideas of women’s emancipation” (5).

According to DeLap, during this period, “feminism” was a term mostly associated with writers and the avant-garde, where transatlantic exchanges of feminist writers networked different thinkers and debates (1-14). DeLap begins her study of Edwardian feminism by discussing the influence of one particularly famous site of feminist exchange, in an amusing anecdote about a series of sermons delivered in 1912 by “a leading British Catholic priest [who] used six consecutive sermons to warn his congregation against the dangers of ‘Feminism’” (1). When “respectable” Catholic suffragists were upset over the “apparent slur on their character,” the priest clarified that “he was referring not to suffrage politics, but to a new grouping, those ‘wicked, yea

¹⁹ On this matter, Dora Marsden and Mary Gawthorpe wrote in the first issue of *The Freewoman* that, “‘Votes for Women’ are not integrally bound up with the conception of the Freewoman, although, considering the circumstances and conditions of things in England at this time, it is inevitable that feminists should insistently be demanding votes” (3). Here, Marsden and Gawthorpe reveal how the vote is not necessarily a central issue for all feminists. The “freewoman,” as they conceived of her, was still rare in 1911, as most women were “bondwomen.” For them, though, the “freewoman” was quite simply an individual: “We believe in the Freewoman, that is, we believe in the spiritual separateness of woman” (2-3). Matters of the vote, while important, were not necessarily directly related to matters of spirituality and individuality, which were the larger goals of the feminist movement they envisioned.

damned women who have created and written for ‘The Freewoman,’...the paper whose object is to drag the souls of women down to hell” (1). *The Freewoman* unabashedly embraced not only feminist ideals, but the word itself. Emblazoned under its title was the subtitle “A Weekly Feminist Review,” and in their inaugural issue published November 23, 1911, the paper eagerly confronted issues of marriage, education, and psychology.²⁰ By singling out Dora Marsden’s magazine, the priest entwined a critique of feminism with a critique of modernism, as Marsden was a key figure in the serialization of the movement. While *The Freewoman* was short lived, Marsden evolved the magazine into *The New Freewoman* and then *The Egoist*, the latter of which would go on to publish the works of famous high modernists like Eliot, H.D., Joyce, and Lewis.

The priest, then, was centring his critique of feminism around the textual exchange and dissemination of ideas. If he had turned his gaze to Edwardian drama, he would have found that dramatists were just as sinful as Marsden since feminism was a major dramatic stimulus. Rebecca Cameron argues that by 1911 “the influence of feminism” played a large role in the narratives of both “men’s and women’s drama,” but that during the interwar years, “some of the playwrights who earlier had shown a definite commitment to feminist causes began to dwell on the lingering, amorphous barriers to women’s advancement” (110). There is a “palpable shift in tone,” Cameron observes, that can be “discerned in many women’s plays of the interwar period, in which a more

²⁰ Some of the articles appearing in the first issue included: “A Definition of Marriage,” “Feminism Under the Republic and the Early Empire,” “The Spinster,” “The Psychology of Sex,” and “A University Degree for Housewives?” In the article on marriage, Edmund D’Auvergne criticizes both the church and state because the institution of marriage offers social protections to only married citizens, grants husbands the freedom to shirk their fatherly duties onto wives, and because through marriage, the church and state govern the morality of sex (5-6). The excoriating article on the treatment of the spinster, meanwhile, asserted that “the indictment which the Spinster lays up against Society is that of ingenious cruelty” (10). From the very start, the magazine unflinchingly confronted controversial social issues.

introspective sensibility, fraught with complexities, comes to replace the more outward-looking, polemical perspective” (113). The introspective and reluctant feminism that Cameron identifies within interwar drama is precisely the kind of feminism that we see in *All Passion Spent*. Lady Slane’s various critiques of women’s treatment are undeniably feminist—they at times even resemble the fervent and polemical suffrage politics of the 1910s—but she rarely expresses these views, preferring to mull over the complexities of her beliefs within the sanctuary of her new home and widowhood. Sackville-West positions this introspection as one of the rewards of old age; having bustled through a busy life, Lady Slane is finally afforded the time to slow down and reflect. However, a drawback of this introspection is that she does not benefit from the social and textual feminist networks that DeLap argues were essential to early feminism. As such, Lady Slane’s feminism tends to be combative and reactionary, and limited by her sheltered and privileged life, without the essential context of other women’s ideas and experiences.

One reason why Lady Slane is so resistant to feminism is because she has thoroughly internalized the socially inferior status of women. This is most evident in her memories of early marriage. She realizes that marriage impeded her life goals, but nevertheless thinks that it “would not do...to assume that she had equal rights with Henry” (162). Though she notes that the “Marriage Service” in her Bible contains a good deal of “parliamentary language”—thus identifying the intertwined responsibility of the state and church in women’s subjugation—Lady Slane takes her marriage vows solemnly, and unquestioningly puts her duties as a wife and mother before her own desires. In fact, she utterly refuses to see the links between her cheated life and gender by thinking that she was “too wise a woman to indulge in such luxuries as an imagined

martyrdom. The rift between herself and life was not the rift between man and woman, but the rift between the worker and dreamer. That she was a woman, and Henry a man, was really a matter of chance” (164). We might initially read Lady Slane’s haughty refusal of feminism here as a classic example of false consciousness. Ipsita Chatterjee explains that “[f]alse consciousness indicates moments when structures of exploitation have not been identified, or have been misidentified by the exploited” (795). We see elements of this misidentification in Lady Slane’s insistence that her artistic dreams were impeded by the conflict between workers and dreamers, and not a result of gendered oppression. However, Lady Slane’s misidentification here is strategic, since her self-identification as a thwarted “dreamer,” rather than an oppressed woman, enables her to reassert the artistic identity that she has always been denied.

Lady Slane’s self-identification as a dreamer is a feminist act of defiance and reclamation because she makes space for women to be identified beyond their subjugated positions. With this, she also reclaims her artistic identity, as her artistic nature is bound up in her “dreamer” disposition; therefore, she also resists the long tradition of men being viewed as serious artists, while women are often regarded as hobbyists. This point is especially significant, since here she defies Henry, who belittles her the one time she confides her aspiration to him before marriage. Henry initially tells her that developing an artistic talent is “an elegant accomplishment most becoming in a woman” and proposes that she make water colours of the places they visit to show their dinner guests. When Deborah says that she means to become a professional painter, Henry smiles “more fondly and indulgently than ever,” and she remembers that he explained that “he fancied that after marriage she would find plenty of other occupations to help her pass her days”

(163). Implicit in this slight against Deborah's aspirations is also a reinforcement of his expectation that she will anchor the home as a dutiful wife and mother. However, though Lady Slane's self-identification has feminist dimensions, she considers herself morally and intellectually superior to the movement—even while espousing clear feminist beliefs—and so she betrays her myopic view of the world. By thinking that feminism is an indulgent waste of time, Lady Slane mirrors the way that Henry belittled her. Indeed, the language she uses to disparage feminists—women who “*indulge*” in an “imagined martyrdom” (164 emphasis added)—mirrors the language of Henry's dismissal.

Lady Slane's curious mix of intellectual superiority over other women, ingrained sense of inferiority to men, and her class privilege enables this refusal. She also refuses to acknowledge how feminism benefits lower-class, poor, and racialized women who do not benefit from the protections of whiteness and wealth as she does. The carelessness with which she gives away all of her expensive jewelry to her eldest son and daughter-in-law, without first thinking to divide her valuables amongst her children, proves how she takes her prosperity for granted. Lady Slane refuses to see the links between her cheated life and gender because to do so would entail a fundamental shift in her own sense of self and class, since she would have to confront the extraordinary comforts afforded to her and align herself with the political efforts of the middle and lower-class women that she implicitly looks down upon. For her, then, it is more comfortable to think of herself as a subjugated artist rather than a subjugated woman, and it is the binaries that govern her life—man/woman, married/single, parent/child, worker/dreamer—that prevent her from seeing that she can identify in multiple ways at once. Lady Slane also refuses to identify her thwarted ambition as a feminist issue because she believes that what causes “rifts” in

people's lives is a matter of human difference, rather than gender difference. This humanist position is not surprising, since Sackville-West considered herself to be a humanist rather than a feminist (Glendinning xiv). In fact, other modernists like Gertrude Stein, Elizabeth Bowen, and Jean Rhys equally distanced themselves from feminism in favour of other political positions, but the modernist and fellow humanist most influential to Sackville-West's thinking and writing was Virginia Woolf.

Sackville-West and Woolf were major influences on one another's work.²¹

Because of Sackville-West's class, Leonard Woolf noted that she "belonged indeed to a world which was completely different from ours" which initially made "intimacy difficult" (Woolf 112). Despite these differences, Virginia Woolf ultimately helped to stretch Sackville-West's politics beyond the purview of her conservative upbringing, which was no small feat, given that Sackville-West's class had an enormous effect on her writing and sense of self (Ames 11). Carol Ames asserts that Sackville-West's class was a mixed blessing—it alienated her American readers who could not or did not want to relate to aristocracy, but her childhood, freedom, and education also enabled her to "create strong, independent female characters" (11-12). However, she often felt herself "different in some essential way from other people" because of her noble birth, and she tended to be politically conservative and an ardent supporter of the feudal system (15). Michael Rosenthal summarizes the contradictions of Sackville-West: regardless of how "emancipated her personal life may have been, intellectually Vita was very much tied to

²¹ Sackville-West and Woolf's relationship is well documented. Many scholars, including Stephen Barkway, Kirstie Blair, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Louise DeSalvo, Suzanne Raitt, and Karyn Z. Sproles, among others, have thoughtfully traced the textual and romantic relationships they shared. Their relationship has also impacted recent popular culture. There is an indie band called "Vita and the Woolf" named after the two, and in 2018 a film entitled *Vita and Virginia*, directed by Chanya Button, was released.

the past, cherishing values she saw fast disappearing from contemporary society” (265). Rosenthal and Ames both quote from a particularly damning and oft-cited assertion of Sackville-West’s conservative strain, when in a letter she wrote: “My Manifesto: I hate democracy. I hate *la populace*. I wish education had never been introduced. I don’t like tyranny, but I like an intelligent oligarchy. I wish *la populace* had never been encouraged to emerge from its rightful place. I should like to see them as well fed and well housed as T.T. cows, but no more articulate than that” (qtd. in Rosenthal 265).²² One of the ways that Woolf influenced Sackville-West is that she was able to smooth the coarse edges of this kind of severe and classist conservatism by introducing her to different political values. Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) was a particular influence, and in many ways, we can read *All Passion Spent* as a fictionalization of Woolf’s lecture.²³ As DeSalvo notes, Sackville-West’s novel is quite literally about “what life is like for a woman without a room of her own” (210). DeSalvo argues that Woolf’s political influence over Sackville-West was only temporary, though, and that her politics were not consistent throughout her life. This inconsistency is evident in the troubled feminism of *All Passion Spent*; although the influence of *A Room of One’s Own* remains clear.

One of the ironies about Woolf’s place in literary and feminist history is that while she is known as one of the most famous literary feminists, with *A Room of One’s Own* considered a touchstone of feminist literary criticism, she was highly critical of feminism. In fact, the ambivalence to feminism that we see in *All Passion Spent* becomes

²² The extremes of Sackville-West’s life, being “personally emancipated” while extremely politically conservative, echo the extremes of Lady Slane’s political views, where she is ambivalent about feminism while also yearning for social advances.

²³ Sackville-West actually wrote a review of *A Room of One’s Own*, praising “Mrs. Woolf’s creative genius” along with her “commonsense” in writing about women’s writing without falling into the trappings of feminism (Majumdar and McLaurin 257).

outright hostility in Woolf's essay *Three Guineas* (1938). The important distinction here, though, is that Woolf is mostly critical of what she considers to be the divisive language of feminism, rather than of efforts to advance women's rights. Woolf argues that the term "feminist" clings to an old past and impedes future progress, and she describes the symbolic destruction of the word. With the ruin of the word, "the air is cleared; and in that clearer air what do we see? Men and women working together for the same cause. The cloud has lifted from the past too" (102). Like *All Passion Spent*, contemporary readers understand *Three Guineas* to be explicitly feminist in content, even though Woolf is clear in her repudiation of the movement.

Sackville-West and Woolf's contrary positions on feminism are not distinct to them, as other modernists whose fiction we read as feminist, or read as containing feminist elements, were equally uncomfortable with feminism. Gertrude Stein, according to Brenda Wineapple, admired some of the early feminists, but "did not consider herself one of them" (1133); Jean Rhys wrote in a letter to Helen Nebeker that she was "not, strictly speaking, a feminist at all" (vii); and Elizabeth Bowen declared in 1961 that "I am not, and shall never be, a feminist" decades after she declared, in 1936, that "the woman's movement has accomplished itself" (qtd. in Ellman 65). In recent years, feminist modernist scholars have productively engaged with these tensions to create a fuller and more nuanced picture of women's modernism. Now, we can read these authors' assertions as a reminder that the feminism of today was not the feminism of their time, and with the knowledge that an understanding of these complexities does not supplant our contemporary feminist analyses, but rather enriches them. Given these contexts, then, Lady Slane's belief that she is "no feminist" becomes understandable, as it

is a statement that reflects the burgeoning and sometimes disorderly formations of early feminism, and is a belief shared by a number of other modernists. Importantly, this disavowal does not negate the novel's feminism, but rather situates it firmly within its historical moment. While the ambivalent feminism of the novel is not particularly remarkable given this history, what *is* unique about the novel is how Lady Slane does not only renounce feminism, like Woolf or Bowen, but re-signifies the word into a conspiratorial, and even regressive, term.²⁴

“She retained, however, a conviction”: Troubling the Language of Resistance

When reflecting on her youth, Lady Slane lingers over the details of her engagement to Henry. She does this because she wants to explore how she came to be married—despite her plans to “extricate herself” from the engagement (156)—but also because she wants to explore how her marriage impeded her ambition to become a painter, an ambition that was “the only thing of value that had entered her life” (149). As Lady Slane dwells on her past, we see her remember her young self through the experienced eyes of her older self, which Malgorzata Milczarek identifies as Lady Slane’s “double perspective” (101). This double perspective is clear in how her memories of youth are mingled with the knowledge of the impending sadness she will face, along with feminist critiques made possible only with hindsight.

When thinking of Henry’s proposal, Lady Slane remembers how her affection for him immediately changed. Unexpectedly, she finds that his tone altered so that his voice

²⁴ My reading of Sackville-West’s manipulation of the word “feminism” takes up Victoria Glendinning’s prompt in the novel’s introduction. Glendinning quickly notes that “Sackville-West redefines feminism negatively” (xiv), which is a curious narrative choice that I think deserves considerable analysis.

could carry the “full weight” of his solemn proposal, and though he tried to create a sense of physical connection to her by “fingering a flounce on her dress,” she “no longer even felt the slight tug of desire to put out her hand and touch the curly whiskers of his cheek” because his proposal, and her subsequent noncommittal reply, “removed him from her” (142-143). Following this, she remembers that Henry “had gone. He had left her” (143). The seismic change she feels between them after the proposal extends to her connection with women. Suddenly women are everywhere, and they bind her with “threads of pride and love and relief and maternal agitation and [a] feminine welcome of fuss” (156). Rather than feel a sense of community with the women—whose relationship to her and difference from one another remains suggestively vague—their attention overwhelms her and leaves her feeling diminished. She suddenly feels isolated, and she blames this shift on the new maternal community of “feminism.” Lady Slane remembers that those weeks before the wedding were dedicated wholly to the rites of a mysterious feminism. Never, Deborah thought, had she been surrounded by so many women. Matriarchy ruled. Men might have dwindled into insignificance on the planet. Even Henry himself did not count for much. (Yet he was there, terribly there, in the back-ground; and thus, she thought, might a Theban mother have tired her daughter before sending her off to the Minotaur.) (158)

In this memory, suddenly the pride, love, and fuss of the women around Deborah becomes unmistakably violent, as the inequalities of gender roles and marriage are blamed on older women who enforce marriage upon younger women. Within this generational power dynamic, Henry remains virtually blameless, which is clear in the metaphor of the Minotaur. Lady Slane relieves the Minotaur of any responsibility

because its very nature is to be monstrous, thus making the culprit in Deborah's destruction not the monster that consumes her, but the people who failed to protect her from the monster. It is women who overpower and exhaust Deborah's senses in preparation for the wedding, women who fail to equip her with the knowledge about what a life as a wife entails, and it is women who toss her into the labyrinth to be consumed.

The Minotaur metaphor, as well as Lady Slane's repeated emphasis on how the women "tired" her, or of how "she was always tired" (157), also has a decidedly sexual implication. In fact, her frustration primarily stems from how the women patronizingly withheld sexual knowledge from her, and how she was forced to "play a most complicated part" where she "was expected to know what it was all about, and yet the core of the mystery was to remain hidden from her" (159). The women around her play up the mystery, as Deborah notices how the "older women seemed to have a kind of secret amongst themselves, a reason for sage smiles and glances, a secret whereby something of Deborah's strength must be saved from this sweet turmoil and stored up for some greater demand that would be put upon her" (158). Deborah simply identifies this behavior as part of a maternal "conspiracy" (157), and the experienced and grown Lady Slane dispassionately thinks that it is precisely for the rites of marriage and its "consequences" that women are "safeguarded, kept in the dark, hinted at, segregated, [and] repressed, all that at a given moment they may be delivered, or may deliver their daughters over, to Minister to a man" (159). While Lady Slane is clearly critical of the "conspiracy" of marriage and maternity, the reality is that she has been on both sides of it: she has had marriage enforced upon her, while she has also participated in the conspiracy by marrying off her own children. This mysterious feminism is a cycle that

perpetuates itself with ease, which is an unacknowledged aspect of the secret the women carry. While the other women seem to enjoy the cycle, Lady Slane feels guilty about it. Thinking of her great-grandchildren, she “sighed to think that she was responsible, though indirectly, for their existence” (266). Here, her guilt stems from how the children were born into a world of struggle and conformity, where they will all, like her, “set hard into the moulds prepared for them” (266).

Lady Slane’s re-making of the word “feminism” is no mistake, nor a product of a generational divide between her and the younger women leading the feminist charge—it is a conscious and deliberate decision. We know this because in her repudiation of the “imagined martyrdom” of women (164), she demonstrates her understanding of the activist usage of the word. Lady Slane’s “feminism” has nothing to do with women’s rights movements; instead, she uses feminism as a synonym for femininity. Like the double perspective of Lady Slane’s memories, there is a double critique of femininity in the novel. One is Lady Slane’s critique of the assertive, bustling, and conspiratorial femininity women exert which makes them double-agents for the patriarchal institution of marriage. The second critique comes from Sackville-West at the expense of Lady Slane, as the novel itself is highly critical of the passive femininity and ignorance which is exemplified through Lady Slane’s character. While *All Passion Spent* is very much an artist’s novel, it is also a novel about gender and gender differences. Lady Slane spends much of her time dwelling upon the differences between men and women and in theorizing why men are—and should be—dominant over women. The gender politics of the novel may occasionally seem extreme and reductive, but these representations of gender are part of Sackville-West’s careful strategy to illuminate how women are

homogenized and infantilized by a culture that values men as individuals and women as accessories to men.

Just as Lady Slane sees the world in binaries, *All Passion Spent* largely represents gender in a binary. Men are strong, dominant, and industrious while women are weak, passive, and idle. Most disconcertingly, the novel also repeatedly suggests that women are incapable and ignorant. In one particularly conspicuous example of Sackville-West's critical representation of uneducated women, Lady Slane remembers attending glittering diplomat receptions with her husband, only to feel at a "loss to know what people meant when they referred to the Irish Question or the Women's Movement, or to Free Trade and Protection, two especial stumbling-blocks between which she had had them explained to her a dozen times" (130). Later, she recalls often feeling "stupidly inarticulate" (132), and repeatedly notes how she would make great efforts to "disguise her ignorance from Henry" (130). In a damning offer of praise for her efforts, Henry would occasionally say in private that she "was the most intelligent woman he knew because, although often inarticulate, she never made a foolish remark" (132). In Henry's praise of Lady Slane's silence, the logic of Sackville-West's feminist critique and emphasis on binary thinking is unlocked. By making Lady Slane ignorant and silent, the forces that not only prize those qualities, but enforce them on women, are explicitly brought to the fore. Lady Slane is so perfectly passive and quiet, while Henry is so dominant and forceful, that the feminist critique here borders on the parodic, which is precisely Sackville-West's point. The two characters are meant to lack all nuance because they represent the extremes of gendered ideals. As Victoria Glendinning observes, Sackville-West "was trying to represent pure femininity. This she saw in terms of sheer impracticality, 'laces and softnesses,' in

opposition to the ‘masculine’ world of business, politics and visible achievement” (xi).

With the idea that “pure femininity” is entirely impractical, Sackville-West dramatizes the consequences of women’s socially enforced passivity by creating a caricature of what the feminine ideal would be like. To her husband and children, Lady Slane embodies the feminine ideal because she is passive, acquiescent, and doting—indeed, she is nearly doll-like. When she dismisses her family to dwell on the past at Hampstead Cottage, Lady Slane reveals that there is no such thing as an expression of pure innate femininity, since under the guise of passivity she has always nurtured a lifelong ambition and simmering frustration, what she calls her “secret existence” (170). In a way, the novel exposes how femininity is a social construction, which is a feminist concept decades ahead of its time. Ideal femininity, Sackville-West asserts, is impossible. We see this in the life of Lady Slane who is expected to be uneducated but able to keep up with complex political discussions, have personal interests to round out her life but also be constantly available to her husband, and be wholly devoted to her children but also wholly devoted to her husband and his career. In short, the ideals of femininity that Sackville-West depicts really are entirely impractical, because they are standards no woman could possibly fulfil. There is no logic to cohere the impossible standards of patriarchy, but by identifying this impossible dynamic, we can make more sense of Lady Slane’s contrary and vexed feminism.

When Lady Slane lingers over her memories, she thus dwells in both impossibility and in the trace of lingering possibility. She finally has the time to “follow [her] bygone ambition from its dubious birth” (149), and in that journey, her politics become more consistent as she accumulates a nascent language of feminist awareness and

resistance. One effect of Lady Slane's dual perspective, as Milczarek argues, is that the "perception of time and the perception of reality" are "intermingled" (101). One crucial element of this mingling is that while tracing her "bygone ambition" to become a painter, her dream is not yet thwarted, and so she reencounters that ambition decades later. "By God," Lady Slane excitedly thinks, "the young blood running again generously through her, that is a life worth living! The life of the artist, the creator, looking closely, feeling widely" (150). Through her memories, just for a glimmer of a moment, the older Lady Slane avoids marriage and becomes an artist. While she never actually paints in the novel, as she studies her life, she begins theorizing about how being an artist is not necessarily about the product of art, but is rather about the disposition of the artist. When given the time for self-reflection, and with the young blood coursing through her again, Lady Slane realizes that she was an artist all along. This is the real power of the novel: by making her artist an ageing woman, and by creating space for an alternative kind of art, Sackville-West challenges the modernist trope of the young male artist. She also makes a feminist intervention into ageist representations of older women by aligning her protagonist with youthful ambition. These modernist and feminist interventions are intertwined, and with them, Sackville-West radically re-writes the *künstlerroman*.

"Anyhow, why should I accept other people's ideas?": Ripening the *Künstlerroman*

With his cry that he was off to "forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (276), Stephen Dedalus became immortalized as the ultimate modernist artist and his story the quintessential modernist *künstlerroman*. As a subgenre of the *bildungsroman* or coming-of-age narrative, the *künstlerroman* is the artist's development

story. Robert Davis observes that the two genres have much in common, since “both leave the protagonist on the verge of adulthood, having passed through various ideologies or poses or, in the case of artists, styles, ready to assume their places in the world” (153). Notably, Ellen McWilliams contends that the *bildungsroman* often has an “unapologetic investment in masculine, bourgeois ideologies” (9) which, I would argue, is a statement that extends to the *künstlerroman* as well.²⁵ One thing that differentiates the two genres, though, is that in addition to depicting “a belief in the power and value of art” (Davis 154), the *künstlerroman* tends to emphasize the artist’s sense of alienation. This trend was identified by Herbert Marcuse in 1922 when he argued that the *künstlerroman* began in the German Romantic period as a result of the artist’s social status in Germany. Unlike French, American, or English Romantics, the German Romantic was “not considered part of society” and was “labeled a pariah” since the art “he produced had no basis in reality, served no social purpose, and influenced no political movement” (Seret 22).²⁶ The artist’s conflicted sense of isolation and desire for social ties caused him “to create a literary asylum” (22) which took the *künstlerroman* form, where “the artist established roots by creating a spiritual biography and tangible identity” (22). Since the artist was disconnected from the public, he wrote works “reserved for a small elite of poets and artists” (22). Summarizing the journey of the young artist in these novels, Davis writes that they go “through a series of experiments with various forms and modes, each ending in failure or disillusion, until the final revelation of the true way” (154).

²⁵ Noteworthy classic feminist scholarship has examined how women authors have re-written the *bildungsroman* and *künstlerroman* genres to navigate around these masculine, bourgeois investments. See *The Voyage In* (1983) edited by Abel, Hirsch, and Langland, Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985), and Esther Labovits’s *The Myth of the Heroine* (1986).

²⁶ Marcuse’s study of *künstlerromane* comes from his 1922 dissertation which has not been translated into English. My discussion of Marcuse’s ideas come from Roberta Seret’s translation and interpretation of his work in her 1992 study *Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman*.

The *künstlerroman* was a compelling genre for a number of prominent modernists, and from its origins, it is easy to see why: with its emphasis on the figure of the artist, artistic production, aesthetic failure, alienation, and its orientation toward an elite audience, the classic *künstlerroman* nicely summarizes many of the investments of high modernism. Alongside Joyce's iconic *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) are a number of other modernist *künstlerromane*. The 1910s, for instance, saw the publication of three particularly notable artist stories with D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and Wyndham Lewis's *Tarr* (1918). Other modernists, including Woolf, Eliot, Pound, and Beckett, among many others, also wrote fiction and poetry that examined art and the figure of the artist. Though works like Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) or Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920) may not be traditional *künstlerromane*, they do, like much of modernism, heartily engage with questions of art, aesthetics, isolation, and artistic production.

Though modernism is filled with narratives of artists and art, Joyce's achievement remains the most iconic example within the period and, perhaps, within the whole literary canon. Davis argues that Joyce's novel represents "not only the culmination but also the terminal point" of the *künstlerroman*, which, like the *bildungsroman*, "were in effect killed off by the First World War" when belief in art and the inevitability of adulthood dwindled in the wake of the war's devastation (154). Perhaps it is strange to view Joyce's novel as emblematic of the kind of pre-war literary optimism that Davis highlights, but alongside all of Stephen's artistic failures and cynicism is the thrumming forward momentum of his maturation and artistic development. Before we even open the book, we know from the title alone that Stephen will eventually become an artist. That famous

title also explicitly aligns the artist's story with men and youthfulness, and thus Joyce's *künstlerroman* stands alongside the classic narratives of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795), Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1850), and Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1947) in making the artist's journey paradigmatically young and male. Joyce, though, takes a particularly modernist approach in representing the young artist's development by emphasizing his consciousness from infancy to young adulthood. From its "Baby Tuckoo" opening, to Stephen's guilt-ridden response to Father Arnall's hellfire sermon, to his famous "I will not serve" (268) speech and subsequent artistic epiphany, the formation of Stephen's artistic identity is intertwined with representations of youth and its accompanying confusion, earnestness, and transformation. Sackville-West subverts this orthodox identification of the artist as young and male by making the protagonist of her *künstlerroman* elderly and female.²⁷ Importantly, *All Passion Spent* does not superficially gesture to Lady Slane's age and then move on. Just as Stephen's artistic journey is intertwined with his youth, Lady Slane's artistic realization is intertwined with her experience of old age. In fact, the novel is deeply invested in both Lady Slane's physical and cognitive experience of being an old woman, as well as her experience of being belittled and dismissed by a society that devalues young women and utterly ignores older women.

In her study of modernist representations of ageing, Kathleen Renk argues that a number of women modernists, including Sackville-West, Woolf, and Rhys, were engaging with the "gendered notions of modernism that aligned modernism with the

²⁷ Though the protagonist of Sackville-West's *künstlerroman* is eighty-eight, we still see her struggle with youthful confusion, earnestness, and transformation through her melancholy memories. However, unlike Stephen's maturation into an artist, Lady Slane is compelled to mature into a wife.

youthful male” (319) by including older women in their fiction. As middle-aged women themselves, these authors were not only competing against male modernists to be read and respected, but they were also competing against a whole movement oriented toward young men. In response to this double-bind, Renk sees a trend in their fiction where each author critiques “the ways in which modernism, in general, ignored the linked oppressions of womanhood and old age” which “make females ‘the other’” (319). We see how ageism and sexism intersect most profoundly within Lady Slane’s family life. Given that in the 1920s, a woman’s life expectancy was fifty-one-in-a-half years (Renk 319), at eighty-eight years old, Lady Slane is extraordinarily old. By this standard, her children who are in their sixties are also unusually old, and yet the irony is that they are still completely consumed with the notion that their mother is incapable of taking care of herself, and that in her widowhood she is now a shared burden they must bear. Indeed, the old conspiracy that ushered Lady Slane into marriage resurfaces again in widowhood, as her children assemble, “hushed and private, like a conspiracy” (48), to take control of her life. None of her children, with the exception of her spinster daughter Edith,²⁸ can imagine that their mother has her own desires and needs; as such, the intersection of ageism and sexism makes it easy for them to deny their mother’s personhood, and to assume “that she had not enough brain to be self-assertive” (24). Her children go so far as to think that “Mother had no will of her own; all her life long, gracious and gentle, she had been wholly submissive—an appendage” (24). Here, the sexist beliefs and

²⁸ Edith is the only child who urges Lady Slane on in her plans to move, and after Lady Slane tells her children that she plans to spend no more time with young people and to spend her time as she pleases, it suddenly and shockingly dawns “upon Edith that her mother might have lived a full private life, all these years, behind the shelter of her affectionate watchfulness” (69). It is no accident that Edith is the child who possesses the most compassion and insight about her mother. Edith and Lady Slane are kindred spirits in refusing—and bearing the brunt of refusing—the cultural expectations of women.

expectations about a woman's presumed submissive role in the family neatly rolls into the infantilization of older women based on the same logic. With their father dead, the children take up his controlling role without hesitation.

Lady Slane's decision to move away, then, is a powerful rejection of her infantilizing children and a rebuttal against a society that insists upon older women remaining passive. In the wake of all the people and systems that enforce Lady Slane's passivity, Hampstead Cottage becomes a multivalent site of resistance: it is a space of her own to contemplate art and life, it is a haven from maternal responsibility, and it is a symbol of her continued capability and newfound independence. Like Hampstead Cottage, Sackville-West's representation of old age is layered. Describing novels that favour positive depictions of ageing women, Barbara Frey Waxman coined the term *reifungsroman*, or "novel of ripening" (2). She asserts that the *reifungsroman* is a "genre of fiction that rejects negative cultural stereotypes of the old woman and aging" while "seeking to change the society that created those stereotypes" (2). At the turn-of-the-century, Waxman details, popular representations of old age in magazines "were often introspective, brooding, self-critical, even despondent about aging," where images of "old crones" or "hags" were associated with ageing women, and the "archetype of old age as hearthside retirement, indoor passivity, and deterioration" prevailed (10). Initially, Lady Slane resembles most of these stereotypes with all of her introspection and days spent by the fire, but the reality is that Sackville-West actually challenges those stereotypes.

In refusing her children's efforts to arrange her life, Lady Slane transforms her age from an idle period of mourning and passivity into an active time of reclamation and liberation. "If one is not to please oneself in old age," Lady Slane tells her aghast

children, “when is one to please oneself? There is so little time left!” (67). Alongside the descriptions of leisurely afternoons by the fire are powerful critiques of youth culture and of a world that is accessible only to the young. One way that Sackville-West depicts this is by showing Lady Slane’s frustration with the need to “compete with the rush of mechanical life” (85) when she struggles to get on and off trains in time. Here, Sackville-West enfold a critique of modernity with her examination of ageism. Lady Slane thinks of all the trains and stops she has missed simply because she could not keep up with the speed of movement (which is also an apt metaphor for all the opportunities she has been denied as a woman), and in this moment, we see that the world is sometimes literally inaccessible to her because of her age. Another way that Sackville-West depicts this inaccessibility is by emphasizing the competitive nature of youth.

Lady Slane does not wish to be young again, and with this she resists the trope of older people pining for youth. Instead, she repeatedly states that youth is nothing but toil and effort, which is why she does not want to visit with her grandchildren, who themselves are in the midst of that toil. Other ageing characters, like Mr. Bucktrout, feel the same way. Mr. Bucktrout tells a sympathetic Lady Slane that it “is terrible to be twenty” (99). “One knows one will almost certainly fall into the Brook of Competition,” he explains, “and break one’s leg over the Hedge of Disappointment, and stumble upon the Wire of Intrigue, and quite certainly come to grief over the Obstacle of Love” (99). He concludes that the benefit of old age is that “one can throw oneself down as a rider after the race, and think, Well, I shall never have to ride that course again” (99). Sentiments like these are not meant to disparage the young, but rather to critique the whole frenzied system of money, marriage, and social expectation that rules the entirety

of people's lives. Lady Slane's awareness of the intersections between the competition of youth and gender inequality begin to coalesce while she ponders her life by the fire, and with this Sackville-West gives "hearthside retirement" (Waxman 10) a revolutionary possibility. Most importantly, Lady Slane's retirement helps her to reclaim her life as an artist. This reclamation is Sackville-West's most powerful rejection of negative stereotypes, since she makes Lady Slane's old age a time of renewed productivity. And with this intervention, Sackville-West returns us to the tropes of the *künstlerroman*.

Sackville-West again distinguishes her *künstlerroman* by orienting her novel toward political rather than aesthetic intervention. A common trope in traditional *künstlerromane*, as Roberta Seret details, is that the novel is a fictionalized account of the author's own artistic journey. Within *All Passion Spent*, however, Lady Slane and Sackville-West share almost nothing in common besides their ambivalent feminism. In contrast to Lady Slane's lonely and unfulfilled life, Sackville-West had written bestsellers, received critical acclaim, and was well supported by family and friends by the time *All Passion Spent* was published. Though she ignores the self-referential aspects of the genre, Sackville-West does embrace other traditional *künstlerroman* motifs, but even then, she tends to subvert or modify those in order to craft her argument about the place of women artists in early twentieth-century Britain. For instance, Lady Slane makes the traditional generic voyage from "home" to a new location, but in this case, it is a mother retreating from her children to enjoy a life free from maternal obligations, rather than a young person breaking free from their parents. She also voyages into her memories, but rather than becoming "absent to reality" (Seret 4) when meditating on her past, Lady Slane gains insight into her life which enables her to reclaim her artistic identity.

Even with this frequent inward turn, she does not create the kind of solitary “literary asylum” (22) that Seret argues is common in the genre. Instead, she creates for herself a thriving community of friends. Mr. Bucktrout, Mr. Gosheron, and Mr. FitzGeorge—her landlord, the local handyman, and a wealthy art collector, respectively—are each social misfits and “eccentrics in their disregard for success-values” (Glendinning xiii). Within this new community of outcasts, Lady Slane develops her first honest relationships with people who value her for being herself.²⁹ They are also sympathetic, rather than dismissive, of her thwarted ambition. Mr. FitzGeorge sympathetically observes, “you were an artist, were you, potentially? But being a woman, that had to go by the board...Now I understand why you sometimes looked so tragic when your face was in repose. I remember looking at you and thinking, ‘That is a woman whose heart is broken’” (219). And so, Mr. FitzGeorge identifies the key difference between Sackville-West’s *künstlerroman* and the ones studied by Davis or Seret, which is, namely, in a world that values men’s artistic production over women’s, there were few options except for Lady Slane’s art “to go by the board” (219).

By retroactively identifying Lady Slane as an artist, Mr. FitzGeorge participates in the voyage that encompasses her life at Hampstead Cottage. When Seret argues that

²⁹ With the exception of Lady Slane’s great-granddaughter who appears late in the novel, the only people who understand her artistic disposition and sympathize with her life’s disappointments are conspicuously male. This, initially, is a curious choice. However, I think Sackville-West uses Lady Slane’s coterie of men to undo the caricature of masculinity advanced by Henry. Indeed, they variously fail the ideals of masculinity advanced by Henry by being sensitive, philosophical, and sometimes silly. Nevertheless, there are notable parallels between Henry and Lady Slane’s new friends, since they each take care of her in various practical ways at Hampstead Cottage, just as Henry took care of her in London. What is so different about her relationships with Mistery Bucktrout, Gosheron, and FitzGeorge, though, is that they take care of all of those practical matters while also attending to her intellectual and artistic life. Additionally, these men fall into the “dreamer” category in which Lady Slane also identifies. Perhaps there would be more “dreamer” women in their circle if they were not so bogged down by the responsibilities of their own homes and therefore alienated from their peers.

“artist-protagonists” will often become “absent from reality” when they cannot physically voyage, she also notes that this flight from reality is usually temporary, since the artist-protagonist invariably finds a way to go on a literal voyage (4). With this, Seret creates a dichotomy between “real” and “vicarious” voyages, implicitly privileging the literal voyage over the metaphorical or cognitive one. For Lady Slane, though, the cognitive voyage is paramount, since her meditations on the past allow her to reclaim her life’s ambition. When Lady Slane loses herself in her memories, it is an act of feminist reclamation because she eventually comes to realize that, despite not producing any tangible art, she has still always been an artist. Before this epiphany, though, she attempts to fashion an artist’s life out of her marriage to Henry: “Was there something beautiful,” she thinks, “something active, something creative, even, in her apparent submission to Henry? Could she not balance herself upon the tight-rope of her relationship with him, as dangerously and precariously as in the act of creating a picture?” (176). With this thought, Lady Slane’s thoughts are divided; indeed, she finds that her very identity suddenly becomes split with the suggestion that her apparent submission to Henry was art, since “[a]ll the woman in her answered, yes!” while “[a]ll the artist in her countered, no!” (176). Lady Slane is gripped by the seeming impossibility of being both an artist and a wife, and by searching through her memories for a way to reclaim her life as an artist, she also searches for a way to unify her identity.

“now she felt safe”: Feminist Mentorship & The Artistic Self

Sackville-West does not offer an easy resolution to Lady Slane’s identity crisis. In fact, she momentarily side-steps the issue to instead focus on the life of Deborah, Lady Slane’s

namesake and great granddaughter, who is engaged to the son of a Duke. When Deborah visits unannounced, Lady Slane initially expects her to be a vapid society girl, so she is taken aback by Deborah's candor when she immediately sits at her knee to thank her "for what she had done" (281). At this point, the narrative becomes unreliable as Lady Slane slips into a hallucinatory state before her death moments later, so we do not initially know what Deborah is thankful for. Through the haze of Lady Slane's consciousness, we do learn, however, that Deborah nurtures an ambition to become a musician, and that she ended her engagement to focus on her music. This is not stated directly by Deborah, but is inferred through Lady Slane's identification with Deborah and her own young self: she imagines that she herself is the speaker instead of Deborah, and she wonders whether it was "an echo that she heard? or had some miracle wiped out the years? were the years being played over again, with a difference?" (281). Soon after, Lady Slane dubiously thinks that maybe she really had broken off her engagement and pursued art over Henry, and she is grateful that she has a confidante in whom to share her ambitions and concerns. No longer able to determine whether she is the confider or the confidante, Lady Slane thinks "[f]ortunate Deborah!...to be so firm, so trustful, and by one person at least so well understood; but to which Deborah she alluded, she scarcely knew" (282).

Eventually, Lady Slane gains insight into her hallucinatory mix of identifications, and the narrative clears enough for Deborah to speak directly. She is grateful because her grandmother gave away the surprise art fortune she had recently inherited from Mr. FitzGeorge, who willed it to her in a gesture of his life-long love. Because Lady Slane prefers the beauty and art of everyday life over staid art objects, she gave the collection to the nation, thus demoting Deborah's social standing and making it easier for her to refuse

the future Duke's proposal.³⁰ Sensing that her grandmother will understand her, Deborah explains that she was initially worried about disappointing her family, who wanted her to become a Duchess, "[b]ut what was that...compared with what she herself wanted to be, a musician?" (284). Despite never hearing her perform, Lady Slane marvels that the "child was an artist, and must have her way" (288) because the two share artistic ambitions and the same sense of being an artist adrift in marital expectations. Over the course of their discussion, Lady Slane gives Deborah the confidence to pursue her ambition, knowing that she is fulfilling both her own dream and the dream of her grandmother. As they talk, Deborah imagines a future where she can be both an artist and wife, so long as she finds herself "marrying someone who measured his values against the same rod as herself" (284), and thus Deborah anticipates a future where she will unite the two identities that Lady Slane herself was never able to merge.

The parallels that Sackville-West carefully draws between Deborah and Lady Slane are obvious, which might make it easy to dismiss the circularity of the finale as too neat and reflective of the tidy conclusions often expected of popular fiction. However, Christine Grandy reminds us that the conventions of interwar popular fiction were anything but simple. During this post-war "early age of mass consumption," popular

³⁰ Unlike Laura Willowes or Sasha Jansen, the effect of having less money provides more freedom to Lady Slane and Deborah, since having less money alienates them from high society, which Sackville-West implicitly suggests is another stricture on women's and artists' lives. This is a provocative but not entirely persuasive argument for Sackville-West to make, since in her own life as a gentlewoman, it was precisely her family wealth and social status that afforded her and her husband the freedoms to pursue fulfilling artistic and public careers, as well as same-sex relationships without social ruin. This suggestion also ignores, like Lady Slane's feminism, the immense privileges associated with wealth that poor women do not experience. Nevertheless, the novel repeatedly shows that Lady Slane's class status disables her artistic opportunities since she is too busy tending to her husband's affairs and travelling the world in diplomatic capacities. The potential for a compelling argument about wealth, class, and feminine submission is here, but Sackville-West misses the opportunity to really engage with these issues given the novel's overly simplistic representations of money and class.

media was strikingly ideological, as the “novels and films that the British chose to consume featured heroes, villains, and love-interests that not only reflected but moderated post-World War I concerns about class, gender, and nation” (3). The ideal post-war figure that emerged to mediate these concerns was the “the male breadwinner and soldier,” who buttressed post-war ideals of Englishness in his promotion of heterosexuality, “proper” Englishness, and capitalist productivity (13).³¹ Rather than celebrate this ideal, Sackville-West instead shows how the male breadwinner’s success is only made possible by the sacrifices of wives.

All Passion Spent shows that the popular fixation on male success erases women, and, indeed, reinscribes pre-war cultural models where women were accessories to men, since there is no room for women’s work or success in a world that emphasizes the importance of male achievement. Deborah’s refusal to marry is a dismissal of the male breadwinner, while her hope that she might someday marry someone with the same values as her gestures to her hope that this interwar ideal is only a terminal point between pre-war patriarchal values and a more hopeful future where both men’s and women’s success might be celebrated. However, Deborah’s imagined future as an artist and wife are just that: a hope, not a certainty. Milczarek argues that “Sackville-West presents the Victorian period and the beginning of the twentieth century in the context of continuity rather than merely contrasting them” and that change is depicted as a “gradual process rather than a revolution” (107). This slow progress is dramatized by Deborah’s uncertain future. By the novel’s conclusion, whether or not she fulfills her dreams is unknown, but

³¹ These popular texts, tacitly endorsed by the government, are in stark contrast to censored modernist texts like *Ulysses* (1922), *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) which challenged the prescribed values of Britishness and British morality, and were thus subject to obscenity trials.

what is certain is that Lady Slane and Deborah's relationship foregrounds the importance of feminist mentorship, which is a relationship that has revolutionary potential.

All Passion Spent displaces the centrality of heterosexual marriage—and the unseen women's work that props up male success—by promoting the more dynamic relationship between Deborah and Lady Slane, which is grounded both in family ties and feminist mentorship. Although their relationship appears late in the novel, it is the antidote to Lady Slane's isolation and sense that her life's ambition has been wasted. And by linking Lady Slane's artistic journey to Deborah's, Sackville-West not only gestures to the importance of feminist community, but also challenges traditional *künstlerromane* by refusing to reinstate the trope of the independent genius. Remodeling mentor relationships into feminist exchanges of support is no small feat, though, since traditional mentorships, as Gloria Pierce observes, are often predicated on hierarchies and reproducing power. Writing of women who are mentored in academic settings, Pierce observes that these relationships can sometimes be a means of “acculturating” women into institutional status quos which “may simply replicate the hierarchical, paternalistic power dynamics that have traditionally disadvantaged women” (Pierce).³² These “acculturating” mentorships are common in many professional careers as a means of training, but we also see these forces in interpersonal relationships, like when Lady Slane recalls the “conspiracy” of women who acculturate her into marriage norms.

³² Within modernist history, we see this kind of acculturating mentorship between Jean Rhys and Ford Maddox Ford. Ford first encountered Rhys's work when a journalist, Mrs. Adam, discovered Rhys's talent after reading her notebook. According to Rhys, Mrs. Adam typed a draft manuscript of her first novel to send to Ford, but changed parts of it to reflect his taste because “[i]t's perhaps a bit naïve here and there” (155). This exchange began Rhys's relationship with Ford, who “was the dominant literary influence on her work” and acculturated her into high modernist norms by variously revising her writing, “tutoring” her on the “craft of fiction,” and providing reading lists to her of other modern writers who he deemed important (Gardiner 68). Ford also instructed her to change her name from Ella Lenglet to the “more modern” Jean Rhys (Banks 1).

Feminist forms of mentorship attempt to circumvent this acculturation by dismantling hierarchies, embracing openness, and seeking alternative forms of mentorship. Most importantly, feminist mentorships also provide role models and visible examples of women doing things differently. For Deborah, Lady Slane's influence as a role model is a key aspect of her developing autonomy. Likely due to her grandmother's eccentricity, Deborah senses that Lady Slane is an artist and someone she can confide in, and so she becomes a visible role model to Deborah of a woman pursuing her dreams. By contrast, Lady Slane has no role model and literally cannot imagine herself being an artist because she so fully absorbs Henry's view of her. She remembers how Henry regarded her as a "little black shadow which had doubled him for so many years" and as this shadowy, non-corporeal appendage in their marriage, it "would not do" if she could not travel across the world for him, if he was "met by a locked door," or if she was too busy to bear him another son (161-162).

In the absence of a direct role model like Deborah has in her grandmother, Lorri Santamaría and Nathalia Jaramillo argue that women's writing and art can serve as its own form of mentorship. Considering their own experiences as women of colour in the academy, they write that their relationships with artists and authors like Frida Kahlo, Octavia Butler, and Gloria Anzaldúa have "complemented the other more traditional versions of mentorship, formal and informal, over the years" since women artists "bridge the personal with the political" to create "radically progressive frameworks" (318) of personal support and intellectual growth. Though they are writing of academic mentoring, Santamaría and Jaramillo reaffirm the instructional and supportive power of women's art and community, which is precisely the power that Deborah identifies in her

grandmother. However, the one crucial difference in Lady Slane and Deborah's artistic mentorship is that theirs is purely relational and aspirational, since there is not yet a work of art by which to be influenced. Instead, their relationship is built upon their self-identifications with one another, their family ties, and their shared hope that Deborah will go on to fulfill both of their artistic dreams. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf famously asserts that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (83), but in *All Passion Spent*, Sackville-West proposes that women artists can also think *forwards* through their daughters. Sackville-West again explores this forward thinking dynamic in "An Unborn Visitant," which was published just one year after *All Passion Spent*.

"An Unborn Visitant" is a supernatural short story set in 1908, and is about a woman named Elsa who suddenly develops a relationship with a man named Evan, which comes as a surprise to herself and others, since she was widely regarded as a spinster unlikely to marry. When Evan proposes, Elsa is unsure whether they should marry, so she is subsequently visited at night by the apparition of her twenty-four-year-old daughter. Daphne is thoroughly modern, fashionably androgynous, and a chain smoker who references Einstein, Freud, and the First World War in front of her bewildered Victorian mother who is affronted by her manners and appearance. Initially, Elsa feels "the virus of horrified disapproval" (119) course through her as she surveys her daughter, but over the course of the story she warms to her. The purpose of Daphne's visit, as she explains, is that she wants her mother to "please buck up about it" and get married, "because I'm in a terrible hurry to get born" (118). Later in their conversation, Daphne again urges her mother to make her decision quickly in order to speed her birth: "I say, you'll hurry up with that marriage, won't you? It is such a bore, waiting about" (122). When Daphne

vanishes to “give [Evan] the same message” (118), Elsa mulls over the possibility of marriage and becoming a mother. She wonders if she even wants to become a mother, and then thinks, “[c]ould she actually cheat Daphne out of her future if she really wanted to?” (123). The brief story concludes with Elsa whispering to herself, and perhaps Daphne, about how quickly she might be able to secure a marriage license. In this story, as in *All Passion Spent*, Sackville-West emphasizes maternal mentorship and the powerful futurity of the bonds between women.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf is also interested in women's mentorship, futurity, and the bonds between mothers and daughters (both literal and literary). While *All Passion Spent* examines the social barriers to Lady Slane and Deborah's ambitions, Woolf's essay contains a key element that Sackville-West's novel lacks, which is a close examination of how “the reprehensible poverty of our sex” (25) is both a social *and* material poverty. Woolf famously recounts how few women writers there are, how women have been denied the necessary conditions for artistic production, and how, in many cases, women's literary achievement has been obscured or claimed by men. She also dwells on the importance of women's legacies, which is another form of indirect mentorship. She most vividly illustrates the importance of women's legacy in her descriptions of the male university Oxbridge and of the women's college Fernham. Oxbridge, as its name implies, represents the grand campuses and traditions of schools like Oxford and Cambridge, while Fernham is paltry and unfinished by comparison. Woolf imagines the “prodigious effort” (25) groups of women would have made to collect an inevitably small sum of money to found the school, and contrasts that with the taken-for-granted networks of men spanning hundreds of years whose generous

endowments furnished and enriched Oxbridge. With a lack of mentorship, scholarships, infrastructure, and money, Woolf illustrates the measurable inequality in women's education and experience. In response to the relative poverty of Fernham, Woolf ironically rails against the generations of women who "mismanaged their affairs very gravely" (28) in their failure to establish schools, before detailing how, in reality, there was hardly any possibility that previous generations of women could do that work. Women, Woolf argues, are isolated from one another and from opportunity when they are subsumed by domestic responsibility, which only makes the links between women even more important, even if those ties are only able to open a modest school without all of the intellectual benefits and comforts of Oxbridge.

Though Woolf's grievance that previous generations of women gravely "mismanaged their affairs" is mostly ironic, there nevertheless remains a very real sense of frustration that her generation does not have the same institutional and systemic benefits that men take for granted. That genuine seed of frustration returns us to "An Unborn Visitant" and Elsa's sense that she cannot "cheat" her daughter out of a future, even if she does not want a child, because part of Woolf's point here is that women need to be forward enough thinkers to make space for future generations of women. In Elsa's story, we see her doing that uncomfortable work of thinking her own experience into the future when she debates whether she wants to have Daphne. In the end, Elsa's choice fundamentally rests on her sense that she cannot deprive another woman of a future. Of course, there is something disquieting about a woman feeling obligated to have children, or of Woolf's frustration at the systemic limitations of previous generations, but the essential argument in both of these examples is that what comes with such ease to men

and male institutions is hard won, emotionally fraught, and precarious for women. Here, too, Woolf emphasizes the power of maternal mentorships and feminism, while Sackville-West, remarkably, emphasises a pronatalism for daughters, wherein birthing and mothering daughters becomes a feminist act.

Ultimately, Woolf and Sackville-West each argue that women must look beyond themselves to determine how they might align with other women to form networks of support for future progress. Woolf's narrative essay and Sackville-West's *künstlerroman* each emphasize the connectedness of women's achievements, and with its emphasis on connection, *All Passion Spent* stands in distinct contrast to the solitary male artist who is traditionally celebrated in the genre.³³ However, while Lady Slane becomes a sort of spiritual artist through her granddaughter, she never actually produces any art and might thus be considered a failed artist. This is another significant intervention that Sackville-West makes into not only the *künstlerroman* but also into modernist preoccupations, since the figure of the failed male artist is prevalent in modernist literature. Medalie notes that the "self in crisis is a trope of modernist literature" (12), which is true of Lady Slane's story, but the reason her identity is in crisis is entirely because of the gendered inequality that impeded her lifelong ambition.

³³ The literary ideal of the male artist is often solitary, but of course history shows that most modernists were financially and intellectually supported by patrons, editors, and other artists. Today, we know more about the "midwives of modernism," to use Bonnie Kime Scott's famous term (55), like Sylvia Beach, Olivia Shakespear, and Margaret Cravens, who helped fund, edit, and/or publish some of modernism's most celebrated texts. This support work was often gendered, which Stella Bowen (who was an author and artist, as well as Ford Madox Ford's long-time partner) wryly acknowledged in her memoir: a "man writer or painter always manages to get some woman to look after him and make his life easy...A professional woman, however, seldom gets this cushioning unless she can pay money for it" (83).

“Achievement was good, but the spirit was better”: Re-reading Artistic Failure

Whether he appears in traditional *künstlerromane* or in poetry, the failed male artist recurs throughout the modernist canon. These artists fail in aesthetic and personal ways, and variously face existential, legal, and expressive crises during their journeys. The poet in T.S. Eliot’s “East Coker” from *Four Quartets* (1940), for instance, faces a linguistic and existential crisis where the uneasy peace of the interwar years is connected to his personal sense of wasted time and artistic failure. He laments finding himself in “the middle way.../Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt/Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure” (V, 1 & 3-4). Hugh Selwyn Mauberley of Ezra Pound’s 1920 long-poem by the same name, by contrast, is an aesthetic failure as his stilted, pained poetry attests. Mauberley is utilitarian in his poetic process, rather than inspired, and, as such, he can never achieve personal or artistic greatness. And in Wyndham Lewis’s *Tarr* (1918), Otto Kreisler is both a failed artist and an utterly destructive person. Joyce is also invested in the narrative exploration of artistic failure, which we see in Stephen Dedalus’s journey where he repeatedly fails in both his artistic attempts and in his immature views on art, before his artistic epiphany and subsequent exile. Stephen dramatically evolves as an artist over the course of the novel, though Stephen Kern concedes that his story only ends in “potential success” (45) rather than outright triumph.

By contrast, Lady Slane’s artistic failures are much less romantic or self-indulgent and are tied, instead, to her family obligations and the social factors Woolf traces in *A Room of One’s Own*.³⁴ Despite never painting, Sackville-West nevertheless emphasizes

³⁴ Of course, Stephen Dedalus’s early artistic attempts are also repressed by social factors, including the church, nation, and family, but that is why he must exile himself at the end of the novel, which is hardly an option available to a woman in the late nineteenth century.

how Lady Slane is still an artist in “spirit” (289) by showing her creative process. We see this artistic spirit when she tries to refashion her marriage into art, but we also see it in her sense of the world and herself. When on a diplomatic tour of the Middle East, Lady Slane notices that the movement of butterflies is its own kind of art. She is captivated by the butterflies, but her thoughts are interrupted by Henry’s conversation about work. Remembering this interruption, Lady Slane thinks of how “she had withdrawn her attention from the butterflies and transferred it to her duty” but that “perversely, the fluttering of the butterflies had always remained more important” (138). Later, Lady Slane wonders whether she never told her “indulgent” parents of her ambition because she enjoyed the “treasured privacy of the artist” (152). Once she settles at Hampstead Cottage, she begins making a scrapbook of news clippings of her grandchildren’s lives, which she again enjoys in private, and in one telling reflection, Lady Slane considers the differences between her and Henry:

There were moments when she could enter into the excitement of the great game that Henry was always playing; moments when the private, specialised, intense, and lovely existence of the artist—whose practice had been denied her, but after whose ideal of life she still miserably and imaginatively hankered—seemed a poor and selfish and over-delicate thing compared with the masculine business of empire and politics and the strife of men. There were moments when she could understand not only with her brain but with her sensibility, that Henry should crave for a life of action even as she herself craved for a life of contemplation.

They were indeed two halves of one dissevered world. (183-184)

In this passage, we again see how Lady Slane is intent on binary thinking. In previous

meditations of her marriage, she underscores how Henry is the archetypal man and she the archetypal woman, but in this reflection, Henry remains the archetypal man while she is both the thwarted artist and dutiful wife. This binary thinking thus enables a radical reconfiguration. Throughout the novel, Henry is a stand-in for the activity, authority, and industry of men, while Lady Slane represents the duty and disappointment of women. By imagining herself, then, as the part of the “dissevered world” capable of a “life of contemplation” as opposed to Henry’s “masculine business,” Lady Slane makes the artist paradigmatically *female*. With this reconfiguration, Sackville-West re-genders the *künstlerroman* into a narrative about women’s artistic struggles which are fundamentally linked to their oppression.

Though Lady Slane never paints, she does imagine her life as a canvas, and on that canvas is Henry who was a “straight black line drawn right through” (169). She also knows herself as an artist and becomes an artistic mentor to Deborah. In all of these ways, the novel attempts to reclaim her life as an artist by favouring the creative process over the creative product. When Lady Slane conjures a painting in her head inspired by nature, or when Deborah enjoys a “sense of enveloping music” (291) as she talks to her grandmother, Sackville-West’s representation of women’s art is both optimistic and melancholic. Their ephemeral and private art has the unintentional benefit of obstructing the capitalist compulsion to commodify and produce (which we know Lady Slane appreciates, since she does not favour art objects), but, ultimately, their art is always on the cusp of potentiality and is never fully realized to either of them. Neither Lady Slane’s nor Deborah’s artistic future is guaranteed,³⁵ and, as such, Sackville-West makes her

³⁵ At least there is a possibility of Deborah fulfilling her dreams. In Woolf’s debut, *The Voyage Out* (1920), she more forcefully dramatizes the disadvantages women artists face in the character of Rachel

readers dwell on the conditions that prevent women from realizing their artistic gifts.

By making space for women's artistic dispositions over the product of their art, Sackville-West claims space for women who, like Lady Slane, never have an opportunity to set brush to canvas. And by incorporating unconventional moments of art in the novel—like Lady Slane's attempts to turn her marriage into art or her scrapbook of her grandchildren's lives—Sackville-West elevates everyday moments, often tied to marital and maternal duties, into art. Lady Slane often struggles to identify these moments as times of artistic production, but people like Mr. FitzGeorge and Deborah confirm that to artistically disposed people, Lady Slane has always been legible as an artist. This visibility only to other artists, and only occasionally to herself, is another challenge to the more triumphant and assertive artistic journeys of traditional *künstlerromane* which feature protagonists who eventually overcome their obstacles. Lady Slane never has a chance to overcome her life's obstacles, and instead defers her ambition to her granddaughter in the hopes that she might achieve success. Lady Slane is not quite an idealized artistic failure and not quite a success—rather, her artistic life is suspended in limbo, but that limbo reveals not only the negligent idealism of traditional *künstlerromane* that privilege male experience while ignoring women artists, but also carves open a little space for an alternative, ambivalent *künstlerroman* that foregrounds the material barriers to women's collective artistic success over the spiritual and artistic genius of the individual male.

Vinrace, who is a sheltered young woman denied education and guidance until her Aunt Helen takes an interest in her. Her cloistered existence gives her an opportunity to become a talented pianist, but when she becomes engaged to Terence, her art suffers: "I can't play a note because of you in the room interrupting me every other second" (276). Eventually, Rachel tries to break off her engagement (like Deborah), but Terence is persistent, and in the end, Rachel becomes sick and dies, young and unfulfilled.

We see a similarly ambivalent feminism and melancholy conclusion as *All Passion Spent* in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926), which I examine in the next chapter. Like Sackville-West, Warner is concerned with women's independence, Edwardian culture, and the social effects of women's failure, but unlike Sackville-West, Warner intended to write an explicitly feminist novel. Despite Warner's intentions, readers missed the novel's feminism because Warner secured her protagonist's freedom through submission to the devil. For readers, Warner's feminism seemed to work against itself, just as the irrepressible feminism of *All Passion Spent* worked against Sackville-West's preference for humanism. The feminism of these novels poses significant interpretative challenges for feminist scholars, but it is precisely within these challenges and failures that these authors claim space for different women's stories within modernism. For Sackville-West, a woman long considered only peripherally related to modernism through Woolf, her novel might initially be easy to overlook since its pace quickly whisks her readers through its modernist and feminist interventions. Like other modernist novels that dwell on big issues, though, *All Passion Spent* rewards slow and thoughtful reading. With this reading, we unearth her feminist modernist *künstlerroman*.

Chapter Two

Going for it: Slow Resistance, Feminist Fantasy, and Failure in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*

“It’s no use leading to an event if it fails.
Go for the failure.” —Sylvia Townsend Warner, apocryphally

Writing of the historical setting of Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *The Corner That Held Them* (1948), a novel about a medieval convent in Norfolk, Arnold Rattenbury challenges claims by leading Warner scholar Claire Harman that Warner’s dating of the novel (1345-1382) is arbitrary. Rattenbury defends his position by quoting personal conversations he had with Warner, whom he met while the two were writers in the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1930s. “In fact,” Rattenbury insists, “Sylvia pitched the book very deliberately between the birth of Chaucer (‘Well, his first or second birthday,’ she said: ‘I want him on his feet’) and the dispersal of the Peasant’s [sic] Revolt of 1381 (‘It’s no use leading to an event if it fails. Go for the failure’)” (231). There is no way to know if Warner really said “[g]o for the failure” (231), and if she did, what the context for or meaning of that cryptic statement was, since Rattenbury’s use of the phrase is charged by his efforts to dismantle another scholar’s work. The statement is also subject to the unreliability of memory as Rattenbury recalls events that took place three decades earlier. The accuracy of the quotation is highly suspect, and yet it is irresistible, as “go for the failure” offers a compelling and suggestive commentary on failure in Warner’s work. Indeed, the conviction to “go for the failure” is central to the politicized failure of this dissertation overall, where I have been arguing that failure is a powerful tool of feminist identification and critique used by modernists like Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys, which has distinct interpretive implications. For Warner

specifically, this idea of seeking or directly “going for” failure is essential to Laura Willowes, the protagonist of her debut novel *Lolly Willowes: Or, The Loving Huntsman* (1926), and offers a useful guide for a critical approach to this cleverly unconventional conventional feminist novel.

Lolly Willowes is permeated with failures to go for: feminist failures and failures of proscriptive womanhood, plot failures, and failures in modernist form and convention. Moreover, *Lolly Willowes* is animated by a subversive revisionist spirit³⁶ that seeks to amend the very structures and norms that limit the lives of women like Laura and, by extension, Warner’s capacity to tell Laura’s story. Laura’s various failures of womanhood and propriety, along with Warner’s literary and plot failure, open up the world and narrative possibilities for Laura as we observe her experiences of failure. Through these failures, Warner reshapes a conventional feminist liberation plot through the use of the unconventional: Laura gains her freedom through bizarre and alienating humour, wilful forgetting, and, most notably, through Satan himself. Warner also makes a point of depicting the long history of Laura’s enforced passivity from her childhood into her adulthood. Laura is not an independent and fiery young woman like those seen in feminist precursor novels by Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters; rather, Warner deliberately represents Laura’s movement toward autonomy as a long, slow process of being subjected to, and then gradually unlearning and resisting, gendered norms and expectations.

³⁶ This idea of a “revisionist spirit” stems from Terry Castle’s observation that *Summer Will Show* (1936) contains many “revisionist gestures” (81). Castle focuses her analysis on how *Summer Will Show* re-envisions Victorian literature while also undoing the centrality of male homosocial desire as described in Eve Sedgwick’s *Between Men*. I see a similar impulse for revisionism in *Lolly Willowes*. In this case, though, Warner is revising the interests and aesthetics of high modernism.

The slowness of Laura's resistance works in tandem with her failures, as Warner stages Laura's feminist resistance gradually, sometimes imperceptibly, which stands in stark contrast to the epic failures of characters like Lady Slane or Sophia Willoughby who break free from their varied constraints through grand acts of rebellion. Laura's rebellion happens so slowly it often goes unnoticed. Initially, she seems incapable of defiance since she is meek, quiet, and almost always acquiescent, and yet her various failures of manners, her fascination with the supernatural, her refusal to marry, and her penchant for extravagance all slowly amass to enable her freedom. One way of understanding the narrative and theoretical implications of what I call Laura's "slow resistance" is by turning to Rob Nixon's persuasive ideas about "slow violence." Nixon defines slow violence in terms of environmental destruction and neoliberalism. He clarifies that "[b]y slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). This slow violence defies the usual way we view violence, which is generally in terms of "an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, [or] as erupting into instant sensational visibility" (2). Nixon's idea of slow violence is helpful in not only thinking about environmental and political catastrophes, but also in terms of feminist resistance. In particular, I would like to seize on Nixon's idea of a violence so slow that it is typically "not viewed as violence at all" (2) to think about Laura's resistance, because a "slow resistance that is typically not viewed as resistance at all" is an apt way to describe her escape. To her family, Laura is an oddball and an outsider, but certainly not an activist. And to the reader, her triumphant submission to the devil at the novel's conclusion

appears to be a step backward in her climb to freedom, until we read the exchange through the unique feminist lens in which Warner has been slowly training us.

In practical terms, though, what does a slow feminist resistance look like? For Laura, her slow resistance takes the form of subtle and sometimes private acts of resistance that accrue over decades to slowly undermine her stifling family and build her confidence. She tells odd jokes to scare away potential suitors, nurses exotic and expensive plants stashed in her room, sneaks out to go for walks at night, and privately regards her family as being self-involved and steeped in stultifying tradition. Laura nurtures these aspects of her private life while simultaneously fulfilling her role as the spinster aunt, and so her resentment towards her patronizing family continues to bloom. It is precisely this resentment and these subtle subversions, which germinate over decades, that eventually give Laura the courage to pursue a life of her own.

Significantly, it is not only Laura who participates in a slow resistance. The novel itself slowly resists modernist conventions, which gradually creates space within modernist aesthetics for Laura's story, and consequently expands the possibilities of modernist feminist expression. Warner challenges the ostensible freedom of the modern city, tests the narrative possibilities of streams-of-consciousness, and blends fantasy and pastoral elements into her amended modernist aesthetic. These aesthetic "failures" are not fully legible until the end of the novel when the feat of Warner's subtle subversions can be seen as a whole. Through Laura's slow feminist resistance and the novel's slow resistance against modernist convention, Warner represents, and then refutes, some of the most toxic and sexist tropes of femininity. To her family (and initially to the reader), Laura embodies all the cultural reasons why women need a man to guide them through

life: she is silent, submissive, foolish, cannot think for herself, unemployable, forgetful, and content to stay in the home. However, through Laura's subtle acts of resistance, we start to understand that those are all traits imposed upon her, rather than innate expressions of her femininity. Warner does not merely reject those traits but instead refashions them into discreet acts of agency. For instance, Laura's silence and submission is an act of self-preservation because it is easier to accept what is expected of her than to put up a fight and lose. Meanwhile, her forgetfulness becomes a feminist act of refusal, and her love of the home (on her terms) is the novel's most realized feminist breakthrough. This is because Warner illustrates how the home can be a space of pleasure and fulfillment, and then represents the personal and interpersonal requirements necessary to make that possible. Through this work, Warner rehabilitates the home from a patriarchal space of domination into a space of feminist freedom.

Going for the failure in Lolly Willowes provides an opportunity to examine how failure shapes Laura's resistance and offers an interpretive opening into the slowness of her rebellion. Ultimately, the unique dynamics of failure, slowness, and forgetting in Warner's narrative make Laura's resistance legible in a world that undermines women's agency. Going for the failure also enables a discussion of the ways that scholarship has failed Warner herself, by relegating her outside of the modernist canon and most literary discourse generally. *Lolly Willowes* is absolutely a modernist text, but Warner uses modernist convention and interest incongruently, and wilfully fails the norms and rules of modernism that we have generally come to accept. If we are to go for the failure in *Lolly Willowes*, then, we must be attentive not only to how Warner wields failure as a critical tool to reflect upon the social conditions of Laura's life, and as a path toward her escape,

but also how Warner uses failure as a way to break open modernist conventions to make Laura's unique story possible. A critical reading of *Lolly Willowes* cognizant of these processes of failure and slowness sees that Warner's initially simple-seeming text is deeply invested in both the material conditions of women's lives in the early twentieth century, but also the conditions and expectations of feminist modernist expression.

Warner does not receive much scholarly attention, and when she is acknowledged, she is typically only given a cursory glance in modernist anthologies. As Robin Hackett describes, those scholars who do attentively study Warner are obliged to follow a formulaic custom of introducing Warner and her significance. Hackett deftly summarizes the routine of "critics writing about Warner [who] have repeatedly had to explain who she was, catalogue her many accomplishments, and exclaim over her absence from literary history" (84). Hackett also echoes the repeated claim that Warner's scholarly neglect is "exacerbated by an incredible diversity that makes her writing impossible to categorize" (86). Warner's "halting revival" (84), as Hackett calls it, is due to her play with multiple genres and because she was a woman who wrote bestselling fiction. *Lolly Willowes*, for instance, "proved both a fashionable and a critical success, the 'smart' thing to read that season" (Allen 113), while Warner's follow-up novel, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* (1927), was also popularly successful before her later novels began to fade into obscurity.³⁷ Warner has thus been doubly displaced within the modernist canon since the institutional formation of modernism has generally been reluctant to admit women into the canon, and until recently has been particularly averse to including authors

³⁷ While Warner's later novels did not garner much critical attention, she made a steady income from publishing short stories in *The New Yorker*. One hundred and forty-four of her stories were published in the magazine during her career, and she cheekily referred to the magazine as her "gentleman friend" (Krueger 388, Allen 115).

who straddled the line between the high and low brow.

Warner's absence from the canon precludes an important dissenting voice since she "had little love for the modishness of much modernist experimentation of her day" (Joannou ii). Warner was uninterested in high modernist aesthetics, which marks her as antagonistic to many high modernist ideals, and it is precisely this disregard for the conventions of modernism that enabled her to fail and expand the possibilities of modernist feminist expression in *Lolly Willowses*. Warner's fiction is deceptively complex, as she juggles her expansion of modernist aesthetics with feminist and Marxist political aims. Though the plot and prose of Warner's novels typically appear straightforward, Jane Garrity observes that "Warner's fiction, far from conventional or conservative, frequently melds social realism, fantasy, allegory, and literary allusion—always with an eye toward subversion. The cumulative effect of her individually accessible sentences is never that of transparency" (148). The "cumulative effect" that Garrity identifies is an essential component of the novel's slow feminist resistance.

Though *Lolly Willowses* does not initially seem feminist, its feminism is slowly uncovered as the world around Laura changes. Warner spends the first half of *Lolly Willowses* focused on the falling away of Edwardian values at the turn-of-the-century before turning her attention to World War One and how the war changed social relations. The early decades of Laura's life are used to explore the rapidly changing gender roles of early twentieth-century England, and Warner's use of recent history enables her to critique the previous generations of social structures that reverberated forward to produce the interwar gender roles of Laura's own time. In effect, the narrative is a history of Britain's recent past and present. In its exploration of changing gender roles, Warner also

explores the dogmatic and sometimes judgmental feminism that emerged during the period, which in many ways was just as prescriptive as patriarchal norms in its insistence that women's freedom lay outside of the home. In response, Laura offers her own quirky—and again, slow—model of feminist fulfillment as a counterpoint to prevailing feminist discourse. *Lolly Willowes* appears to be a relatively simple realist novel from the outset, but just like *Great Mop*, the village that Laura finds herself inexplicably drawn to in the latter half of the book, the novel is not what it appears. As *Lolly Willowes*' realism corrodes, its subtle politics become explicit, and Warner's novel opens up into a work that critiques Edwardian values, emerging feminist discourse and the orthodoxy of "liberated" women's rejection of domesticity, alongside conventional modernist aesthetics itself.

Disappointingly Charming Reviews and a Bewitched Public

One of the problems in identifying slow violence, as Nixon repeatedly stresses, is that there is a "representational bias against slow violence" (13) since people are accustomed to violence as a spectacular event. Consequently, it is easy to ignore slow violence because it lacks a sense of immediacy and intensity. These "representational challenges are acute, requiring creative ways of drawing public attention to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects" (10). In the same way, we can see how the slow and often gentle resistance of Warner's novel was missed by reviewers, who regarded the novel as Victorian, sedate, and charming, but not particularly political. Warner so elegantly and subtly embeds her politics into the narrative that even Satan's appearance can be written off as part of the novel's whimsy, and as such, it can lose its

feminist import. The novel's slow resistance thus created its own representational challenge, because unless readers came to the novel from a feminist perspective, they missed its subversiveness. However, we solve this representational problem when we thread together readings of the novel's slow resistance with Laura's feminist failures.

Lolly Willowes is a quirky novel about Laura Willowes' life and her efforts to achieve independence. As a young girl, Laura's doting father and sickly mother afford her unusual liberty, and she enjoys a childhood of outdoor games, gardening, and unsupervised reading. Though a gratifying freedom marks her childhood, she is still taught to be passive and uphold delicate feminine ideals by her father and brothers. Indeed, the family model of the ideal woman is great-great-aunt Salome who was "a loyal subject, a devout churchwoman, and a good housewife" who "the Willowes were properly proud of" (8). Salome's life thus becomes the example that all Willowes women are encouraged to follow. From birth, her father repeatedly likens Laura to a stuffed ermine he had as a child, which was "his ideal of the enchanted princess, so pure and sleek" (13) while her brothers would "dutifully cast [her] for some passive female part" (14) in their games. She is so good at this part that once, when "Laura as a captive princess had been tied to a tree, her brothers were so much carried away by a series of single combats for her favour that *they forgot* to come and rescue her" (15 emphasis added). Just as Laura's father imagines her to be his ermine brought to life, her brothers forget her tied to the tree because they, like their father, are more interested in the idea of who Laura can embody than Laura herself. Through these early examples, Warner quickly establishes the routine in Laura's life where she is conditioned by family and social convention to be passive, feminine, and quiet. Despite this childhood conditioning,

Laura lives a charmed life until her father dies when she is twenty-eight, at which point she is forced to move to the city and live with her brother, Henry, and his wife, Caroline.

The freedom Laura enjoyed at her family home of Lady Place is swiftly replaced with the busyness of city and domestic life in London. With Laura's refusal to marry, Henry and Caroline resign themselves to having Laura live with them forever, and she becomes subsumed into their family as "Aunt Lolly." At forty-seven, inspiration suddenly strikes, and Laura takes her few remaining assets—whatever Henry did not squander in bad investments—and moves to the little village of Great Mop. There, Laura regains her independence and happiness, only to have it again threatened by her unintentionally usurping nephew, Titus, who follows her to her new home and imposes upon her once again the fraught role of "Aunt Lolly". Desperate for Titus to leave, Laura makes a pact with the devil, and finding herself a witch, delights in the indifferent care of "the loving huntsman" who leaves her alone. *Lolly Willowes* is an unmistakably feminist novel for today's scholarly reader, as Warner makes pointed critiques of marriage, women's socially enforced passivity, and the various social foundations—including religious, legal, and educational institutions—that maintain and reinforce women's subjugation. Contemporary reviewers, however, did not quite read it that way.

Lolly Willowes was an immediate sensation. It sold well in Britain and the United States, had nine different editions published, was nominated for multiple awards, and received "rapturous" praise by critics (Macdonald 216-217). The *Springfield Republican* wrote that it "[s]tands out among the year's novels with few rivals in delicate perfection of workmanship" (30 May 1926), while the *Saturday Review of Literature* celebrated how it appealed to sophisticated readers: "How it tingles that rich, refined, and honorable

snobbishness of the pensive reader” (13 Feb. 1926). While most reviews were glowing, no one seemed to notice the novel’s feminist content, although the *Literary Digest International Book Review* revealed some sensitivity to Warner’s project by seeing that “the book is filled with refreshing wisdom about life and folks of all kinds” (Aug. 1926). Mostly, though, the novel was praised for being “charming,” which bothered Warner.

Responding to early reviews, Warner wrote to her friend David Garnett that “[o]ther people who have seen Lolly have told me that it was charming, that it was distinguished, and my mother said it was almost as good as Galsworthy.³⁸ And my heart sank lower and lower. I felt as though I had tried to make a sword, only to be told what a pretty pattern there was on the blade” (Maxwell 8; Waters 2012). Indeed, one review really did highlight the “pretty pattern” of the novel over its political content, with the *New Republic* stating that while the novel contained “stabs of genuine beauty and happy phrase...in the end it is all so mild, so like an interior decorating shop of emotions seen by candle-light” (17 Feb. 1926).³⁹ Reviewers who observed the novel’s gentle aesthetics and filigree are not wrong, but they failed to see that embedded within that mildness was also a political intervention. Warner wrote a novel that was gentle to read but sharp in content; to Warner’s dismay, that gentility overrode its politics.

As much as Warner greatly enjoyed the fame the novel brought her and was

³⁸ The *Saturday Review* similarly compared *Lolly Willowes* to men’s work, in fact noting that “Miss Warner’s curious tale owes something to Mr. Garnett in its conception and to Defoe in its execution.” (6 Feb. 1926, emphasis added). However, that same review noted that the novel was “feline in the best sense,” which likely would have gratified Warner, who was a noted cat-lover.

³⁹ In fact, the entire *New Republic* review is dismissive of Warner’s work. The review considers a few recently published novels, including D.H. Lawrence’s *The Plumed Serpent*. It begins with two paragraphs dedicated to Lawrence’s novel, followed by a single paragraph about *Lolly Willowes*, where the reviewer criticizes its “mildness” and “quaintish” names (which is followed by two full lines listing those names). The paragraph on Warner’s novel ends abruptly with the sentence, “[b]ack to D.H. Lawrence and his sizzling blood quest” (17 Feb. 1926). Here, the contemporary dismissal of Warner as a modernist is laid bare: her novel is dull, quaint, mild, and lacks any “sizzle” that a modernist like Lawrence can produce.

grateful for the enormous increase in her income (Harman 85, 66), the reviews of *Lolly Willowes* disappointed her. Readers were attracted to the novel's fantasy elements but failed to see how fantasy facilitated and upheld its feminism. Brooke Allen argues that *Lolly Willowes* was successful because it "played into a current vogue for so-called fantasy novels" (113) and the public's interest in witches. The interest in Laura Willowes as a witch was so enthusiastic, in fact, that the press frequently asked Warner if she were also a witch, which she indulged "with a mixture of candour and flippancy, at one time suggesting that modern witches might use their vacuum cleaners instead of broomsticks for flying" (Harman 65). The witchiness of both Laura Willowes and Warner even attracted the attention of Virginia Woolf. Harman recounts that during dinner with Woolf, "Mrs. Woolf asked how she knew so much about witches. 'Because I am one,' Sylvia replied" (66). Warner was smart to maintain her public witchy pretenses as the mystery around *Lolly Willowes* and its author helped maintain and expand public interest in her work. Warner's savvy marketing, however, coupled with a public unable to see the novel's submerged feminist content, came at the expense of her political intent; in reality, Warner's novel really was reduced to a charming decorative sword.

"Feme sole...and feme couverte, and all that sort of rot": Failing Feminism

The frank feminism of *Lolly Willowes* is precisely what has attracted contemporary scholarly attention, as it is immediately recognizable as a feminist *bildungsroman*. However, most scholarly attention paid to the novel has focused on its latter half where Laura achieves her much-debated liberation. As such, this work has unintentionally elided the compelling feminist critiques and transformative failures of the novel's first

half. Laura's story before she moves to Great Mop is crucial because it highlights Warner's claims about feminist orthodoxy and showcases her adaptation of modernist convention. What is unconventional about Laura's story, and worth lingering over, is how she slowly secures her freedom and critiques and fails early twentieth-century feminist ideals along the way.

The novel begins by taking stock of the distinct sense of unease that characterized the post-WWI period, caused in part by women's shifting public roles, and then moves into a description of Laura's conservative childhood. By structuring the opening this way, the novel pointedly juxtaposes the values of the late Victorian period with post-WWI England, thus depicting two very different and conflicting cultural and political climates. This contrast shows how swiftly England changed, but also how wholly unprepared Laura is to keep up with those changes. While Laura remains caught within the limited boundaries of her family's conservatism, the novel chronicles the advancement of (mostly white, middle-to-upper class) women in Britain from the figure of the New Woman, to temporary war-workers, to the Working Girl. Importantly, though, Warner also shows that this advancement was not a smooth transition for women in general, and especially not for women like Laura, who were raised with Victorian sensibilities. By contrasting the "forward spirits" (6) who embrace the social changes for women with Laura's family who obstinately cling to their traditions, Warner also depicts the limits of social progress. *Lolly Willowes* is a spinster narrative, after all, and Laura is perceived as odd, feared, and witch-like precisely because she refuses marriage.⁴⁰ Laura's freedom from marital constraints, then, socially imprisons her through conservative judgement.

⁴⁰ Representing social anxieties about women's independence, role in the family, and the maintenance of the hetero-patriarchy, the disquieting figure of the "spinster" or "old maid" in literature and popular culture

Early on, the novel foregrounds the importance of tradition in the Willowes family, for whom even the furniture conspires against social progress, as the family “slept in beds and sat upon chairs whose comfort insensibly persuaded them into respect for the good sense of their forebears” (3). Highlighting the growing disjunction between the Willowes’ conservative values and post-WWI England, the narrative flashes forward to a reflection of Laura’s adult niece Fancy, who had “grown up, and married, and lost her husband in war, and driven a lorry for the Government, and married again for patriotic motives” (6). Fancy exclaims to her husband, “[h]ow unenterprising women were in the old days! Look at Aunt Lolly. Grandfather left her five hundred a year, and yet she could find nothing better to do than to settle down with Mum and Dad” (6). In her critique of her aunt, Fancy misses how Laura *is* enterprising in her own subtle ways. Despite her status as an “inmate of the tall house in Apsley Terrace” (3), Laura rebels against her parsimonious brother by filling her small room with secret luxuries and by staying out until after the family has gone to bed, thus ensuring that she can come home without being interrogated about her whereabouts. Given the constraints of her life, these little acts of rebellion give Laura immense pleasure as well as a sense of control over her life. Fancy, meanwhile, is not only critical of how “unenterprising” her aunt is, but she also ignores the fact that there were people sympathetic to women’s independence even in the

is an old and pervasive stereotype. The spinster is generally a white middle-class woman, emerging from Victorian constructions of the unsettling and potentially dangerous single woman (Doan 2). That construction of the single woman as bizarre and dismaying continues to persist: “even though the number of single women globally is said to be on the increase, it appears that the spectre of the spinster looms large in the popular imaginary” since “the most visible and indeed the most anxiety-provoking single women in the Western mediasphere are still those who are not (or have not been) married” (Taylor 2). Warner’s spinster novel thus nicely slots into a long history of anxieties about single women which begin to take hold in the Victorian period, and which persist into today, where images of the single witchy-crazy-cat-lady are still exploited to disparage single women and make them the object of jokes.

“old days.” After Fancy’s observations, the narrator is quick to point out that “[e]ven in 1902 there were some forward spirits who wondered why that Miss Willowes, who was quite well off, and not likely to marry, did not make a home for herself and take up something artistic or emancipated,” but unfortunately, “[s]uch possibilities did not occur to any of Laura’s relations” (6) or, indeed, to Laura herself. Placing Fancy’s and the “forward spirits” reflections together foregrounds the pervasive, if not insidious influence of the Willowes’ conservative values on Fancy’s belief that all women were “unenterprising” in the “old days.” Ironically, while Fancy criticizes Laura, she does not realize that her life in service to a husband, children, and the nation is precisely the fate that Laura manages to avoid.

According to Fancy, Laura is a failure twice over. Fancy’s judgements highlight not only how Laura fails norms of womanhood by refusing marriage, but also how Laura fails as an “enterprising” New Woman. While Fancy criticizes Laura, Warner actually deploys Fancy to critique the figure of the wartime and post-war New Woman. Unlike the emergent feminist figure of the educated, independent, and employed New Woman at the turn-of-the-century, Warner shows that the ideal of the New Woman changed during World War One and signaled a regression of women’s independence. While Fancy asserts her authority as a “progressive” woman to her husband, Warner demonstrates that Fancy’s views are outdated, and that the New Woman has been eclipsed as the model for a progressive, independent woman’s life. Here, Warner proposes that “progressive” feminist ideals are really just confining conventions linked, in Fancy’s case, not only to the authority of a husband, but also to the authority of the nation. Fancy’s independence, Warner shows, is purchased by her participation in war efforts and her reproductive

submission to the nation's interests, and thus is only enabled by the nation's need.

In many ways, Fancy is portrayed as less independent than Laura since she is subject to more diffuse modes of control than Laura, who only lives under the control of her brother and does not feel any obligation to the nation or a husband. Warner thus implies that being a New Woman is merely a rebranding of feminine submission. Between Fancy and the "forward spirits" it is really the latter who have the most progressive views, since the forward spirits—suggestively left unnamed—do not insist that Laura's independence be bought at the cost of subservience to the nation, but instead should occur for her pleasure alone, not attached to anyone or anything. Just within the opening pages of the novel, then, Warner establishes a model of critique and failure that extends throughout the rest of the narrative. Fancy's choices and service to the war and husbands are figured not as freedom, but as additional constraints, and Warner offers up an alternative to Fancy's life through the "failed" life of Laura.

Warner offers another challenge to orthodox feminist values by remodeling the domestic sphere into a space of contentment and freedom. The New Woman and the Working Girl, like Fancy, each prioritize a woman's experience outside of domesticity, but Warner consistently undermines or nuances this value. Throughout each stage of Laura's life, Warner foregrounds the gentle peace and contentment that domesticity brings to Laura when she is in control of her home life and leisure time. Even during crisis or flux, domesticity is a comfort to Laura, like after her mother's death. Warner depicts a girl's adolescence as a loss of freedom and enforced passivity since she "must be subdued into young lady-hood" (19). For Laura, this transition is especially painful as her loss of childhood freedom coincides with the death of her mother. The only solace in

Mrs. Willowes' death is that Laura assumes the "easily-worn honours as mistress of the household" (62), which she considers "recompense for the loss of her liberty" (19). Jennifer Nesbitt observes that Laura's "service" to her father by taking over the responsibilities of the house "initially protects Laura from the growing demands of 'young-ladyhood'" which keeps her "relatively free from pressure to marry" (456). Laura discovers that "[e]scape is impossible, but negotiation is possible" (451), and she negotiates a life of relative freedom with her father by leveraging her socially prescribed—and seemingly inescapable—role as homemaker to avoid a permanent and legal status of submission. Importantly, though, Laura's attention to her father and home is not solely a political move; in fact, "[h]er life perfectly contented her" (29). Laura rarely goes out because home provides her the fulfillment she needs. Lady Place brings "colour into her cheeks and spirit into her being," (25) and is where she contentedly reads, oversees seasonal chores, and enjoys the witchy hobbies of botany and brewery.

When Laura is forced to move into her brother's house after her father's death, her animated spirit languishes, and it is not until she moves out at forty-seven that she again delights in domestic pleasures. In *Great Mop*, Laura enjoys mornings of reading and afternoons of napping, leisurely shopping trips, long walks in the countryside, and one afternoon, spends her time making currant scones cut in the shape of her fellow villagers to "amuse herself" (145). Warner makes a necessary feminist intervention here when she affirms that the home and its responsibilities do not automatically equate to submission and subjugation; notably, when under her own authority, Laura's experience of the home is emancipatory and deeply gratifying. Indeed, Warner shows that the pleasures of everyday domesticity can be a form of resistance. This hopeful portrayal of

domesticity and reassessment of the assumption that women are imprisoned in the home advances Warner's earlier critique of the New Woman, as she shows that a woman does not have to reject domesticity in order to be liberated. By re-figuring the home as a hindrance to "enterprising" women to a potentially liberating space, Warner opens up rather than forecloses opportunities for women seeking alternatives to feminine submission.⁴¹

The home is still a contested space within feminist discourse, and was especially so in the early twentieth-century when feminist groups fought for women's rights and rejected the home as the primary territory of women's subjugation. This is why Warner's affirmation of the domestic is such a crucial feminist intervention, since Laura's experience of the home is neither static nor always oppressive. It is also significant that Warner's novel was a popular sensation, as her representation of domesticity stands in contrast to other popular depictions of the home. Sally Alexander observes that in the 1920s and 1930s, "advertising and cinema, playing on fantasy and desire, enabled women to *imagine* an end to domestic drudgery and chronic want. Images of streamlined kitchens, effective cleaning equipment...on hoardings and cinema screens and in the new women's magazines, added a new dimension to romance—a source of narrative pleasure" (205). Part of the narrative pleasure of *Lolly Willowes* is quite different from the pleasure Alexander highlights. For Laura, the narrative pleasure comes from seeing her finally move to the countryside and enjoy quiet domestic life on her own terms. Notably, Laura's

⁴¹ Like all of the opportunities afforded to the New Woman and Working Girl, Laura's ability to enjoy domestic life is predicated on her having enough money to support herself. Reimagining domestic life as potentially liberating is an important feminist intervention to be sure, but this critique is undoubtedly exclusionary and limited. Warner complicates her critique with a sense of class consciousness in her later *Summer Will Show* (1936) when she again asserts that domesticity can be liberating, but in the latter novel, she is acutely conscious of the class barriers that impact racialized and poor women's lives.

ideal of a liberated domesticity is distinctly pastoral and unencumbered by modern conveniences. Laura's ideal of the domestic eschews the modern and remains set in an ideal past, while at the same time, her achievement of independence is enabled by modern feminist efforts.

Warner's hopeful and rural depiction of domestic life fundamentally reimagines and transforms the "cult of domesticity." The "cult of domesticity" refers both to the ideal position of women in the home that emerged in the eighteenth century and influenced gender roles into the twentieth century, but also to scholarly critiques of women's assumed role in the home. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes how the "Cult of Domesticity (or the Cult of True Womanhood) had its roots in the emerging bourgeois literature of eighteenth century England" which advocated a series of restrictions on women's lives, and upheld the ideal that a so-called "true woman" had to be "confined to the home, devoted to the husband and children, and eschew productive labor and the political arena" (139).⁴² Meanwhile, scholars like Barbara Welter, Deborah Rotman, Katie Gentile and others refer to the cult of domesticity as a kind of shorthand for oppressive gender roles where "the home was defined as a private, female sphere in opposition to the public economic sphere" (Rotman 666). Gal Gerson writes of the domestic in more hopeful terms, however, and echoes Warner's claims that the home can be a happy and liberating place when negotiated individually and through the various norms and hierarchies that attempt to control private life. Gerson writes that when "free of preconceived expectations, household forms proliferate to the point where the familiar

⁴² Amusingly, Laura's experience of domesticity in her later life really does usher her into a kind of cult. However, her experience of the witchy cult of domesticity is distinctly liberating and not loaded with the assumptions and impositions of gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality.

image of domesticity—an image that anchors received notions of the private sphere’s distinction from politics—dissolves, and its place is taken by a multiplicity of arenas for debate and change” (653).

Warner represents some of those multiplicities in her novel: we see Laura’s experience of the home while living with her father, her brother-in-law, and finally, when she rents a bedroom and parlour in Mrs. Leak’s cottage. If the cult of domesticity is predicated on heterosexual kinship and uneven power dynamics within the home, then Laura’s most powerful form of “debate and change”—or negotiation, to return to Nesbitt’s term—occurs when she rejects marriage and lives alone. When Laura lives with her father, she is free to do as she pleases and enjoys taking care of the home, but the most striking example of a liberated household form comes when Laura moves to Great Mop.⁴³ Initially, Laura’s landlady, Mrs. Leak, treats her with a distant, servile deference. She brings Laura dinner and supplies her with books, but “showed no curiosity” in Laura or her activities (118). Laura is not able to “thaw” Mrs. Leak until she compliments one of her home-brewed drinks, which makes the women realize that they both share an interest in making distillations. After this, the two women fall into a relaxed evening tradition of drinking home-made wine after dinner and chatting by the fire.

Laura’s experience of living in the Leak home is figured through her bond with Mrs. Leak and the negotiations of their shared domestic space. Indeed, one of the first interactions between Mrs. Leak and Laura is a negotiation: Laura insists that she get both a bedroom and a parlour, and she requests that she cook her own cheeses and mushrooms

⁴³ Notably, Laura rents the space that “till last year an aunt with means of her own had occupied” (111). Laura thus takes over the home of another liberated aunt, and so the space itself seems especially suited to provide spinster aunts with rooms of their own.

on the hearth (110). Mrs. Leak consents to all of her requests. Mr. Leak, meanwhile, plays no role in Laura's initial move into the home, has almost no impact on Laura's life besides being an unseen snoring presence, and does not seem to play a considerable role in Mrs. Leak's life, either. Mr. Leak is simply portrayed as a background figure, like a piece of furniture. Laura avoids the cult of domesticity because her life in the Leak home is not established through the subject position of wife or mother. And after Titus leaves, her life becomes free from the role of aunt, too. In *Great Mop*, Laura's life is finally her own, and she finds that pleasure and independence by renting from Mrs. Leak, forming a genuine friendship with her, and by negotiating the terms of their shared home. With this relationship, Warner reveals how the home can be a space of freedom for women, while also staging the conditions necessary to make that possible.

“She had no thoughts”: Failing Modernist Aesthetics in Search of New Expression

No such negotiations take place between Laura and her sister-in-law Caroline when Laura is forced to move to London. When Laura moves to London, the novel describes her as almost impossibly passive, but through this depiction of her passivity, Warner offers a subtle challenge to the modernist preoccupation with narrating consciousness. This challenge is evident in Laura's lack of thinking as the novel repeatedly shows that she does not expend much energy on the activity. “Laura was not thinking at all” (3) while Caroline made arrangements to move Laura after the death of her father, and fantastically, later in the novel, Laura exclaims “O Satan! Why do you encourage me to talk when you know all my thoughts?” to which Satan replies, “I encourage you to talk, not that I may know your thoughts, but that you may” (244). James Harker has studied

how this “cognitive minimalism” (44) functions as a formal principle in *Lolly Willowes*, which “provides a new way of understanding modernism’s ‘inwardness’” (45). Harker argues that Laura’s lack of thinking is unique in modernist literature, where the inner lives of protagonists are often revealed in great detail, sparked by modernity’s excess of stimuli. Warner’s protagonist, however, suffers from a profound lack of external stimuli in London. As Harker shows, most of the moments in the novel where Laura speaks at length or has her thoughts conveyed by the narrator occur after she has left Apsley Terrace to live in Great Mop and commune with nature and Satan. Harker argues that Warner’s representation of thinking demonstrates “the social conditions that encourage and discourage certain kinds of thinking, in particular women’s thinking” (59). These social conditions are exemplified by how silent Laura is—both verbally and mentally—while she remains a captive of her brother’s patronizing watch.

Through her challenge to the narrative technique of streams-of-consciousness, Warner also challenges representations of the modern city. The descriptions of Lady Place and Apsley Terrace establish the familiar dichotomy between the countryside and city by depicting London as a space void of the natural pleasures that Lady Place provided Laura during her youth. However, Warner sharply uses this dichotomy to invert the conception of the cosmopolitan woman as independent and modern. Modernist literature often focuses on life in the city, and authors like Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys use their female protagonists’ mobility throughout and experience of the city to make their feminist claims. But Laura’s experience is much like Lady Slane’s in *All Passion Spent*, where the city is restrictive. Warner, like Sackville-West, depicts the city as dull and oppressive. Franco Moretti argues that the modernist technique of streams-of-

consciousness arose in response to the psychological tensions and intensity of stimuli brought by modernity and the city (124). According to Moretti, streams-of-consciousness provided a method for modernist authors to manage and wade through the shock, variety, and force of the city experience. As such, the technique “provides the metropolis with a form, and its inhabitants with a perspective” (124). For Laura, though, the city has the exact opposite effect. The city does not offer perspective, nor does it offer much beyond a deadening oppression. Neither does it stimulate thought—however frenzied, fragmented, or troubled—but instead silences thought altogether through its tedium, its claustrophobically oppressive institutions, and its routine. Warner explicitly disregards the union between the modern city and consciousness in her depiction of Laura’s consciousness. In fact, Warner’s deliberate use of non-thinking in *Lolly Willowes* becomes central to Laura’s freedom and Warner’s feminist critique. Late in the novel, Laura wilfully decides to forget the people and institutions who have oppressed her and only begins thinking at length once she has left the city. The city is thus explicitly marked as a silencer of thought and articulation, and Warner’s vision of the city is an example of the revisionist spirit that animates and makes Laura’s story possible through subtle, compound failures.

Both Barbara Brothers and Terry Castle have identified a trend in Warner’s fiction where she refutes literary and social conventions in order to produce less restricted representations of women’s lives. Brothers argues that in *Lolly Willowes*, “Warner realizes that a radical re-visioning of Western culture and the literary tradition that expresses and imparts Western values is necessary if women are to come to know themselves and create their own stories” (196). Similarly, Castle argues that Warner’s

later *Summer Will Show* (1936) is “profoundly anticanonical” and a kind of “revisionist fantasia” (81, 80). Castle asserts that *Summer Will Show* contains multiple “revisionist gestures” (81), including the considerable undertaking where Warner “constantly pastiches—yet also rewrites—Victorian fiction itself” (80). Warner’s debut contains a similar revisionist agenda as *Summer Will Show*. The difference with *Lolly Willowes*, though, is its striking modernist specificity, and Laura’s lack of thinking is one such example.

Access to a protagonist’s streams-of-consciousness is one of the hallmarks of high modernism, but it is also a feminist modernist strategy of critique and representation. Modernists like Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and Jean Rhys use streams-of-consciousness as part of a feminist writing strategy to capture the sometimes-fleeting senses of the world around their protagonists and to exhibit how sexism and patriarchy affect women’s lives in various ways. In the first novel of *Pilgrimage*, Richardson’s increasingly aesthetically complex series, she uses the technique to reveal her seventeen-year-old protagonist Miriam’s sense of unbelonging, her ambitions and insecurities, and her sense that as a young woman her only options are to become a governess and grow old. Virginia Woolf, modernism’s most famous feminist, masterfully uses streams-of-consciousness to variously critique gender norms, heteronormativity, ageism, restrictions of family and domestic life, and the limits of women’s agency in patriarchal England in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To The Lighthouse*, and *Orlando*. And Jean Rhys uses streams-of-consciousness in her early fiction to unflinchingly depict the depression, anguish, and shame felt by women who have been marginalized for failing norms of femininity and respectability.

Richardson, Woolf, and Rhys each wield streams-of-consciousness as a powerful tool to produce their feminist critiques, but Warner's lack of streams-of-consciousness is just as impactful. Instead of experiencing the richly felt and complex world that characters like Clarissa Dalloway or Sasha Jansen reflect to us, Warner alienates her readers from Laura's thoughts, and repeatedly draws attention to Laura's lack of thinking and her dull life in order to reorient our sense of her experience as a woman. Harker argues that Warner's use of cognitive minimalism forms "an implicitly feminist social critique" (45), but there is nothing implicit about Warner's feminist critique here—on the contrary, Laura's lack of thinking forms a crucial component of Warner's political project. Rather than feeling Laura's subjugation, or seeing it through her eyes, we are forced to singularly focus on the social and familial structures that render Laura passive and unthinking. We do not have privileged access to her thoughts, as we are asked to focus on *why* Laura does not think, rather than *how* it is she is not thinking. As readers, we spend most of our time watching Laura closely, just to the side of her consciousness and our ability to understand her fully, and we see how she is buffeted by norms of femininity and propriety. Warner, thus, does not simply fail modernist aesthetics, nor are her aesthetics simple—instead, her play with consciousness is a significant intervention in modernist feminist critique, since her intentional and carefully plotted use of thinking and non-thinking offers us an entirely different perspective of Laura's life than the perspectives we see in Richardson, Rhys, and Woolf. As Garrity argues, finding a place for Warner in the modernist canon "will necessarily alter our notions of canonicity" because scholars will have to rethink "not only how Warner's work might conform to the aesthetics of modernism, but how the aesthetic itself is altered by her inclusion" (243).

Warner's play with streams-of-consciousness is a compelling example of how her work challenges modernist aesthetics; in fact, her play with representations of consciousness proposes a new form of modernist feminist critique altogether.

When Laura moves to Apsley Terrace, she does not think because she is emptied of her identity and sense of self and because her role as an aunt, sister-in-law, and woman does not permit thinking but instead rewards domestic productivity. Warner depicts Laura as a passive object of the move, even at the level of sentence structure, as "Henry and Caroline left Lady Place, taking Laura with them" (44). Laura is also immediately infantilized by Caroline, who "put her to bed as soon as they arrived in Apsley Terrace, which simplified her unhappiness by making her feel like an unhappy child" (44). This moment between Caroline and Laura emphasizes not only how Laura's thinking is limited in her new role at Apsley Terrace (she has no choice that she is moving, just as she has no choice in how she spends her time anymore), but even Laura's affects are tempered by Caroline's occupation as mistress of the house. Meyrav Koren-Kuik argues that after the move, "Laura defends herself by going into spiritual hibernation; on the outside she abides by the rules of a place which make no sense to her, while inwardly she withers away" (249). We see Laura's "withering" through her passivity and her lack of thinking, but we also see brief glimpses of her amenable façade wearing down. When Laura is barred from doing "useful needlework" since that is Caroline's work, she is "driven to embroidery" (46). The narrator notes that "[e]ach time that a strand of silk rasped against her fingers she shuddered inwardly" and Laura "actually had a sensation that she was stitching herself into a piece of embroidery" (46). Here, Laura is overcome by the surreal sense that she is literally stitching herself into her new role as Aunt Lolly

and the permanence of familial tradition. Crucially, this moment of self-awareness is registered in a vivid, visceral sense, rather than in a cognitive sense. The feeling does not last long, though, as Laura remembers Caroline's proverb that "it was impossible to feel dull when there was much to do" (46).

Time at Apsley Terrace passes rapidly in the narrative since each day is as routine as the last. Laura, who is first introduced in the household "as a sort of extra wheel, soon found herself part of the mechanism, and, interworking with the other wheels, went round as busily as they" (47). Amid the mechanics of the household, Laura soon becomes known as "Aunt Lolly" to her family, a title that is likened to a sort of death, since when "Laura went to London she left Laura behind, and entered into a state of Aunt Lolly" (61-62). Essentially, Warner "presents the process of urbanization as one of moving from life to death" (Knoll 352) and presents the process of her becoming "Aunt Lolly" and part of Apsley Terrace in much the same way. Brothers identifies the paradox in Laura's re-naming here, noting that "Laura becomes 'Lolly' and 'Miss Willowes,' both a child and spinster" (196), but Laura's re-naming also reinforces how "[n]ames, both proper and common, impart the values of a culture" (198). Both Laura's re-naming and her displacement to the city alienate her from her sense of self and consciousness, while also literally casting her body into culturally acceptable spaces and social identifications.

"the clue to the secret country of her mind": Conscious Transformation and WWI

Non-thinking is a crucial part of Warner's intervention into modernist aesthetics and is another example of her slow resistance, since the impact of Laura's non-thinking is only apparent after we see it slowly amass over the novel's first half. Once the war begins,

though, a new kind of non-thinking with different critical dimensions emerges. Here, Warner emphasizes resistance and freedom through forgetfulness, where forgetting becomes an “interruption to generational modes of transmission that ensure the continuity of ideas, family ties, and normativity itself” (Halberstam 123). Willful forgetting thus becomes a part of Laura’s slow and private rebellion against her family, as she chooses to discard aspects of their belief system. Importantly, her ability to forget is occasioned by the war, and it is her intentional use of forgetfulness, coupled with her newly emboldened joy in being a social failure, that enables her impending freedom.

Warner does not linger over the war itself; instead, she focuses on its after-effects on Laura’s consciousness. The social effects of the war empower Laura’s freer thinking, helps her to see the inconsistency between her family’s outdated values and the changing world around them, and breaks her free of her “spiritual hibernation” (246). Koren-Kuik argues that Warner is careful to explicitly tie this change to the end of the war, since the “date that signifies the beginning of Laura’s personal process of awakening, and the only explicit date in the novel, is November 11, 1918...a date which signals that collective realization that reality has altered and will never revert back to its pre-war course” (246). When Laura learns the war has ended, she leaves her temporary war-work position in a parcel depot⁴⁴ and heads home to go to bed. There, she enters into a feverish fugue for a few weeks and is cared for by Caroline. Laura’s reaction after the war ends is strikingly similar to her experience when she is forced to move to Apsley Terrace: she goes to bed

⁴⁴ Laura, like many women, participates in the war effort, but the “war had no such excitements for Laura” like Fancy and other women who drove “motor lorries” in other countries (70). Instead, Laura’s experience of war-work is much like her experience of domestic responsibility under Caroline’s direction. Laura “did up parcels” four days a week and was so acquiescent and capable in the job that, “no one thought of offering her a change of work,” and nor does Laura bother to ask for one (70). Laura’s war-work is not liberating; instead, it is framed as an extension of her subjugated domestic responsibility as a woman.

and is cared for by Caroline, only to wake up days later in an entirely new world. Except, Laura's second recovery is marked by a conscious transformation that is, as yet, undetectable to Henry and Caroline, and still barely noticeable to Laura herself.

When Laura recovers, she goes downstairs to see Henry and Caroline basking in “a demure Willowes-like satisfaction in the family tree that had endured the gale with an unflinching green heart” (72). Initially, Laura is also proud of her family, and even fondly remembers a time when a woman had asked Henry if the family retreated into the basement or went upstairs to the roof during air-raids, to which Henry responded, “[w]e do neither...we stay where we are” (72). Hearing Henry's response:

A thrill had passed through Laura when she heard this statement of the Willowes mind. But afterwards she questioned the validity of the thrill. Was it nothing more than the response of her emotions to other old and honourable symbols such as the trooping of the colours and the fifteenth chapter of Corinthians, symbols too old and too honourable to have called out her thoughts? She saw how admirable it was for Henry and Caroline to have stayed where they were. But she was conscious, more conscious than they were, that the younger members of the family had somehow moved into new positions. And she herself, had she not slightly strained against her moorings, fast and far sunk as they were? (72)

For the first time, Laura notices that she has never before interrogated Henry's ideas—just as she never thought twice about royal pageants or bible verses—but as soon as she realizes that these things are constructions of old value systems, she experiences a startling breach in her worldview that breaks open her conscious awareness of herself and the world around her. This moment does not mark the beginning of Laura's liberation,

though. Her admission that she has long strained against Henry's values is striking because here, Laura recognizes that despite how "fast and far sunk" her moorings have been, she has always been subtly agitating against them. Indeed, her moorings briefly rattle up to the surface of her consciousness when she sees her family resume their life like the war had not happened, but soon after, "the buffeting waves withdrew, and she began to settle back into her place" (73).

Despite her sense that she is settling "back into her place," Laura's thoughts of the war and her family are irresistible, and she continues analyzing the post-war change in her consciousness. "Outwardly there was no difference between her and Henry and Caroline in their resumption of peace," she thinks, except they "had done with the war, whereas she had only shelved it, and that by an accident of consciousness" (73). This accident of consciousness recalls Harker's work on cognition since Laura's reflection shows how the war, by enabling her new self-determined thinking, allows her to recognize that her passive role within the family is a product of her brother's will. In turn, this warrants the broader awareness that her subjugation is the result of systemic processes.

After Laura's conscious transformation, the family returns to their annual summer holiday in East Bingham. The novel pointedly mocks Henry's and Caroline's unchanging beliefs and perception of the world when the family returns to see that "the sandbags had rotted and burst and the barbed-wire had been absorbed into the farmer's fences" (74). Rather than register this scene as remnants of a deadly and costly war that changed the social and cultural landscape of Europe, Caroline remarks that the trip is "quite like old times," to which Laura wryly replies, "[e]xcept for these anachronisms" (74). Laura's

vaguely sarcastic response is one of the first times that she verbally asserts herself, and her subtle refusal to agree with Caroline highlights Anne Cunningham's assertion that "refutation is an example of how passivity functions as resistance" (374). By denying Caroline's nostalgic desire that the scene is "quite like old times," Laura refuses to forget the war, thereby refusing to re-instate the Edwardian values on which Henry and Caroline so desperately cling. As her final words in Part I, Laura's comment about the anachronistic scene gestures to the continued loosening of her moorings, and to the coming dramatic changes in her character. What first appears to be a simple act of disagreeing, then, is actually a powerfully emancipatory moment in which Laura refuses the authority of Caroline's perception of the world, through which she also implicitly refuses the authority of her brother.

Significantly, Laura recognizes that her new sense of the world and self is unusual—if not a total affront to her family—because she refers to her new awareness as "an accident of consciousness." Caroline, for instance, is not impacted by such an accident since she is comfortably able to resume her pre-war life, but for Laura, the "accident" irrevocably changes her. We have already seen how Warner carefully deploys thinking and non-thinking to produce some of her feminist critiques, so it is not surprising that it is an "accident of consciousness" that sparks Laura's drive for independence. Having been spurred on by the war to think again and to question Henry and Caroline's assumed authority, Laura is finally fully conscious of the structures that have kept her passive for years, but which until now, had only occurred to her in brief flashes or visceral senses of unease. The richly ambiguous phrase "accident of consciousness" is also suggestive of the greater swell in feminist consciousness that the

war empowered, which unlike Caroline, Laura is unable to ignore or forget.

Laura's inability to forget the war is especially noteworthy given that later in the novel, she develops a habit of consciously forgetting the people in her life who hinder her independence once she moves to Great Mop and becomes a witch. After this final move, Laura purposely forgets Caroline and her family, and later goes on to forget her friend, Mr. Saunter. Indeed, forgetting becomes central to Laura's strategy of resistance. While enjoying a summer day in her new home of Great Mop, Laura reflects upon her family of "tyrants" and the institutions that oppressed her. She realizes her family's conservatism is part of a vast and complex series of social institutions, and considers what institutions she would need to forgive if she were a forgiving person (which she is not). She concludes that she would need to forgive "Society, the Law, the Church, the History of Europe, the Old Testament, great-great-aunt Salome and her prayer-book, the Bank of England, Prostitution, the Architect of Apsley Terrace, and half a dozen other useful props of civilization" (152). The list is long but not exhaustive, and Laura realizes that since she cannot forgive, "[a]ll she could do was to go on forgetting them" (152). Harker argues that "[w]hat is wrong with the world is simply too overwhelming. Laura must *not think*; she must forget in order to put the past behind her and to avoid being crushed by a society that does not afford her a satisfying life" (55). Laura's realization of systemic oppression is indeed overwhelming, but this process of forgetting is also a feminist strategy that has the dual benefits of self-protection and familial disruption. Halberstam writes that "[w]e may want to forget family and forget lineage and forget tradition in order to start from a new place, not the place where the old engenders the new, where the old makes a place for the new, but where the new begins afresh, unfettered by memory,

tradition, and usable pasts” (70). Laura recognizes this power, too, since she sees that forty-seven years of her life were consumed by her family and the institutions they support, and as such, deems them unworthy of any more of her time. Read in this context, Laura’s forgetfulness is not because she is overwhelmed or witless; instead, Laura’s agency is recuperated when we see that her forgetfulness is an intentional strategy that helps her secure her freedom and undermine her oppressive family.

“her thoughts were elsewhere”: Plotting against the Ideal Housewife

Similar to how Warner uses Fancy’s earlier comments about “unenterprising” women as a way to critique emergent feminist discourse, Warner uses the holiday scene between Caroline and Laura to establish two very different women and approaches to life.

Caroline, described as “a good wife, a fond and discreet mother, a kind mistress, a most conscientious sister-in-law” (52), is utterly uninterested in the new post-war world.

Drawing attention to when Laura notes how tidy Caroline’s linens are, to which Caroline replies “[t]he graveclothes were folded in the tomb” (52), Bruce Knoll argues that

“Warner writes of Caroline as though she were already dead, and of Laura as the paradigmatic angel in the house” (350). While Knoll is correct that Warner establishes

Caroline as a sort of automaton, in many senses dead to anything other than her husband’s will, he misreads Laura’s role as the emblematic Angel in the House. If

anything, Caroline is the embodiment of the Angel in the House since she appears to be a devoted mother and wife, but secretly feels that wifeness and maternity are “her duties,

rather than her glories” (60). Warner undermines her novel’s Angel in the House, though, by directing our attention to the secret of Caroline’s displeasure, and by subtly suggesting

that even the Angel in the House may sometimes prefer the company of the devil.

Laura, the only Willowes brave enough to eventually embrace the devil, is unwilling to bow entirely to a submissive role in the house, as is evident by her fervent desire to avoid marriage and her developing sense that she should accept her eccentric nature. While Laura is almost impossibly passive before her “accident of consciousness,” she is remarkable for her persistent failures of gendered norms and respectability, demonstrated by her wry comments and bizarre sense of humour about the supernatural, which she enjoys showcasing when her family tries to find her suitors. By pausing to interpret Laura’s failures of norms and manners *as* failures, rather than lapses in social convention or character oddities, going for the feminist failure here reveals how Warner uses these moments not (just) as comedic intervention, but as indicative of Laura’s developing affirmations of autonomy and as part of her unique feminist critique. Laura does not spectacularly fail social conventions once and experience an immediate emancipatory effect; rather, Warner shows that failure is sometimes a slow process of chipping away at social norms and systemic processes. Laura’s persistent but subtle failures (bringing secret luxuries into the house, refusing Caroline’s Edwardian nostalgia, aimless wandering) are also a form of subversive and refutative negotiation.⁴⁵ This notion of refutative negotiation returns us to Nesbitt’s earlier observation that Laura discovers that “[e]scape is impossible, but negotiation is possible” (451) when living with her father. Nesbitt’s insight is important because she identifies negotiation as a vital tool of resistance for Laura. However, I see the use of Laura’s negotiation shifting throughout the novel, since she slowly employs a refutative negotiation that eventually enables her

⁴⁵ This idea of a refutative negotiation is inspired both by Jennifer Nesbitt’s assertion about negotiation and Anne Cunningham’s reading of refutation as a key form of intervention in Jean Rhys’s fiction.

escape. By insistently and repeatedly refusing what is expected of her while living with Henry, Laura very slowly negotiates herself out of the norms of respectability that Henry attempts to enforce. These refusals eventually make way for her escape to Great Mop, but they also dramatize the artificiality of social convention.

We see this refutative negotiation most comically and incisively when Henry and Caroline bring over potential suitors for Laura, or “suitable and likely undertakers” (56), as the narrator humourlessly describes them. Having been unsuccessful in their pursuits and feeling annoyed over how much money they have spent inviting men over for dinner, Henry and Caroline invite one final suitor, Mr. Arbuthnot, over for tea one Sunday afternoon. To their surprise, they see Laura take “special pains to be nice to him” (57). Mr. Arbuthnot, a lawyer, holds himself in high regard and “felt that being thirty-five he owed himself a wife, and he also felt that Laura would do very nicely” (57). Mr. Arbuthnot also reflects upon how his aunt would always try to employ servants who had been trained in Mrs. Willowes’ home and hopes that Caroline is as equally good at “training wives” (57) as her late mother-in-law was at training servants. By every description, Mr. Arbuthnot is an archetype of the most repellent of patriarchs.

Nonetheless, Laura entertains these visits for months because she “had come more and more to look on Mr. Arbuthnot as an indulgence” (57), though “nothing would have induced her to marry him” (58). Just as expectations build for an impending marriage, Laura “wrecks” her family’s “good intentions” by responding to Mr. Arbuthnot’s claim that “February was a dangerous month” with the observation that indeed it was, because “[i]f you were a were-wolf, and very likely you may be, for lots of people are without knowing, February, of all months, is the month when you are most likely to go out on a

dark windy night and worry sheep” (57-58). Laura’s response is an unmistakable and thinly veiled appraisal of how the courtship process is a hunt where predatory patriarchs like Mr. Arbuthnot stalk women pacified by social convention. Laura’s curious reply also prefigures the novel’s later turn to fantasy, and how the realm of the supernatural will become the world in which she finds independence and contentment living in Satan’s thrall. Of course, Laura’s assessment of Mr. Arbuthnot as a predator is momentarily destabilized when she later delights in this union with Satan—the most famous predator in the Christian tradition. Ultimately, though, Warner portrays Satan as an antidote to the predatory courtship and marriage in which her family tries to ensnare her. Brothers argues that Warner’s vision of Satan is not particularly menacing and should not trouble readers because “Warner makes Satan into what Lolly conceives him to be,” which is someone who “listens and faithfully attends to Lolly’s words” (209). Much like Laura’s quirky refutation of marriage, Warner’s manner of securing Laura’s freedom is subversively peculiar and unconventional. Laura’s turn to Satan is irreverent and resistant to a conventional feminist ending, and the novel itself behaves, like Laura, insubordinately.

When Laura jokes about werewolves to everyone’s horror, she refutes the norms of courtship and of women being property passed along male lines, which disentangles herself from that process once and for all. On this occasion, Laura’s resistance is anything but slow. With her comment, she also refutes and highlights the artificiality and conventions of conversation when she shows how discussion of the supernatural is unthinkable in polite company, while tedious conversations about “climbing Welsh mountains” or “gathering parsley fern” (57) are entirely acceptable. Laura’s

unwillingness to perform the role of her gender and class appropriately, along with her failure of manners, swiftly renders her a disrespectable subject. Laura cannot control how the names of “Miss Willowes” and “Aunt Lolly” have cast her into culturally acceptable social identifications, but she does have control over her own participation in respectability politics. Her failure of class-appropriate respectability is yet another form of refutative negotiation since, after this dinner, Henry and Caroline give up on finding her a suitor.

Refutative negotiation is essential to Laura’s eventual independence, but it is only one part of two critical features of her feminist strategy, as her remarkable persistence enables these negotiations. Sara Ahmed reminds us that “there is nothing ‘mere’ about persistence. Persistence can be a deviation from a trajectory, what stops the hurtling forward of fate, what prevents a fatality” (10). And it is precisely through Laura’s persistence in failing norms and expectations—forty-seven years of persistence and failure, in fact—that she is finally able to eke out an independent life for herself. In the end, it is these persistent refutative negotiations that lead to the emancipation that revives her from her dead life in London.

Persistence, in fact, forms a crucial component of Warner’s novel and feminism in multiple ways. The significance of persistence is evident in Warner’s feminist writing strategy and in the plot of the novel. What makes *Lolly Willowes* unconventional is the persistently weird, incongruent, and failed moments in the text: the blend of realism and fantasy, the subtle critiques of feminist discourse that build and develop over the course of the novel, and the re-envisioning of the modernist city and use of consciousness. Persistence works in conjunction with slow resistance as persistence is what powers the

novel's slow undoing of the political, narrative, and aesthetic constraints surrounding Warner's protagonist. Even Laura's strategy of forgetting can be read through the lens of feminist persistence. Typically, forgetting is a passive conscious experience marked by a lack of thinking. For Laura, though, willful forgetting becomes a conscious choice and active task as she is regularly confronted by the people and institutions who have oppressed her, even when she flees to her refuge in Great Mop.

“She had not come...to concern herself with the hearts of men”: Romancing Great Mop

Laura persistently makes it clear to Henry and Caroline that she is not interested in marriage, but Warner works to make Laura's desire for solitude especially explicit once she moves to Great Mop. Returning to the idea of Warner's multiple revisionist gestures, Castle argues that part of Warner's project in *Summer Will Show* is animated by “the desire to plot *against* the seemingly indestructible heterosexual narrative of classic European fiction” (81-82). Likewise, *Lolly Willowes* plots against, or fails, heterosexual narratives in multiple ways: Laura blatantly rejects and mocks marriage and rituals of courtship; Warner repeatedly emphasizes Laura's happiness being alone and in nature; and, in a spectacular example of failing narrative convention, Warner creates a classic romance plot between Laura and Mr. Saunter only to frustrate narrative expectations and abandon—or forget—the plot.

Laura does not spend much time socializing in Great Mop since she prefers the company of nature, so it comes as a surprise when she develops a friendship with the local poultry farmer, Mr. Saunter, “a serious, brown young man, who after the war had refused to go back to his bank in Birmingham” (132). Laura and Mr. Saunter are

narratively aligned by their shared choice to leave the city for the country after the war, while the vague descriptor of Mr. Saunter being “brown” also implicitly suggests that he, too, is subject to the disadvantages of living in a white patriarchal society. Laura’s first impression of Mr. Saunter is of him being “perfectly of a piece with his surroundings,” which makes her feel like an “intruder” (132). Upon finding out that a badger had just gotten into his henhouse and killed some of his hens, Laura finds herself compelled to comfort him. This urge suggests that Laura feels an immediate affection for Mr. Saunter, and so it initially appears that she might be romantically interested in him.

When Mr. Saunter invites Laura in for tea, Warner further encourages a romantic interpretation by depicting his home as “very untidy and homelike,” prompting the description:

Till now, Laura had rejected the saying that man is the noblest work of nature. Half an hour with Mr. Saunter showed her that the saying was true. So had Adam been the noblest work of nature, when he walked out among the beasts, sole overseer of the garden, intact, with all his ribs about him, his equilibrium yet untroubled by Eve. She had misunderstood the saying merely because she had not happened to meet a man before. Perhaps, like other noble works, man is rare...So much did Mr. Saunter remind Laura of Adam that he made her feel like Eve—for she was petitioned by an unladylike curiosity.

(133)

The lengthy description of Mr. Saunter/Adam, coupled with Laura’s “unladylike curiosity,” reinforces the earlier suggestion of an intense and erotic attraction. Laura thinks of Mr. Saunter as a caregiver of the earth—which she perceives to be a masculine

pursuit—and imagines him being “Adam” to her “Eve.” Like Laura’s youthful brothers who are more interested in the idea of the “passive female part” (14) than actual women, though, Laura is most interested in and attracted to the idea of a masculine steward of the earth. Obvious erotic overtones are evident in Laura’s fantasy re-creation of her and Mr. Saunter as Adam and Eve, but the reader never learns his first name. This creates a narrative distance between the two and recalls the relational distance between Laura and her potential suitors whose first names are similarly withheld.

Laura’s friendship with Mr. Saunter is an inversion of the earlier anti-courtship scene with Mr. Arbuthnot. Laura first gets to know both men over tea, but Laura’s tea with Mr. Saunter is free from the constraints of courtship since she is not on display for marriage, and since Mr. Saunter values Laura as a potential friend, not as a potential wife. When Laura enters Mr. Saunter’s home, there is no artificiality of a courtship scene. Mr. Saunter serves Laura tea and then comfortably sits down to darn his socks, which Laura thinks he does much better than she can. The scene is markedly domestic, and though Mr. Saunter performs the kind of labour that Laura has been trained to read as manifestly feminine—and which Mr. Arbuthnot would undoubtedly rebuke—Laura reads Mr. Saunter as distinctly masculine. When she goes to play her mental game of deciding what animal Mr. Saunter most resembles, she unexpectedly finds “that he resembled no animal except man” (133).

Warner rather forcefully develops the expectation that Mr. Saunter and Laura will enter into a romantic relationship through the symbolic union of them as Adam and Eve, but she quickly undermines those expectations. Weeks after their friendship develops, Laura watches Mr. Saunter disinterestedly, and as she again considers how he is like

Adam, this time, she likens herself to God: “And she, watching him from above...was like God” (143). After this observation, “Laura soon forgot him as completely as she had forgotten Caroline” (144), thus suggesting that their relationship is over. Warner builds up the expectation of a romantic union between the two of them again, though, when Mr. Saunter visits Laura after she forgets that she has invited him over for tea. Soon after, Laura begins working with Mr. Saunter to care for his poultry farm, until one day she reflects upon how much she likes him, which enables her to feel “perfectly free to wander away and forget him once more, certain of finding him as likeable and well liked as before whenever she might choose to return” (150). One of the critical benefits of Laura’s “accident of consciousness” is her ability to willfully forget people in her life—whether she likes them or not—so that she can pursue her independence and solitude unencumbered by interpersonal responsibilities. For Laura, forgetting Mr. Saunter is not a malicious act, nor is it a self-protective act like when she forgets Caroline. Instead, “forgetting” empowers Laura’s sense of freedom and agency, since she forgets Mr. Saunter knowing she has the option to remember him and resume their friendship anytime she chooses.

Laura and Mr. Saunter’s friendship begins and ends in rapid succession, but how Warner envisions their relationship is remarkable for the way that she repeatedly builds narrative expectations for a romantic relationship between the two, only to dismantle those expectations and have Laura “forget” Mr. Saunter. The novel fails pastoral narrative convention, which often ends in a romance, and through their friendship, Warner plays with her reader’s allegiance to her protagonist. Laura makes it absolutely clear that she does not want to be married, but her friendship with Mr. Saunter is

established and symbolized in such a way that a developing romantic relationship between them seems inevitable. Just as Henry and Caroline plot for a relationship to form between Laura and Mr. Arbuthnot, Warner encourages a romantic reading of Laura and Mr. Saunter, and as such, makes the reader complicit in enforcing marriage norms on Laura. Laura Doan argues that the figure of the spinster “cannot be accommodated by the ideology of the traditional romance plot” because she “breaks out of the confines of conventional narrative strategies and demands that both the writer and reader invent new, alternative literary forms” (10). Similarly, Warner breaks Laura out of conventional romance plots and demands that readers relinquish their narrative expectations and develop a strategy to interpret Laura and Mr. Saunter’s relationship as platonic, instead of as the next logical plot point.

While Laura and Mr. Saunter’s relationship initially appears to be romantically coded, Warner equips us with the tools to read their relationship in another way entirely. Mr. Saunter is coded as an antidote to the patriarchal exertions of Henry, Mr. Arbuthnot, and of Laura’s nephew, Titus. Though Laura has always been fond of Titus, she quickly becomes frustrated with him when he follows her to Great Mop and unintentionally exerts a self-assured, Willows kind of dominance that threatens her independence. Moreover, Titus’s presence unwittingly re-instates Laura’s fraught identity as “Aunt Lolly.” Unlike Mr. Saunter who is represented as a humble servant of the earth, Titus leaves his pipe and tobacco on the mantelpiece “like the orb and sceptre of an usurping monarch” (160) and “loved the countryside as though it were a body” which is an unseemly and possessive love that is a “horror” to Laura (162). Titus’s love for nature threatens and shames Laura since his love is an “appetite, a possessive and masculine

love” (162), whereas Laura’s and Mr. Saunter’s love of nature is modest and mutually respectful. Laura loves and respects nature, just as nature respects her freedom. Henry and Titus are both coded as controlling and domineering forces of nature—they sweep into a space, or someone’s life, and completely take over. They are also represented as the wrong kind of masculine: patriarchal, controlling, and destructive. Mr. Saunter, however, treats Great Mop and nature with a deference that Laura admires and is surprised to see in another person. When she imagines that he is like Adam, Laura is attracted to his relationship with nature—being “of a piece with” nature (132) and not attempting to control it—but not to Mr. Saunter himself.

In failing the conventional romance plot, Warner asks her readers to re-assess their narrative expectations for Laura, and asks us to pay close attention to what Laura wants rather than what we expect from her and the narrative itself. Warner develops the romance plot only to dismantle it, to gesture to the confines of the pastoral narrative genre, and to make space for Laura’s own story, free from both social and narrative confines. Warner’s use of the pastoral is also another example of her subtle revisionist gestures. There is a kind of romance plot here, but it is between Laura and her profound love and respect of nature generally, and Great Mop in particular. Indeed, there is a long-distance courtship between Laura and Great Mop. When Laura buys a map of the village, she cherishes and memorizes its every description, and gushes to her family about it. When remembering this courtship, Laura thinks of how “long before she saw it she had loved it and blessed it. With no earnest but a name, a few lines and letters on a map, and a spray of beech-leaves, she had trusted the place and staked everything on her trust” (162-163). While considering with horror Titus’s masculine possession of the landscape, Laura

jealously and repeatedly claims her love for the space: when Titus mentions he would like to stroke the landscape Laura “turned away her eyes from the landscape that she loved so jealously” (162); Laura “hated him for daring to love it at all” (163); and Titus prevents Laura from being “allowed to love in her own way” (163).

Her “own” kind of romance with nature disrupts conventional romance plots, just as her relationship with domesticity disrupts patriarchal norms of feminine submission. Garrity writes that a reading of Laura as “nondesiring” is “persuasive only superficially, to the extent that she has no lover, but it is misleading in light of her eroticized relation to nature, her passionate identification with Great Mop, and particularly the repeated references to her enigmatic, indefinable, longing” (253). “Underlying all of these attractions,” Garrity writes, “is Lolly’s relation to her own body which, despite popular critical opinion, is not devoid of eros” (253). Garrity’s work is important because she reminds us to consider Laura’s passions and desires, even when they are not easily legible. Laura’s desire, then, challenges not only narrative expectation but also the notion of the sexless spinster. Garrity examines Laura’s relationship to nature in terms of unfulfilled lesbian longing, but I am more interested in how Laura fundamentally wants to be alone, which a romance with nature gives her. My reading does not suggest that Laura is without eros, but instead that she finds the most comfort and pleasure being by herself. We see Laura’s flare of desire for the red-headed woman at the witches’ sabbath, but ultimately the feeling is fleeting and uninteresting to Laura. After her experience at the sabbath, Laura wanders off to be alone with nature, thus establishing her preference for solitude and communion with nature over communion with other people. Notably, Laura’s love of nature is transformative, as her love transforms Great Mop into

something more than a conventional pastoral setting. Considering Titus's possessive love, Laura worries that if Titus stays in Great Mop, soon it "would be a place like any other place, a pastoral landscape where an aunt walked out with her nephew" (164). Here, in a subtle metanarrative gesture, Warner draws our attention to how the natural beauty of Great Mop is animated by Laura's love and romance with the land. Without that love, it just becomes another generic pastoral setting.

1920s Realism and the Interventions of Warner's Failed Feminist Modernism

While Warner's novel fails conventional pastoral romance plots and poses subtle challenges to modernist aesthetics and interests, Laura's turn to fantasy and Satan in the final act of the novel is her most recognizable challenge to narrative convention.

Certainly, feminist challenges to patriarchy are not uncommon in English literature, but what makes *Lolly Willowes* distinctive is that Warner couples a more conventional feminist critique with a review of emergent feminist discourse and the restrictions that Warner sees contemporary feminist doctrine imposing on women's lives. Warner's "fantastical version of a feminist manifesto" (Bingham 41) advocates for women's independence on their own terms, but her feminist intervention, while subversive and challenging in many ways, inevitably gestures to a limit in feminist representation in the 1920s. *Lolly Willowes* ultimately resists a triumphant conclusion to Laura's story by suggesting that her acquiescence with the devil is the best option available.

Contemporary scholars have understandably struggled with Laura's contentment living under Satan's thrall (Mitchell 1992, Nesbitt 2003). However, they have missed how the novel foregrounds Laura's slow resistance and subtle failures as vital acts of agency that

help her create little pockets of autonomy that eventually enable her escape. They have missed, too, that Warner's turn to fantasy comments on the failures of realism in the 1920s. Warner's use of fantasy shows the disheartening reality that in the 1920s, it was more conceivable for a woman to sell her soul to supernatural forces than it was for her to be solely independent from a man. But this turn to fantasy also showcases the revisionist spirit of the novel, where Warner upends narrative conventions by reworking and destabilizing the very form of the realist novel to create a space for Laura's emancipation.

While realism could not sustain the narrative and feminist vision of *Lolly Willowes*, Warner still breaks with convention to create an opportunity—no matter how temporary, supernatural, or melancholy—for Laura's freedom. Modernists were undeniably expanding the possibilities of their textual and social worlds, but there were still limitations to what an author, and what fiction, could do. The limitations of realism are even more apparent in E.M. Forster's *Maurice* (written in 1913, published posthumously in 1971), where the protagonist, Maurice, and his lover, Alec, must escape to the fantastic "greenwood" so they "shan't be parted no more" (213). To be together, Maurice and Alec have to quit their old lives entirely, and "must live outside class, without relations or money; they must work and stick to each other till death" (212). Just as Laura's true emancipation only comes in her death, the ending of *Maurice* is decidedly melancholic; both Laura and Maurice get a sort of "happy ending," but at the cost of almost everything. Warner and Forster demonstrate that early twentieth-century realism failed the narratives of non-normative lives like Maurice Hall's and Laura Willowes'.

Arnold Rattenbury has suggested that Warner came to dislike *Lolly Willowes* based on her "twee" introductions in later reprints of the book and that she hoped her

lasting legacy would be of a revolutionary and radical (237-238). Warner's debut does not contain grand acts of rebellion, polemics, or overt Marxism like her later fiction, but it does champion a slow and steady resistance that is just as valuable. Indeed, this practical method of resistance may even inspire some of her readers to pick up her sword. *Lolly Willowes* is also significant and subversive for the many ways that it resists convention. From its challenges to early twentieth-century feminist ideals, Edwardian traditions, modernist aesthetics and interests, and realist narrative plot itself, *Lolly Willowes* is animated by a radical revisionist spirit that contests and reworks many of the social and literary preoccupations of its time. As such, Warner transforms a conventional feminist plot into an unconventional narrative invested in the material conditions of women's lives as well as the narrative expectations of literary modernism.

Chapter Three

“Hers was the liberty of a fallen woman”: Privileged Resistance and the Politics of Failure in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Summer Will Show*

“If story-telling had not appealed to her more, Sylvia Townsend Warner might have been a formidable historian. She had a secure sense of what it was like to live in other times than her own...She also knew—and not merely from her reading—what it was like outside the comfortable and cultivated social class she was born into. She had a connoisseur’s eye for the bogus, and a hatred of the assumption of privilege”
– William Maxwell

In 1959, Sylvia Townsend Warner was invited to give a lecture to the Royal Society of Arts on the topic of women as writers.⁴⁶ She began by confronting the double-standard implicit in the lecture’s topic. “I reread my invitation,” Warner said, “and became the prey of uneasiness. Women as Writers. *Women* as Writers. Supposing I had been a man, a gentleman novelist, would I have been asked to lecture on Men as Writers? I thought it improbable. Here was an implication I might or might not resent. Here, at any rate, was an obligation I couldn’t dodge” (154).

After this candid and distinctly feminist introduction, Warner argued that despite having no “literary advantages” (161) like education and time, literate women have always managed to write. From recipe writing to diaries, journalism, and fiction, women have written while also exercising a “mental bi-location,” where “a woman can be in two places at once; at her desk and at her washing machine” (156-157). Women, Warner asserted, clambered into the “palace” of literature through the “pantry window,”

⁴⁶ Moderated by Leonard Woolf at Warner’s request (*Letters* 169), Warner’s lecture resembles Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. In fact, Jane Garrity argues that Warner reignited interest in Woolf’s “then forgotten essay” (241). For a comparison of the two lectures, see Shari Benstock’s *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship* (1987), where she examines the two lectures as examples of “truly socialist feminist criticism” (91).

“breathless, unequipped, and with nothing but their wits to trust” (160). Warner notes that over time, the “Tradesman’s Door” of the palace opened to women, but the subversive experience of that formative leap through the window remains essential to women’s experience of writing. While the unlocked “Tradesman’s Door” signalled the increase in women’s autonomy in the latter half of the twentieth century, Warner was careful to note the continued limitations on women’s freedom. Women have the liberty to “write very nearly as they please,” she said, but that “liberty is zoned,” as it only “applies to women belonging in the middle classes” (161).⁴⁷ Through that acknowledgement, Warner went from sketching the history of women’s writing to critiquing such histories for being exclusionary because most “women writers have come from the middle class and their writing carries a heritage of middle-class virtues” (162). Warner also argued that when considering women as writers, “we must bear in mind that we have not very much to go on, and that it is too early to assess what they may be capable of” because working-class women are still largely excluded from the palace of literature (162). With that, the parallel Marxist argument of her lecture, encoded from the start, became apparent.

Warner’s lecture was erudite, occasionally funny, and audaciously feminist. Delivered to a group of intellectuals, it was bold in its condemnation of the centrality of middle-class writing and values and in its insistence that space and opportunity needed to be made for the equally important voices of working-class women. The lecture also demonstrated Warner’s commitment to feminism and class equality, which are values that endured throughout her life and career.⁴⁸ What began as a history and theory of

⁴⁷ Although, Warner also notes that in 1959, it is still indecorous for women to make a living writing (161).

⁴⁸ Warner’s class-consciousness coalesced in the 1930s when she joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, though her membership ended in the 1950s. Angela Jackson writes that “[a]long with other writers on the Left, she became a literary casualty of the Cold War. Asked why she had written no more novels

women's writing became something quite different by the end. This turn in the lecture is an example of Warner's talent for narrative transformation, first flourished in her debut novel *Lolly Willowes*, which began as a realist novel but concluded as a "fantastical version of a feminist manifesto" (Bingham 41). Warner performs a similar transformative maneuver in her 1936 novel, *Summer Will Show*. Instead of leaping through the pantry window, though, Warner vaults her readers into the Parisian flat of a revolutionary woman. *Summer Will Show* begins as a pastoral novel about the life of a snobby gentlewoman, but evolves into a chronicle of the lives of the unclassed and revolutionary. It is plainly feminist from the start, just as her lecture was, but as the novel progresses, a nuanced account of class inequality, desire, and the (ir)responsibilities of the wealthy becomes central to the plot.

"Her narratives never rest content":⁴⁹ Courting History and its Political Potentials

Warner's life and the world around her changed significantly in the intervening decade between the debut of *Lolly Willowes* and the publication of *Summer Will Show*. By 1936 she had met her lifelong partner Valentine Ackland, moved from London to rural England, had joined the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), and was bracing, like much of the world, for the eruption of another global conflict.⁵⁰ *Summer Will Show*

after 1954, she replied 'We had fought, we had retreated, we were betrayed and now we are misrepresented'" (196). Though her membership lapsed, "Warner's Leftist affiliations appear to have survived in some form until her death" (Jacobs 43-44).

⁴⁹ Beer 76.

⁵⁰ Warner was intimately familiar with war even before the outbreak of WWII, as Warner and Ackland went to Spain to aid the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. In a letter dashed off to Oliver Warner before they left, Warner detailed how she and Ackland had been asked to "help in the Red Cross bureau there" and requested that the publisher of *Summer Will Show* announce her business in Spain (39). She asked that Chatto & Windus stress "that it is for the Sp. Government side, I don't want to be confused with Owen O'Duffy's fascist legion!" (39). Ever savvy, Warner knew the simultaneous promotion of her new book and her work in Spain would aid sales: "It should be good advt for the book" (39). Warner also

reflects these personal and political changes as it was daring in its embrace of several subversive themes at the time of its publication. While the feminist politics of *Lolly Willowes* are somewhat submerged in comedy and fantasy, the feminism and Marxism of *Summer Will Show* is explicit. Adding to the boldness and candour of the novel is its lesbian romance. Significantly, this romance is not circumspect or heavily coded; rather, Warner places the excitement and devastation of a new and fleeting love at the centre of her heroine's political actualization.

Remarkably, the overt feminism, Marxism, and lesbianism of *Summer Will Show* did not cause controversy, despite being published amid decades of famous obscenity trials.⁵¹ There are no explicit scenes of sexuality in Warner's novel, unlike in James Joyce's *Ulysses* which was put on trial in 1921, nor is it as polemical as Radclyffe Hall's definitively unsexy but obviously lesbian *The Well of Loneliness* which was at the centre of a public scandal and trial in 1928. Still, considering that as late as 1960, D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was put on trial for its sexual content, it is surprising that the particular confluence of feminism, communism, and lesbianism that makes up the plot of *Summer Will Show* did not register as controversial in 1936—especially considering Warner's earlier fame and lingering status as a public figure. Jane Garrity

intellectually supported the war, as she went to two writers' conferences in Spain during its course "to express support for the Republicans" (Aldrich 133). Years later, in contrast, Warner wrote vividly in her diaries about her experience of WWII. She recorded the many warplanes that flew over her and Ackland's home in Dorset, the bombings they could hear in the distance, and their efforts to support local troops. She also expressed frustration that they were unable to help in WWII as much as in Spain. "This war has not issued a single call for the help of intellectuals," she wrote, "It is just – your money and/or your life" (106).⁵¹ Warner's fiction was never censored, but she was apparently barred from the BBC for a time. In a letter written to Nancy Cunard in 1946, Warner made an offhanded parenthetical remark that the BBC "...wrote to me the other day, by the way, as Western Regional, politely suggesting I might assist with a little whatnot, and I could not deny myself the rapture of writing back meekly to say that before they entangled themselves further with me they should make sure whether or not I am still on their list of the damned)" (qtd. in Rattenbury 236). This is an excerpt from one of her many unpublished letters, so it is unclear why Warner was counted among the "damned" and briefly censored by the BBC. A likely guess is her membership in the CPGB.

argues that Warner's use of fantasy shielded her work from controversy (142), but this explanation does not account for how *Summer Will Show*—which only uses fantasy tropes in passing, and never as a means to obscure controversial ideas—escaped condemnation.⁵² The lack of controversy surrounding *Summer Will Show*, I argue, is instead indicative of the baffling mix of modest fame and simultaneous obscurity that Warner experienced, which tended to shield her work from censure. Since Warner lived in Dorset, detached from the famous London literary groups, her work simply flew under the radar. This indifference had its benefits and disadvantages. On the one hand, Warner had celebrity enough to be invited to give talks and interviews and to make a living from regularly publishing short stories in the *New Yorker*, but on the other hand, her later novels were only given cursory glances by critics and did not sell particularly well; therefore, their subversions went largely unnoticed.⁵³

Diana Wallace offers a different guess for why Warner has been overlooked in the canon, which also illuminates why *Summer Will Show* never encountered any controversy. Wallace agrees with the now familiar scholarly lament that Warner's obscurity is due to her gender, sexuality, politics, and play with genre, but Wallace adds another reason to the list. Wallace argues that Warner is an accomplished historical writer, indeed, a "major writer," because "her achievement is to new-mint the genre through a fusion of realist and Modernist forms and Marxist and feminist politics" (70). However, the "critical neglect of the historical novel in the twentieth century has led

⁵² *Summer Will Show* is not a fantasy novel, but it does occasionally employ fantasy tropes for narrative effect. Heather Love reads these "elements of fantasy" as a "medium for dreaming about the transformation of social life" (133). For more on the novel's use of fantasy, see Jane Garrity, Terry Castle, and Janet Montefiore.

⁵³ Though, as Warner saw with *Lolly Willowes*, even a bestseller's politics can be missed by reviewers.

directly to the marginalization of Warner” (70).⁵⁴ David Malcolm agrees that Warner is a noteworthy historical writer, and observes that one of her innovations within the genre is that her novels are not particularly concerned with “historically specific states and experiences” (156), and thus they exist on “a borderland, in this case on the margins of the historical novel traditionally understood” (158). As Wallace and Malcolm show, Warner was an innovative historical writer, but by transforming the conventions of a genre that was already marginalized, she inadvertently obscured herself further.

The above critical sketch of *Summer Will Show* establishes that it is a novel of varied interests and political allegiances, which has proven to be a jarring mix for some readers. In a 1936 review, Gerald Gould roundly complained about the book and then refused to offer an opinion on its “political implications” (6). In 2003, Brooke Allen made her opinions on the novel’s politics clear by arguing that it was “written under the spell of her new political faith, [and] is Sylvia’s only really bad novel...The French portion of the story is nothing but bad, and misguided, political fiction” (116). Although Gould and Allen disliked Warner’s overtly political turn, and Allen was frustrated by the novel’s sudden tonal shift, critics like Terry Castle and David Malcolm earmark *Summer Will Show* as one of her best novels. Moreover, the sudden switch in tone and style is a crucial part of Warner’s political strategy, which we first see in *Lolly Willowes* when Laura moves to Great Mop and suddenly finds herself in the supernatural world of witches, Satan, and irrepressible feminist freedom. In *Summer Will Show*, though, the

⁵⁴ For more on Warner as a historical writer, see Rosemary Sykes and Chris Hopkins’ essays in *Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978* (2006). Hopkins analyzes how Warner’s historical novels operate within the tradition of 1930s left-wing fiction that smuggled revolutionary politics into genre fiction (132), while Sykes argues that Warner represented contemporary events in “Aesopian language” (107).

shift is even more striking and makes political demands on the reader. For just as Warner's early-Victorian protagonist is shocked out of her genteel life and ushered into revolutionary Parisian bohemia, the reader is shocked into a sharp political engagement with the text.

“a world policed by oughts”: Subverting Narrative and Social Expectation

Summer Will Show was not a bestseller like *Lolly Willowes*, but it is another novel featuring a “failed” woman protagonist. Though linked by their names’ evocations of the willow tree, Sophia Willoughby “fails” much more publicly and spectacularly than Laura Willowes. Mary Jacobs argues that for “Laura, patriarchy has the power to cancel out her economic and class privilege” (77) since patriarchy will “sen[d] her back to bondage” (*Lolly Willowes* 220). However, in *Summer Will Show*, Sophia becomes acutely aware of how class and economic disparity are other forms of bondage that particularly disadvantage women. Sophia’s realization about the impact of class on women’s oppression highlights the crucial difference between the two novels’ politics. Both are invested in a critique of mainstream feminism, but the latter novel complicates and nuances the feminism of the former. In *Lolly Willowes*, Warner emphasizes the failures of contemporary feminism to see the liberating potential of domesticity by depicting the pleasures of home in Laura’s life, while *Summer Will Show* enjoins that same argument with a broader view of how feminist efforts will always be incomplete if they are not attuned to the ways that race and class intersect to oppress women in different ways and to varying degrees. As such, *Summer Will Show* advances Warner’s nascent intersectional feminism.

The plot of *Summer Will Show* is reasonably straightforward: Sophia, the mistress of an English estate called Blandamer, is recently separated from her husband, loses her children to smallpox, and ventures to Paris on the eve of the 1848 revolution in the hopes of finding her estranged husband to have another child with, since bearing more children seems like the only option left to her. Upon her arrival in Paris, though, Sophia falls in love with her husband's mistress, an impoverished Bohemian artist named Minna Lemuel. There, Sophia also becomes motivated by the revolutionary spirit of the communist movement and rejects her wealth, family, and genteel life in England. When Sophia meets Minna, *Summer Will Show* rapidly transforms from a pastoral narrative into a bold engagement with the lives of the unclassed, the non-normative, and the revolutionary. Suddenly, the novel becomes a "panoramic portrayal" of Paris, "showing the full range of social classes, maintaining an ability to show how the exterior reality and interior reality of characters' thoughts are interdependent" (Hopkins 124).

Sophia's "failures" happen earlier and more self-consciously in *Summer Will Show* than Laura's do in *Lolly Willowses*, as in her later novel, Warner is primarily invested in the consequences of women's failure. Indeed, the theme that unifies its disparate settings is failure. In her study of the novel, Maren Linett asks, "why 1848?" (98) and speculates that the plot was inspired by failure. "One of the salient features of the 1848 revolution for Warner was surely its failure," Linett writes, "[c]ircumscribing her narrative within a historical revolution that initially burst with hope and then failed brutally allows Warner to speculate, in the midst of her love story, about the risks facing a possible revolution in the 1930s. It offers her a way to display hope for progressive change without seeming utopian" (98). Heather Love, meanwhile, writes that the

“postrevolutionary world that the novel imagines is characterized by loss, violence, and disappointment; the failures of this historical revolution illuminate the failures of the present rather than setting off its successes” (132). This plotting with failure in mind, and with an eye toward social change while reflecting upon both history and the present, proves Warner’s conviction that “go[ing] for the failure” (231) is an effective way to produce social critique.

While Linett argues that the theme of failure allows Warner to write about social change without seeming utopian, Terry Castle and Thomas Foster do think the novel is utopic. In their analyses, they see a utopic impulse running through Warner’s depiction of lesbian desire as uncontroversial. Since the novel is so varied and politically complex, it is not surprising that there are significant interpretative differences among scholars. One way to negotiate the qualities of the novel which seem at odds with each other—its despair, failure, and utopic impulses—is by focussing on how Warner uses failure as a critical apparatus to reveal some of the ideological, political, and gendered contradictions that underpin Sophia’s life. Halberstam argues that it is possible to “recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique” (88). Halberstam shows that failure as a form of critique does not have to have an end product: narratives or practices of failure are not obliged to end in a successful overthrow of an oppressive regime or a triumphant account of personal growth. Sometimes failure is simply a “practice of stalling the business of the dominant” (88). In *Summer Will Show*, we see how Warner wields failure as a sort of focal decoder, where, as Sophia fails gendered and classed expectations, her failures reveal the oppressive ideological and social constraints that structure her life. Importantly, the revelations that

Sophia's embrace of failure occasion are sometimes incomplete, obvious to unclassed women, or are indebted entirely to the theorizing of other people in her life. Nevertheless, Sophia's failures and her developing Marxist feminist politics open her world and the world of the narrative in order to give Warner space to make her argument about how class inequality is the basis of all oppression.

Summer Will Show is primarily invested in a critique of how capitalism creates and sustains massive inequalities that particularly disadvantage women and people of colour. As such, the novel argues that communism is the way forward to a more hopeful and equitable future. Warner's argument for Sophia, however, is the same modest feminist proposal that we see in *Lolly Willowes*: namely, that women should be able to make of their lives what they want. However, Sophia, unlike Laura, does not initially seek out the life of a "failed" woman in a defiant feminist effort. Instead, failure is thrust upon her when she suddenly becomes single and childless. Sophia's unexpected independence initially leaves her feeling grieved and adrift, but this feeling quickly fades when she arrives in Paris and begins to realize that a woman's identity does not have to be bound to the normative family structure. After this realization, Sophia welcomes being a "fallen woman" (156), since her new identity affords her more liberties than her life at Blandamer ever did.

Warner stages different kinds of failure through Sophia, which she later complicates in the character of Minna. While the illusions of conservatism, class prejudice, and Blandamer fade out of the narrative and Sophia's life, Paris and Minna rush in and fill the novel with emotional and political complexity. In many ways, Minna is the real protagonist of *Summer Will Show* as her presence permeates the novel even

before Sophia meets her, and continues to do so after Minna is murdered. In this way, Sophia is a kind of literary Trojan horse who ushers Minna's much more engaging and radical character into the novel. Sophia goes on to adopt Minna's politics, and, as Love argues, "Sophia becomes more and more like Minna until she finally takes her place" (140). Acknowledging this, my analysis nevertheless remains focused on the changes in Sophia's character as she embraces the "liberty of being a fallen woman" (156). This is because Sophia's embrace of failure amid her new community highlights the privileges of *choosing and revelling* in the failure that was initially thrust upon her. Throughout the novel, Sophia develops a sense of the much larger structures that subjugate women, but, most devastatingly for her, she begins to understand how her class has given her many advantages over most women. Love observes that "[i]t is through loving Minna that Sophia sees her glimpse of freedom" (145), but it is also through Minna that Sophia begins understanding her class privilege and catches a glimpse of freedom's systemic limitations and exclusions. Minna introduces Sophia to a new life entirely, and as Sophia experiences the world outside of wealth and privilege, she can "see that much of what she once held to be self-evident was, rather, class-prejudice and ideology" (Hopkins 129).

Importantly, Sophia's persistent racism proves that there is a limit to her embrace of failure and its revelatory possibilities. Sophia is not a wholly sympathetic or utopic protagonist; instead, Warner often undermines Sophia to assert her political messages, and it is through the transformative and levelling experience of Sophia's failures that Warner threads together the political intersections of gender, race, and sexuality in women's experience of oppression. By contrasting Sophia and Minna, Warner dramatizes how choosing failure is a privileged form of resistance enabled by a specific set of

ideological and material conditions that allow some women to fail and survive, while others are marked for failure and death.

“destiny and death had combined”: Nascent Feminism & the Anxiety of Freedom

As the novel opens, Sophia thinks about her childhood as she, her children, and their Nanny, Hannah, walk to a limekiln so the children can inhale its fumes as a cure for their whooping cough. As the only daughter of a Squire, Sophia remembers her family being a “minor spectacle” when out in public, and recalls inspecting horses with “a child’s exacting curiosity, sharpened and stiffened by the consciousness of being an heiress” (3). Sophia recognizes that her class status shaped her “consciousness” from an early age, but it is her father’s measured authority that is the most influential, as his approaches endure in Sophia’s management of Blandamer and her children. As the group walks across “her property,” Sophia feels a sense of “pride and well-being” while making plans for its future, but she does not feel the same confidence in her parenting as she does in managing her estate. Sophia mimics the authority of her father while parenting—“in every case of doubt consulting the practice of her father, and doing as he would have done” —but her sense of well-being is threatened by her doubts about her son Damian and her inability to know “with more assurance how Papa would have brought up a boy” (5-7). Though she is anxious about Damian’s ability to one day assert the same confident authority over Blandamer as her father, in the present, she consoles herself by relishing in the power of her authority over her labourers. In these opening scenes, Warner quickly summarizes the key features of Sophia’s exacting character: she is authoritative, analytical, and possesses a sense of superiority because of her class. However, she is also

anxious to reproduce her father's authority both within the family and within their estate.

Sophia exerts her authority multiple times on their walk, with the first time occurring when a gardener stops working to greet her. Notably, the worker remains unnamed, and Sophia thinks to herself that he is a "rogue" and "idle" worker who is only speaking to her as an "excuse not to work" (11). Meanwhile, Warner makes an effort to describe the physicality of the worker's labour, noting that the "sweat stood on his burned skin" and that his "shirt clung damply to his shoulder" (11). The worker quickly returns to his labours at the "persistence of her look" (11). Afterwards, Sophia "pine[s] for something decisive, for the moment when she should exercise her authority" (11), and with that, she demonstrates a profound lack of self-awareness in her failure to recognize that her exchange with the gardener was just such a moment.

Sophia finds an opportunity to decisively "exercise her authority" when the group arrives at the limekiln, which is a scene weighted with Sophia's dominance over and disdain for the working class. Sophia calls for the kilnman (another labourer suggestively left unnamed) and hears "with pleasure her voice carry its command over the silent hillside" (12). She then notices that the man is hunched on the ground and appears to be asleep. When roused, he gazes at them with dilated pupils. Sophia contemptuously assumes he is drunk—so does Hannah, initially. Hannah responds to him with "scorn and reprobation," but her "class loyalty" softens her response to him when she surreptitiously warns him against Sophia's ire: "Pull yourself together, lad. Don't you know that this is Mrs. Willoughby? Better not let *her* see you in this state" (14). The kilnman explains that he is too poor to get drunk early in the day and that he is unwell. In response, Hannah tries to make him more presentable to Sophia, notices the "bug sores" on his wrists, and

slowly registers that the man really is ill.

This scene is significant in multiple ways. First, Warner uses this exchange as an occasion to depict how oppressive power can be asserted by people from lower classes who have a close proximity to power. Hannah initially treats the kilnman with the same indignation as Sophia, before her “class loyalty” persuades her to show compassion. Second, the scene foreshadows the impending death of Damian and Augusta, but also how Sophia’s class prejudice makes her oblivious to the disquieting signs of death that Hannah notices. When Augusta cries over the prospect of being dangled over the kiln, Sophia admonishes her, saying, “You foolish baby, do you suppose I would bring you here to be hurt?” (13) while Hannah, in her “religious mind,” thinks that “it seemed as though they were advancing toward an altar of Moloch” (15). Hannah’s concern is validated when the kilnman transmits to the children the smallpox that later kills them, thus setting in motion the series of events that send Sophia to Paris.

I linger over these early scenes because they launch key thematic and political interests in the novel. Sophia’s childhood memories establish how her class status is central to her identity—making her later renunciation of class all the more impactful—and how her father’s influence continues to impact her. The limekiln and the gardener scenes, meanwhile, do more than just emphasize her class prejudice and her unawareness of suffering. They illustrate a trend we see throughout the novel, where Warner contrasts Sophia’s prejudices with a detailed and sympathetic description of the material realities of labour and inequality. These scenes also illustrate the depth of Sophia’s ignorance, and foreshadow the great sorrow her insensitivity and prejudice will later cause. Sophia’s ignorance causes her to make fatal assumptions about the kilnman, and later, her racism

against her half-cousin Caspar leads to the death of Minna.

Sophia is initially portrayed as a prejudiced snob, but Warner is careful to show that she is also restless for feminist advances. Although, Warner is equally careful to show that Sophia's critiques of the social constraints of womanhood are myopic and only extend to racially and economically privileged women. At first, Sophia reveals an awareness of women's oppression that is similar to Laura Willowes'—namely, that it is dull being a woman and subject to norms of respectability. Sophia reflects that “[i]t was boring to be a woman, [since] nothing that one did had any meat in it” (53). Sophia's interactions with the labourers proves that this perception is incorrect, though, since her mere presence causes them to act. Sophia also visually presents as authoritative: she is “tall, well-made, well-finished” with a “direct gaze” and a “slow, rather loud voice and enunciation, [that] warded off criticism” (24). However, Sophia lacks the self-awareness to see how her class position and appearance give her an imposing authority over both women and men. Warner thoughtfully exploits this disjunction between Sophia's presumptions and the realities that the narrator describes, and in doing so, undermines Sophia to show how her class prejudice weakens her feminist critiques. Robert Caserio identifies this as Warner's “tendency to dramatize the disjunction between feminist theory and concrete experience” (256), and this dramatization forms an essential part of Warner's political and narrative strategy. As seen with the labourer scenes, Warner often offers her readers two perspectives. We see the reality that the narrator describes (the physicality of labour, illness), and we see Sophia's perspective. Throughout the novel, we watch as these two perspectives gradually become less distinct, as Sophia's prejudices unravel, and she begins to see with more clarity the inequality of the world and the

consequences of her bigotry. Notably, Sophia never abandons her racist views, and Warner does some of her sharpest and most nuanced political work by pressing the disjunction between Sophia's racism and the reality of colonial exploitation.

We again see the productive and critical disjunction that Caserio highlights in Sophia's feelings about motherhood. Sophia faithfully does everything expected of her as an upper-class mother, but she is nevertheless plagued by anxiety and ambivalence about her role. This ambivalence forms an implicit critique of the expectation that women are supposed to become and be fulfilled by their roles as mothers. While Sophia performs the role of the socially acceptable mother, her internal dialogue about motherhood is transgressive. Sophia initially likens her children to a "burden" of ripening fruit on a tree, but soon after thinks "I live for my children—a good life, the life my heart would have chosen" (9). When they later become sick, she again compares them to fruit when she thinks that they are "the fruit of her forsaken womb" (55). She also feels they are too "delicate" for her liking, a result of "that deplorable mating" between her and her estranged husband, Frederick (20). Her most revealing views on maternity, though, are filtered through her musings about her livestock. The "bull blared again and again, and the cows cropped on, uninterested. Sensible cows, thought Sophia" (19). Soon after, she thinks that her "horses (she did not admit it but the thought was there) were everything that her children should have been: strong, smooth-skinned, well-trained, well-bred" (23). Considering these displaced revelations about Sophia's views on maternity, her earlier assertion that "I live for my children—a good life, the life my heart would have chosen" (9) reads more like a script of what she is supposed to think and say about being a mother, rather than how she actually feels.

Even in her private reflections, then, there is a disjunction between what she feels and what she keeps telling herself she should feel. Sophia's views about motherhood are linked to her frustration with Frederick, but it is clear that she also struggles with the unpredictability of children, and that she feels the duty of motherhood confines her identity to a singular role. Sophia's sense of self is inextricably bound to the notion of duty, which we see in her initial feminist critiques of marriage. "Duties came out of thought, one after another," muses Sophia, "swift as bees coming out of a hive. She was a mother, and a landowner; but fortunately, she need no longer be counted among the wives" (20). With relief, Sophia finds that her class shields her from scandal after she and Frederick separate, and since she is still married, she is delighted that she will not have to deal with any new suitors. The arrangement leaves her feeling that "no queen [could] have a more absolute sway" (22) over her life and Blandamer.

When Frederick returns to see his ailing children, though, his presence undermines Sophia's authority, and his visible expressions of grief reignite her anxieties about motherhood. Sophia thinks that Frederick can be easily consoled while the children are dying, and that he can feel his sorrow openly and "purely" while "for her, the mother, there was nothing. She must wait, idle and alone" (60). It is this solitary grief that gives Sophia the language to make her earlier implicit critique of enforced marriage and maternity explicit. Sophia rethinks not only her disappointments in motherhood, but in the whole patriarchal system that expected her to marry and bear children. She thinks about how all her hopes will have failed in the death of her children, and how they have been like "a wound in me that would never quite heal, that must perpetually be cleansed and dressed" (66). "My children are dying," she admits, "and all that I can truly say I feel

is resentment that I have been made a fool of” (66-67). Sophia’s resentment is both a coping mechanism and a confession. In her grief, she is finally able to admit to herself the extent to which the gendered expectations of motherhood have been an anguish and a disappointment. And here, Sophia explicitly uses the language of failure. No amount of instinct, preparation, or imitation of her father’s methods prevents the death of her children. “An animal instinct cowed, that is what I have chiefly known,” she thinks, “And now that fails me” (66).

Sophia’s sense that she has been “made a fool of” (66-67) suggests an audience, and, indeed, a British culture that fails to imagine alternatives for women’s lives outside of matrimony and maternity is the audience she addresses. Sophia did what was expected of her, despite her hesitations and misgivings, but the world did not live up to its side of the bargain. She addresses a literal audience, too, as the collapse of her family is made public. During this mourning period, Sophia becomes increasingly paranoid about public appearance, and so her feminist critiques become framed as public events. When she learns that the doctor’s wife, Mrs Hervey, is pregnant, she imagines hearing a judge pronounce a sentence in court, “a sentence of death...or of that worst death, a life-long imprisonment” (91). In the sentencing, Sophia imagines that the judge wills “*therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house*” and thinks that even though her children have died, she is “not freed from that sentence” (91).

Compelled to live out that sentence, Sophia ruthlessly returns to the solace of asserting her authority when she visits the kilnman to demand that he impregnate her. Here, Sophia feels entitled not only to his labour but to his body, as she feels that he owes her. Instead of sympathizing with her and acquiescing as she expects, the kilnman

explains to Sophia that there are “[p]lenty of things for children to die of” (96), including disease and starvation. When Sophia comments on his lack of pity, he says, “I’m like the gentry, then” (96). As a result of the exchange, the kilnman suddenly becomes emblematic of all labouring classes and Sophia’s original apathy toward their living and working conditions becomes an outright aversion, for “[n]ow, in the kilnman, the insolence of the labouring classes had been demonstrated” (98). Hackett argues that Warner “makes much more of the kilnman than she might have if she were only looking for an accident to propel Sophia to Paris” and Minna (107). Instead, Warner “makes the lime-kiln man at least as pivotal to Sophia’s sexual and political transformations as Minna” since his “political analysis” of inequality and class “resonates through the novel” (106) as Sophia begins developing her class consciousness. At the same time, his “working-class hypersexuality...catapults Sophia into sexual curiosity” (109).

Between the two journeys to the limekiln, Warner efficiently establishes Sophia as a complicated and conflicted character. She has feminist tendencies, but she mostly demonstrates an appalling lack of self-awareness, entitlement, and prejudice. Even in Sophia’s most clear-headed moments of feminist defiance, all she can do is identify gendered injustice before circling back to what is expected of her: bearing more children and managing Blandamer. Sophia’s life here is marked by failure. Failures of empathy in her treatment of her labourers, as well as failures of motherhood and matrimony. Importantly, these failures are not irredeemable since she realizes that anything she does out of “convention” will be explained away because of her sex. She thinks that though she is “[f]ree as she might be to do as she pleased, all her doings were barred” and that anything she does out of the norm “would only be granted to her on the terms that it was

a woman's whim, a nonsense to be tidied up as soon as possible by the responsible part of the world" (53). No matter what she does to resist, Sophia knows she will be turned back into a respectable subject. Claire Harman argues that Sophia realizes that her "gestures of defiance misfire" (vi), while Thomas Foster identifies this realization as the start of Sophia's political awakening, since she "begins to realize how her middle-class autonomy over her house and land only reinforces her subordinate position as a woman" (540). Indeed, "Sophia's initial optimism about her possibilities for stepping outside gender structures, of being 'no longer counted among the wives,' is revealed to be an illusion generated by class privilege" (541). Foster's insight about Sophia's privileged illusions of freedom returns us to Warner's work in creating a disjunction between Sophia's perspective and material reality. Here, though, we see the slow convergence between reality and Sophia's perspective, as she begins seeing women's oppression more clearly in her identification of the paternalistic forces that continuously reshape her life when she strays too far from norms. To later reconstitute Sophia into a radical feminist subject and release her from the power of those forces, Warner introduces Minna and Paris, the two influences that undo almost everything about Sophia.

"that irrefutable force and logic of a different existence": the Privileges of Failure

Crucially, it is not Sophia's rejection of heterosexuality and her relationship with Minna that makes her an irredeemably "failed" woman. Part of the magic of *Summer Will Show* is that it represents lesbian desire as ordinary and uncontroversial. Early in the novel, Sophia casually wonders if Mrs. Hervey "might be in love with me" (58),⁵⁵ and when

⁵⁵ Hackett's chapter on the novel in *Sapphic Primitivism* (2004) contains an excellent analysis of Sophia and Mrs. Hervey. She argues that Minna introduces Sophia to the freedom of rejecting class decorum, not

Sophia later falls in love with Minna, their relationship is remarkable only to them. Frederick's resulting outrage is not because of their lesbianism, but because he is incensed by the inconvenience and humiliation of being rejected by both his wife and mistress. In a scene that showcases both Warner's humour and Frederick's desperation, Sophia and Minna return to their flat one afternoon to find that Frederick has left them each a bouquet of flowers with a handwritten card that simply says "With Kind Enquiries" (237). When neither woman replies, Frederick cuts Sophia off from her wealth in retaliation, which serves "only to intensify—indeed eroticize—the intimacy between the two women" (Castle 78).

Summer Will Show is one of Warner's better-known novels precisely because of its lesbian plot, which situates it within the tradition of other lesbian modernist fiction like Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1926), Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936), and Stein's *Q.E.D.* (written in 1903, published in 1950). In his reading of Sophia and Minna's relationship, Foster argues that Warner "attempt[s] to represent a lesbian couple as historically typical at the moment of the 1848 revolution" (535) in the Lukácsian sense, where the goal of historical fiction is to "*invent* popular figures to represent the people and their predominant trends" (535 Lukács qtd. in Foster). In her well-known queer reading, Castle asserts that *Summer Will Show* is an "exemplary 'lesbian fiction'" that undoes "the seemingly compulsory plot of male homosocial desire" (74) as articulated by Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men* (1985). Castle argues that "between Sophia and Minna, one might say that the male homosocial triad reaches its point of maximum destabilization and collapses altogether. In its place appears a new

to the pleasures and knowledge of lesbian desire, which we see Sophia was already familiar with in her interactions with Mrs. Hervey.

configuration, the triad of *female* homosocial desire” (83). Sophia and Minna, Castle argues, displace—or “sacrifice”—Frederick, reducing him to a “figure of fun” (83). Castle repeatedly observes that there is a “utopian tendency” (88) in the novel, and finally concludes that it, along with other lesbian novels that seek to “decanonize” the “canonical structure of desire itself,” are “utopian in aspiration if not design” (90-91). Foster gestures to this utopian design as well, arguing that the “temporality implicit in the narrative’s representation of sexuality anticipates what it might be like when lesbian existence is an established and legitimated social practice; Minna and Sophia’s relationship is written in the future perfect tense, as what will have been” (545). Certainly, there is a utopic impulse in *Summer Will Show* as Castle and Foster highlight. However, Warner’s choice of placing Sophia and Minna in this “future perfect tense” also signals her wider literary and political project where she was “aware of the need to smuggle her political message *incognito* to her readers” (Jacobs and Bond 46). Though her anti-homophobic messaging is not exactly *incognito*, it is clear that Warner tries to resist homophobic responses to the novel by creating for Sophia and Minna a model of a more inclusive world.

Not all critics have identified the centrality of Sophia and Minna’s romantic relationship, though. Caserio compares Sophia and Minna to Laura and Satan in *Lolly Willowses*. He argues that in *Summer Will Show*, “the coupling of spinster-heroine and Satan is replaced by the coupling of sisters-in-revolution” (264). He also contends that *Summer Will Show* is one of many examples in Warner’s fiction of “chaste or celibate pairs of (so to speak) sisters-in-revolution” whose “chaste bond[s]” create a “relation between or among women that is political and that is related to revolution” (254). Though

Caserio concedes that Sophia develops a “sudden passion” (265) for Minna, by demanding that their relationship be celibate, he elides the import of lesbian love in Sophia’s political awakening. In fact, he elides a major part of Warner’s multivalent argument about the possibilities and pleasures of women’s failure and freedom.

Caserio’s reading is perplexing, given that Warner’s depiction of Sophia and Minna’s love is remarkably forthright considering the time of the novel’s publication. Their desire is barely coded, as Warner deliberately highlights the physicality of their relationship through subtle and exhilarating touches. When Minna passes Sophia a glass of wine on the night they meet, Sophia thinks that the wine is “like a caress” (139) and that first caress carries throughout the rest of the novel, as Sophia becomes acutely aware of the thrill of touching and being touched by Minna. Sophia notices “Minna’s fingers touching out a small ruminative rhythm” on her arm as they walk together (210); Minna “caresses” Sophia’s hand (248); and Sophia holds “Minna’s body across her lap” (250) when she is sick, and “laid a caressing hand upon her wrist in order to measure the pulse-beats” (254). In a shy gaze suggesting budding love, Sophia glances “under her eyelashes” at Minna, to assess how “poverty had laid a tarnish on that skin” and finds that her worries dissolve as in “that glance love reabsorbed her” (228). Later, Sophia thinks that it is “the odd mixture of nobility and extravagance which was the core of the Minna she loved” (290). There is even a symbolic sex scene, as Castle and Foster both point out: “[o]nly beneath the crust of thought,” the narrator describes, did Sophia’s “being assent as by right to that flush of pleasure, that triumphant cry” (274). After a paragraph break, the next line is, “[b]ut of course,” said Minna a few hours later, thoughtfully licking the

last oyster shell, ‘we must be practical’” (274).⁵⁶ Foster argues that this moment tests a “reader’s willingness or reluctance to accept” their relationship as sexual, while also asking readers to “join the novel in departing from the cultural conventions of verisimilitude” (544).

Warner excels at testing her readers in this way by asking them to stretch themselves to envision new worlds and lives of freedom and possibility. We see a similar testing in *Lolly Willowes* when Warner asks her readers to accept Laura’s wish to enjoy the solitary pleasures of nature. While Warner leaves room for her readers to accept Sophia and Minna’s relationship as sexual or not, their relationship is clearly romantic, and there is no doubt that Minna’s influence is central to Sophia’s new life and political views. Moreover, by envisioning a world where lesbian desire is uncontroversial, Warner makes it clear that the transgression that makes Sophia irredeemably “failed” (and thus free from the paternalistic forces that reform her back into a respectable subject) is not lesbianism, but is, instead, her rejection of her class status. This rejection of class is gradual, though, and before Sophia first meets Minna, she hates her not because she is Frederick’s mistress, but because of her low-class status.

Though we do not see Minna in the first quarter of the novel, Sophia’s hatred of her nevertheless suffuses the narrative. Sophia is obsessed with Frederick’s relationship with Minna, not because Frederick has a mistress (she presumes he does), but because of “his choice of a woman” (30). Sophia hates Minna because she is unclassed and Jewish, and as such, Sophia feels debased by Frederick’s association with her. Warner wrathfully

⁵⁶ Sophia and Minna’s oyster supper is not the first sexually suggestive meal they share. The day after they meet, Sophia takes Minna out to lunch and asks, “am I as good as Frederick?” to which Minna responds, “You are much better” (161).

describes Minna as a “byword, half actress, half strumpet; a Jewess; a nonsensical creature bedizened with airs of prophecy” (31). What especially enrages Sophia about Frederick’s relationship with Minna is that he is “not even king in that outrageous court, not even able to dismiss the mongrels, and take the creature into keeping” (31). It is an affront to Sophia that Frederick does not assert his classed authority, which she feels is an insult to both her and their shared social status. Though Sophia later gives up her class status, she “never quite abandons her antisemitic responses” to Minna (Linett 83) that we see in these early descriptions. Sophia’s persistent antisemitism is yet another example of how Warner uses Sophia’s prejudices to undermine her character and show how her privilege makes her feminist critiques myopic. Linett argues that Sophia’s antisemitism is also part of Warner’s political strategy, where the novel itself “works against antisemitism, using Jewishness to disrupt dominant stereotypes” (83). We see this, for example, when Warner disrupts the “greedy Jew” (42) stereotype by making Minna’s art of storytelling free from both the “[c]ommunist insistence that art can serve the cause and from the bourgeois assumption that art should bear financial fruit” (42). Minna’s storytelling is enormously important in the novel, which Linett demonstrates in her analysis, and which we also see in how Warner represents the transformative powers of Minna’s storytelling over Sophia.

In Part II of the novel, we hear Minna before we see her. Sophia arrives at Minna’s Parisian flat to confront Frederick, but finds herself—along with a large crowd of assembled listeners—captivated by Minna, who is recounting her memories of her childhood persecution by crusading Christians. Warner devotes seventeen nearly continuous pages to Minna’s violent monologue, which she recounts as she lounges, with

“the attitude of one crouched over a sleepy fire” (115), as her alert audience hangs on each of her words. Minna performatively exploits her cultural and Jewish difference in front of her audience, made up of “the ill-dressed and the well-dressed” (136), and enjoys sweeping them into the spell of her story. When she is interrupted by the barricades being erected, “she had put on for a moment the look of a cat made a fool of—a massive sultry fury” (136). Equally performative, though, is her recovery, since “[r]allying, she had matched the situation by a majestic rising to her feet, a lightening of her sombre mask, a deepened breathing and an opening of hands, as though welcoming a dayspring on her darkness” (136). While the mixed-class audience is equally enchanted and horrified by the violence of Minna’s story, Sophia is seduced by her narrative of suffering.

Sophia’s enchantment by Minna’s performance is immediately and powerfully erotic, as Sophia’s curiosity in the woman who “housed the siren voice...went beyond speculation, a thing not of the brain but in the blood. It burned in her like a furnace, with a steadfast compulsive heat that must presently catch Minna in its draught, hale her in, and devour her” (145).⁵⁷ Minna’s story is so captivating, in fact, that Frederick is forgotten entirely. Harman observes that in this scene, Warner “achieves an important coup; having told us that Minna is a spell-binder, she makes her one. The narrative, with its complete change of pace and tone, pushes the reader into that Parisian drawing-room with Sophia. One is, for its duration, more of a listener than a reader” (vii). Minna’s spell is abruptly lost by the revolutionary tumult in the streets below, but this interruption is serendipitous since the barricades make it impossible for Sophia to leave Minna’s flat. As a result, they spend the next day lounging and engaged in a “passionate amity” (156).

⁵⁷ The intense and devouring heat described here is an unmistakable reference back to the limekiln, which metaphorically devoured Sophia’s children and set Sophia’s new life in motion.

Castle notes that Minna's storytelling is so powerful that the next day, it compels "the normally reticent Sophia...to recount the story of *her* own life. As if freed from an invisible bondage, she finds herself talking for hours" (78). Soon after this extraordinary encounter, Sophia abandons her plans to have another child and begins to unselfconsciously enjoy a new life with Minna.

Having accepted life as a failed woman, Sophia shares a contented afternoon in her new home with Minna. Sophia describes feeling "exactly as though I had run away and gone to sea, like a bad youth in a Sunday school story-book" and Warner directs the reader's attention to both the pleasure and strains of failure:

'You have run away,' said Minna placidly. 'You'll never go back now, you know. I've encouraged a quantity of people to run away, but I have never seen any one so decisively escaped as you.'

And with dusters tied on her feet she made another glide across the polished floor, moving with the rounded nonchalant swoop of some heavy water bird. Her sleeves were rolled up, she wore a large check apron, she had all the majestic unconvincingness of a gifted tragedy actress playing the part of a servant—a part which would flare into splendour in the last act.

'But what have I run away from?'

'From sitting bored among the tyrants. From Sunday Schools, and cold-hearted respectability, and hypocrisy, and prison.

'And domesticity,' she added, stepping out of the dusters. (217)

The importance of Sophia and Minna's class difference is especially evident here, as it is Minna's status as an outsider and failure among institutions of "success" that gives her an

acute ability to recognize oppressive norms. While Minna lists many oppressive institutions from which she has largely been excluded—but from which she still experiences negative effects—Sophia was only previously aware of domesticity as a gendered constraint on her life. Minna was not socialized by oppressive norms in the same way as Sophia, however, and does not fully comprehend how their influence lingers in Sophia’s consciousness since, despite her thrilling new freedom, Sophia still feels like a “bad youth.” Crucially, this scene underscores the reality that failure is a privileged class of resistance, as Sophia is afforded more opportunities to undermine norms and institutions of success because she was initially included in them. Due to Sophia’s decisive “escape,” she is culturally read as a failure since her marriage fails, she rejects heterosexuality, land, her family, and, perhaps most transgressively, she attempts to reject her class status. But for Minna, being an unclassed woman who is “othered” both by her poverty and Jewishness, there never was another option than being read as a “failed” woman since she cannot reject the institutions and social structures that have always rejected and excluded her. As Linett observes, “Minna is not only poor, but crucially female, bohemian, Jewish, exiled, and bisexual. If only because she is expelled from them, Minna can hardly have much stake in the categories of identity that have until now policed Sophia’s life” (41). Observing Minna’s expulsion from these systems, Sophia can “see her previous life as entirely based in an economy of obligations” (41). As such, Minna introduces Sophia to the “liberty of [being] a fallen woman” (156), but she also introduces Sophia to the shame associated with her privilege, as she begins to understand the many more ways that Minna has been marginalized and oppressed.

In addition to encapsulating the novel’s interest in class difference and the

privilege of choosing failure, this passage also shows how Minna transforms domesticity. Warner's amusing description of Minna polishing the floor is worth examining, as the scene reinforces Warner's earlier proposal in *Lolly Willows* that the home can be a space of possibility for women, rather than the site of their subjugation. Part of the fantasy of *Lolly Willows* is that Laura's move to Great Mop and acceptance of Satan provides her with a clean escape, which enables her to wilfully forget her oppressed life in London. Sophia's feelings, however, are more complicated, as are the circumstances of her escape. The smooth and playful movements of Minna's body as she polishes the floor are in tension with Sophia's persistent senses of guilt and unease. Despite these feelings, Sophia resignifies Minna's labour into a scene of play by first picturing her as a water bird and then as a gifted tragedy actress. This act of labour contrasts with the earlier scene of the gardener's labour and Sophia's perception of him. Previously, Sophia was resentful of the gardener's lack of productivity and insensitive to the efforts of his labour. Watching Minna, though, Sophia delights in her playful and parodic performance of domestic labour. The scene is also subtly erotic, as Minna joyfully performs domestic labour for Sophia's keen and desiring gaze, which is a gaze that sharply diverges from the earlier glare that returned the gardener to his work. Ultimately, this scene is emblematic of what Jane Garrity highlights as Warner's talent for "couching subversion within the realm of domestic familiarity" (241). In this instance, the subversions are clear in Sophia's desire for Minna who undermines Sophia's class prejudice that had, until then, been ingrained in her consciousness "as a matter of course" (97).

Warner makes Sophia and Minna's domestic familiarity central to their happiness, but she also depicts the stresses of disrupted domesticity. When Sophia later busies

herself with the work of stealing scrap metal for revolutionaries to turn into munitions, Minna gradually loses her flair and becomes increasingly frustrated as their poverty becomes extreme, and she finds herself caring for Sophia's half-cousin Caspar. Sophia feels like she is the "the child of good fortune, destiny's pet" while Minna remains "the daylong labourer in the vineyard, Minna the nursing-mother of revolutions, [who] must stay at home, devoting her slighted talents to Caspar's socks" (327-328). Here, Warner depicts an asymmetrical domesticity, where Sophia re-exerts old models of patriarchal home life in her insistence on her fulfillment at the expense of Minna, who is forced to remain at home in order to tend to Sophia's responsibilities and to keep their shared life in order. It is a vital counterpoint that demonstrates the necessary balance of domesticity, and which also recalls the centrality of negotiation in happy domestic spaces, like we see between Laura and her landlady in *Lolly Willowses*. Before Sophia's revolutionary efforts disrupt the balance of their home, though, we are shown the liberating power of domesticity in balance, where Sophia and Minna transform their home and its poverty into an intimacy free from social constraints. And this intimacy, empowered by her new home and love, helps Sophia to understand her class privilege and the complex ways that money has enabled and disabled her freedom. Though Sophia becomes more aware of her privilege—and uses her "well-finished" appearance to help the communist party by sneaking into privileged areas for theft—she nevertheless romanticizes poverty, as she associates her loss of money with her newfound happiness, while ignoring the increasingly desperate reality of their poverty and Minna's starvation.

“Caspar had already been swallowed up:” Race, Tragedy, and the Limits of Failure

Almost everything about Sophia’s life and politics change in Paris, and yet there is still a hard limit to her embrace of failure and its progressive political possibilities. This limit is confirmed in Sophia’s treatment of her young “illegitimate, half-caste” (34) half-cousin Caspar from the West Indies. Hackett argues that “Caspar is the most disturbing and the most interesting presence” in the novel, as its critiques of racism, colonial wealth, and exploitation are made at his expense (112). “Presence” is an apt descriptor for Caspar, because though his appearances in the lengthy novel are brief, he is imbued with an enormous amount of narrative significance. His presence—and the guilt and resentment he evokes in Sophia—pervades her otherwise liberating experience in Paris. Caspar not only signifies Sophia’s inability to reckon with the source of her family’s wealth and the anti-black sentiments she espouses, as Hackett observes, but he also powerfully returns us to Sophia’s parental anxieties discussed earlier. In discussing Caspar, it is again worth lingering over Sophia’s experience of motherhood since she justifies her poor treatment of Caspar out of a sense of jealousy and motherly inadequacy.

Caspar is introduced as a subplot in the novel’s dense first quarter. When Sophia walks the children to the limekiln, she thinks about the upcoming work she must do on her estate, which includes hosting Caspar for a week before he begins school at the English institution of her choosing. While planning his visit, Sophia fears that he might “tease Augusta, or corrupt Damian” (19). Caspar’s apparent corrupting influence is measured before we even learn his name. Sophia initially considers him “that boy from the West Indies,” and then as a “negro,” “half-caste,” and “bastard” (19). When Sophia finally acknowledges his name, she thinks of him as “that Caspar, Gaspar, whatever the

child is called,” and offhandedly notes that “the red dressing-room would do” for him to stay in (20). By refusing to use his name and host him in a proper room, and by only thinking of him while planning her household tasks, Sophia dehumanizes Caspar and establishes him not as family, but as another chore in the management of her estate. Sophia’s treatment of Caspar mirrors the way his father, Sophia’s half-uncle, treats him. Caspar’s father is Julius Rathbone, “part-owner and manager of the West Indies estate” (34) that supplied her family’s wealth. In a letter to Sophia preceding her bi-annual shipment of tropical goods, a request for Sophia to place Caspar in a “moderate establishment where he could receive a commercial education” where, hopefully, he will not “get false ideas into his head,” is couched among lengthy descriptions of what he will bring (34). After making the request in the middle of the letter, it was “as though with a waving of the hand, the letter had turned to a more detailed account of the guava jellies, etc., which would accompany the boy across the Atlantic” (35), and thus Caspar is also casually figured as a trade good.

Hackett traces how Caspar, the son of a slave, would have been born one year before the slave trade was made illegal in the British Empire (113). Unable to make Caspar a slave, Julius instead “treats Caspar as a byproduct of Caribbean sugar production to be used, like molasses, in a way advantageous to the capital-owning class” (113). With his position in the letter among the “edibles” sent from the West Indies, Hackett identifies how like “the edibles, Caspar should enrich the lives of the ruling class: the edibles will be eaten; Caspar will flesh out the ranks of the managerial class” (113). It is with these assumptions of Caspar’s inferiority, the moral rightness of his utility to her family’s continued wealth, and her expectation that he will likely “be no

more than a woolly negro,” that Sophia finds herself stunned by Caspar’s “extreme beauty and grace” (37) when he arrives at Blandamer. As Sophia watches Caspar arrive alongside her equally stunned household, she feels “like one with something at stake” (37). What is at stake remains suggestively unclear, though Caspar’s arrival at Blandamer immediately makes Sophia self-conscious about the staff and villagers observing her family, which in turn threatens her sense of authority over her household.

Indeed, as the week goes by, Blandamer and its new guest become a local spectacle. Sophia regards her household and village’s “askance” view of Caspar as only “natural” because of his racial difference. However, she does not anticipate how his competence in riding, swimming, and music infuriates those he meets, nor does she anticipate the many comparisons between Damian and Caspar (40-41). Sophia’s workers linger around Caspar, and feel the “need to call out some achievement, as people prod monkeys at a fair; and then, angered by the brilliant response, sulk, grumble, and belittle it” (41). The racism in Caspar’s comparison to a monkey in captivity is unmistakable. Hackett argues that Sophia’s labourers think of Caspar “as *exactly* monkey-like” and “despise him for it” (115), which contrasts with Sophia’s more implicit racism and complicated feelings about Caspar. According to Hackett, Sophia is “enchanted” by Caspar and views him as an “entertaining spectacle” (114) not because of his race but because of his beauty and talents.⁵⁸ As such, Warner is careful to distinguish between the villagers’ racism and the subtle softening of Sophia’s “overtly hostile” racism that dissipates when she finally meets him (114-115). While it is true that Warner attempts to mark Sophia as less racist than the villagers, intermingled with Sophia’s enchantment is

⁵⁸ I would argue, however, that Sophia views Caspar as an “entertaining spectacle” precisely because of her racist assumptions that a young black boy should be unable to possess such talent.

an illumination of her sense of failure as a mother which buttresses her existing prejudice against Caspar and his place in the system of exploitation and hierarchy that produces her wealth. Fundamentally, Caspar's abilities make Sophia confront her suppressed fear that she has failed to produce a suitable and authoritative heir.

Caspar's arrival forcefully reminds Sophia of all the ways Damian has failed to live up to her standards. Despite beginning his training at a young age, Damian never masters horsemanship, carpentry, shooting, sports, or leadership skills. Instead, Damian is kind and affable, and Sophia often finds herself compelled to kiss and caress him but refrains, since she "had to be careful not to make a pet" of him (7). Sophia's anxieties about making a "pet" out of Damian stem from his failure to perform the classed and austere masculinity that she expects from the heir to Blandamer; she simply does not know what to do with a sensitive son, and instead attempts to reshape his personality through a feigned detachment. As she attempts to groom her children in the image of her father, Sophia views her relationship with Damian in terms of success and failure: despite "all her care" she fails to "succeed" in making Damian an expert rider, and the "hardening system" that was "so admirable, so well-proved and well-accredited, so successful" (7, 8) fails on her children. Indeed, Sophia's children literally do not measure up to her, as on "the nursery door the notches recording her own growth from year to year were still visible; and year by year Damian and Augusta fell short of them" (8).

When Caspar arrives at Blandamer, then, and is tested by the household and excels at every activity set before him, his seemingly natural ability undermines Sophia's parenting and by extension, her father. The tests set for Caspar seem designed, in fact, to highlight the deficiencies in Damian and Sophia, since "all the household set themselves

to match one boy against the other” (41). With each test, “Caspar was always the readier, the more agile, the more daring. Each new feat increased their bile against him” (42). Caspar’s achievements equally impress and frustrate the household, but for Sophia, the most frustrating comparison comes from the village rector, who ignores all courtesy and deference by visiting Blandamer to discuss the boys. When Mr. Harwood discovers that Caspar is unfamiliar with the catechism, Caspar responds by learning “the catechism by heart, adding several collects as gratuity” (42). In turn, Mr. Harwood tells Sophia of Caspar’s “remarkable quickness” but then offers a backhanded compliment about preferring “Damian’s type of mind” when he realizes he has offended her (42). To Sophia, Mr. Harwood’s bold meeting in her home, rather than staying quiet in his “proper place” (41), confirms her fear that her staff and the villagers think that she has failed to produce a suitable heir. Though her household is determined to belittle both Caspar and Damian, true to his amiable personality, Damian’s response is to “delight in the successes of the elder boy” (42). Meanwhile, Sophia feels that Caspar remains “unharm[ed] by [the] slights and snubs” (44), but fails to notice that Caspar’s “anxi[ety] to please” (41) betrays his ardent desire to be accepted.

Warner uses Caspar’s trials and pleasant demeanour throughout to emphasize the cruelty of his treatment. She also repeatedly shows that Sophia is just as racist as the villagers whom she demeans, even while she deludes herself into thinking that her more implicit racism does not affect the way she treats Caspar. Despite this anti-racist work, Warner’s representation of Caspar remains troubling. It is not enough that Caspar is tested continuously, taunted, and subjected to racist treatment, but Warner makes him good at everything—manners, music, sports—and seemingly oblivious to his treatment,

in order to elicit sympathy. Caspar cannot just be an average boy, he has to be an *exceptional* boy, and Damian's apparent deficiencies are used to showcase Caspar's remarkability further. Caspar is not allowed to be a complex character. Instead, he is figured as only worthy of Sophia's frustration and reluctant appreciation because he is beautiful and highly capable in the leisure activities she was socialized to value.

Warner's treatment of Caspar is emblematic of what Ralina Joseph calls "black transcendence" where "blackness is seen as a deficit to overcome" (7). While Joseph examines contemporary American mainstream representations of multiracial people, her study is nevertheless helpful in interpreting how Caspar is characterized. Caspar embodies the "exceptional multiracial" (6) or "model minority" (34) trope that Joseph argues is one part of a dual-sided racist dichotomy. The other side to that dichotomy is the trope of the "new millennium mulatta" (6). In her study, Joseph presents these "representations as operating along a nonchronological spectrum from the new millennium mulatta, the exceedingly tragic and mixed-racial, to the exceptional multiracial, the strikingly successful and post-racial" (6). Warner portrays Caspar as both a tragic and "strikingly successful" character, and as such, he embodies aspects of both of these stereotypes. Caspar's efforts and anxiety to fit in and be accepted at Blandamer mark him as a tragic figure who will always remain an outsider, while his talents align him with upper-class whiteness and a transcendent success. The crucial difference between the contemporary American figures that Joseph studies and Caspar, though, is that Caspar's success only makes him more detestable to the villagers.

For Sophia, Caspar's talents also pose an ethical dilemma, since she does not take her responsibility of finding him a suitable school seriously. Sophia chooses to send him

to Trebennick Academy in Cornwall, which is an austere and cold institution. Sophia's first impression of the school "was one of distaste, almost fear" (36), but she chooses to send Caspar there because she is attracted to its surrounding nature. When Sophia meets Caspar, she feels that she cannot "dismiss this being to the Trebennick Academy" (43), but she does anyway. As Sophia escorts Caspar to the school, she feels a "sense of doom and predestination" and thinks, "[t]he child will die there" (50). Her sense of doom foreshadows how her children are dying at Blandamer without her knowledge. This sense also betrays her hope that Trebennick will kill off Caspar's remarkable talents, evidenced by her admonition that if Caspar wishes "to gain favour with his teachers and fellows it would not do to play the guitar, dance, or sing" (48).

Despite her decision, Sophia is nagged by a persistent sense of doubt over Caspar's schooling. During one of her characteristic bouts of parental anxiety, Sophia fantasizes about how Caspar's mother would know what to do for him. In her fantasy, though, Sophia romanticizes and eroticizes slavery. "But if one cannot understand one's own children," she thinks, "how hope to judge best for the bastard of one's half-uncle and some unknown quadroon, passionate and servile, her gold ear-rings swinging proudly, and the marks of the lash maybe on her back?" (40). It is a short scene, and one that has received little scholarly attention, but Sophia's fantasy here is loaded with insight about her character. Sophia imagines Caspar's mother being content to serve, and thus evades the violent reality of slavery and her family's wealth. Meanwhile, the lingering image of the "marks of the lash on her back" is reduced to a titillating afterthought. Sophia's fantasy of Caspar's mother is also troubling because she links it to her persistent sense of failure as a mother. In fact, Sophia suggests that Caspar's mother has more freedom than

her because her “passions” and pride do not have to be repressed in accordance to genteel social custom; as such, Caspar’s mother is free to show affection to, and “know,” her child unencumbered. By romanticizing slavery, Sophia effectively suppresses the reality of how her wealth is created by making Caspar’s mother into an exotic fairytale. Caspar’s mother also becomes a fantasy figure onto whom Sophia can displace her sense of responsibility and guilt. Sophia justifies casting Caspar off to an unsuitable school by rationalizing that she cannot fully know her own children, let alone someone else’s, and concludes that his racial difference makes him completely unknowable and, therefore, not even worthy of trying to know.

Sophia’s failure to empathize with Caspar, and her refusal to take the violence inherent in her family’s wealth seriously, returns forcefully in the novel’s final act when Caspar murders Minna. Before this dramatic denouement, though, Sophia is given an opportunity to atone for her cruel treatment of Caspar when he unexpectedly arrives in Paris after escaping Trebennick Academy. Instead, Sophia repeatedly and cruelly rejects Caspar, who returns out of love and admiration for her. While Sophia’s attitudes about Minna’s Jewishness evolve throughout their relationship, Sophia’s racism against Caspar intensifies in the latter half of the novel as his presence forces her to confront the horrific reality of her economic privilege, which is a privilege she variously downplays, rebukes, and uses for revolutionary advantage. Sophia’s treatment of Caspar, in comparison with Minna, demonstrates the fragility of Sophia’s new identity. Sophia’s encounter with Minna’s alterity helps her to understand the shared oppressions of women and the labouring classes (while also being erotically appealing to her), but she utterly refuses to accept Caspar’s racial difference and confront how she and her family have exploited that

difference for their own gain. Sophia thus makes Caspar the abjected part of her old class identity that, if not continually repressed, could resurface and break apart her revolutionized identity and independence. In Caspar, then, the intersections between class critique and colonialism crystallize, and we see how Sophia's embrace of the freeing possibilities of failure is essentially self-serving. Though she is willing to help in the class wars, a meaningful engagement with the legacies of colonialism, racism, and exploitation remains a hard limit in her new political views, which inevitably weaken her feminist critiques of gendered and classed inequality.

Devastatingly, Warner shows that it is precisely Sophia's lack of compassion for Caspar and refusal to reckon with her family's source of wealth that leads to the collapse of her happy life with Minna. When Sophia insists that there is no room for Caspar in her home with Minna, he boards with the antisemitic neighbour Madame Coton, and every night is "warned afresh against the Jewess" Minna (311). Sending Caspar off leaves the compassionate Minna with a feeling of misgiving, an "intuition, a feeling that this is something we shall have to regret" (311), and in the end, her dread is justified. When Caspar later escapes a new school, Sophia asks Frederick to intervene, and he, in turn, "deposits" Caspar in a local *Gardes Mobile* detachment (354). Sophia has the sense that Frederick places him in a Left Bank detachment to taunt her, and as such, she feels haunted by Caspar, often thinking that she sees him in the parading groups of "prancing youngsters" patrolling the streets (354). Despite this feeling, "an angry unwillingness kept her from looking too closely, for this was another of Frederick's lucky cannons" (354). As Sophia refuses to look at Caspar, the shame and racism that she figuratively denies becomes literal.

When Sophia and Minna join the other revolutionaries at the barricades during the June Days uprising, Sophia can no longer ignore Caspar. In the ultimate act of revenge and revolt against Sophia and her repeated rejection, Caspar stabs Minna in the chest with his bayonet while yelling, “Jewess! This is the end of you” (382). Caspar’s act represents Sophia becoming undone by that which she has repressed at the brutal expense of Minna. The act also crystallizes Warner’s arguments about the intersections of oppression and the privileges of failure. Linett argues that “Sophia’s indifference to Caspar’s antisemitism and the racial prejudice that causes her to devalue and underestimate him distance readers from her character, revealing her blindness to the role of racism in larger systems of oppression” (107). Hackett, meanwhile, argues that Minna’s murder is used “to press the political point that divisions across gender, race, and nation cripple the struggle to change oppressive relationships between labor and wealth” (112). It is a decidedly dramatic way to illustrate the importance of an intersectional resistance, but Minna’s apparent murder is another example of how Warner exploits the effect of shock on her readers to jolt them into a sharp political engagement. Caspar’s attack on Minna, however melodramatic a climax it might be, demands that the reader re-evaluate Sophia’s prejudices and how her adoption of failure and its freeing possibilities are purchased with Minna’s life.

Warner also comments on patriarchal abuse and exploitation here by making Caspar a conduit of Frederick’s revenge. In these maneuverings, Caspar is doubly used and abused: Frederick only cares for him in the hopes that he will torment Sophia, while the counter-revolutionary effort only values him as disposable labour. Though Warner primarily makes Caspar a sympathetic figure, his violence has the potential to undo that

sympathy as both he and Frederick momentarily emerge as the joint antagonists of the novel. However, it is Frederick who finally surfaces as the victor alongside the crushed and ruined lives of Sophia, Minna, *and* Caspar. Having been rejected by Sophia and Minna, Frederick violently reasserts his presence in Sophia's life, and through Caspar, he attempts to own and manage Sophia's desire. Caspar also has his own revenge plot since he is jealous of Minna and hurt that Sophia has repeatedly rejected him. Caspar's act is thus saturated with political and narrative significance. At Caspar and Minna's expense, Warner stresses the damaging legacies of racism, antisemitism, and colonialism, while also portraying the damages of white patriarchal power and the possession and destruction of women's desire. Through all of this, though, Caspar fundamentally remains a tragic figure who is made into a violent instrument of the same violent white patriarchal power that has exerted itself in profoundly destructive ways in his own life. In the end, Caspar receives an ending as bloody as Minna's, as Sophia violently suppresses her prejudices by shooting Caspar in the face before being taken prisoner.

There is no resolution to Sophia's involvement in the exploitative colonial practices that result in the deaths of Minna and Caspar. Just as Caspar was a hard limit in Sophia's political awakening and embrace of failure, her own act of violence remains a key unresolved—perhaps unresolvable—point in the novel's political development. The tragic fates of Caspar and Minna also prove that Sophia's embrace of the life of a “fallen woman” is self-serving, as she unselfconsciously assumes Minna's bohemian lifestyle—becoming Minna by “tak[ing] her place” (Love 140)—and rejects her responsibilities for Caspar in her dogged pursuit of freedom. This lack of self-awareness is made explicit by how Sophia becomes happier and more fulfilled by the revolution and poverty while

Minna languishes. This is not to suggest that Sophia does not love Minna; instead, her lack of awareness establishes how her personal perspective is often at odds with material reality. Sophia is aware of Minna's unhappiness, but fails to see the full extent of how her new dominance in Minna's life is damaging. In the wake of Minna's death, Sophia is devastated, and the persistent fear that her newfound happiness will end becomes realized. Minna's death also shifts Sophia's perspective, where, suddenly, her perspective and reality converge, as she sees the impact and uses of her privilege with clear eyes.

Just as Warner uses Caspar's act of violence to shock the reader into a more nuanced reading of the novel's politics and Sophia's choices, Sophia herself is literally shocked into a sharp political engagement. She is captured by soldiers who debate where to execute her and the other captive revolutionaries, but Sophia is dismissive of her impending death since she thinks that returning to her old life as "Mrs. Willoughby" is far worse than being executed. Even when standing alongside other people who are about to die, Sophia remains calm—almost disinterested—but just as the order for their execution is about to be given, a priest brought to deliver absolution to the prisoners declares that he "cannot consent to the death of a woman" (390). At this, Sophia shows emotion for the first time since Minna's death, and importantly, demonstrates a nuanced sensitivity to the classed inequalities women face. Sophia no longer views poverty as an escape from restrictive social norms, and experiences an epiphany where the intersections between the punishing structures of gender and class become clear to her. Provoked by Minna's death, and inspired by her life's example, Sophia cries out furiously:

'Death of a woman! And how many women are dead already, and how many more will be, with your consent and complaisance? Dead in besieged towns, and

towns taken by storm. Dead in insurrections and massacres. Dead of starvation, dead of the cholera that follows starvation, dead in childbed, dead in the workhouse and the hospital for venereal diseases. You are not the man to boggle at the death of a woman.’ (390)

In the wake of her proclamation, it “seemed to her, and she was glad, that she had screamed like a virago of the streets” (390). Sophia’s response to the priest’s statement is both transgressive and an acknowledgement of her past transgressions. While Sophia becomes increasingly more radical and politically engaged as she embraces her status as a fallen woman, these changes and her efforts are only ever acknowledged by like-minded individuals, and, as such, are unremarkable to them. To her annoyance, Sophia is often treated differently in public because of her speech and mannerisms. When she publicly berates a priest in front of the National Guard during her own execution, then, her feelings of gladness are genuine because she hopes that for once, people who are not revolutionaries will see beyond her gender and class. In this moment, Sophia hopes to emerge in a new authoritative form, as a “virago of the streets” rather than a “well-finished” woman whose authority comes from her class.

Hackett notes that Sophia’s speech parallels the early moment when the kilnman castigates Sophia for only being concerned with the deaths of upper-class children. Hackett argues that while the kilnman does not appear again in the novel, “his language, once flung at her, becomes her own and enables her to make an attack, like his, on class-based injustice” (108). Sophia learns how to make class-based critiques from the kilnman, and by repurposing his argument to advocate for unclassed women, she aligns herself with a class and language not her own, but which she understands she can use in

conjunction with her social status to become an advocate for others. To Sophia's profound horror, though, the brief moment of triumph is almost immediately deflated. Sophia can neither shed the markers of her class nor use her privilege to help other women, so with a submissive bow, the priest corrects himself, saying, "I cannot consent to the death of a lady" (390). "Bitterly humiliated," Sophia is freed (390).

There is a vital confusion in the reception and failure of Sophia's speech: for Sophia, her speech not only advocates for justice on behalf of other women, but it is also a public assertion of her allegiance that she hopes will finally allow her to shed the constraints of her class. The priest, though, denies Sophia with his rebuke, and hurls the term "lady" at her to put her back in her place. The novel thus ends with a wholly non-affirmative or liberating failure—in this instance, Sophia fails in the traditional sense. She is unsuccessful in her pursuit to save the other people's lives, she is unable to exert a new class allegiance before the priest, and her contented life with Minna is gone. She also makes her declarations amid the ruins of a failed revolution. It is a powerful transformation, since the liberating failures that accumulated over the course of the novel are gone, and in their wake, Sophia is left with a clear-sighted view of the stark reality of poverty, loss, and systemic—seemingly unyielding—inequality.

"Whether I die first or survive you, I lose you": Loss and the Cost of Freedom

Just as Warner has a talent for narrative transformation, she also has a talent for writing troubling and ambiguous endings. Like *Lolly Willowes*, the ending of *Summer Will Show* resists a triumphant assertion of the possibilities of escape. Gillian Beer sees a trend in Warner's fiction where "escape is investigated rather than celebrated" (86), but in

Summer Will Show, the investigation of escape is precisely where Warner's most important critical work takes place. Throughout the novel, we watch as Sophia develops an understanding of how failing social norms can foster alternative social possibilities. More importantly, though, we watch as she develops an understanding of the material and ideological conditions surrounding her class status which enabled her "failures" to occur in the first place. Sophia gradually becomes aware of the double standards that allow for women like herself to fail and thrive, while poor, unclassed, and racialized women "fail" and die. There is an unresolved limit and wilful ignorance to Sophia's political awareness, however, as we see in her violent repression of Caspar and the colonial legacies he represents. Warner also carefully illustrates how women who are already marginalized in society cannot choose to fail and, therefore, cannot self-consciously resist gendered norms in the same way as privileged women like Sophia, since they were never accepted by those norms in the first place. As such, Warner foregrounds how unclassed women have even fewer tools to use against systems of power and oppression since they cannot remake or subvert processes that have rendered them outcasts or invisible. *Summer Will Show* proposes that only advocating for feminist advances is not enough because orthodox feminism is also a privileged club. Warner uses Sophia's developing political awareness—as well as her failures to grapple with her place within systems of racial inequality and colonial exploitation—to promote a nascent material feminism with an emphasis on the intersections between race, class, and gender.

Though the overall political project of the novel is hopeful and progressive, its ending is sorrowful and tragic. *Summer Will Show* ends after Minna's implied death, with Sophia freed and back in their shared home, poring over a copy of Marx's *Communist*

Manifesto. Indeed, the novel ends with a lengthy citation from Marx. This conclusion troubles scholars just as much as Laura's subservience to Satan does in *Lolly Willowes*. Though both novels have utopic impulses, they eventually refuse those by emphasizing how feminist freedom is bought at a great cost, and how limited and often melancholic that freedom is once achieved—although the ending of *Summer Will Show* is even more fraught than *Lolly Willowes*. Linett highlights the troubling “antisemitic strain in the novel” that “finds it easy and appropriate to kill off a Jewish character once she has fulfilled her function of mirroring the English protagonist's loss and alienation so that the protagonist can move forward” and notices a disquietingly close association with Stalinism, where Minna's socialism is killed off in order to free “the orthodox Communist in Sophia” (102). The sacrifice of Minna, no matter how painfully felt by Sophia, is like Caspar's story in that it is another unresolvable point in the novel. This narrative untidiness and dissatisfaction in Sophia's treatment of Minna and Caspar is precisely the point, though: as a privileged white woman, Sophia makes it out of the literal and figurative conflicts of the novel alive, while Minna and Caspar do not. Sophia's story reveals the exclusions of failure as a tool of resistance while proving that failure is not liberating for those who never get to choose that designation.

Reading the inclusion of Marx in the finale, Caserio argues that Warner's “submission” of the novel to Marx emphasizes how “Sophia, having set out for Paris to initiate her further bearing and delivery of children, exchanges this project for bearing and delivering the offspring of Marx and Engels” (265). Caserio concludes that this exchange suggests that Marx and Engels “are enwombed in a woman's story, that Sophia's narrative is impregnated with the *Manifesto*, so that the latter grows out of

female experience” (265). According to this reading, Sophia radicalizes her socially prescribed role as a mother, which helps reclaim the centrality of her story and resistance in an ending that otherwise threatens to erase her. Sophia sees a new avenue for escape in her adoption of Marx, just as Laura sees her opportunity for escape in Satan.

Nevertheless, these escapes remain unsatisfying since Laura and Sophia both capitulate to the authority of men. This dissatisfaction in the endings and feminism of the novels offers a rich encounter with the possibilities of liberating failure. Warner is not naïve about the capacity of failure or feminist critique. She does not propose that failure is *the* tool to produce change, or that feminist critique is sufficient enough to create real-world transformation. Instead, Warner envisions a more realistic approach to women’s independence that usefully combines failure, critique, and persistence in order to create a space of autonomy for an individual woman that enables her to look forward to, and participate in, efforts (or sometimes merely hopes) for all women’s emancipation. Thus, when Sophia begins reading the *Communist Manifesto*, she does so because it is a hopeful document of a freer and more equitable future that momentarily blots out the reality of the oppressive and tragic world she inhabits. For a novel punctuated by drama and explosive events, the final pages of *Summer Will Show* are soft, sad, and filled with failure and regret. In the end, the melancholy and disappointing ending to Sophia’s story is entirely appropriate, since hers is a story of failure.

Chapter Four

“I had a shot at the life I wanted. And I failed”: Stagnation, Indifference, and Jean Rhys as a Feminist (Modernist) Killjoy in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*

“[I]t was no use. I knew in myself that it would never happen. I would never be part of anything. I would never really belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong, and failing. Always something would go wrong. I am a stranger and I always will be, and after all I didn’t really care”
– *Smile Please*, Jean Rhys’s autobiography

Even at their most melancholy, Vita Sackville-West’s and Sylvia Townsend Warner’s narratives of failed women are redemptive and hopeful. *All Passion Spent* concludes with hope for the next generation of willful women, *Lolly Willowes* depicts the virtue of persistence and the relief of escape, and *Summer Will Show* demonstrates how grief can be transformed into resistance. These novels offer flights from reality into worlds of possibility, hope, and sometimes even whimsy, and they do this by recuperating the socially “failed” identities of their protagonists by remaking them into triumphant feminist women who unselfconsciously sweep away patriarchal detritus to clear a space for art, community, nature, and revolution. By contrast, Jean Rhys’s interwar fiction is neither hopeful nor willingly feminist. *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) are hauntingly similar narratives that explore alienation and desperation.⁵⁹ These are novels about women who live precariously on the fringes of society and are transient, alcoholic,

⁵⁹ Rhys and her novels are often described as “haunted” which is an apt metaphor and also a way to describe the belatedness associated with her fiction—both in terms of her delayed critical reception (where she apocryphally remarked that her fame after the success of *Wide Sargasso Sea* had come “too late”), and in her novel’s plots. Narrative-wise, it is as if readers are dropped into a novel *after* the plot has already occurred; when we arrive, her characters are already “smashed up,” to use Julia’s term (38), and we are there to watch them poorly cope. For more on Rhys’s ghost imagery and “spectral afterness” (499), see Graham Fraser’s excellent reading of *Good Morning, Midnight*.

desperately poor, depressed to the point of being suicidal, and who rely on affairs with wealthy men to survive. There is nothing liberating about their failures since their experiences are as blunt as Rhys's prose: quite simply, social failure makes their lives unlivable and perpetuates their statelessness, poverty, and abuse.

Rhys's fiction makes for uncomfortable reading. Whereas pockets of joy and communion mitigate the sorrow, frustration, and injustices that Sackville-West and Warner's protagonists face, Rhys's women consistently experience further pain and isolation. There is no redemption in these novels, and her protagonists are never rescued from their dire circumstances. In fact, their situations actually become worse by the end of each novel, with Marya's implied death in *Quartet*, Julia's estrangement from her family and abject poverty in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Anna's hemorrhage from a back-alley abortion in *Voyage in the Dark*, and Sasha's repeated sexual assaults at the end of *Good Morning, Midnight*. As Graham Fraser describes, the final sentences of Sasha's story are "surely some of the most despairing in modern literature" (504). When we identify this despair and discomfort as cornerstones of Rhys's narrative project, though, we see that she makes her readers uncomfortable to intensify our responses to her protagonists' distress, who are women cast aside as scandalous and foreign—or worse, as women not even worth bothering about. Rhys refuses to rescue her protagonists in much the same way that she refuses to let her readers off the hook: since her women are locked in cycles of despair and self-consciousness, Rhys extends that self-consciousness to her readers to make an ethical address on behalf of those in our society who are similarly poor, traumatized, and stateless. Remarkably, though Rhys's fiction contains this clear

ethical call-to-arms on behalf of marginalized women, she does not make this address from an ideologically feminist position.

One of the many contradictions about Rhys and her critical legacy is that she was unconvinced by the feminist movement and yet her fiction has so often been analyzed through feminist lenses. Rhys rarely gave interviews as she preferred to keep her life private, but after the success of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), she developed friendships with different writers and critics with whom she granted interviews in the 1970s. During this candid period, she told David Plante that “I’m not at all for women’s lib. I don’t dislike women exactly, but I don’t trust them” (40), and in a letter to Helen Nebeker she wrote, “I’m not, strictly speaking, a feminist at all” (vii). In typical Rhys fashion, though, these decisive anti-feminist statements are contradicted in an interview with Mary Cantwell where she said that “I think women have been rather badly treated...A woman almost has to be twice as good as a man to be a success. I’m glad there’s so much fuss about it now...because it wasn’t really fair” (25). And yet, in response to a television production of her work which was “distorted as to make the Movement the message,” Rhys also told Cantwell that she was “so depressed I swore I’d never write again. I just wanted to say about life [sic], not about propaganda” (25). Of course, Rhys is responding here to second-wave feminism, which is vastly different from the first-wave feminist context of her early career. Though she refused to identify her fiction and personal views with either wave, she nevertheless acknowledged that she was “glad” about the “fuss” second-wave feminists were making about women’s rights. These contrary statements are part of the long history of Rhys’s inconsistent and elusive feminism, which is an (anti)feminism that has long confounded and frustrated critics. In 1988 Laura Niesen de

Abruña noted that Rhys's "'heroines' are unco-operatively anti-feminist" (326); in 2000 Katie Owen wrote that she found it "hard to see how feminist critics can claim any part" of Rhys and her oeuvre (xviii); and in 2013 Anne Cunningham identified the tension in Rhys's fiction where she "lays bare the expectations of patriarchal femininity while also disavowing conventional feminist praxis" (385).

Critics have similarly found Rhys's life to be anti-feminist and disconcerting. In her review of Lillian Pizzichini's 2009 biography of Rhys, Lesley McDowell summarizes the narrative of Rhys's life which included "her 'showgirl' career, her brief stint as a prostitute, her abortion paid for by an ex-lover, her three disastrous marriages, her alcoholism, her stay in Holloway prison for assault, [and] her short sojourns in asylums." McDowell writes that Rhys ultimately "turned to men to prop up and pay for her" and that her life is precisely "the kind of narrative we don't really want to read in a post-feminist age" (n.p.).⁶⁰ Early Rhys criticism tended to reductively map these biographical details onto her fiction, and so contemporary scholars have been trying to amend that critical legacy.⁶¹ Although Rhys's work is not merely reducible to her biography, aspects of her life clearly intersect with her fiction and are thus worth taking into account.

⁶⁰ It is worth mentioning that many feminists, myself included, do not view sex work, abortions, failed marriages, and mental health crises as being fundamentally anti-feminist. Nor do I endorse the assertion that we live in a "post-feminist" age. However, I nevertheless take McDowell's point that Rhys's reliance on men and her accumulated life experiences frustrate the typical trajectory of a feminist life informed by intentional resistance, advocacy, solidarity with women, and a detachment—or at least desire for a detachment—from a reliance on men.

⁶¹ Indeed, the overlap of Rhys's fiction with her biography is a mythologized part of her legacy. After the publication of *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1939, it was widely believed that Rhys had died (perhaps by suicide), so it came as a shock when she was found alive in the 1950s after the BBC solicited the public for information when they were producing a radio adaptation of the novel. In another remarkable story, Diana Athill writes of how one of Rhys's obituaries misreported the crime of her first husband Jean Lenglet, attributing his imprisonment to the crime of Stephan Zelli from *Quartet*. This fusion of fiction and biography persists, as we see in Caryl Phillips' recent *A View of the Empire at Sunset* (2018), which is a fictionalization of Rhys's autobiography *Smile Please*.

Diana Athill, the editor of Rhys's late work, explains that writing served a "therapeutic function" (6) for Rhys and that her novels "started out with something that had happened" which she would write down as quickly and accurately as possible. From there, she "would be compelled to leave out things that had happened, or to put things in; to increase this or that—all this to suit the shape and nature of the work of art which was forming out of the original experience" (10). This method enabled Rhys to give narrative "substance to a story of suffering by giving it form" (Davidson 219), which is a strategy we see throughout her early novels. *Quartet* and especially *Voyage in the Dark* distort the idealism of the *bildungsroman* to depict young women's sexual exploitation and displacement, while *Good Morning, Midnight* masterfully manipulates the modernist techniques of streams-of-consciousness and non-linear chronology to create a looping and unsettling narrative of haunted memories and gradual dissolution.⁶²

While *Quartet*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Good Morning, Midnight* explore the experiences of women who are deemed social failures and outcasts because they are foreign, alcoholic, impoverished, and dependent, I examine her lesser-studied second novel *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* because it departs from the other three in its significant perspective shift. This change in focalization enables Rhys to explore the experiences and affects of both Julia and her oppressors. Rhys's early novels examine the

⁶² Addressing the biographical nature of Rhys's fiction is tricky since there is a long history of erasing her artistic talents in favour of representing her as a woman who made a career of writing pseudo-biographical grudging fiction about men. These readings are obviously reductive and misogynistic, but they have persisted in pockets of Rhys criticism, as Joseph Wiesenfarth demonstrates in his widely condemned study of Rhys in *Ford Madox Ford and the Regiment of Women* (2005), where he reduces Rhys to a vindictive, interminable victim. Contemporary scholars have rightfully tried to make amends for these dismissive and sexist readings, and my work shares this reparative goal. However, I do acknowledge that the anguish of Rhys's women is rooted in tangible experience, and as such cannot only be understood in terms of aesthetic readings of modernist abstraction. Her biography, when used cautiously and as a supplement, can be a useful tool to glean insight into her fiction.

abjection of their protagonists from first- and third-person perspectives, but *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is her only novel to occasionally use second-person perspective. This narrative shift, Jason Marley argues, is unique within Rhys's early canon and is used "to enact a collapse of the interiority among [the novel's] major characters" (1). I further propose that this perspective choice is essential to the kind of failure that Rhys depicts. Unlike Sackville-West and Warner's novels, which chart an embrace of failure through a linear series of epiphanies and personal advances, Julia experiences an increasingly desperate stagnation because of hers, which reduces her life to a seemingly endless barrage of torments that prevent her from moving forward; in short, failure makes Julia's life stagnant, repetitive, and unyielding. Rhys's varied narrative perspectives allow her to depict Julia's sense of this stagnation which is then verified through the perspectives and gazes of those around her—including the reader—who watch her collapse.

Though we see more of the characters' inner lives than in her other novels, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* has even less plot than usual for Rhys, and Julia, whose life V.S. Naipaul describes as a "comprehensive damnation" (57), is even more listless and unmoored than Marya, Anna, or Sasha. To survive, Julia lives off the meagre stipends given to her by former lovers and exists on the margins of respectable society in a series of seedy boarding houses, dingy clubs, and cheap cafés. When her latest lover's lawyer unceremoniously ends her allowance, her already fragile life is cast into further chaos. The emotional core of the novel forms around Julia's estrangement from her London family, which deepens when she returns home from Paris to see her dying mother only to be painfully, and finally, wrenched from her family's life forever after one last devastating fight. Since Julia's family feel that she abandoned them and respectable

society to marry an unsuitable man and wander Europe, they have no sympathy for her when her marriage fails, her infant son dies, and she becomes destitute. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is a bleak book, and yet it is a vital novel in the modernist canon because it both belongs to and complicates the notion of feminist modernism.

Rather than attempt to rehabilitate *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*—and by extension Rhys—back into the comfortable contexts of unambiguous feminism, this chapter asserts that Rhys is an unintentional feminist killjoy whose work frustrates the possibility of redeeming women’s social failure. The feminist killjoy, as Sara Ahmed articulates in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), operates in opposition to the “sociality of happiness” (56). Happiness, she observes, “involves a form of orientation: the very hope for happiness is assumed to follow from some life choices and not others” (54). Ahmed notes that we “could describe happiness quite simply as a convention, such that to deviate from the paths of happiness is to challenge convention” (64). The feminist killjoy, like Rhys, challenges conventions of happiness and “kills joy” by “not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising” (65). The feminist killjoy also “‘spoils’ the happiness of others” and “disturb[s] the fragility of peace” because she exposes “the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy” (65). Erin Wunker describes the feminist killjoy as “that irreverent figure who lights a match and joyfully flicks it into the dry hull of patriarchal culture” (15), but how can we read the killjoy when she—like Rhys’s characters—lives without joy or any specific political intention? What if, like Sasha Jansen, the killjoy struggles to light the match because she is weak from alcohol withdrawal, and rather than give the match an assertive flick she accidentally drops it? Are the engulfing flames of patriarchal culture any less impactful

because they were not intentionally set? I qualify Rhys as an “unintentional” feminist killjoy because her feminist critiques arise out of an indirect feminist polemic. Rhys did not aim to write feminist “propaganda” as she viewed it, and yet by painstakingly exploring how marginalized women navigate their lives in public, Rhys’s fiction contains some of the most potent feminist indictments of gendered oppression in the feminist modernist canon. No matter how unintended, the feminist blaze of her fiction cannot be ignored, as it contains critical insights into the possibilities and limits of women’s resistance in the early twentieth century.

As an unintentional feminist killjoy, Rhys proves that not all failure can be recuperated as liberating, because sometimes, failure is simply failure. With this, Rhys challenges Halberstam’s introductory provocation in *The Queer Art of Failure* that “not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures” (4). There are no pleasures associated with the gender failure Rhys portrays. Instead, she proves that it is sometimes necessary to resist the impulse to subsume women’s failure back into norms of success—or alternatives of success—because that impulse can trivialize the failures of women like Julia who have no choice but to inhabit the “failed” identity thrust upon them in a patriarchal culture. Rhys explores the failures of unclassed and foreign women in Europe (with origins from either the West Indies or Brazil) who have little to no family or social support, and it is precisely this deeper exploration of class, nationality, and social (dis)connection that enables Rhys to reveal the systems and processes of power that act on and over women’s bodies and agency from a very different perspective than Sackville-West or Warner. My reading of this subjugation thus takes into account how Rhys represents failure as a lived experience of stagnation but also how she stages the negative

affects of such failure. Due to her failed subject position, Julia is permeated with negative affect, but her feelings of shame, rage, and humiliation also permeate those around her.

Consequently, using Ahmed's theories about the circulation of affect, I examine how Rhys turns negative affect into a language of its own when Julia's language fails to adequately express her alienation. Importantly, Julia's language fails not only because she struggles to speak her experiences, but also because the people around her pointedly ignore her despair. As a result, producing negative feelings in others to mirror her own becomes a non-verbal way of making others pause—even if just for a second—and consider both the emotional and material deterioration of Julia's life. Despite the intensity of the affects that Julia occasionally feels and frequently produces in others, throughout the novel, she becomes progressively more indifferent, because her failed subject position delegitimizes her mourning, her sense of alienation, and her justified frustration with her degraded social status. Julia is an unwilling failure coded as such because she is divorced, ageing, impoverished, alcoholic, and relies on affairs with men to survive. Her developing sense of indifference, I argue, is the affective result of her powerlessness to transform these social failures into a new and liberating identity.

Finally, though Rhys might be an unintentional feminist killjoy, this chapter also examines how she is more pointedly a *modernist* killjoy since she challenges the conventions and aesthetics of modernism to make an ethical address. Rhys demands an emotional inward turn on behalf of her readers, where through reading the suffering of her protagonists, we are forced to confront the suffering in our own world. Julia repeatedly locates the source of her troubles as “organized society, in which she had no place and against which she had not a dog's chance” (17). For Rhys's women, organized

society is money, marriage, fine clothing, and a comfortable place to live. It also represents the social systems that abject them because of their status as poor, nationally othered, unmarried, and ageing women. This abjection leads the social insiders to turn pointedly away from their despair and need, and thus Rhys performs her most pressing political work by emphasizing how often people turn away from her protagonists' hardships and by depicting the psychic costs of being ignored. The consequence of these disavowals on Julia, as Lorna Sage observes, is that she "suffers time and again from a fear that she is unreal, that people can't hear or see her properly" (xii). With the novel's ethical address, Rhys demands that her readers not look away from Julia's suffering, but instead inhabit it. Of course, feelings do not automatically equate to ethical or political intervention, but as Lauren Berlant argues, feeling "is at least akin to *consciousness* that can lead to *action*" (105). One feeling that feminists have long converted into action is empathy, because, as Clare Hemmings describes, "[e]mpathy foregrounds the importance of feeling as knowledge; it opens a window on the experiences of others and stresses their importance for an ethical feminist epistemology" (151).

Rhys nudges her readers toward empathy and feminist action by implicating us directly in Julia's suffering through her narratological and aesthetic choices. Her strategic deployment of second-person perspective occasionally links her reader to the feelings of shame that circulate in the novel, and at other times, it creates a sense of humanity between us and Julia. At the same time, Rhys revises the modernist figure of the *flâneuse*. Although women's mobility throughout the city is already politicized in modernist literature, Rhys evacuates that mobility of any joy or readerly detachment, as we watch Julia aimlessly wander from dreary boarding house to red-lit backstreet, to public spaces

like cafés, parks, and trains where she is solicited by leering men who view her as a commodity. Through Rhys's depiction of irredeemable failure, her killjoy approach to modernist aesthetics, and her ethical address to receptive readers, reading *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* thus becomes a confrontation of our privileges and our denials, and is ultimately a plea to not turn away from the suffering of others, but to examine instead how we, too, might be culpable in the suffering of women like Julia.

“Because she could not imagine a future, time stood still”: The Stagnation of failure

Instead of failure offering Julia an opportunity to remake her life like it does for Sackville-West and Warner's protagonists, Rhys emphasizes how it stagnates Julia's emotional, social, and personal growth. Julia is “smashed up” (38) as soon as we meet her because of her failed relationships and because she cannot live up to the impossible standards of English society, which has no place for women like her. Writing of the (dis)comfort of norms, Ahmed argues that “[n]ormativity is comfortable for those who inhabit it” (147), which leaves people who fail norms (like Julia) in a state of perpetual discomfort. This unsettled feeling is cognitive—I feel “smashed up,” for instance—but also profoundly embodied, since social discomfort is “a feeling of disorientation: one's body feels out of place, awkward, unsettled,” as this affect returns “one's attention to the surfaces of the body *as body*” (*Cultural Politics* 148). Julia is painfully aware of herself as a public body since her movement throughout the city is frequently interrupted by strange men making advances on her, or by the judgmental looks of women. To avoid these gazes, Julia compulsively does her make-up and obsesses about fashion, which she views as armour. However, no amount of fur coats or powder can disguise the deeply felt

and embodied discomfort of someone like Julia who can never fit in, because the fact remains that the social fabric contains people who “cannot inhabit the social skin, which is shaped by some bodies, and not others” (148).

Julia fails to inhabit the social skin in numerous ways, which is clear to those around her, since her failures manifest in distinctly bodily ways: her frantic use of make-up to obscure her age; her bawdy and public drunkenness; her inability to be “properly” English through ethnicity and conduct; the death of her infant son; the seediness of the “gloomy” rooms whose striped walls “made her head ache worse” (8). These aspects of Julia’s life are foregrounded in the text as visible markers of her outsider status which are explicitly linked to her body; in turn, these markers of failure invite a public awareness of her as both spectacle and commodity. The tension in Julia’s life, though, is that she has to nurture the judgmental gazes of wealthy men who inhabit the social skin because her survival depends on her sexual appeal. As Cynthia Port observes, the “dread of female ageing is marked throughout Rhys’s fiction as not simply an economy of loss, but one that requires ongoing investment in a speculation that will inevitably lose value over time” (207). As her age increases and her money decreases, Julia cannot keep pace with the investments needed to stay with the trends of the sexual market, but disregarding her appearance is akin to annihilation. After Julia’s break-up with Mackenzie, the narrator grimly acknowledges that to “stop making up would have been a confession of age and weariness. It would have meant that Mr Mackenzie had finished her” (11).

While there are clear markers of Julia’s failures and otherness, she is also vaguely racialized, which is less evident to those around her, but no less felt by Julia. Curiously, just as Rhys experiments with perspective in this novel, she also reconfigures her

protagonists' origins. The West Indies are a central aspect of Rhys's fiction, and yet she removes that familiar context in Julia's story and replaces it with a few vague references to her mother's youth in South America. Julia's mother is described as "[d]ark-skinned, with high cheek-bones and an aquiline nose" (70) and in a rare moment of hallucinatory communication, she mutters about "orange trees" to Julia, who assumes that her mother must be "thinking of when she was in Brazil" (72). Julia remembers how her mother rarely spoke about her childhood, but would comment about England's cold. On one occasion, Julia recalls her mother saying, "[t]his is a cold, grey country. This isn't a country to be really happy in" (76) and on another that "I can't rest in this country. This is such a cold, grey country" (89). From a young age, then, Julia holds onto her mother's belief that there is something vaguely wrong with England, but she lacks the context of her own experience to know what she is missing.

These ambiguous references to Brazil and her mother's discontent make Julia's racialized roots the most obscure of Rhys's women, which is an obscurity pressed even further by Julia's lack of—and longing for—unattainable knowledge about her mother's life. When Julia arrives in London to see her dying mother, she has a profound desire to understand her and in turn be understood. As she sits next to her mother's silent and inert body, she feels that if "she could go on sitting there she would learn many deep things that she had only guessed at before" (71). Julia's longing for knowledge is met with the silence of her mother's incapacitation, but she finds her speech similarly incapacitated. Julia cannot form the words to explain herself: she "whisper[s] soundlessly: 'Oh darling, there's something I want to explain to you. You must listen'" (71). At that moment, her "mother's eyes opened suddenly and stared upwards" in a moment of hopeful

recognition, only for Julia to notice that “it was like seeing a spark go out and the eyes were again bloodshot, animal eyes” (71). As her mother begins crying, Julia’s hopes of recognition and understanding vanish. In this scene, Rhys gestures to a vague sense of diasporic longing that is more fully developed in her other novels, but which she strategically keeps ambiguous in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* to evince Julia’s profound feelings of alienation. Just as Julia is alienated from her mother, the reader is too. Though Rhys’s roving perspective lingers over the consciousness and life history of characters like Mackenzie, Horsfield, and Norah, we never have similar contact with Julia’s mother. All Julia can access—and all the reader can see—is her indistinct sense of connection to Brazil through the unspoken histories of her dying mother. Moreover, these tenuous associations are established through subtle gestures meaningful only to Julia, like when she haltingly asks her sister Norah to put the roses she bought for their mother outside—“Not—not inside” (92)—because she remembers how her mother had ached for the sun. After her mother’s death, Julia has only the “phantom memories that belonged really to her mother” (Sage xi) of a life outside of Britain’s punishing culture.

Julia’s longing for an elusive home is just one of many hauntings in the novel that underscore her sense of unbelonging and failure. While Julia’s failed status is evident to those around her, Rhys emphasizes the emotional and spiritual degradation of failure to her readers through the novel’s insistent spectral and animal imagery. There are many scholarly readings of this imagery and for good reason, since Rhys uses ghosts and animals throughout her entire oeuvre to tell the story of her women’s alienation. Elaine Savory reads this imagery as a mirror of Julia’s silence and deteriorating ability to speak, since neither “ghosts nor animals can converse with humans” (74), while Erica Johnson

reads the identification of Rhys's women with ghosts, animals, and inanimate matter as an attempt "to escape or at least extend their subjectivities beyond the limits of their own imperilled bodies" (209). Panayiota Chrysochou, in her turn, integrates the animal and ghost imagery to assert that Julia is a "borderline" character, "positioned in between antitheses, neither material nor ephemeral, occupying the categorical position of neither human, beast or ghost, but participating in all of them" (2). These readings establish how, in her abject state, Julia slips outside of adequate human representation into the world of apparitions and animals. They also figure the indeterminacy of Julia's character, and critical consensus, since scholars have variously argued that the ghosts and animals are an extension of her subjectivity but also an obliteration of it. However, when we read this imagery through the lens of failure—the same lens through which Julia reads her self—we see that Rhys offers us a distinctly human explanation for this imagery.

For Julia, failure is an experience of stagnation, since she can neither fix what has happened nor move forward to start anew. When she thinks "I had a shot at the life I wanted. And I failed..." (82), Julia highlights the impossible standards of her time. For her, the mistake of marrying the wrong man throws her off the only acceptable course of a woman's life, and her subsequent alcoholism, poverty, and affairs worsen her failed subject position. The ghosts and animals that puncture the novel's realism powerfully signify this stagnation, since they illustrate how Julia's failed status is so profound that it gradually strips her of human signifiers. As her life on the margins loses momentum and meaning, Julia eventually becomes more closely associated with animals and ghosts than with herself or other humans. What does remain socially legible about Julia is her failure, and so she uses the language of failure to describe herself since she feels like one, and

because she knows that is how people expect her to identify.

When Julia visits her wealthy ex-lover Neil James to ask for money, she explains “as one would say something off by heart: ‘I tried, you know, to make things a success after I married, but I didn’t pull it off’” (80). In reply, James flatly says, “‘Yes, I gathered that when I saw you last’” (80). James’ reply shows that Julia’s practiced recitation is unnecessary because her failures are apparent and require no explanation. When Julia tries to gather herself to explain her situation further, she realizes that there is no use in bothering. “Because he has money he’s a kind of god,” she disconsolately thinks, “[b]ecause I have none I’m a kind of worm. A worm because I’ve failed and I have no money” (81). Here, Rhys conjoins the experience of failure with animal imagery to reveal Julia’s parasitic dependence and her feelings of inert vulnerability. After she admits to herself that she is a failure, she adds, “I might have succeeded, and if I had people would have licked my boots for me” (82), thus relating “success” with the vindictive dominance she feels from others in more secure positions than her.

With James, Julia is animated by her hatred of everyone who has harmed her, which momentarily rouses this unusual articulacy. As Cathleen Maslen argues, “Rhys links material poverty with diminished emotional or subjective capacity” (89) which is why Julia struggles to articulate her feelings. This diminished subjective capacity and subject-position also explains why she is inhabited by a ghostly sense of dissolution that sabotages her language and ability to discern the world around her. When she receives her last cheque from Mackenzie’s lawyer—a stop payment that promises to finally propel her into abject poverty—Julia’s perception of other people becomes as insubstantial as her grasp on material necessities like food and shelter. During this episode, Julia’s

experience of failure becomes uncanny. As she “blindly” walks in a panic, the people who “glare” and “mutter” at her are reduced to “shadows...gesticulating” (16). Later, this dehumanizing ghost imagery becomes more direct when Julia and Horsfield make their careful, silent trek up the staircase in the dark to reach Julia’s room unnoticed by the landlady. When Horsfield reaches out to guide Julia, she reacts as if an apparition has passed her on the stairs: “Oh God, who touched me?... Who touched me? Who’s that? Who touched my hand? What’s that?” (118). The panicked repetition in her questions signals a profound dissociation from her own body, Horsfield, and the present moment, which is intensified by the silent darkness of their ascent.

A similarly remarkable example of dissociation occurs when Julia sees a “thin and eager” woman walking through the fog on Tottenham Court Road. Julia does not recognize the woman as another person, but rather as herself. As Julia walks, the “houses and the people passing were withdrawn, nebulous. There was only a grey fog shot with yellow lights, and its cold breath on her face, and the ghost of herself coming out of the fog to meet her” (49). Julia is unnerved to notice that her ghost “looked at her coldly, without recognizing her” (49). Just before this spectral encounter, Julia feels “that her life had moved in a circle. Predestined” (48), so the ghost scene moments after this realization cements this circularity—her life is so stuck that it has circled back on itself in an ominous loop. As Johnson contends, this “encounter with her own ghost powerfully conveys the depth of Julia’s estrangement from her humanity; that her own ghost finds her unworthy of recognition signals her essential despair and anomie” (223). Julia is not only haunted by her past, herself, and others, but also by the inanimate markers of the city: the houses become uncanny blurs that are illuminated by nightmarish streaks of

artificial light; everything is at once distant and altogether too close. With this, Rhys startlingly depicts Julia's disconnection not only from her own humanity but also from the very markers of civilization. This recurrent ghost imagery thus establishes that Julia's experience of failure is a gradual fading out—or ghosting—from people and society.

Although the novel's animal imagery is less unnerving, it is no less significant. The ghost imagery emphasizes Julia's liminal position in respectable society, as someone who is at once marginalized by social norms and yet still buffeted by their force. The animal imagery, by contrast, appears throughout the novel, but most forcefully during climactic moments of alienating conflict. Marley identifies two noteworthy moments of animalization when Norah looks at Julia "as if she were something out of a zoo" (52), which is later "mirrored" (9) by Julia when she tauntingly says in an argument with Norah that "[a]nimals are better than we are, aren't they? They're not all the time pretending and lying and sneering, like loathsome human beings" (97). With this retort, Julia reclaims the judgmental and animalizing gaze of Norah by asserting that being an animal is preferable to being a "mean beast" of a human (98) like her. Animalization also suggests her woundedness, as we see when Uncle Griffiths interrogates Julia about her failed marriage, which prompts her to feel "as though her real self had taken cover, as though she had retired somewhere far off and was crouching warily, like an animal, watching her body in the armchair arguing with Uncle Griffiths" (59).⁶³ Ultimately, Rhys's ghost and animal imagery confirms that without any anchors of conventional success like money or family, Julia becomes just another shadowy figure denied and

⁶³ These scenes of spectrality and animalization have been richly analyzed by a number of scholars. For more, see Chrysochou, Fraser, Johnson, Maslen, and Savory, among others. My reading subtly departs from these readings in my insistence that this imagery signifies the stagnating effects of failure.

ignored by those who inhabit respectable society. Indeed, Julia is so disconnected from this society that the pages of a magazine resemble to her “a world as remote and inaccessible as if it existed in another dimension” (45).

Rhys dramatizes the stagnation of failure even further through her representation of time. Since Julia has no future, time becomes indeterminate and formless. As the emblematic “successful” person in Julia’s life—because he was her first lover who dazzled her with his money, and because he is a lawyer—James’s time is described as precise and valuable.⁶⁴ By contrast to James’s industrious time, Julia’s time is blurred and often indiscernible because she has neither an economic nor interpersonal reason to track it. When thinking of how she slapped Mackenzie in a restaurant the day before, Julia “knew that she would always remember it as if it were yesterday—and always it would seem to have happened a long time ago” (43). Similarly, she cannot quite determine when and how long her trip to London had been. In her mind, it had “become a disconnected episode to be placed with all the other disconnected episodes which made up her life” (129). Rather than life being a continuity of experiences, failure reduces Julia’s life to a bewildering discontinuity.

One way of reading this discontinuity is through the lens of feminist theory that emphasizes embodiment and materiality. In *Living A Feminist Life* (2017), Ahmed discusses the importance of materiality in feminist theory and practice. The works of feminist women of colour like Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa are so influential, she writes, because they prove how “an embodied experience of power provides the basis of knowledge” (10). In their work, Lorde, Anzaldúa, and Ahmed see “the everyday as

⁶⁴ See Rebecca Colesworthy for a compelling, sustained analysis of James’s valuable time and gift theory.

animation” (10), which can be shaped into its own feminist theory. This insight is not merely a retread of the classic feminist slogan “the personal is political” (although that is still true), but rather an acknowledgement that the little details of daily life can contain illuminating feminist “resonances” (12). The modernists, as we know, were equally interested in the resonances and animation of everyday life. Through her representation of the stagnation of failure, Rhys brings together an embodied account of women’s oppression with a modernist exploration of the everyday. Because Julia is a failure, fleeting and everyday moments like a lingering gaze, a guiding touch, or the gleam of a street light at night take on profound and unsettling resonances, as they become heightened reminders of Julia’s inability to move forward in life, and of the paternalistic forces that continually shove her back onto the margins when she tries to fight back. The novel’s insistent ghost and animal imagery, meanwhile, work in tandem with these everyday moments of alienation to reinforce Julia’s ontological instability and gradual disappearance from society. Despite her feminist reluctance, Rhys’s narratives of women’s embodied failure thus enact their own kind of modernist feminist theory, where the stagnating effects of failure are painfully illuminated.

“he had been really afraid of her”: Moving Through Rhys’s Affective World

As Julia devolves into a silent and ghost-like figure, her relationships with other people and mainstream society wither; as a result, she becomes increasingly isolated and depressed. In her study of *Good Morning, Midnight*, Kristin Czarnecki reads Sasha’s loss of self through the lens of Kristevan depression, which is also a useful approach in reading Julia’s experience. Kristeva asserts that the depressed subject is “unbelieving in

language,” which makes them “prisoners of affect. The affect is their thing” (14). Throughout the novel, Julia repeatedly struggles to explain herself and be understood, either because language fails her, or because other people are unwilling or unable to hear her. As language repeatedly fails, affect moves in and gradually becomes Julia’s primary communicative medium. This substitution of language with emotion explains why the novel centres around Julia’s anguish and the negative feelings she produces in others. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* is pervaded by negative affect: despair, rage, humiliation, irritation, discomfort, and grief circulate around and through Julia and those around her. The movement of these affects conjures Kristeva’s “prisoners of affect” image, as the novel’s major characters are reluctantly bound to Julia through their fraught emotional attachments. At times, Julia intentionally produces uncomfortable feelings in others as a means of self-protection or retaliation, but at other times, adverse affects circulate around her simply because she is so visibly vulnerable and threatens the fictions of presumed security on which those around her rely. To understand this affective movement, and to investigate how Julia is progressively conditioned into indifference, I turn to feminist affect theory.

In “Affective Economies,” Sara Ahmed analyzes how emotions circulate and bind—or “stick”—groups of people together. In 2004, she theorizes about affect in the immediate context of the post-9/11 era of terror, where fear discursively produced and legitimized the figure of the “terrorist” and reinforced xenophobic prejudices in Western cultures. Though she writes in and of a singular moment of cultural anxiety, Ahmed’s theory about the movement of affect also works within the context of Rhys’s world. This is because, according to Ahmed, feelings have a material impact. When we understand

the circulation and effects of emotion as an “affective economy,” we see that “emotions *do things*” (119), and this doing creates boundaries, attachments between people and things, and reinforces the existence and abjection of the “other.” Emotions “align individuals with communities,” but they also align “bodily space with social space” (119). The boundaries created by these emotional attachments dictate who an individual can align themselves with and where they can go in the world. Importantly, Clare Hemmings argues that affects “not only draw us together,” but can also “force us apart, or signal the lack of any real intersubjective connection” (152). This pulling apart by affect is precisely what Julia experiences: because she lacks substantial “intersubjective” connections, those around her fear social contamination. In Rhys’s world, respectability consequently has a moral and emotional quality, as its influence and security is felt by those who have it and used against those who lack it. Based on the disgust of those in “organized society” who see her, as Mackenzie does, as one of “these people” whose final “descent in the social scale was inevitable, and not far off” (20-21), Julia is fully aware of how affects circulate and link people within respectable society, while abjecting others, like herself. The effects of these exclusions are profound, since “social isolation often engenders sexism, racism, and economic impoverishment” (Marley 6). Julia, then, is both structurally *and* affectively excluded. In light of these layered exclusions, Rhys emphasizes how Julia uses negative affect as a weapon against those who harm her, while at the same time she becomes increasingly indifferent to the influence of other peoples’ feelings about her.

The circulation of affect is established by the novel’s shifting perspectives, which allows Rhys to portray Julia’s feelings of fear and shame which are then mirrored in her

lovers through the anxiety they feel about their sexual improprieties and uneasy attachments to her. Early in the novel we see this mirroring when Julia is crushed by Mackenzie's dismissal, as she is left with a "sore and cringing feeling" (9). However, when Mackenzie cuts off her allowance, Julia feels confusion, rage, and then a sensation of "dreary and abject humiliation" (15). These feelings soon become Mackenzie's own, as he watches with horror as Julia, "pale as a ghost" (22), walks into the restaurant where he is dining. For a moment, Mackenzie becomes as inarticulate as Julia, as he repeatedly thinks "O God, oh Lord" (22) as if to will God to exorcise her out of the restaurant. Instead, he realizes with shock that "'she's come here to make a scene'" (22)⁶⁵ and to threaten his social standing.

As soon as Julia enters the restaurant, Mackenzie shares a look of "significance" with the Maître d' that "telegraphed, 'I understand; I remember this woman. Do you want me to have her put out?'" (22). Their shared feelings of disapproval "stick" them together, and creates what Ahmed observes is "the very effect of a collective" (119), as they become united against Julia's disrespectable presence. Their collective effort to deflate Julia's confidence fails, though, since she is bolstered by a rare sensation of defiant indignation. In the restaurant, Julia loudly describes how Mackenzie's lawyer bullied her, and suddenly it is Mackenzie, not Julia, who is aware of himself as a vulnerable public body. In response, Mackenzie repeatedly scans the room to see if

⁶⁵ Elaine Kraf connects Mackenzie's anxiety here to Hugh Heidlers' obsession with keeping up appearances in *Quartet*. In that novel, Hugh repeatedly implores Marya not to betray their relationship in public. Kraf writes that for these men, "their fear of public embarrassment far outweighs love, affection, and even a sense of decency" (125). Kraf is also quick to point out the subtlety in Rhys's depiction of Mackenzie, which is "without overt criticism" and in fact "carefully weigh[s] his good points and honorable intentions" (125) which attests to Rhys's preference for exploring the gray areas of social being and interaction.

anyone is watching and anxiously tries to maintain “a sane and normal atmosphere” (23). Mackenzie’s vulnerability is both emotional—evidenced by his anxiety—and physical, as his “collar felt too tight for him. He thrust his chin out in an instinctive effort to relieve the constriction. The movement was exactly like that of a horse shying” (24). Here, Mackenzie is reduced to an animal body like Julia is so often, and his “shying” implies both his fear and his attempts to flee. It is an image of fight or flight in the respectable public sphere, where Mackenzie’s only respectable recourse is to tamp down his fear to avoid spectacle and instead attempt to reassert his dominance. Fixing his eyes on Julia, he “deliberately assume[s] an expression of disgust” (25), but his efforts fail since Julia has seen those expressions all her life. Instead, Julia reflects onto Mackenzie all the disgust, rage, and hurt she has endured from others. In this moment, Mackenzie is momentarily the one within someone else’s thrall. With a wrenching realization, he notices a threatening gleam in her eye and thinks “[m]y God, she’s going to attack me” (26), and so Julia musters the courage to pick up her glove and hit him in the cheek with it, so lightly “that he did not even blink,” before saying “I despise you” (26) and leaving.

This crucial scene has invited a range of critical responses. Rebecca Colesworthy argues that Julia’s slap is a physical reciprocation of the metaphorical “blow” to her well-being that their break-up caused, except that her act of “retribution falls woefully short” since “she leaves the restaurant defeated” (98). Marley, meanwhile, argues that “the power and force of this scene is diminished as the thoughts and consciousness of the two are conflated, and the physical and psychological distance between them vanishes” (19). For Colesworthy and Marley, the slap is a failure, in part, because it does not bolster Julia’s sense of self or set her on a new, self-determined path. Undoubtedly, the

restaurant scene leaves Julia more shattered, as Colesworthy observes, but it *also* momentarily shatters Mackenzie. The conflation of their subjectivities that Marley reads as the scene's failure is precisely the point—this blending strengthens the power of Julia's act, rather than diminishes it. Since Mackenzie compartmentalizes his relationship with Julia as an “insanity” (19) separate from his otherwise respectable life, when she makes a scene in the restaurant, the fictions he tells himself about his conduct and standing within respectable society are destabilized and exposed for all to see. This is not a scene of vindication. We are not meant to read her feeble slap as a failure, or her will to confront Mackenzie as a rare triumph of self-determination. Instead, this is a scene of mutual social extinction. For a brief moment, the slap publicly aligns Julia and Mackenzie, as her feelings of regret and humiliation momentarily stick to him. So, when Julia inevitably leaves feeling more defeated and degraded, those affects and their social *effects* also spread to Mackenzie, who for a split second feels what it is like to be Julia.

The confrontation between Julia and Mackenzie creates an unmistakably public intimacy between two people whose relationship is otherwise meant to be concealed and which threatens to damage them both. The scene also draws attention to the broader social anxieties about women's use of public spaces. As Bridget Chalk reminds us, the early twentieth century “offered a widening range of public spaces that catered to unaccompanied women” (218) like restaurants, shops, and boarding houses. These “semi-public” spaces commodified domestic services that had traditionally existed in private. Women's new freedom to consume, and to consume in public, thus “activated cultural anxieties about normative gender roles and expectations” (218). Importantly, Chalk notes that women's public consumption did not always signify respectable independence, as

“[s]ingle women’s entrance into modernism’s public spaces served in many cases to cement, rather than erase, the associations between female urban visibility and socially damning promiscuity” (218).⁶⁶ In the restaurant, then, Julia uses this visibility to her advantage to reflect some of that “socially damning promiscuity” back onto Mackenzie.

The restaurant scene is a powerful example of the circulation of affects in the novel, and of how Julia causes others to feel as badly as she does when language fails to express her feelings of abjection. However, these feelings are so intense and injuring to Mackenzie because Julia confronts him in the restaurant, which is a public scene of respectability. With Horsfield, Rhys again stresses that location is an essential component of the novel’s affective economy, as Horsfield’s feelings of shame, excitement, and despair are specifically linked to the spaces he inhabits. In Rhys’s canon of abusive men, Horsfield—a man whom Maslen calls “a connoisseur of melancholy” (96)—is among the most predatory since he transparently sees Julia as an easy target and initially shows little sympathy for her despair. In fact, he views her anguish as an inferior reflection of his own troubles. In the novel’s most direct example of the circulation of affect, Horsfield drunkenly listens to Julia recount how Mackenzie devastated her. “[W]hat she was saying,” the narrator describes, seemed to Horsfield “very intimate and close. He *began*

⁶⁶ In addition to exploring the tensions of the semi-public/private spheres of boarding houses and restaurants, Rhys also examines the social space of the public restroom, which we see most clearly in *Good Morning, Midnight* when Sasha frequently dashes into restrooms to cry or do her makeup. Ian Todd explains that the public restroom was a novel invention in the early twentieth century meant to conceal both literal and metaphorical social dirt. It “arose out of a desire to impose a certain degree of respectability on the space of the modern city and its inhabitants” and it maintained “the propriety of its citizens, particularly women” (192). Within this history, Todd discusses modernism’s impulse for anarchy and to degrade middle-class respectability by lingering over images of the public bathroom, toilets, and general filth. In these spaces, Todd argues, modernists engaged with social taboos and aspects of modernity that respectable citizens wanted to disavow. I agree that Rhys exploits the shock of representing the restroom in her fiction to engage with taboos, but she also uses it as a space of protection and dejection, as her protagonists go to the restroom to both collect themselves and to feel more degraded as they gaze in public mirrors. However, it is not the scenes of public toilets that are most obscene about Rhys’s fiction. What is most obscene and even more banal than bodily functions is the male violence against women that permeates her fiction.

to apply it to himself and he thought with anger. ‘It’s always like that. When you are tottering, somebody peculiarly well qualified to do it comes along and shoves you down’” (emphasis added 38). The verb “apply” here makes explicit the circulation of affect in the scene, and shows how Horsfield intentionally adopts Julia’s emotions. Julia’s feelings of rage and hopelessness are thus used like an affective varnish by Horsfield to lacquer his own bruised ego over his feelings of inadequacy and listlessness. Indeed, Horsfield first notices Julia not because he is attracted to her, but because he is attracted to how she publicly humiliates Mackenzie.

The uneasy voyeuristic pleasure Horsfield derives from watching Julia’s confrontation with Mackenzie unfold in the restaurant is bolstered by his dining partner’s disapproval of her. Despite these uneasy feelings—or perhaps because of them—afterwards, Horsfield follows Julia to a nearby café and their first evening together is fraught with his impatience, disappointment, and even rage by Julia’s misery and unwillingness to show him “a good time” (34). This frustration later turns into physical aggression when Julia refuses to take him to a club. When she wearily explains that she is tired and wants to be alone, Julia assures him that he will “soon find a girl who’ll show [him] something better” (32). In response, Horsfield “went after her and took her by the arm, feeling defrauded and extremely annoyed” (32). As she withdraws her arm from his grasp, he notices a young man watching them (just as Horsfield earlier watched Mackenzie) and becomes self-conscious. However, the location of this new confrontation preserves Horsfield’s respectability which contrasts with how Mackenzie’s is endangered in the restaurant. If “all this had happened in the daylight,” the narrator notes, “he would have been shamefaced and would have left her as soon as he decently could” (33), but

instead Horsfield realizes that the “deserted street, with its shabby, red-lit hotels, cheap refuges for lovers, was the right background for what she was saying” (33). With this, Horsfield explicitly links Julia to the seedy areas of Paris, and as such, the streets validate his poor treatment of her. Here, Horsfield feels neither a sustained self-consciousness over his behaviour nor a flickering of empathy toward Julia. Though the young man’s gaze does momentarily disarm Horsfield, he ultimately realizes that his audience poses no threat to his social standing, nor to his efforts in seducing Julia. Horsfield thus remains steadfastly opposed to empathetically responding to Julia’s despair, and given the back-alley scene of their confrontation, Julia’s shaming feelings do not travel to Horsfield and compel him to rethink his actions, as they do to Mackenzie in the restaurant.

Despite his earlier callousness, Horsfield does begin to genuinely empathize with Julia. Notably, this change occurs after they consummate their relationship, but this affective change is conspicuously dominant, as he begins to feel on her behalf when she becomes incapable of feeling for herself. Under the disapproving gaze of Julia’s landlady, a “feeling which was a reaction against her...swept over Mr Horsfield. He put his arm around Julia and said: ‘Come along, my dear’” (119). Mrs. Atherton’s judgement causes Horsfield to feel “an overwhelming contempt for the organization of society” (120), which mirrors the contempt and language Julia uses earlier to describe how “organized society” is against her. This exchange results in Julia’s eviction the following day, but despite the indignity, she remains mostly silent and indifferent, since she has been kicked out of respectable places many times before. Horsfield’s indignation on behalf of Julia thus takes the place of the indignation she lacks the energy to muster, and yet Horsfield’s feelings on behalf of Julia are inevitably self-serving. Walking home from the hotel,

Horsfield imagines himself scolding Julia for looking at him like “one of the others” (121). He imagines saying, “I’m not one of the others; I’m on your side. Can’t you see that? I’m for you and for people like you, and I’m against the others. Can’t you see that?” (121). Horsfield’s fantasy reveals that despite his feelings of an emotional alignment with Julia based on her suffering, he regards Julia as fundamentally other, as his insistence that he is for “*people like you*” mirrors Mackenzie’s earlier dismissal of Julia as one of “these people” whose “final descent” (21) on the social ladder was near.

When Horsfield arrives at his home, though, he “suddenly” sees Julia not as “a representative of the insulted and injured, but as a solid human being” (122) and decides that he must help her. However, just as suddenly as he develops this awareness of Julia’s humanity, he abruptly feels “appalled” and reminds himself that he is not in love with her, and will not “be rushed into anything” (122). Horsfield’s sudden shuttling between emotions—he goes from feeling on Julia’s behalf, to pitying her, to feeling appalled by his reckless emotion—demonstrates Berlant’s assertion that feeling can turn into a consciousness “that can lead to *action*” (105). Except just as Horsfield settles home for the night, he halts this nascent action because he realizes the socially-damaging consequences of his feelings. Chalk argues that Horsfield’s home causes this reversal, because he “defines Julia in opposition to his own respectability which is not only represented by, but also made concrete and tangible by his domestic space” (228-229). By contrasting his home with Julia’s semi-public room, Horsfield makes literal his sense that she is one of “those” people, which extinguishes his fleeting desire to help at nearly the same time that the stark contrasts of their homes initially activated that feeling.

As Johnson argues, when Horsfield finally sees Julia as a “solid person,” the

novel shifts “away from the notion that human misery is a general existential condition of modern life toward a more specific awareness of the ways in which economic conditions place Julia on the borders of destitution and Horsfield in a position of dissatisfied leisure” (189). However, despite Horsfield’s fuller awareness of the material conditions of Julia’s abjection, he chooses not to act, which effectively seizes any of the empathy he previously felt for her. When Julia tearfully recounts the poverty of her life, “[f]or the life of him he was unable to think of anything more sympathetic” to say except ““Oh that’s all right”” (126). The narrator adds: “yet he could imagine everything she had left unsaid. He understood her, but in a cold and theoretical way” (126). In this exchange, Julia finally receives the understanding she has yearned for, but since Horsfield’s feelings of empathy are exhausted, his understanding is distant and uninterested. When Horsfield leaves the restaurant, he puts “Julia entirely out of his mind” (127).

Though he repeatedly dismisses any empathetic feelings or responsibility, Horsfield nevertheless recognizes the conditions of modern society that leave Julia an impoverished outcast. In this way, the novel legitimates Julia’s plight through Horsfield’s perspective. It is troubling that it takes a male perspective to explicitly state what Julia has been consistently demonstrating, but that is precisely the point. Rhys repeatedly shows that the evidence of Julia’s life, speech, and emotions are not enough. She is clearly destitute, miserable, and in peril, but the people in her life and the world around her pointedly ignore the evidence of her troubles, so it is not until Horsfield feels how she feels, has his epiphany, and glimpses what has always been evident, that he acknowledges what Julia has been trying to express all along. This movement of affect between Julia and Horsfield creates neither a meaningful intimacy nor an ethical response

from Horsfield. All it does is cause Horsfield to “flee from [Julia’s] shamed and shaming company” (Moran 19) because it is less threatening for him to return to a state of denial than to grapple with the realities opened up by his emotional attachments. Eventually, Horsfield becomes as indifferent to Julia as she is to everyone and everything around her.

“a hope that was a stealthy pain”: Emotional Agency & Conditioned Indifference

Julia’s progression into indifference is urged on by her outsider status in a world of insiders who regularly degrade and exclude her. Like Rhys, Virginia Woolf famously envisions society in terms of an insider/outsider dichotomy in her anti-war treatise *Three Guineas* (1930), but rather than being divided along the lines of respectability, Woolf sees the world divided by gender. According to Woolf, women are a “society of outsiders” who can use their socially prescribed passivity to disrupt war efforts and male domination, and one element of this resistance is indifference. Rachel Hollander argues that Woolf re-envisioned the political implications of women’s indifference, where it “entails something other than mere neutrality” (83). Woolf thus “invokes indifference as a radically new kind of feminist ethical resistance” (83) that endorses “disengaged engagement,” an “attitude” of indifference “that implies a kind of non-relational mode of relation between women and men. Necessitated by the false choice between remaining dependent or assimilating to the very male culture they must resist, indifference enables women to hold open the possibility of more radical change” (92).

Woolf converts indifference into an active political affect and social position. Hollander, in turn, reads this indifference as a liminal affective and social space that women can inhabit, which shelters them from patriarchal expectations. For Rhys,

indifference is similarly far from neutral, and it does occasionally shelter Julia from patriarchal expectations. By contrast, though, Rhys removes the sense of agency Woolf attributes to indifference. Instead, because of her failed subject-position, Julia is gradually made indifferent through the delegitimization of her feelings and experience of alienation, which politicizes her indifference in an entirely different way than Woolf imagines. For Julia, the social world transforms her into an indifferent subject, rather than her indifference transforming the social world.

The conditioning effect—and affect—of indifference is a dehumanizing progression in Julia’s relationship with Horsfield. When he continually interrupts her at the café, she shrugs and “relapse[s] into silence and indifference” (31). Before this relapse, Julia rouses herself to explain her situation, but Horsfield’s interruptions reinforce how he views her as an object rather than a person. Horsfield even notices her frustration but insists that she is indifferent rather than annoyed. Instead of letting her speak, *he* becomes irritated: “why should she be annoyed?” (31). Later, Horsfield again projects indifference onto Julia when he contemplates what life must be like for a woman like her, someone who clings to “pathetic illusions” about herself. He wonders if she still thinks she is beautiful, or “perhaps she was just heavily indifferent...” (66). Finally, when Julia detects that Horsfield is going to leave her soon—even before he has consciously made the decision—he notices that she “stared at him, not sadly, but with a heavy, dead indifference” (123). By repeatedly imagining that Julia is indifferent, Horsfield supports Mackenzie’s view of Julia as one of “those people” who occupy a degraded social position and consequently have little interiority and even less of a capacity for emotion. By imagining her this way, Horsfield strips Julia of emotional agency which in turn

excuses how he treats her. In reality, Julia feels a mixture of despair and shame in Horsfield's company, rather than indifference. Over time, though, his belief in her indifference eventually conditions her into a genuine indifference, as she realizes that Horsfield is just as self-serving as all the others.

Horsfield is just one of many agents who condition Julia into indifference, as she is made indifferent by the repeated disavowals of her humanity, her feelings, and her very corporeality. Julia's sense that she is a ghost, for instance, demonstrates the startling effect of these disavowals, but so does her "mechanical" approach to living. Julia is often described as "mechanical" when applying make-up or speaking to others, which suggests how the effects of failure and indifference combine to make her an automaton. This degradation steals her language, but it also robs her of the intensity of her feelings, which we see most painfully when she attempts to discuss the death of her infant son with Neil James. As someone who has known her for her entire adult life, Julia wants him to be a witness to how her life went awry despite her best intentions. In James' company, Julia is characteristically inarticulate, but she does remember the details of her infant son's death in a purge of pent-up misery. She remembers how he died "for the simple reason that you haven't enough money to keep it alive" (80) and his death leaves her numb, "indifferent—because the whole damned thing is too stupid to be anything else but indifferent about" (81).

Once again, Rhys proves how emotionally disconnected Julia is from herself and others, as she describes being indifferent and unsentimental about her son's death. Alone in an unsympathetic world, his death is reduced to another trauma in her endlessly miserable existence. Except it is not. Julia's insistence that her son's death as a result of

her poverty is “stupid” and that she is “indifferent” about it betrays the genuine intensity of her emotions, which she is otherwise made to repress. She is profoundly wounded, and yet her failed subject position invalidates her experience since respectable society recognizes her as a social aberration rather than a grieving mother. Reading Julia’s loss, Maslen argues that “[s]entiment’ is the privilege of legitimate mourning, which Julia has been denied...She has ‘lost her loss,’ since her maternal tragedy is unrepresented, deprived of a ‘reality’ in the discursive and cultural world that she inhabits” (86). Maslen also observes that Julia’s son “was a victim of social *indifference* insofar as he died from preventable poverty” (emphasis added 103), which is an insight that fatally links Julia’s affective indifference to the material indifference of social marginalization. For his part, James reinforces this social indifference by interrupting Julia before her testimony even begins: “My dear, don’t harrow me. I don’t want to hear” (82). And so, like Horsfield, James conditions Julia into silence and into believing that her grief is not real and that her emotions are not worth expressing. Later, Julia is again denied her grief when her mother dies. After Norah and Julia argue following the funeral, Miss Wyatt urges Julia out of the family home: ““you must go. I can’t have Norah upset any more. She’s been through enough”” (100). Julia mournfully replies, “[b]ut I’ve been through something too,” which Miss Wyatt dismisses with a curt “I daresay” (100), before pushing Julia out the door. Before this climactic fight, though, Rhys depicts a few episodes where Julia feels intensely and can articulate her feelings; more importantly, Rhys also shows that other people recognize Julia’s feelings but choose not to respond.

At her mother’s funeral, Julia “abandon[s] herself” while “kneeling and sobbing” as she watches the coffin sink into the ground (94). This display prompts Uncle Griffiths

and Norah to separate themselves from her since they find her sorrow embarrassing and uncouth. This disavowal of Julia's despair has the curious impact of confirming that her emotions are real to other people, but just not worth acknowledging. Alone with her emotional "torture," Julia makes the "huge effort to grapple with nothingness," and just as she finds herself unexpectedly dawning on the meaning of death, the "dam inside her head burst, and she leant her head on her arms and sobbed" (94). As Julia mourns for herself and her mother, she cries "because she remembered that her life had been a long succession of humiliations and mistakes and pains and ridiculous efforts" (94). At the same time, she realizes "[e]verybody's life was like that," which causes her to feel like "some essence of her was shooting upwards like a flame. She was great. She was a defiant flame shooting upwards not to plead but to threaten" (94). This flame signifies a brief resurgence of Julia's agency, but it is also a flame of connection, as she recognizes that everyone's life is full of pain and difficulty and, therefore, she is not alone. Given the reality of her marginalization which makes her powerless, though, the threat and promise of Julia's "flame" is extinguished as soon as it materializes: "the flame sank down again, useless, having reached nothing" (94). In the end, Julia's defiant flame scorches only her with the raw knowledge that her life might have been different—indeed, might still be different—if she could only muster the energy to resist and fight back. This knowledge inevitably increases Julia's dejection, which is compounded by her family's rejection, who choose to ignore the flame of human connection ignited by grief. As Julia blinks away her sorrow, she notices how alone she is. "Norah was not there" because she had left with the parson, and Uncle Griffiths, who is visibly uncomfortable by Julia's grief,

“had retired to the farthest end of the pew” in order to distance himself from her (95).⁶⁷

After this abandonment, Julia senses that she is about to be expelled from yet another relationship. Much like her confrontation with Mackenzie, Julia reframes this rejection so that it becomes *her* rejecting her family, rather than *them* rejecting her. The novel’s second fight begins when Norah offends Julia by offering her a ring from their mother’s collection with the warning not to pawn it. In a conciliatory gesture, Norah offers Julia sympathy by saying, “I’m sorry that you were so upset today, but I can understand you feel miserable” (97). In reply, Julia explains, “it was rage. Didn’t you understand that?” (97), which prompts in her an outpouring of rage directed at Norah and all of humanity. Julia furiously declares that if “all good, respectable people had one face, I’d spit in it. I wish they all had one face so that I could spit in it” (98), and for a brief moment, she even considers spitting in Norah’s face, which fleetingly resembles “a huge, stupid face” (98) representing everyone who has harmed her.

The fight ends with Norah’s humiliation after Julia metaphorically spits at her that “[y]ou’re jealous of me, jealous, jealous...Eaten up with it” (98). However, Julia notices Norah pale and feels a “horrible spasm of pity” (99). When Julia is finally in a position to wound another person, she finds it gut-wrenching, but by mocking Norah’s pain and resentment—and choosing not to apologize—Julia ignores the connective capacity of empathy and instead reacts based on her worst impulses. Her behaviour confirms her family’s suspicion that she is “disgusting” (98) and someone to be avoided, which Uncle Griffiths makes explicit when he condemns Julia’s “disgraceful” conduct

⁶⁷ Cunningham argues that the funeral is liberating for Julia. When Norah and Uncle Griffiths reject her, and Julia later fights with her sister, Rhys “suggests that poverty and rejection are preferable to maintaining familial ties that ensure that the daughter inherits the legacy of the mother and reproduces her relationship to patriarchy” (384).

“among respectable people” (99). He also bellows that the family home ““is not a bad house”” (99), which suggests that even in the privacy of their home, Julia is a social contaminant that threatens to cast them all out of respectable circles. In the end, he literally shuts a door in her face, thus quarantining her infectious disrespectability into a back room.

Perversely, these uncharacteristically dramatic scenes affirm Julia’s tenuous connections to other people. When Norah and Uncle Griffiths separate themselves from Julia when she loudly grieves at the funeral, they validate her feelings and their familial relation to her through their associated shame. Similarly, when Uncle Griffiths chastises Julia after the fight, he worries that his relationship with her will tarnish him should the drama spill out into the streets. The spectacle of Julia’s grief and its aftermath, then, draws her family disconcertingly close to one another, and forces them to recognize her humanity, emotions, and familial bond. Julia’s grief also reinforces her bond to her mother, as she shows that even though she was not her caregiver like Norah, she still has a legitimate claim to grieve. During the funeral and subsequent fight, Julia finally feels the connection with others that she has been craving throughout the novel, except that connection is reinforced by how those bonds become irrevocably damaged. Afterwards, while lying in the back room she is shut into, Julia genuinely feels indifferent. She listens to Norah sob through the door, and “suddenly” feels “immensely calm and indifferent to anything that had ever happened or could possibly happen to her. It was like that. Just when in another moment your brain would burst, it was always like that. She sat placidly...She felt nothing” (99). The narrator suggests that Julia’s switch into indifference is a protective measure, but the side effect of this protection is a total

evacuation of feeling and a near suicidal disregard for her fate (stressed pages later when she does contemplate suicide). This conditioning into indifference is distinct from Horsfield or James's because this time Julia's indifference consumes her with an emotionless void similar to the nothingness she tried to comprehend at the funeral.

Having been repeatedly dismissed and humiliated, by the novel's end Julia undergoes a stark conversion into irretrievable indifference. Rhys lingers over this conditioning when Julia sees:

a thin man, so thin that he was like a clothed skeleton, drooping in a doorway.

And the horses, standing like statues of patient misery. She felt no pity at all.

It used to be as if someone had put out a hand and touched her heart when she saw things like that, but now she felt nothing. Now she felt indifferent and cold, like a stone.

'I've gone too far,' she thought. She sat down on the terrace of a little café and had another brandy.

And it was funny to end like that—where most sensible people start, indifferent and without any pity at all. Just saying: 'It's nothing to do with me.

I've got my own troubles. It's nothing to do with me' (136).

Julia stares long enough at the man to see that his suffering is dire, and yet she feels nothing for him. She feels so little, in fact, that she is not even surprised by her new lack of empathy, but instead bluntly states that at another point in her life, she would have been deeply moved. Maslen argues that the man's deathly appearance mirrors Julia's impending destruction, "as if she has already started to die: her interiority contracts, she has lost her capacity to feel pity" (113). Though Julia's hardened heart leaves her feeling

nothing, she is self- and socially-aware enough to see that she is as indifferent to the man as other people are to her. Julia intimately knows the material and psychological costs of such disavowals, and yet she feels “no pity at all” (136). Betsy Berry argues that the novel’s characters “approach death in a grotesque slow-motion as they falsely convince themselves of the possibility of escape” (558). As she fully apprehends the impossibility of escape and finds herself unmoved by the dying man’s suffering—even though she knows she *should* be moved—“Julia realizes her final descent” (558). Earlier in the novel, when Julia is shamed by her Uncle for seeking help, she admits, ““it was idiotic of me to come. It was childish, really. It’s childish to imagine that anybody cares what happens to anybody else”” (61). Julia’s indifference to the dying man thus suggests a perverse maturation. She has become a “mean beast” of a human (98) like her family; she has finally “grown-up,” and learned to take on the sensibilities of respectable society by realizing that nobody cares about anyone else. In a typically ironic gesture, Julia is finally connected to the respectable society she so yearns to join by her assimilation into apathy and by her dismissal of the man’s suffering.

“Nobody had noticed anything”: The Aesthetics of Rhys’s Ethical Address

Although Julia becomes increasingly indifferent, Rhys implores that receptive readers be anything but by manipulating modernist aesthetics to create her ethical address. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* foregrounds the material consequences of negative emotion in its exploration of Julia’s feelings of abjection and indifference, and through its representation of the circulation—or “stickiness”—of negative affect. Having charted this careful plotting of emotion in the novel, we can now turn to how this affective movement

is entwined with what I call Rhys's modernist killjoy aesthetic.

Rhys's aesthetic is a modernist relative of the feminist killjoy, who is an inconvenient agitator that reveals to others the problems often hidden or denied by the societal injunction to be happy. In an interview, Ahmed describes her own experience of being a feminist killjoy: "you raise questions about the representations of gender and you become the problem. You're getting in the way of people's innocent enjoyments of these lovely things and people get very, very angry" ("A Conversation" 104). In *The Promise of Happiness*, meanwhile, when Ahmed examines the figure of the feminist killjoy she also identifies "feminist consciousness as a form of unhappiness" (53). Rhys takes up some of these elements of the feminist killjoy in her fiction, where her killjoy approach to modernist aesthetics never allows us to detachedly read her fiction, since her aesthetic choices consistently raise gendered questions about modernist interests. In particular, this killjoy aesthetic appears in her use of second-person perspective and in her conversion of the *flâneuse* into a haunting and lost wanderer, whose peripatetic life is a symptom of her stagnated, failed existence on the literal margins of the city. Rhys's consciousness of women's marginalization and the brutality of human indifference is thus infused in an aesthetic of unhappiness that infects the narrative world of her novel. This aesthetic, in turn, circulates feelings of responsibility onto her readers, either by implicating us directly in Julia's suffering or by evacuating modernist aesthetics of any joy or readerly detachment. Rhys's killjoy aesthetics thus re-politicize modernist convention toward an aesthetic of empathy, recognition, and intervention.

In his reading of Rhys, Marley explores the effects of the novel's unique narrative voice in critiquing cosmopolitan universalism, as a "fantasy of exploration and

excitement” that is “largely a myth for anyone but affluent white men” (5). Rhys’s novel, he argues, undermines this fantasy with its blend of second and third-person perspectives, shifting personal pronouns, and intentional ambiguity, which “disorients the psychological and emotional distance among its characters” (1). The novel’s occasional but pointed slippage into second-person “you,” Marley argues, makes it seem like the novel is being narrated *to* Julia. As the novel progresses, that “you” becomes increasingly ambiguous, thus making it “difficult to differentiate the major characters of the text” by creating a “curious linkage among its four primary characters” (8). I agree that Rhys’s narration is strategically confusing, but I read this as part of the novel’s circulation of affect, where Rhys intentionally collapses the subjectivities of characters to show how Julia’s feelings of alienation momentarily spread to those who isolate her. However, I think we can press the implication of Rhys’s use of second-person even further, and read it as an entanglement of the reader into the social dynamics of the text. Rhys, I argue, folds her readers into the narrative to challenge us not to become yet another person who ignores the suffering of Julia and those like her.

The first shift into second-person perspective occurs in the novel’s second paragraph, as Rhys establishes the setting of Julia’s latest boarding house and the narrator describes her landlady. She is thin, fair, and “had a low, whispering voice and a hesitating manner, so that you thought: ‘She can’t possibly be a French-woman.’ Not that you lost yourself in conjectures as to what she was because you didn’t give a damn anyway” (7). This revealing passage offers us a model for how Julia—and each of Rhys’s women—wish they would be treated based on their ethnicity; that is, that people would not give a damn about it. However, the narrator’s assertion that “you didn’t give a damn anyway”

also functions as a standoffish address to the unfeeling reader. Rhys reproaches the dispassionate, detached reader, and as such, she circuitously challenges us to care about what we are about to read. This implicating perspective appears again when Horsfield gives Julia money and then feels shame for getting involved with someone like her. “You gave way to an impulse,” the narrator describes, “and then you were enmeshed in all sorts of complications” (36-37). This observation links Horsfield with Mackenzie—and suggests the interchangeability of character subjectivities that Marley highlights—as both men feel shame over their “enmeshment” with Julia. However, this feeling of entanglement also sticks to the reader: what are *we* going to do about our enmeshment into Julia’s narrative of suffering?

These early moments align the reader with Julia’s oppressors, but Rhys later attempts to bridge the gap between her reader and Julia by bringing us disconcertingly close to her suffering in the novel’s “childhood” section. Following the trauma of her mother’s death and her subsequent familial exile, Julia is hurled back into the memories of her childhood. Julia’s mother is “the warm centre of the world” (77), who drifts away from her and becomes severe and abusive after Norah’s birth. In the “childhood” section, the narrator juxtaposes Julia’s childhood feelings of happiness and fear with her dual losses of her mother, both as a child and again as an adult. Interspersed with these memories are moments where Rhys uses second-person perspective to establish an emotional connection between the reader’s life and Julia’s story. Rhys invites us to tread back into memory with Julia: “How far back can you remember? The last time you were really happy—happy about nothing?” (115). The indeterminacy of the narrator’s answering reply, “How old were you? Ten? Eleven? Younger...yes, probably younger”

(115), provides space for the reader's varied answer to when *they* last felt happy about nothing. This brief but emotionally vivid section is filled with a melancholic longing for the innocence of childhood. However, Rhys troubles this nostalgia by insisting that this adult longing is a fiction, as childhood is also marked by a conditioning into fear, misunderstandings between adults and children, and a sense of alienation engendered by maturation into an unfeeling world. The section concludes with one final humanizing address directed again at Julia and the reader: "The last time you were happy about nothing; the first time you were afraid about nothing. Which came first?" (116).

Considering how each of Julia's attempts to connect with other people fail, these readerly addresses are a subtle narrative fourth-wall break to foster an empathetic connection with someone—anyone—even if only with an inaccessible reader.

But what are we to do with this connection? Hemmings theorizes about "affective solidarity," a concept that sees a broad "range of affects—rage, frustration and the desire for connection—as necessary for a feminist politics of transformation" (148). Hemmings argues that affect "gives feminism its life" because "to know differently we have to feel differently" (150). Feelings, she contends, "can produce a politicised impetus to change that foregrounds the relationship between ontology and epistemology precisely because of the experience of their dissonance" (150). A vital affect in the politicization of feminist feeling has long been empathy, since "empathy prioritises embodied knowledge, affective connection and a desire to transform the social terrain" (151). Hemmings cautions that empathy is often a privileged position, though, since it is "usually only given to those perceived to be in need" (153) by people with more power. Hemmings also notes that "failed empathy" (152)—an essentializing and sometimes even degrading empathy—can

misconstrue the actual needs of the marginalized, based on an empathizer's assumptions. Rhys mitigates this essentializing risk by depicting Julia's subjective perspective of failure alongside the judgmental perspectives of Horsfield, Uncle Griffiths, and Norah, who each feel a mixture of contempt and pity for Julia. By looping the reader into the narrative, Rhys embeds another observer inside the novel who can bear witness to each of these perspectives. This enmeshment draws us into the affective and material experience of the novel's representation of failure. Because we see Julia's subjective experience along with the conscious decisions of those who dismiss her suffering, Rhys demands an emotional inward turn from her readers to see if we will also ignore suffering like Julia's.

A more explicit way that Rhys is an aesthetic killjoy is through her depiction of *flânerie*. Lauren Elkin describes the *flâneur* as a "figure of privilege and leisure, with the time and money to amble around the city at will. He is both stimulated and agitated by the buzz and hum of the city, the crowd; he is both part of and separate from the urban spectacle, both actor and observer" (n.p.). Deborah Parsons, meanwhile, argues that the *flâneur* is an "iterant" metaphor that "register[s] the city as a text to be inscribed, read, rewritten, and reread" (3). The *flâneur* as both a symbol of leisure-classed mobility, and as a historical figure, was overwhelmingly gendered male (even despite Woolf's ample engagement with the figure in her fiction and essays) until writers like Janet Wolff, Rachel Bowlby, and Deborah Parsons began theorizing about the *flâneuse*. The experience of the *flâneuse* contrasts sharply with her male counterpart's. Elkin writes that instead of "wandering aimlessly...the female *flâneur* has an element of transgression: she goes where she's not supposed to" (n.p.). Her walk is marked by gendered assumptions about women's movement, independence, and idleness, which makes her travels

subversive and undeniably political. If the *flâneur* is an active agent who reads the city and its inhabitants as a text, then Rhys shows that for failed women like Julia, the city is the active agent who reads and inscribes meaning onto the bodies of women, which in turn pushes them into seedy areas of the city which reflect their apparent moral failures. But unlike the female *flâneur* that Elkin describes, Julia does not boldly go where she is not supposed to out of a sense of defiant agency; instead, Julia wanders because she has nowhere else to go.

Julia's *flânerie* is a product of her exile and a symptom of the stagnation of failure. Unsurprisingly, Julia prefers the comfort of her room ("when she was locked in her room—she felt safe" (9)) because her vulnerability is on full display in the streets. However, she is cast out daily by maids waiting to clean, thus making her daily walks involuntary. Other times, she wanders because she has been evicted and is seeking a new place to stay. Her unwilling wanderings are anxious and self-conscious: she keeps to the back streets because she is "so anxious not to meet anybody she knew" (13), she avoids places like Montparnasse because it sinks her further into feelings of dejection (32), and she tells Horsfield that she "hate[s] drifting about streets...It makes me awfully miserable" (65). These passages show that Julia's *flânerie* is contemplative like her male counterpart's, but rather than her thoughts being consumed by art and philosophy, she contemplates misery, anxiety, and how best to hide. The city thus becomes an active agent in Julia's alienation and humiliation. Walking the streets of Notting Hill after her devastating visit with James, for instance, she "walked with her eyes on the ground, and a puff of wind blew capriciously before her a little piece of greasy brown paper, omnibus tickets, a torn newspaper poster, coal dust, and dried horse dung" (84). Here, nature and

the city combine to insult Julia by throwing street garbage and horseshit at her, in a depressing image of her social worth.

Julia also feels that the city is maliciously dark. As she walks one night, she agitatedly thinks, “[t]hey might light the streets a bit better” (62). In the claustrophobic image that follows this thought, the narrator describes Julia’s sensation of being alone at night: “[i]t was the darkness that got you. It was heavy darkness, greasy and compelling. It made walls round you, and shut you in so that you felt you could not breathe” (62). In this move into second-person perspective, the vivid description of the constricting darkness that envelops Julia momentarily consumes the reader, too. The darkness here has a devouring, malevolent agency. The city has agency, too, and indeed Rhys suggests that the city has more agency than Julia, since it has the power to imprison her in darkness, mock her with flying detritus, and psychologically torment her. Through this depiction, Rhys makes the *flâneuse* a haunting rather than progressive figure, whose wanderings are emblematic of her failures.

Finally, Rhys also links Julia’s nightmarish experience of the city with gendered violence, since her walks are interrupted continuously by soliciting men. One evening, Julia notices a man following her on a dark street, “muttering proposals in a low, slithery voice.” When she “sharply” tells him to go away, “he caught hold of her arm, and squeezed it as hard as he could by way of answer.” She “wanted to fly at him and strike him” but sensing danger, she instead shames him away by calling him “ignoble” (45). Since Julia is a single woman walking alone at night, the man feels entitled to her body, which he makes explicit by his grab and offer of money. Julia’s marked feelings of vulnerability mute the response she would like to give him, though, because alone at

night she knows her only safe(r) defense is humiliating him. Men do not only approach her at night, though. While on the train, a man “looks to the right and the left” (101) before soliciting her. The train is not as ideal as the streets to make his inquiry, which is why he is self-conscious, and yet he persists because he sees Julia as an opportunity. After declining multiple times, Julia “mechanically” says “yes” and takes his card, and then embarrasses him by wordlessly leaving the card behind when she leaves the train. Finally, Julia notices a man following her who goes onto humiliate her, rather than her humiliating him. When the two meet each other’s gazes, she notices that he is “young—a boy” (135), and he notices that she is ageing. Instead of making a lewd comment, he says, “*Oh, la, la...Ah, non, alors*” (135). His taunts crush Julia, and “as she walked on her knees felt suddenly weak, as if she had been struck a blow over her heart” (135). His taunts so wound Julia that she struggles to flee from his gaze and the gazes of others who feel compelled to interrupt her walks.

Notably, these city-scenes mirror Julia’s social and emotional descent. The first man, while initially frightening, leaves Julia with “a feeling of exultation” because his sexual interest in her makes her feel like she is “not finished” (45). When the man on the train solicits her, though, her deepening indifference steals her energy to be indignant, and so she treats him indifferently. And when Julia is reduced to a humiliated beggar, the young man’s insult engulfs her in the shame that she had earlier made the other men feel. Ultimately, Rhys’s representation of the city is of a space that is fundamentally dangerous and uninhabitable for precarious, single women. Elements of the city like large houses and street lights take on nightmarish qualities at night. Men are emboldened to approach, stalk, and grab Julia because they interpret her public mobility as a sign of her

sexual availability, and she feels that the city itself mocks her anguish. Hers is a desolate representation that undermines the image of the city as a space of freedom, intellectual and artistic growth, and of buzzing excitement. For Julia, instead, the city is an uncannily barren place populated only by danger and humiliation.

Rhys's representation of the city, like the entirety of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, is unabashedly bleak. Through her exploration of the emotional and material consequences of women's social failure, Rhys teaches us that failure is tangible. It has a product. Moreover, it is not always possible to recuperate women's failure into a feminist identification or triumph. Her fiction also shows us that sometimes women's writing does not need to be "rescued" through feminist analysis: Julia is not a feminist character, and though it contains unmistakably feminist critiques, Rhys was not trying to write a feminist novel. Ahmed argues that "feminism itself can be understood as an affective inheritance" because our "own struggles to make sense of realities that are difficult to grasp become part of a wider struggle, a struggle to be, to make sense of being" (*Feminist Life* 20). Even though neither Rhys nor Julia are feminists, Julia's struggle to exist on the margins of society becomes its own feminist theory of the embodied and psychic experience of women's involuntary failure. In this, we can recognize a feminist killjoy aesthetic that never lets us relax and detachedly enjoy her fiction. Instead, Rhys re-works modernist aesthetics and painstakingly explores the movement and effects of affect to bluntly depict the life of a woman who is ignored by society and was, until recently, also ignored by the modernist canon.

As feminist readers, we can respond to Rhys's quiet call to action, where she asks that women on the margins be validated by those from within. Reading the novel's

conclusion, Jane Nardin observes that Julia “is now a skid row alcoholic and a beggar. Is this horrible or not? A defeat or some sort of victory?” (58). The conclusion returns Julia to where she began, but this time, even more traumatized and alienated. Back in Paris, her alcoholism has intensified, her poverty is abject, and she has no family or male benefactor. As the cycle of her life would have it, though, Mackenzie sees her in the street, buys her a few drinks, hands her some money, and moves on. As Nardin observes, Rhys refuses to offer us any guidance in our interpretation of the ending, or indeed any release in our sense of guilt, having just witnessed a woman’s repeated dismissals while attempting to establish human connection. As readers, when we set down the novel, we are put into a similar position as Horsfield who frets over what he can do to improve Julia’s life. He ultimately closes his door with relief which helps him “altogether shut out the thought of Julia” (127), since worrying about her undercuts his comfortable life. His closed door echoes the other doors shut in Julia’s face by her uncle and Miss Wyatt. As for the readers who have just read a study of a woman’s suffering grounded very much in material experience, Rhys implores those who are willing to compassionately inhabit Julia’s story not to shut their doors, but rather to leave them ajar.

Epilogue

When I began writing this dissertation four years ago, I was thrilled. I was excited because I had the freedom and luxury to pursue authors, texts, and research interests that invigorated and challenged me. But I was also anxious. Indeed, my early writing was marked by a persistent sense of worry. This anxiety was not the usual graduate student apprehension—although there was still plenty of that—but a fear that maybe I had led myself astray by choosing to pursue this project. I worried that my sense of women writers as under-represented was untrue. I worried that having done my undergraduate studies at a small university known for feminist pedagogy, that maybe I was conditioned into hyper-sensitivity—perhaps I had imagined these issues. Maybe I was making a strawman out of the field of modernism. Surely, by the twenty-first century, women writers did not need recuperation, and feminist methodologies were commonplace? As I described this project to professors, colleagues, and friends, I would often seek reassurance: “this sounds like Ph.D. work, right? Not an enthusiastic undergrad paper?” I sought this confirmation because, in those early days, I had a sense that recuperative projects were not sufficiently scholarly. Or that they were not sufficiently doctoral. Perhaps, I worried, my project was decades too late.

More recently, though, I have realized that my former anxiety was bound up in the systemic ways that women had been gaslit into thinking that Western society had moved beyond matters of gender inequality—that we were somehow post-feminist. For years, “women’s issues” of equality, fair employment, accessible and reliable healthcare, and safety were second-tier topics only worth airing in a single, sweeping election debate question, or when a blatant act of misogynistic violence forced a disbelieving public into

an earnest but brief conversation. But then movements like #MeToo and Time'sUp came along in late-2017 and shattered the post-feminist illusion for everyone. For a fraction of a second, it felt like genuine progress was coming. The systemic sexual harassment and violence that women regularly face was addressed with a sense of urgency, which opened up attendant conversations about all the other inequalities and indignities women face in our patriarchal culture. Pockets of intersectional awareness also entered public discourse. After white celebrities were first credited with starting the #MeToo movement, civil rights activist Tarana Burke was rightfully acknowledged for beginning the campaign over a decade earlier. During this moment of feminist solidarity, women's experiences were no longer homogenized, as nuanced conversations about the varied experiences of women of different races, classes, orientations, abilities, and regions took place in public and private. Significantly, women admitted that they never honestly felt that matters of gender inequality were resolved—they just felt compelled to stay silent by a complex series of social, legal, and interpersonal pressures. In place of our previous silence, conversations began about how much work there was still to do, and that we deserved better from our employers, governments, and relationships. Finally, it seemed like a cultural reckoning was happening.

We know what happened to this optimism, though. Recent feminist movements have particularly constellated around issues of sexual harassment, and while many abusers have been held to account, others like Donald Trump and Brett Kavanaugh have still held onto—or been newly appointed to—positions of high power in the United States. In Canada, meanwhile, we have yet to reckon with the way we dismissed and degraded the women who came forward with their stories of harassment, abuse, and

manipulation from Jian Ghomeshi just one year before #MeToo ignited these necessary conversations.

Despite the re-awakening initiated by recent feminist movements and contemporary consciousness-raising, patriarchy's enduring power persists in nearly every aspect of women's lives. Thankfully, feminist persistence is also powerful. Social media hashtags have become worldwide movements. Women across the world have mobilized *in the millions* to protest injustice of all kinds at the women's marches. Equally powerful have been the global climate strikes, where people have decried governmental and corporate apathy toward climate change. These latest movements join the distinguished ranks of other activist organizations from the last decade, like Black Lives Matter and Idle No More, which have called attention to and pushed back against systemic racism and colonial abuse. The global political climate is almost paralyzingly grim, and yet, people are converting governmental and cultural failures into action and resistance.

Given the marked increase in public discussions about feminism and resistance, my early sense of anxiety about this project's relevance has been replaced with the inspiring feminist anger that has been re-activated across the world, and which aims to unravel not only sexism but all systemic inequality. At its core, my project is a recuperative one that aims to re-establish and confirm the presence of Vita Sackville-West, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Jean Rhys in the modernist canon. I know now that this modest goal is no less vital or necessary today just because I share it with previous generations of feminist scholars; instead, I realize that my work bears witness to and advances such feminist scholarship by insisting on its continued relevance. As Bonnie Kime Scott writes, "issues of gender can repeat themselves, and we are best equipped if

we keep a running history and draw from cumulative experience” (7), and so this project draws from the experience of previous feminist scholars, with the awareness that my work is just one part of a broader conversation that will continue for decades to come. After all, there is no way to make feminist modernism new until it is fully established.

In this dissertation, I have followed two lines of critical inquiry through the lens of feminist failure, inspired by Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure*. I have traced how Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys work with and against early feminism and in so doing, explore the tensions and contradictions that mark early feminist (dis)identification. These authors variously disavow, contest, and re-work early feminism, but these feminist “failures,” I have suggested, enable us to engage with the conflicted dynamics of the movement itself. In turn, their fiction has the potential to help us navigate the tumultuous feminism of our own time. These authors wrote during a time when the world was facing its own seemingly intractable problems, and yet they represent a multiplicity of oppositional approaches by embracing the possibilities of failing social norms.

Sackville-West and Warner depict women’s social failure as a decisive and often exhilarating way of extricating oneself from patriarchal oppression. Their narratives are disrupted by melancholy—indeed, their novels each end with death—but they nevertheless assert that resistance is possible, and worth pursuing, even if the consequences are profound. Lady Slane models the transformational power of feminist mentorship in halting generations of patriarchal norms; Laura Willowes whimsically illustrates that it is never too late to remake your life and pursue freedom; and Sophia Willoughby represents the euphoria and devastation of new love and collective resistance. These authors reveal multiple options for resistance and prove that small

changes can have enormous effects.

Rhys, meanwhile, shows us that opting into failure is a privileged form of resistance, available only to those who possess social power. Rhys does not offer a model of feminist opposition; instead, her fiction is a disquieting, but essential, warning that marginalized people too often fall through the cracks of both society and activist movements. For those of us with the privilege to spend our time thinking through societal problems, going to marches, and contextualizing feminist modernist history, Rhys reminds us that we need to ensure that in the midst of all that work, we are securing space for *everyone* affected by oppressive systems, not just the ones who have the energy and institutional language to identify it. Sackville-West, Warner, and Rhys are dynamic modernists to study because they challenge not only their contemporary feminist movements, but also current feminist methodologies, thanks to their resistant, problematic, and contradictory feminism. The messiness of their feminism is precisely where we can do our most productive feminist work, though, when we slow down and take the time to think through the limitations of feminist activism and discourse.

This dissertation's second line of critical inquiry follows how these authors "fail" and rework high modernist conventions and aesthetics to produce their narratives of women's oppression. Sackville-West genders the *künstlerroman* as a distinctly female—and reluctantly feminist—genre, Warner carefully silences streams-of-consciousness to represent how patriarchy contracts women's thinking, and Rhys revokes any freedom from the *flâneuse* by reshaping the city into a nightmarish underworld. As I have traced how these authors reshape modernist tropes and aesthetics, I have simultaneously outlined how the institutional formation of modernism has failed women modernists by

largely excluding them from the canon. In this way, my dissertation is closely aligned with the efforts of the new modernist studies, which has reconfigured nearly everything about how we read, teach, and study modernism in the twenty-first century.

In recent years, the combined efforts of new modernist studies and feminist scholars have shed light on under-read women authors. Rhys studies have expanded dramatically, Sackville-West is slowly being identified by her own literary merits, and Warner's name is no longer completely unknown. And yet, there is still so much work to be done on these authors to reclaim their distinctive feminist modernist voices. Recuperative projects like mine, and the many others reaching back through generations of feminist scholarship, remain necessary because there are innumerable other women modernists whose contributions need to be re-instated in modernist history and whose political and aesthetic complexities deserve to be thought through with the same attention as male authors.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- . "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22.2 (Summer 2004): 117-139. Web.
- . *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. Print.
- . *Willful Subjects*. Durham: Duke UP, 2014. Print.
- . *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke UP, 2017. Print.
- Aldrich, Robert. *Gay Lives*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012. Print.
- Alexander, Sally. *Becoming A Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*. New York: New York UP, 1995. Print.
- Allen, Brooke. "Sylvia Townsend Warner's 'very cultured voice.'" *New Criterion* 19.7 (2001): 20-27. Web.
- Ames, Carol. "Nature and Aristocracy in V. Sackville-West." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 11.2 (1978): 11-25. Print.
- Armstrong, Tim. *Modernism: A Cultural History*. Malden: Polity Press, 2005. Print.
- Athill, Diana. *Stet: An Editor's Life*. New York: Grove Press, 2000. Print.
- Banks, Eric. "Jean Rhys: Tossed About on an Uneasy Sea." *The Los Angeles Times*. 28 Jun 2009. Web.
- Barkway, Stephen. "'Oh Lord What it is to Publish a Best Seller': The Woolfs' Professional Relationship With Vita Sackville-West." *Leonard & Virginia Woolf, The Hogarth Press and the Networks of Modernism*. Ed. Helen Southworth. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012. 234-261. Web.
- Bazin, Victoria. *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity*. New York: Routledge,

2016. Print.
- Beer, Gillian. "Sylvia Townsend Warner: 'The Centrifugal Kick.'" *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History*. Ed. Maroula Joannou. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999. 76-86. Print.
- Benstock, Shari, ed. *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren. "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics." *Left Legalism/Left Critique*. Eds. Wendy Brown and Janet Halley. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. 105-133. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren and Jordan Greenwald. "Affect in the End Times: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 20.2 (2012): 71-89. Web.
- Berry, Betsy. "'Between dog and wolf': Jean Rhys's Version of Naturalism in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*." *Studies in the Novel* 27. 4 (1995): 544-559. Web.
- Bingham, Frances. "The Practice of the Presence of Valentine: Ackland in Warner's Work." *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978*. Eds. Davies, Gill, David Malcolm, and John Simons. Lewiston: Mellen Press, 2006. 29-44. Print.
- Bowen, Stella. *Drawn From Life: A Memoir*. 1941. London: Picador, 1999. Print.
- Brothers, Barbara. "Fly the Nets at Forty: *Lolly Willowses* as Female Bildungsroman." *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century*. Ed. Laura Doan. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991. 195-212. Print.
- Cameron, Rebecca. "The Limits of Emancipation: Changing Approaches to Feminism in

- Early-Twentieth-Century British Women's Drama." *Women's Studies* 37.2 (2008): 110-130. Web.
- Cantwell, Mary. "A Conversation with Jean Rhys." *Critical Perspectives on Rhys*. Ed. Pierette M. Frickey. Washington: Three Continents Press, 1990. 21-27. Print.
- Caserio, Robert. "Celibate Sisters-in-Revolution: Towards a Reading of Sylvia Townsend Warner." *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*. Eds. Joseph Boone and Michael Cadden. New York: Routledge, 1990. 254-274. Print.
- Castle, Terry. "Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Counterplot of Lesbian Fiction." *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing*. Ed. Joseph Bristow. New York: Routledge, 1992. 128-147. Print.
- Chalk, Bridget. "The Semi-Public Sphere, Maternity, and Regression in Rhys and Mansfield." *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 28.3 (2017): 217-237. Web.
- Chatterjee, Ipsita. "Feminism, the false consciousness of neoliberal capitalism? Informalization, fundamentalism, and women in the Indian City." *Gender, Place & Culture* 19.6 (2012): 790-809. Web.
- Childs, Mary. Rev. of *Lolly Willowes*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner. *Literary Digest International Book Review* (1926): 583. Print.
- Childs, Peter. *Modernism*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Chrysochou, Panayiota. "In-between States: Twilight Horror in Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* & Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*." *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 7.1 (Spring 2011): 139-151. Web.
- Colesworthy, Rebecca. "Jean Rhys and the Fiction of Failed Reciprocity." *Journal of Modern Literature* 37.2 (Winter 2014): 92-108. Web.

- Cook, Blanche Wiesen. "'Women Alone Stir My Imagination': Lesbianism and the Cultural Tradition." *Signs* 4.4 (1979): 718-739. Web.
- Cunningham, Anne. "'Get on or Get Out': Failure and Negative Femininity in Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 59.2 (2013): 373-394. Web.
- Czarnecki, Kristin. "Yes, it can be sad, the sun in the afternoon": Kristevan Depression in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*." *Journal of Modern Literature* 32.3 (2009): 63-82. Web.
- Davidson, Arnold E. "The Art and Economics of Destitution in Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*." *Studies in the Novel* 16.2 (1984): 215-227. Web.
- Davis, Robert Murray. "Everything old/new is new/old again: The fiction of Russell Smith." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 73 (Spring 2001): 151-165. Web.
- DeKoven, Marianne. "Modernism and gender." *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Ed. Michael Levenson. 2nd edition. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.
- Delap, Lucy. *The Feminist Avant-Garde*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.
- DeSalvo, Louise A. "Every Woman is an Island: Vita Sackville-West, The Image of the City, and the Pastoral Idyll." *Women Writers and the City: Essays in Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ed. Susan Merrill Squier. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1984. 97-113. Print.
- Detloff, Madelyn. "Strong-armed Sisyphus: feminist queer modernism again...again." *Feminist Modernist Studies* 1:1-2. 36-43. Web.
- Doan, Laura. "Introduction." *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century*. Ed. Laura Doan. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1991. 1-19.

Print.

Elias, Liora. Rev. of *The Queer Art of Failure*, by Jack Halberstam. *International Journal of Communication*. 6 (2012): 1962-1964. Web.

Eliot, T.S. *Four Quartets*. London: Faber, 1947. Print.

Elkin, Lauren. "A Tribute to female flâneurs: the women who reclaimed our city streets." *The Guardian*. 29 Jul 2016. Web.

Ellman, Maud. "Elizabeth Bowen: The Missing Corner." *Feminism, Aesthetics, and Subjectivity*. Ed. Manuel Barbeito. Santiago de Compostela: University Press of Santiago de Compostela, 2001. 65-98. Print.

---. "The Art of Bi-Location: Sylvia Townsend Warner." *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945*. Ed. Maroula Joannou. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Print.

Fernald, Anne. "Women's Fiction, New Modernist Studies, And Feminism." *Modern Fiction Studies* 59.2 (2013): 229-240. Web.

Forster, E.M. *Maurice*. 1971. London: Penguin Classics, 2005. Print.

Foster, Thomas. "'Dream Made Flesh': Sexual Difference and Narratives of Revolution in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 41.3-4 (1995): 531-562. Web.

Fraser, Graham. "The Ghost in the Mirror: Self-Haunting in *Good Morning, Midnight*." *The Modern Language Review* 113.3 (July 2018): 481-505. Web.

Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "Rhys Recalls Ford: *Quartet* and *The Good Soldier*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1.1 (1982): 67-81. Web.

Garrity, Jane. "Encoding Bi-Location: Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Erotics of

- Dissimulation.” *Lesbian Erotics*. New York: New York UP, 1995. 241-268. Print.
- . *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003. Print.
- Gay, Roxane. *Bad Feminist*. New York: Harper Collins, 2014. Print.
- Gerson, Gal. “Deliberative Households: Republicans, Liberals, and the Public-Private Split.” *Political Research Quarterly* 57.4 (2004): 653-663. Web.
- Glendinning, Victoria. “Introduction.” *All Passion Spent*. Vita Sackville-West. 1931. London: Virago Press, 1995. vii-xviii. Print.
- Gould, Gerald. Rev. of *Summer Will Show*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner. *The Observer* 13 Sept. 1936. 6. Print.
- Grandy, Christine. *Heroes and Happy Endings*. New York: Manchester UP, 2014. Print.
- H.,M. Rev. of *Lolly Willowes*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner. *The New Republic* 45 (1926): 363. Print.
- Hackett, Robin. “Class, Race, and Lesbian Erotics in *Summer Will Show*.” *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction*. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 2004. 84-120. Print.
- Halberstam, Judith (Jack). *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011. Print.
- Harker, James. “‘Laura Was Not Thinking’: Cognitive Minimalism in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowes*.” *Studies in The Novel* 46.1 (2014): 44-62. Web.
- Harman, Claire. *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1989. Print.
- Hemmings, Clare. “Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation.” *Feminist Theory* 13.2 (2012): 147-161. Web.

Holloway, Gerry. *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Print.

Hopkins, Chris. "Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Historical Novel 1936-1948." *Critical*

Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978. Eds. Davies,

Gill, David Malcolm, and John Simons. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006.

117-144. Print.

Huyssen, Andreas. *After the Great Divide*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986. Print.

Jackson, Angela. *British Women and the Spanish Civil War*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Print.

Jacobs, Mary. "Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Politics of the English Pastoral."

Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978. Eds.

Davies, Gill, David Malcolm, and John Simons. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press,

2006. 61-82. Print.

Jacobs, Mary and Judith Bond. "Nefarious Activities: Sylvia Townsend Warner,

Valentine Ackland and MI5 Surveillance, 1935-1955." *Journal of the Sylvia*

Townsend Warner Society 9 (2008): 40-58.

Joannou, Maroula. "Preface." *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English*

Novelist 1893-1978. Eds. Davies, Gill, David Malcolm, and John Simons.

Lewiston: Mellen Press, 2006. i-v. Print.

Johnson, Erica. "'Upholstered Ghosts': Jean Rhys's Posthuman Imaginary." *Jean Rhys:*

Twenty-First-Century Approaches. Eds. Patricia Moran and Erica Johnson.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2015. Print.

Johnston, Georgia. "Counterfeit Perversion: Vita Sackville-West's *Portrait of a*

- Marriage.*” *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.1 (2004): 124-137. Web.
- Joseph, Ralina. *Transcending Blackness*. Durham: Duke UP, 2013. Print.
- Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 1916. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.
- Keeler, Emily M. “David Gilmour on Building Strong Stomachs.” *Hazlitt*. Sept. 25, 2013. Web.
- Kern, Stephen. *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.
- Knoll, Bruce. “‘An existence Doled out’: Passive Resistance as a Dead End in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowes*.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 39.3 (1993): 344-363. Web.
- Koren-Kuik, Meyrav. “*Lolly Willowes* to *Kingdoms of Elfin*: The Poetics of Socio-Political Commentary in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s Fantasy Narratives.” *Baptism of Fire: The Birth of the Modern British Fantastic in World War I*. Ed. Janet Brennan Croft. Altadena: Mythopoeic Press, 2015. 245-262. Print.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. 1987. New York: Columbia UP, 1992. Print.
- Krueger, Christine L. *Encyclopedia of British Writers, 19th and 20th Centuries*. New York: Book Builders LLC, 2003. Print.
- Laity, Cassandra. “Editor’s introduction: toward feminist modernisms.” *Feminist Modernist Studies*. 1.1-2 (2017): 1-7. Web.
- Lamos, Colleen. *Deviant Modernism*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.
- Latham, Sean and Gayle Rogers. *Modernism: Evolution of an Idea*. New York:

- Bloomsbury, 2015. Print.
- Liddington, Jill and Elizabeth Crawford. "'Women do not count, neither shall they be counted': Suffrage, Citizenship and the Battle for the 1911 Census." *History Workshop Journal*. 71.1 (Spring 2011): 98-127.
- Lindroth, Colette. "Whispers Outside the Room: The Haunted Fiction of Jean Rhys." *Critical Perspective on Jean Rhys* (1990): 85-90. Web.
- Linett, Maren. *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.
- Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009. 129-145. Print.
- Macdonald, Kate. "Witchcraft And Non-Conformity in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926) and John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927)." *Journal of The Fantastic in the Arts* 23.2 (2012): 215-238. Web.
- Malcolm, David. "The Flint Anchor and the Conventions of Historical Fiction." *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978*. 145-162. Eds. Davies, Gill, David Malcolm, and John Simons. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006. Print.
- Mao, Douglas and Rebecca Walkowitz. "Introduction: Modernisms Bad and New." *Bad Modernisms*. Eds. Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. 1-17. Print.
- . "The New Modernist Studies." *PMLA*. 123.3 (2008): 737-748. Web.
- Marley, Jason R. "'Every Day You are a New Person': Narration and Cosmopolitan Universalism in Jean Rhys's *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*." *Criticism* 59.1

- (Winter 2017): 1-26. Web.
- Marsden, Dora and Mary Gawthorpe, eds. *The Freewoman*. 23 Nov 1911. Web.
- Maxwell, William. "Introduction." Ed. William Maxwell. *Letters: Sylvia Townsend Warner*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1982. vii-xvii. Print.
- McDowell, Lesley. "Jean Rhys: Prostitution, Alcoholism, and the Mad Woman in the Attic." *The Independent*. 3 May 2009. Web.
- McWilliams, Ellen. *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2009. Print.
- Medalie, David. "The Widowhood of the Self: Vita Sackville-West's *All Passion Spent*." *English Academy Review* 21.1 (2004): 12-21. Web.
- Mellows, James R. *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1974. Print.
- Milczarek, Małgorzata. "Landscape of Life: Past and Present in Vita Sackville-West's *All Passion Spent*." *Acts of Memory: The Victorians and Beyond*. Ed. Ryan Barnett and Serena Trowbridge. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010. 97-108. Print.
- Mitchell, J. Laurence. "In Another Country: Sylvia Townsend Warner at Large." *Writers of the Old School: British Novelists of the 1930s*. Ed. Rosemary M. Colt and Janice Rossen. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992. 120-37. Print.
- Moretti, Franco. *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*. Trans. Quintin Hoare. New York: Verso, 1996. Print.
- Morley, Christopher. Rev. of *Lolly Willowes*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner. *Saturday Review of Literature* 2 (1926): 555. Print.
- Mulqueen, Tara. "Succeeding at Failing and Other Oxymorons: Halberstam's *The Queer*

- Art of Failure.*” Book Review. *Theory & Event* 16.4. 2013. Web.
- Naipaul, V.S. “Without a Dog’s Chance.” A Review of *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. *The New York Review of Books*. 18 May 1972. 29-30. Web.
- Nardin, Jane. “As Soon As I Sober Up I Start Again”: Alcohol and the Will in Jean Rhys’s Pre War Novels.” *Papers on Language & Literature* 42.1 (2006): 46-72. Web.
- Nebeker, Helen. *Jean Rhys: Woman in Passage*. Montreal: Eden Press Women’s Publications, 1981. Print.
- Nesbitt, Jennifer. “Footsteps of Red Ink: Body and Landscape in *Lolly Willowes*.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 49.4 (2003): 449-471. Web.
- Nicolson, Nigel. *Portrait of a Marriage*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973. Print.
- Nicolson, Nigel and Joanne Trautmann, eds. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf, Volume Three 1923-1928*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980. Print.
- Niesen de Abruña, Laura. “Jean Rhys’s Feminism: Theory Against Practice.” *World Literature Written in English* 28.2 (1988): 326-336. Web.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011. Print.
- O’Toole, Emer. “Why snubbing books by women is not the same as snubbing motorbikes.” *The Guardian*. Sept. 27th, 2013. Web.
- Owen, Katie. “Introduction.” *Quartet*. Jean Rhys. 1928. London: Penguin Classics, 2000. v-xiv. Print.
- Parsons, Deborah L. *Streetwalking the Metropolis*. Oxford, Oxford UP, 2000. Print.
- Perényi, Eleanor. “The Good Witch of the West.” *The New York Review* 32.12 (July

- 1985). Print.
- Pierce, Gloria. "Mentoring: Functions, Roles, and Interactions." *National Education Association*. Web.
- Plante, David. *Difficult Women*. New York: Atheneum, 1983. Print.
- Port, Cynthia. "'Money, for the night is coming': Jean Rhys and the Gendered Economies of Ageing." *Women: A Cultural Review* 12.2 (2002): 204-217. Web.
- Rado, Lisa. "Lost and Found: Remembering Modernism, Rethinking Feminism." *Rereading Modernism: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*. Ed. Lisa Rado. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Rattenbury, Arnold. "Literature, lying and the sober truth: attitudes to the work of Patrick Hamilton and Sylvia Townsend Warner." *Writing and Radicalism*. Ed. John Lucas. New York: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd, 1996. 201-244. Print.
- Renk, Kathleen. "'Blackberrying in the Sun'? Modernism and the Ageing Woman in Rhys's *Good Morning Midnight*, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Sackville-West's *All Passion Spent*." *Women: A Cultural Review* 27.3 (2016): 317-328. Web.
- Rev. of *Lolly Willowes*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner. *Saturday Review* 141 (1926): 165. Print.
- Rev. of *Lolly Willowes*, by Sylvia Townsend Warner. *Springfield Republican* (1926): 71. Print.
- Rhys, Jean. *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. 1930. London: Penguin Group, 2000. Print.
- . *Good Morning, Midnight*. 1939. London: Penguin Group, 2000. Print.
- . *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*. London: Penguin Books, 1979. Print.
- Rosenthal, Michael. "V. Sackville-West." *The New York Times*. 28 July 1974. 265. Web.

- Rotman, Deborah. "Separate Spheres?: Beyond the Dichotomies of Domesticity." *Current Anthropology* 47.4 (2006): 666-674. Web.
- Sackville-West, Vita. *All Passion Spent*. 1931. London: Virago Press, 1995. Print.
- . "An Unborn Visitant" 1932. *What Did Miss Darrington See?: An Anthology of Feminist Supernatural Fiction*. Ed. Jessica Amanda Salmonson. New York: The Feminist Press, 1989. 115-123. Print.
- . Rev. of *A Room of One's Own*. *Virginia Woolf. Critical Heritage*. 1975. Eds. Robin Majumdar and Allen McLaurin. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Sackville-West, V., et al. *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*. 1st ed. New York: Morrow, 1985. Print.
- Sackville-West, V., Nigel Nicolson, and Harold George Nicolson, eds. *Vita and Harold: The Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992. Print.
- Sage, Lorna. "Introduction." *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*. Jean Rhys. London: Penguin Group, 2000. v-xiv. Print.
- Sandler, Matthew. "Gertrude Stein, Success Manuals, and Failure Studies." *Twentieth-Century Literature*. 63.2 (June 2017): 191-212. Web.
- Santamaría, Lorri and Nathalia Jaramillo. "Comadres among Us: The Power of Artists as Informal Mentors for Women of Colour in Academe." *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning* 22.4 (2014): 316-337. Web.
- Savory, Elaine. *Jean Rhys*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print.
- Schmitz, Sigrid & Sara Ahmed. "Orientation Matters: A Conversation between Sigrid Schmitz and Sara Ahmed." *Freiburger Zeitschrift für GeschlechterStudien* 20.2

- (2014): 97-108. Web.
- Scott, Bonnie Kime. *Refiguring Modernism: Women of 1928*. Vol. 1. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. Print.
- . *Gender in Modernism*. Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2007. Print.
- Seret, Roberta. *Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Künstlerroman*. Bern: Peter Lang Publishing, 1992. Print.
- Seshagiri, Urmila. "Mind the Gap! Modernism and Feminist Praxis." *Modernism/modernity Print Plus*. Vol 2, Cycle 2. Aug 7, 2017. Web.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "Cult of Domesticity." *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History*. Ed. Wilma P. Mankiller. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998. 139. Print.
- Sykes, Rosemary. "'This Was a Lesson in History': Sylvia Townsend Warner, George Townsend Warner and the Matter of History." *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978*. Eds. Davies, Gill, David Malcolm, and John Simons. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006. 103-115. Print.
- Taylor, Anthea. *Single Women in Popular Culture: The Limits of Postfeminism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.
- Todd, Ian Scott. "Dirty Books: Modernism and the Toilet." *Modern Fiction Studies* 58.2 (Summer 2012): 181-213. Web.
- Trodd, Anthea. *Women's Writing in English: Britain, 1900-1945*. New York: Pearson Longman Publishing, 1998. Print.
- Wallace, Diana. *The Woman's Historical Novel*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. *Lolly Willows*. 1926. Chicago: Academy Chicago Limited, 1979. Print.

---. *Summer Will Show*. 1936. New York: New York Review Books, 2011. Print.

---. "Women as Writers." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 107.5034 (May 1959): 378-386. Web.

---. *Letters*. Ed. William Maxwell. London: Chatto & Windus, 1982. Print.

---. *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner*. Ed. Claire Harman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1994. Print.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend and Valentine Ackland. *I'll Stand By You*. Ed. Susanna Pinney. London: Pimlico, 1998. Print.

Waters, Sarah. "Sylvia Townsend Warner: the Neglected Writer." *The Guardian* 2 Mar. 2012. Web.

Waxman, Barbara Frey. *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 1990. Print.

Wiesenfarth, Joseph. *Ford Madox Ford and the Regiment of Women: Violet Hunt, Jean Rhys, Stella Bowen, Janice Biala*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2005. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.

Wineapple, Brenda. "A piece of my mind: Gertrude Stein reads JAMA." *Journal of American Medical Association* 276.14 (1996): 1132-1133. Web.

Woolf, Leonard. *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939*. London: Hogarth Press, 1967. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Voyage Out*. 1915. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. Print.

---. *A Room of One's Own*. 1929. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001. Print.

---. *Three Guineas*. 1938. London: Hogarth Press, 1943. Print.

Wunker, Erin. *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy: Essays on Everyday Life*. Toronto:

Book*hug Press, 2017. Print.

this diss is now done
i trust it's not a failure altho
if so, that's fine too