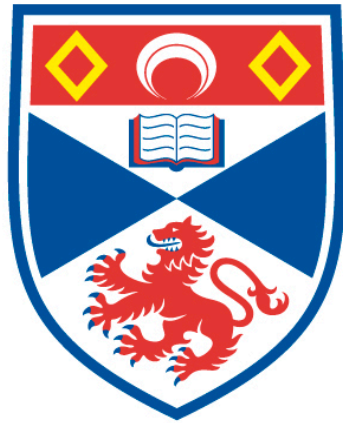


# 'On mentioning the unmentionable': feminism, little magazines, and the case of Rebecca West

Gail Toms

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD  
at the  
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## **Abstract**

### **‘On Mentioning the Unmentionable’**

#### **Feminism, Little Magazines, and the Case of Rebecca West.**

**Gail Toms**

Recent projects conducted by The Universities of De Montfort, Nottingham, and Sussex, U.K. and Brown University in Providence, U.S.A., have highlighted the wealth of under-researched material contained in early twentieth-century little magazines. These niche periodicals, in a cultural materialist sense, provide a useful entry point for the research, analysis, and recreation of the zeitgeist of what can be loosely termed ‘the Modernist movement.’ One area in which these magazines are particularly useful is in uncovering the genesis of modern or contemporary feminist thought. In some respects it can be argued that despite their small circulation figures and limited readership, magazines such as *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *BLAST* reveal a groundbreaking shift in, and towards the ‘Woman Question’. Women editors and writers such as Dora Marsden and Rebecca West, embraced new continental philosophies and aesthetics, and used them to deconstruct the concept of ‘Woman.’ Grasping the idea of individualism, Marsden challenged the essentialist language that controlled women through oppressive gender stereotypes.

This thesis will map out the feminist topography that influenced and encouraged Dora Marsden in her quest for a more wholesale, psychological, female

emancipation, as opposed to continuing the singular pursuit of the franchise. Through *The Freewoman* journals Marsden, and her protégée West, began to articulate new modes of feminism that challenged the grand narratives of Edwardian society and exposed the cultural and linguistic fault lines that created ‘woman’ as ‘the helpmeet’; a subordinate and commodified adjunct to man. Far from being outmoded or forgotten, Marsden’s ideas – particularly those concerned with language – have filtered their way into modern consciousness through feminist writers such as West, and at times prove prescient of the groundbreaking work of Simone de Beauvoir, Monique Wittig, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristeva. Complementing the stimulating research of Lucy Bland, Peter Brooker, Cary Franklin, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Gillian Hanscombe, Sheila Jeffreys, Jane E. Marek, Maroula Joannou, Janet Lyons, Jean-Michele Rabaté, Robert Scholes, Andrew Thacker, Virginia L. Smyers, and Clifford Wulfman, this thesis will examine how *Freewoman* individualism helped shape the early fiction of Rebecca West and influenced the masculinist ethos of its contemporary little magazine, *BLAST*.

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Thank you to Prof. Peter Brooker and Prof. Jean Michele Rabaté who allowed me access to pre-published material and to Dr Cary Franklyn who provided me with a digital copy of her doctoral thesis. Also to the many academics who have generously shared their knowledge and research with me over the past 4 years, not to mention the invaluable support and encouragement I have received from the members of The International Rebecca West Society.

And last but never least, to my friends and family: Brian Golden, my lobster; Elliot and Isobel, each blessings in their own unique ways; my mother, for her love, loyalty and unassailable belief in my ability to succeed; Dr. Keir Elder and Jill Brown, for keeping the Geeks on top; Roxie and the Divas, a collective of strong, intelligent

women; and to Emma, Steve, and LeeAnne, who never failed to lend support, friendship, encouragement, and most importantly laughter.

*Writing is the delicate, difficult, and dangerous means of succeeding in avowing the unavowable.*

Hélène Cixous

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# **Introduction**

I know, I feel  
the meaning that words hide;  
they are anagram, cryptograms,  
little boxes, conditioned ...  
To hatch butterflies.

H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)

So, I must baffle at the Hint  
And cipher at the Sign  
And make much blunder, if at last  
I take the clue Divine

Emily Dickinson

## Introduction

On the seventeenth of November 1911, an advertisement appeared within the iconic suffrage periodical *Votes for Women* announcing:

On Thursday, November the Twenty-third, Messrs Stephen Swift and Co., Ltd., will publish a new weekly Feminist review "THE FREEWOMAN" which will be under the joint editorship of Miss Dora Marsden and Miss Mary Gawthorpe.

The new undertaking is entered upon in the hope that it will afford the conditions most favourable to a full and frank discussion of Feminism in all its aspects.

The editorial attitude will be taken upon the assumption that Feminism has as yet no defined creed, and that even in respect of what would be regarded as its fundamental propositions, the subject still bristles with interrogations.<sup>1</sup>

This statement – which bears the hallmarks of *Freewoman* editor Dora Marsden's confrontational gusto – operates on three levels: first, it identifies the limitations imposed on contemporaneous discussions about feminism; second, it questions the fundamental propositions of feminism, herein understood to mean suffragism; and third, it casts doubt on the ability of peer publications (such as *Votes for Women* in which this appeared) to adequately articulate feminism 'in all its aspects'. The advertisement continued:

It is considered that while the articulate consciousness of mind in women, which, in its different forms of expression is called Feminism, is one of the most unmistakable features of modern times, yet, none the less, the readjustments in politics and morals which the new feature will make necessary, form highly debatable questions upon which we have barely yet entered.

In such circumstances, therefore, it has seemed that the next advance in the progress in Feminism would be made through the encouragement of full and open discussion, and it is this encouragement the new journal will provide.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Votes for Women*, No. 193 (17<sup>th</sup> November 1911), p. 103.

Marsden's statement of intent to provide 'encouragement of full and open discussion' upon 'highly debatable questions upon which we have barely yet entered' was not mere hyperbole but one which she saw through to fruition. Despite frequent personal attacks and financial setbacks – a consequence of the periodical's controversiality – Marsden persevered in her commitment to publish a magazine that facilitated 'the next advance in the progress of feminism.' The aim of this thesis is to examine the manner in which Marsden and her fellow *Freewoman* journalists challenged extant feminist ideas of the early twentieth century, and to show how the journal fits within the historical trajectory of theoretical feminism. As Barbara Green observes:

When one examines women's efforts to chronicle their experiences of popular culture, politics, and modern life in the essay form, one finds that the example of feminist periodical literature is unique in its ability to assist us in our efforts to rethink the connections between women's experience of modernity and the definitions of the 'modern' everyday life that have come to characterize the period for us.<sup>3</sup>

The thesis also aims to analyse how a magazine with such a small circulation and select readership influenced and facilitated modernist modes of feminist writing and in particular, its profound influence on both the early literary career of Rebecca West and the avant-garde publication *BLAST*. Structurally the thesis is divided into three main sections: section one considers Marsden's development of nineteenth-century individualism as a twentieth-century feminist discourse, within *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman*; section two analyses the impact of these two little magazines upon the literary career of Rebecca West; and section three examines the correlations between the political and feminist appropriations of individualism by Marsden and its

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<sup>2</sup> *VFW* (193), p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Green, 'The New Woman's Appetite for "Riotous Living": Rebecca West, Modernist Feminism, and the Everyday' in Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis (eds) *Women's Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 221-236, p. 233.

impact upon the avant-garde publication, *BLAST*. A deliberate decision has been made to exclude Marsden's editorials within *The Egoist*. Despite a continued and extensive engagement with feminist individualism throughout her time as editor of *The Egoist* (1914-1919), Marsden's editorials became disengaged with the rest of the magazine's literary content. West, having parted ways with Marsden in 1913, later criticised the direction that Marsden's individualism took during this period, and as such it was felt that it was Marsden's earliest work that had the most influence on West's career.<sup>4</sup>

### **Little Magazines in Modern Scholarship.**

Little magazines have in the past decade or so become an important feature within the field of literary criticism and as such have attracted substantial research funding. This project was inspired by three of the most recent major research studies in the United States and Britain, which have established the significance of little magazines within Anglo-American literary history. These projects have also helped facilitate further study by cataloguing and digitising many rare and formerly inaccessible publications. The first ongoing project is the Brown University Modernist Journals Project (MJP) which, in response to Woolf's ubiquitous statement 'on or about December 1910, human character changed', aims to create an accessible, digitized database of early twentieth-century little magazines that are considered culturally significant in the trajectory of literary modernism.<sup>5</sup> Taking a multi-faceted approach it includes magazines produced in English between 1890-1922. The MJP is primarily staffed and promoted by Robert Scholes and Sean Latham with Mark Gaipa managing the online material.<sup>6</sup> This project has been successful in digitizing many ephemeral

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed explication of Marsden's later egoism see Clarke (1996).

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 4

<sup>6</sup> Further information about the Modernist Journals Project at: <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/mjp/about.html>

bibelots, including rare magazines such as *The Freewoman*, providing open access to high quality online reproductions. Secondly, the four-year A.H.R.C. funded Modernist Magazines Project (MMP, 2006-2010), headed by Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, has produced three definitive critical and cultural histories of British, North American and European modernist little magazines circulating between 1880-1960.<sup>7</sup> This large-scale project also created an online database of magazines similar to that of their American counterparts at Brown. Thirdly, Nottingham Trent University's Little Magazines Project, under the leadership of David Miller, is in the process of compiling an indexed, online, searchable bibliography of little magazines produced between 1850-1944.<sup>8</sup> These projects all identify the important cultural and literary significance of small print-run, niche periodicals during a period of great literary, linguistic, and cultural change.

Many of these little magazines provided political, historical or literary intersections between mainstream culture and the developing ideas of the avant-garde. It is widely recognised that little magazines were fundamental to the 'genesis, growth and dissemination' of many modernist and avant-garde literary and artistic milieus, as well as generating counter-cultural discourses for political or societal change through

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, (eds) *The Oxford Critical Anthology and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Vol. I Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Vol. II, *North America 1894-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) Vol. III, *Europe, 1880-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Further information at: <http://www.modernistmagazines.com>

<sup>8</sup> Further information about the nature of the Little Magazines Project (hereafter abbreviated to LMP) can be found at: <http://shelob2.ntu.ac.uk/littlemagazines/default.asp> [last accessed 30th June 2012]. See also David Miller and Richard Price (eds) *British Poetry Magazines, 1914-2000: A History and Bibliography of 'Little Magazines'* (New Castle DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2006).

feminism, socialism, and reformism.<sup>9</sup> The MMP web pages describe little magazines thus:

They helped sustain small artistic communities, strengthened the resolve of small iconoclastic groups, keen to change the world, and gave many major modernists their first opportunities in print. Many of these magazines existed only for a few issues and then collapsed; but almost all of them contained work of outstanding originality and future significance.

Given the extensive topography that little magazine research covers, it is important to impose strict boundaries on a project of this size, with the intention of expanding those boundaries in future projects. The decision to focus upon *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *BLAST* was undertaken initially because they all contain material by the writer Rebecca West, an important but often neglected figure within the *oeuvre* of literary feminism and whose work as literary editor and reviewer for *The New Freewoman* arguably influenced the early development of literary modernism. As the project developed it became apparent that a clear understanding of Marsden was something of a prerequisite to understanding West. Thus far within the milieu of little magazines research, the *Freewoman* series has attracted critical attention primarily as the magazine(s) that mutated into *The Egoist*, a formidable publication in terms of its modernist and avant-garde legacy. However, the history of these little magazines is not only germane to an understanding of the development of early literary modernism but also to the trajectory of twentieth-century feminist culture. If suffrage is the feminist grand narrative of this era, then *The Freewoman* and its sister publications provide examples of the contemporaneous meta-narratives (or counter-cultural feminisms) that existed. The major works on women's suffrage, a movement in which *Freewoman* editor Marsden was an important, yet often controversial driving force,

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<sup>9</sup> LMP at <http://www2.ntu.ac.uk/littlemagazines/main.asp> [last visited 25th April, 2013]. This website capitalises these categories primarily because they are used as proper nouns.



have lacked the space to acknowledge her significant contribution or to cite her as one of the most vociferous critics of the Pankhurst's vote-driven agenda.<sup>10</sup> Marsden rates only a single mention in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work *No Man's Land* and then only as one of a long list of 'entrepreneurial' female editors. Given the scope of Gilbert and Gubar's work it is unsurprising that the contribution of a relatively marginal figure, such as Marsden, is glossed over. However it also highlights the work yet to be done. In recent years scholars such as Lucy Bland, Peter Brooker, Bruce Clarke, Les Garner, Jayne E Marek, Maroula Joannou, Jean Michele Rabaté, and Andrew Thacker have done much to rehabilitate Marsden within a literary context and as a result she is now recognised as an integral figure within modernism. Nevertheless, her role within feminism remains undefined and at times contentious. Similarly, Rebecca West's work has failed to attract widespread recognition for its contribution to feminism and gender discourses. West scholars attribute this academic neglect to the eclectic and broad-ranging nature of her diverse corpus: her work spans several decades and includes the fields of literary criticism, novels, philosophy, political journalism, feminism, history, biography, and reviewing, making her a difficult writer to examine.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists: Women's Emancipation Movements in Europe, America and Australasia, 1840-1920* (London: Croom Helm etc., 1977); Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women: The Story of the Struggle* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1957); Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality, c.1850-1940* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 1990); Jane Marcus, *Suffrage and the Pankhursts* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); June Purvis & Sandra Stanley Holt, (eds) *Votes for Women* (London: Routledge, 2000); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Bloomsbury, 1991); Sophia A. van Wingerdan, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1866-1928* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999).

<sup>11</sup> For an index of West scholars and a full online bibliography see The International Rebecca West Society at <http://www.rebeccawestsociety.com> [last accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2013].

*BLAST* is unconsciously connected to and consciously disconnected from *The Freewoman* and as such offers an interesting contribution to the field of gender studies. In *BLAST: Vorticism 1914-1918*, Paul Edwards' chapter, entitled 'You Must Speak with Two Tongues', alludes to the dualities and contradictions that are the foundation stones of Vorticist aesthetics.<sup>12</sup> Edwards is focusing primarily on the dichotomous nature of *BLAST*'s editor, Wyndham Lewis, and his propensity for 'symbolizing contradictory qualities', a facet of Vorticism that offers fresh insights into how the magazine operates within a gendered discourse. No one would conclude that *BLAST* is a feminist publication, but there is sufficient ambiguity to allow a more nuanced reading of gender within its ostensibly masculinist manifesto. Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry also 'reconceptual[ize] Vorticism' by analysing its relationship to women, modernity and modernism.<sup>13</sup> Their work offers new interpretations regarding sexuality and space within a Vorticist context, which for the purposes of this thesis justifies a vigorous reinterpretation of Rebecca West's 'surprising' inclusion within this magazine (as seen in Section 3:2.) If we are to understand the significant contributions of *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *BLAST* in the development of gender studies there are four key points to be considered. First, the role of little magazines in the culture of the 1900s; second, the historical and theoretical context of feminism during the early twentieth century; third, the emergence of individualism and consequently femino-anarchism; and finally, the significant role played by Rebecca West in all three publications.

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Edwards, "'You Must Speak with Two Tongues": Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist Aesthetics and Literature' in Paul Edwards, (ed) *BLAST: Vorticism 1914-1918* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 113-121.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernism, Modernity' in Edwards (2000), pp. 59-72.

### **The Role of Little Magazines in Early Twentieth-Century Culture.**

The first little magazines emerged in various guises from about 1850 onwards and have collectively, and individually, played a significant role in the evolution of political, social, and cultural aesthetics. Their function in early twentieth-century culture was very different from that of popular, mainstream newspapers and magazines. Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, authors of *The Little Magazine: A History and Bibliography*, describe this periodical sub-genre as ‘designed to print artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency were not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses’.<sup>14</sup> They appealed to ‘a limited group of intelligent readers’ expressing ‘a spirit of conscientious revolt against the guardians of public taste.’ Jayne Marek describes them as ‘iconoclastic publications’ involved in ‘deliberately violating accepted principles of publishing and commercial success’ and as such they ‘afforded a particularly pertinent value to the avant-garde work that few established magazines were willing to print’.<sup>15</sup> Brooker and Thacker call them ‘combative’, while Cyril Connolly remarks upon their dynamism, claiming they were ‘magazines determined to “make a difference”’ which according to Malcolm Cowley, was ‘worth the struggle, the quarrels, and penury’ endured by the editors.<sup>16</sup> As Cowley’s observation suggests, most little magazines were commercially precarious by nature; Brooker and Thacker describe them as suffering ‘serious economic and cultural’ difficulties ‘dogged by the costs of production, haunted by the

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen, Carolyn F. Ulrich, (eds) *The Little Magazines: A History and Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 2-4.

<sup>15</sup> Marek (1995), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> See Marek (1995), p.1. Also: Malcolm Cowley, *Exile’s Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951), p. 188; and Cyril Connolly, ‘Little Magazines’, [1960] in *The Evening Colonnade* (London: David Bruce and Watson, 1973), p. 414; Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, (eds) ‘Movements in Magazines and Manifestoes: The Succession from Naturalism’ in *Modernism, A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 192-205, p. 203.

threat of censorship, at loggerheads with more conventional publications, and at war with the philistinism of a prevailing business culture'.<sup>17</sup> *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman*, and *BLAST* were, and remain, prime examples of this trend in 'precarious' little magazine publication.

Post-1900, the exponential growth of mass culture periodicals and journals was attributable largely to the development of more affordable and accessible printing processes.<sup>18</sup> The popular presses enjoyed 'unprecedented success' during this period, and between the years 1875-1910 there was unparalleled expansion within the field of women's periodicals;<sup>19</sup> Marsden's fellow editor and founder of *The Freewoman*, Mary Gawthorpe, in her autobiography *Up Hill to Holloway*, labelled it 'the golden age of the periodical press'.<sup>20</sup> Apart from their role in literary and artistic developments, niche publications, ephemeral bibelots, and little magazines provided the textual space within which to counter the mass-marketed opinion of a burgeoning bourgeoisie. Richard Ellmann describes little magazines as useful vehicles that facilitated literary growth from 'youthful grumblings to adulthood.' Expanding his point he wrote that 'Literary movements pass their infancy in inarticulate disaffection, but mature when they achieve a vocabulary.'<sup>21</sup> It was within the *œuvre* of little magazines that literary groups developed their own defining vocabulary. Among these diverse publications, the editorial independence of little magazines appealed to writers as they provided an unfettered space in which to proselytise any agenda. Janet Lyon observes in *Manifestoes* that little magazines not only helped determine the semiotics of the

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<sup>17</sup> Brooker & Thacker (2010), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Mark S. Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines and Reception 1905-1920* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Cynthia L. White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1970), p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Gawthorpe, *Up Hill To Holloway* (Penebscot, ME: Traversity, 1962), p. 125.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 101, as quoted in Brooker and Thacker (2010), pp.1-2.

‘revolutionary discourse’ of the literary avant-garde, but also helped mould ‘other feminist polemics as well’.<sup>22</sup> She cites Marsden as an example of a female editor, closely allied with the avant-garde, who nevertheless ‘eschewed [the] revolutionary discourse’ of violence – in which the suffrage movement was heavily invested – favouring instead the promotion of individualism and the individual.<sup>23</sup> *The Freewoman* is singular amongst little magazines of the same period, as it developed into a site upon which the aims of feminism and avant-gardism intersected.

In contemporary literary terms, little magazines characterise modernism and the avant-garde, creating a fulcrum around which shifting attitudes towards cultural identities revolved. In many ways, particularly in certain intellectual London circles, they created an ‘urban network across which individual writers and artists moved or formed groups and associations’.<sup>24</sup> As will become evident, one such urban network was formed between the editors, writers, and artists involved in *The New Age*, *The Freewoman* series, and *BLAST*. These periodicals ‘functioned as points of reference, debate, and transmission at the heart of an internally variegated and often internationally connected counter-cultural sphere, or what we could now describe [...] as a network of cultural formations.’<sup>25</sup> They ‘belonged to a nexus out of which an ongoing campaign for artistic, intellectual, and broadly political values were launched and launched again’.<sup>26</sup> In short they formed a ‘dialogic matrix’ of cultural diversity.

In literary terms, magazines such as *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman* and *BLAST* facilitated the challenge to literary convention by making controversial

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<sup>22</sup> Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> Brooker & Thacker (2010), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Brooker & Thacker (2010), pp. 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

decisions to publish experimental work. *The New Freewoman* introduced Imagism to a British readership, and under *The Egoist* banner published poets and novelists who would later become established figures of the modernist canon. James Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* was serialised in *The Egoist*. Alongside Joyce were: T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, H. D., William Carlos Williams, and Mina Loy, amongst others. However, it is worth noting that by this point Marsden had removed herself from the majority of editorial decision-making, preferring to leave that aspect of the new magazine to Harriet Shaw Weaver.<sup>27</sup> This literary adventurousness was echoed in little magazine politics, as journals such as *The Freewoman* allowed counter-cultural movements an arena within which participants could freely debate the 'new' or contest the credibility of 'tradition'. They also challenged the traditionally bifurcated gendering of mainstream publications; little magazines rarely aimed themselves at a specific 'sex' but rather attempted to universalise their readership through their ideological position or philosophical standpoint. This desire for gender-neutrality – further examined in chapter 1:2 – was one of the main reasons for Marsden's periodical undergoing its sequential changes of name. These little magazines were liminal textualities occupying the periphery of mainstream press culture, a location that enabled them to circumnavigate or negotiate the censorial control exercised upon established mass culture publications; it is notable that the reputation of *The Freewoman* was based primarily on its ability to attract publicly expressed opprobrium.

Even today early twentieth-century little magazines continue to challenge the traditional and the normative. In modernism they represent a threat to the authority of

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<sup>27</sup> Jane Lidderdale and Mary Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver: Harriet Shaw Weaver 1876-1961* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970) pp. 82-107.

the established Anglo-American, modernist canon. The bias of this canon, which was formed largely around Western, male, white writers, is exposed by the plurality of modernisms contained in such publications as *The Freewoman*. The existence of this little magazine and others like it complicates concepts of literary and cultural homogeneity, helping scholars to identify alternative modernisms that are out-with the institutionalised cultural phenomenon of the canon. These modernisms are inflected with ‘accents of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and region’.<sup>28</sup> They also reveal, as Brooker and Thacker observe, ‘an antagonism towards dominant forms and values associated with “avant-garde cultural politics” and deploy the category of “modern” as a term encompassing both this combative impulse and the experimental but latterly “normalized” modernism’.<sup>29</sup> Similarly they undermine assumptions of suffrage as the grand narrative of feminism during the early twentieth century, offering instead alternative feminisms that are similarly inflected with ‘accents’. Little magazines are not merely contemporaneously counter-cultural, but remain so in contemporary terms as they continue to challenge what might reasonably be perceived as ‘traditional’ in any given mainstream cultural or political context.

In order to address some of the gaps within extant published research, this thesis follows a recent trend in modernist studies, which Brooker and Thacker have termed ‘the materialist turn’.<sup>30</sup> This ‘turn’ has caused academics to focus their attention on questions of text and historicity, which acknowledges George Bornstein’s observation that the original context of a text is significant to its critical

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<sup>28</sup> Brooker & Thacker (2010) p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, here quoting Ann L. Ardis, ‘The Dialogics of Modernism(s) in the *New Age*’ in *Modernism/Modernity*, 14:3 (Sept. 2007) p. 428 n. 6, p. 427 n. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Brooker & Thacker (2010) p. 5.

interpretation.<sup>31</sup> The thesis also adopts a cultural materialist approach, thus treating the little magazine as an historical artefact that enables the critic to ‘analyse and recreate the zeitgeist’ of a particular moment in history.<sup>32</sup> The little magazines’ role as a catalyst in modernism is well established so this thesis will focus on areas in which the critical standing of *The Freewoman* series and *BLAST* is less clear. Whilst Marek notes, in *Women Editing Modernism*, that the magazine became most influential after its transition into *The Egoist*, this thesis would contend its previous incarnations were also significant, particularly within discourses of feminism and gender.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Feminist Context**

The feminism of any given era does not stand in isolation. It is in conversation with those feminisms that have preceded it, as well as anticipating what is to follow. Whilst it is still conventional to divide feminism into two waves – the first 1830-1920 and the second 1960-present – it is now widely accepted that this model acts primarily as a descriptor of certain types of feminism rather than as a summary of feminism as a whole. First-wave feminism emerged from social reform campaigns and is characterized by suffragism and social movements that focused on ‘campaigns for women’s enfranchisement and the extension of civil rights to women’.<sup>34</sup> Second-wave

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso Books, 1980) and *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981) Williams’ work is based in principles derived from western Marxist traditions, but replaces the Marxist model of an economic ‘base’ as the determinant of a cultural superstructure, with a more flexible model in which cultural activities (such as the production of little magazines) themselves are regarded as ‘material’ and productive processes. This approach allows the scholar to place the text firmly within its social, economic, and historical context. Other scholars identified as ‘cultural materialists’ include Catherine Belsey, Jonathon Dollimore, and Alan Sinfield. See also John Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Jayne E. Marek, *Women Editing Modernism: Little Magazines & Literary History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995) p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Sandra Kemp & Judith Squires, *Feminisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 3. See also the introductions to: Robyn R. Warhol & Diane Price Herndl, *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997) Revised Edition; Mary Eagleton (ed) *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996).



feminism, broadly speaking, dates from the 1960s and ‘grew out of the women’s movements and consciousness-raising groups [...] that were initially based in publishing and journalism, and politically in civil rights campaigns and Marxism’.<sup>35</sup> However, recent feminist readers and anthologies have demonstrated that this linear approach to feminism can be reductive; the dates imposed are somewhat arbitrary and, as Tillie Olsen observed, many women writers and feminists, who do not fit neatly into either category ideologically or chronologically, have effectively been ‘silenced’ by time.<sup>36</sup> Even though certain eras ostensibly lacked obvious feminist agitation, the discovery of lost or forgotten feminist voices provides modern scholars with a ‘mass of vast new testimony, of new comprehensions of what it is to be female’.<sup>37</sup> As Gill Plain and Susan Sellers explain in *A History of Feminist Literary Theory*, second wave feminism did not just appear as a singularity, but was a ‘culmination of centuries of women’s writing, of women writing about women writing and of women – and men – writing about women’s minds, bodies, art and ideas’.<sup>38</sup>

Alongside Plain and Sellers, theorists such as Mary Eagleton, Diane Price Herndl, Sandra Kemp, and Robyn R. Warhol have examined feminisms that blur the divisions between the two waves, offering feminism as a continuous trans-historical narrative. This allows for a much broader framework within which the silences are as significant as the orations. For example it would be impossible to apply the label of first wave feminist to characters such as Dora Marsden or Rebecca West, because the definition of first wave feminism is too narrow to encompass the diverse complexities

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<sup>35</sup> Kemp & Squires (1997), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Eagleton (1996), p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (London: Virago, 1980), p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Plain & Sellers (2010), p. 2.

of Marsden and West's feminist ideas. Neither disputed that women should get the vote, but both argued that emancipation was equally dependent upon other, more individual, psychological factors. Similarly, West may have begun her career as an activist in the WSPU, but her work and ever-evolving feminism spanned seven decades. West is arguably one of the feminist writers who falls between the gaps created by the first and second waves, as she fails to fit neatly into either. It is reductive then, to draw a line between feminist narratives that existed prior to 1920 and second-wave ideas as recent developments have identified that they are not as distinct as once thought. Arguably modern feminism is in constant conversation with its own history as modern scholars tasked with the job of establishing a 'female tradition' reveal an increasingly complex picture.

*The Freewoman* was innovative in many ways when it came to women writers. In her inaugural editorial 'Bondwomen' Marsden's opening statement outlined the difference between 'Bondwomen' and 'Freewomen', marking the latter out as bearing a 'spiritual distinction'. Her magazine aimed to provide these Freewomen with a platform upon which to freely express opinions without fear of opprobrious editorial censorship. Unlike many contemporary publications, which contained sectioned off areas for women's topics such as cooking and housewifery, *The Freewoman* pages allowed a frank examination of female interiority and psychology, including the taboo subject of woman's sexual desires.<sup>39</sup> Following the example set by her feminist antecedent Mary Wollstonecraft, Marsden addressed women as intelligent individuals, refusing to accept them as weak, compliant

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<sup>39</sup> Rebecca West, *Selected Letters of Rebecca West*, edited, annotated, and introduced by Bonnie Kime Scott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 13.

helpmeets to their male peers.<sup>40</sup> However, Marsden's editorial leaders, regarding the position of women in society and culture, alongside her theoretical editorials on egoism and the individual, have led to second-wave feminists, such as Sheila Jeffreys, rejecting her ideas as heterosexist and to some extent anti-feminist. Jeffreys' conclusions about Marsden and her colleagues mark them out as enemies of the spinster and attributes this apparent antipathy or hatred to a hetero-centric impetus, rather than – as shall be argued – a battle to refute the cultural taxonomies that oppress woman through sexual orthodoxy and essentialist stereotypes. Whilst there have been several articles focusing their attention upon the magazine and its main protagonists, these have sought to contextualise the magazine within a modernist and political feminist framework, but few have undertaken a direct analysis of the magazines' contribution to theoretical feminism. Although Andrew Thacker's 1993 article begins to deconstruct Marsden's statement 'Our War is with words,' identifying points of connection between her arguments and the later ideas of French feminist Julia Kristeva, there has been little further research expanding upon these connections.<sup>41</sup>

Lucy Delap remarks that 'the term "feminism" first gained wide currency in Britain during the Edwardian period' and was 'frequently characterized as signifying a commitment to equality, inclusion, and liberal politics.'<sup>42</sup> By 1911, as evidenced by a series of invectives against the Pankhursts, it was clear Marsden felt that suffrage had monopolised the arena labelled 'feminism' and as such had squeezed out more

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<sup>40</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Dover Pub. Ltd., 1996 [1792]).

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Thacker, 'Dora Marsden and The Egoist: "Our War is With Words" in, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 36:2, (1993), pp. 179-196.

<sup>42</sup> Lucy Delap, 'The Superwoman: Theories of Gender and Genius in Edwardian Britain' in *The Historical Journal*, 11:4 (March 2004), p. 101.

ontological or philosophical streams of thought.<sup>43</sup> In her opening editorial ‘Bondwomen’ Marsden identifies the curse of womankind as something that has been masquerading as an advantage: male protection or paternalism. The price of this paternalism is a woman’s servility:

Women’s very virtues are those of a subordinate class. Women are long-suffering, adaptable, dutiful, faithful, and with unlimited capacity for sacrifice. Even if in such matters as sex, where women are considered more ‘moral’ than men, because women recognise intuitively that men *think* more, they pay their homage as from a lower to a higher authority, by allowing men to frame their standards even *in* morals.<sup>44</sup>

In return for this safety, she argues, women are forced to be ‘servants’ and only when they are released from this culturally endorsed master/slave bond will they be fully emancipated. The vote will only help in part. She declares:

The sense of quality, the sense that a woman has gifts, the sense that she is a superior, a master – can give her the strength to slip the comfort and protection and to be content to seize the “love” in passing, to suffer the long strain of effort, and to bear the agony of producing creative work. Having this sense, they will learn that freedom is born in the individual soul, and that no outer force can either give it or take it away; that only Freewomen can be free, or lead the way to freedom. They will learn that their freedom will consist in appraising their own worth, in setting up their own standards and living up to them, and putting behind them for ever their role of complacent self-sacrifice. For none can judge of another soul’s value.<sup>45</sup>

Feminism by 1911 had become synonymous with ‘the vote’; as Helen McNeil phrased it, ‘[i]n historic terms the feminism of the pre-World War One period has slid like a tectonic plate under the powerful image of suffrage.’<sup>46</sup> Consequentially alternative feminist impulses slipped from view and, like Marsden’s editorials, were

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<sup>43</sup> Marsden’s apostasy of and eventual hostility towards the key figures of the WSPU is documented in Garner (1990), Chapter 3, pp. 22-50 and also Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism, Science* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1996), Ch. 2, pp. 47-94.

<sup>44</sup> Marsden, ‘Bondwoman’ in *FW*, 1:1 ( 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Helen McNeil, ‘Vortex Marsden and the Making of Modernity’ in Kate Campbell, (ed) *Journalism, Literature and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2000), pp. 141-169, p. 158.

subsequently lost in one of history's female silences. By investing its energies entirely in obtaining the vote, it can be argued that suffragism was privileging the political over the psychological 'well-being' of womankind. *The Freewoman* perspective argued that whilst the vote would emancipate woman politically, it would not actually change her status culturally. Despite the violent images associated with militancy, the WSPU steadfastly endorsed female stereotypes and characteristics: domesticity, weakness, femininity, chastity, purity, heterosexuality, whilst upholding marriage and motherhood as female ideals. When police brutalised women, the WSPU exploited public sympathies that the violence was levied upon the 'weaker' sex.<sup>47</sup> Suffragism did not question the extant labels that determined how women were perceived culturally, unlike Marsden who identified that language was a key factor in determining how women's identity was constructed. To her 'all that was needed was to recognise it and seize the power inherent in naming'.<sup>48</sup> Unlike *The Freewoman*, the WSPU's mouthpiece, *Votes for Women*, modelled itself on contemporaneous women's magazines.<sup>49</sup> *The Freewoman* shared none of the periodical codes evident within the pages of *Votes for Women* preferring instead to follow the example set by Alfred Orage's radical weekly review of politics, literature, and art, *The New Age*. Suffragists were seen as the radical, militant agitators within society, provoking the

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<sup>47</sup> Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* (Chicago: UCP, 1988), p. 106, 'Force-Feeding' & p. 137 'What Cat Could Keep Up with This?' – WSPU campaigns that highlighted male violence acted upon women suffragettes. See also Antonia Raeburn, *The Militant Suffragettes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973).

<sup>48</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2000), pp. 141-2.

<sup>49</sup> Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 13. McGann, proposes a division between linguistic codes used to interpret the semiotics and semantics of the language contained within a text, and the bibliographic codes that exist within formatting. A subset of these bibliographic codes, known as periodical codes, allow critics to examine a wide range of features that textually link or differentiate any given publication. By comparing all the phenomena contained within magazines such as: price, size, periodicity, page layout, typeface, use of illustrations, monochrome or colour, quality of paper, publishing and distribution networks used, types of fundraising sought, placement advertising, editorial arrangements, material published etc., scholars can identify trends and possible affiliations between various publications.

ire of the incumbent government with their increasingly voluble protests. Yet they sought only one fundamental change to their lives: the right to vote. As McNeil has pointed out: ‘Marsden’s resistance to the strongly sex-differentiated gender theory of her day was based on a political and economical analysis as well as a philosophical one’.<sup>50</sup> Marsden was proposing ‘an existentialist’ position, which ‘rejected “the feminine” as a purely cultural construct and rejected the societal role implications of woman’s physiological difference’.<sup>51</sup> Whilst placard-waving, window-breaking suffragists concerned themselves with preserving the rights of the married woman and blaming the decline of society on male sexual intemperance, Marsden debated the injustices of a system whereby women fell mercy to patriarchal notions of sexual licence and male economic caprice, both of which reinforced and perpetuated essentialist arguments of sexual difference and inadequacy. Similarly, whilst the Pankhursts were indicting the unsanitary male for the sexual pollution of his wife, Marsden was advocating a ‘transcendent and inclusive’ theory of sex that deconstructed its traditional associations with ‘breeding, hygiene, and social policy’.<sup>52</sup>

The ‘feminism’ of *The Freewoman* and the manner in which it was articulated was vastly different from the suffragist press. The magazine became an important forum for a wide spectrum of radical ideas that simultaneously entranced and perplexed its readership. Marsden and the contributors of *The Freewoman* had more in common with second wave feminists than with their contemporaries, as the magazines addressed not only the matter of women’s materiality but also their symbolic value within patriarchy. McNeil has referred to *The Freewoman* sequence as

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<sup>50</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2000), p. 160.

<sup>51</sup> Karen Offen, ‘Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach’ in *Signs*, 14:1. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 119-157, p. 149.

<sup>52</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2000), p. 160.

‘a self-conscious initiator of modern discourses of womanhood’ that was ‘trying to establish a sexual woman without using gender binaries’.<sup>53</sup> *The Freewoman’s* attacks on institutional female roles and its unconventional attitude towards sexuality can be located in the trajectory of theoretical feminism as a mid-point between the enlightened radicalism of Wollstonecraft and the arguable starting point of the second wave, Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal text *The Second Sex*.<sup>54</sup> Like de Beauvoir, Marsden’s ‘language and politics appeared impossibly exotic’ and the infinitely quotable phrase ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, woman’ would not have looked out of place if it were found embedded in one of Marsden’s editorials.<sup>55</sup> There are many parallels to be discovered between Marsden’s attack on the symbolic construction of female identity and second-wave feminist thinking. Her work anticipates the feminisms of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, and Monique Wittig, each of whom, in different ways, identified and challenged the performativity of gender, the construction of identities, ‘normative’ androcentric cultural assumptions, the bondage of patriarchal language, and woman as symbol. As shown in chapter 1:2 of this thesis *The Freewoman* hosts articles in which the difference between sex and gender is beginning to be articulated. ‘By 1913’, McNeil observes, Marsden was already ‘working towards a recognition that categories thrive on empty oppositions’, and by 1915 she had ‘located the ideology of interpellation in its agent, language’.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2000), p. 143 and p. 160 respectively.

<sup>54</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 2010 [1949]).

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Fallaize, ‘Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Woman’ in Plain and Sellers (2007), pp. 85-99, p. 86 and de Beauvoir (2010 [1949]), p. 293.

<sup>56</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2000), p. 157.

In her key paper 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach' Karen Offen identifies with *The Freewoman's* struggle to endow the term feminism with any definitive value. Asking the question 'What is feminism?' Offen answers, 'everyone seems to have different answers, and every answer is infused with a political or emotional charge.'<sup>57</sup> Marsden's solution was to dispense with the term altogether, opting eventually for the more clearly defined 'individualist' label, but Offen's model creates two broad, trans-historical categories, rather than two chronologically delineated 'waves'; she opts to bifurcate feminism into two 'historically sensitive' 'relational' and 'individualist' traditions.<sup>58</sup> It also offers a clearer understanding of why, at times, *The Freewoman* and its followers were so vocal in their opposition to the Pankhursts.

Offen's theory addresses the problem of 'factions' that developed alongside emerging feminist thought. She argues that 'relational feminism represents the dominant line of argument prior to the twentieth century throughout the Western World', whilst individualist feminism emerged out of a European philosophical culture around the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Relational feminism is defined as a 'gender-based but egalitarian vision' of society that features 'the primacy of a companionate, non-hierarchical, male-female couple' as the basic unit of society. It also 'emphasised women's rights *as women* (defined principally by their childbearing and/or nurturing capacities) in relation to men'.<sup>60</sup> Relational feminism insists that

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<sup>57</sup> Offen (1988), p. 119.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134-5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135. Offen pinpoints John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* written in 1869 as the origin of Individualist feminism.

<sup>60</sup> Offen (1988), p. 136.



women have a unique and distinct function within society because of their reproductive function. Individualist feminism, on the other hand:

posits the individual, irrespective of sex or gender, as the basic unit [and] emphasized more abstract concepts of individual human rights and celebrated the quest for personal independence (or autonomy) in all aspects of life, while downplaying, deprecating, or dismissing as insignificant all socially defined roles and minimizing discussions of sex-linked qualities or contributions, including childbearing and its attendant responsibilities.<sup>61</sup>

Offen argues that the two models allow room for ‘intertwining and interplay’ and that historically they have not always been as distinct from one another as they become in the twentieth century. She claims that individualism’s emergence in French culture (circa 1890) ‘forced a paradigm shift in the campaign for women’s emancipation’ and the same argument can be applied to its emergence in Britain with Marsden arguably leading the field.<sup>62</sup> By applying Offen’s model we can begin to understand the oppositional nature of *Freewoman* individualism to Pankhurstian pro-family, pro-natalist relationalism. Unlike the Pankhursts (and *Votes for Women*) who advocated political equality whilst women maintained their femininity and their ‘essential’ roles as wives and mothers, *The Freewoman* demonstrates Offen’s position that ‘[i]ndividualist arguments have served especially the cause of single women to justify an independent, non family-based existence in a world that remains male defined.’<sup>63</sup> This also strongly defines West’s feminism throughout her career. She fought hard for collective women’s rights but also judged women on their individual merits and not out of sex-loyalty or ‘sisterhood’. *The Freewoman*’s brand of feminism was arguably out of step with its time but it is important to understand its role in early twentieth-

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<sup>61</sup> Offen (1988), p. 136.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137. Most of Offen’s expertise is in French women’s history, though in this essay she is considering all Western culture, including Anglo-American feminist development.

century discourses. One of the key elements to this ‘rebranding’ of feminism was Marsden’s appropriation of Max Stirner’s theory of ‘individual egoism’ and its conversion into the femino-anarchic figure of the Freewoman.

### **Individualism and Its Role in British Culture**

Bruce Clarke’s *Dora Marsden: Gender, Individualism, Science* is a key text in understanding the philosophical premises upon which Marsden based her own developing ideas regarding the linguistic construction of female identity. His first chapter ‘Self-Evolution’ is a cacophony of baffling ‘isms’ that map out the origins of Marsden’s controversial – or, to quote her biographer Les Garner, ‘obtuse’ – feminism.<sup>64</sup> Clarke summarises that Marsden appropriated ‘elements from Max Stirner, Herbert Spencer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Havelock Ellis, Henri Bergson and Edward Carpenter’ in order to ‘set forth an unprecedented strain of femino-anarchism’.<sup>65</sup> Clarke is the first to identify that whilst the politics of individualism had historically been gendered male, Marsden’s appropriation of the language and concept facilitated the development of an ‘androgynous rather than a strictly feminine or heterosexual idea’.<sup>66</sup> Whilst a detailed analysis of Marsden’s philosophical development is out-with the parameters of this thesis, its genesis is pertinent to understanding the main impetus behind Marsden’s feminism. The concept of the individual, as conceived and adapted by Stirner, underpins any subsequent discussion of Marsden’s – and the young West’s – deconstruction of cultural taxonomies, such as ‘The Spinster’ and ‘The Drudge’ that take place in chapter 1:2 of this thesis. Stirner states:

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<sup>64</sup> Clarke (1996), pp.1-46. Les Garner, *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit: Dora Marsden, 1882-1960* (Aldershot: Gower Pub. Co. Ltd., 1990), p. 119.

<sup>65</sup> Clarke (1996), p.8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Names name you not. He articulates the word, so long as he calls it the Unique, but adds nonetheless that the Unique is only a name. He thus means something different from what he says, as perhaps someone who calls you Ludwig does not mean a Ludwig in general, but means You, for which he has no word. [...] It is the end point of our phrase world, of this world in whose “beginning was the Word.”<sup>67</sup>

In *The Ego and Its Own* (1844) Stirner outlines his theories on psychological and ethical egoism, arguing that whether willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily humans are destined to fulfil their own desires. Stirner, like Nietzsche, is largely regarded as a ‘rational egoist’ because he deems it irrational not to act in one’s own self-interest; this line of thinking follows the path set by Protagorean relativism, which is based upon the premise that ‘man is the measure of all things’.<sup>68</sup>

Individualism also plays an integral part in rehabilitating Marsden’s, and her contributors’, reputations as authors of a discourse of sexuality, which has been categorised by Sheila Jeffreys as promoting ‘an ideal of heterosexual love’ that was ‘invariably combined with the stigmatising of lesbianism’.<sup>69</sup> The majority of published work on Marsden and *The Freewoman* locates them firmly within a heterosexual matrix. However, femino-anarchism advocated self-rule and autonomy in all aspects of a woman’s life, including control over her own body and sexuality; as already observed it anticipated de Beauvoir’s anti-essentialist observation that ‘one is not born, but rather becomes, woman.’<sup>70</sup> Individualism was, and still is, strongly

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<sup>67</sup> Max Stirner, ‘Stirner’s Critics’ in *The Philosophical Forum*, 8 (1978): 66–80. (A partial translation of Stirner’s 1845 response to critics, covering his reply to Feuerbach.) The Anarchists Library at: <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/max-stirner-stirner-s-critics.a4.pdf> [last accessed 12th May 2012].

<sup>68</sup> Sidney Parker, ‘The Egoism of Max Stirner: Some Critical Biographical Notes’ (New York: The Mackay Society, undated) at <http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/00/pwillen1/lit/egomax.htm> [last accessed 7th September 2013].

<sup>69</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (Melbourne: Spinifex, 1985), p. 115.

<sup>70</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]) p. 293.

associated with free-love and as the twentieth century unfolded, the ideas that prompted intellectuals such as Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis to reassess what constituted ‘normal sexual behaviour’ instigated discourses that later facilitated broader debate, which eventually forced reforms that acknowledged the political and cultural rights of homosexuals and lesbians.<sup>71</sup> In 1891 Oscar Wilde passionately promoted the idea of individualism in his essay ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’ as it promoted a desire for a ‘radical *personal freedom* and a desire for *society itself* to be radically different, the first thing being inseparable from the second.’<sup>72</sup> In 1912 homosexuality was still a criminal act and the shockwaves of Oscar Wilde’s very public 1895 trials and conviction still reverberated. Lesbianism was barely articulated and when it was – as described by Edward Carpenter in *Sexual Inversion* – it carried with it all the motifs and stereotypical characteristics of the ‘aggressive’ non-conforming Spinster, which were also being attributed to the New Woman, claiming that they showed physical and mental signs that ‘they ought to have been a man’.<sup>73</sup> *The Freewoman* would later take issue with this dichotomous gendering of single women. Whilst Jeffreys argues that free-love, as outlined by early twentieth-century writers such as Carpenter and Havelock Ellis, was prescriptive and thus reinforced hetero-normative practices, it can be equally argued that the work of Carpenter and Ellis contributed towards the dismantling of cultural taboos. The ability to discuss sex

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<sup>71</sup> Edward Carpenter was publishing on matters of sexology from the 1890s onwards, when he took a stance against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Inspired by John Addington Symonds, a radical homosexual scholar publishing in defence of same-sex relationships in the 1880s, Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1908) became a key text in twentieth-century gay and lesbian activism. See Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London: Verso, 2009) for further details.

<sup>72</sup> Jonathon Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex 2: Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davies, 1927 [1894]), p. 250. Quoted in Jeffreys (1985) p. 106.

frankly is a key tenet for opening debate as it provides a platform from which to challenge the extant legislation that controlled the body; the promotion of sexuality as an individual's right of personal expression arguably paved the way for the eventual decriminalisation of homosexuality and a broader acceptance of non-hetero-normative sexualities.<sup>74</sup>

Anarchic individualism can be traced back to the Enlightenment, and was developed through the work of philosophers such as Thomas Paine, Edmund Burke and William Godwin (spouse of Mary Wollstonecraft and father to Mary Shelley) who began to question the role of the government and its impact on the individual.<sup>75</sup> Arguably individualism has developed through a long lineage of notable philosophers including: Josiah Warren (1798-1874), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), Max Stirner (1806-1856), Lysander Spooner (1808-1887), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903).<sup>76</sup> Though Wollstonecraft's name is omitted from Clarke's list of individualists, her seminal work can be said to have set a feminist

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<sup>74</sup> Reforms generated by committees such as The Wolfenden Report (1957) recommended that 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults should no longer be an offence'. This report eventually led to the passage in the Sexual Offences Act 1967, that replaced the previous law on sodomy contained in the Offences against the Person Act 1861 and the 1885 Labouchere Amendment which outlawed every homosexual act short of sodomy. Although there is no direct correlation between the work of early free-love campaigners and the later Gay Rights advocates, it can be argued that the early free discourse on the nature of both male and female sexuality enabled these later discussions to take place. More information and the full report is available at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/homosexuality.htm> [last accessed May 22nd, 2013].

<sup>75</sup> William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972[1793]).

<sup>76</sup> Ann Caldwell Butler, 'Josiah Warren and "The Sovereignty of the Individual"' in *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* IV:4 (Fall 1980), pp. 433-488; John Stuart Mill *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1859-1869]); Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (New York: Benj. R. Tucker Pubs., 1907) translated by Stephen Byington full text at <http://tmh.floonet.net/teaho/theego0.html> [last accessed 18th August 2013]; Lysander Spooner, Various Works at Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/browse/authors/s#a552> [last accessed 18th August 2013]; Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (London: Penguin, 1983 [1854/1849]); Herbert Spencer, Various at The Online Library of Liberty [http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Fperson=165&Itemid=28](http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Fperson=165&Itemid=28) [last accessed 18th August 2013]

precedent for individualism, one that can be identified in Marsden's work. In fact, Marsden's recriminations against 'Bondwomen' can be read as a distant echo of Mary Wollstonecraft's own admonishments to women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.<sup>77</sup> Wollstonecraft therefore provides an historical 'feminist' link with individualism, a link that in some way ameliorates feminist objections to Marsden's adoption of such a masculinist philosophy. Chicago journalist Floyd Dell summarised what Marsden's individualism offered women:

Freedom! That is the first word and the last with Dora Marsden. She makes women understand for the first time what freedom means. She makes them want to be free. She nerves them to the effort of emancipation. She sows in a fertile soil the dragon's teeth which shall spring up as a band of capable females, knowing what they want and taking it, asking no leave from anybody, doing things and enjoying life – Freewomen!<sup>78</sup>

Clarke goes on to explain that in 'Dora Marsden's London, "the ego" referred not to the psychological legacy of Sigmund Freud, but to the philosophical legacy of Kant and Hegel'.<sup>79</sup> It would be an impossible task to summarise Clarke's detailed and intricate unravelling of Marsden's complex philosophical heritage, but he concludes it was born out of her 'concrete participation in the radical nexus of British suffragism, feminism and political anarchism'. He explains that, for Marsden, 'Stirner's stripping of the political issues down to the absolute Self was a handy way to dissolve

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<sup>77</sup> Wollstonecraft (1996 [1792]) This book argues a similar case to Marsden, that women are a product of their inadequate education (p. 6), stating that the most critical difference between the sexes was the way in which they were raised and taught. Women, she argued, were cultivated to 'weak elegance of the mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners supposed to be the sexual characteristic of the weaker vessel' (p. 8). Marsden's attitude in creating *The Freewoman* echoed Wollstonecraft's disclaimer: 'my own sex I hope will excuse me if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone.' (p. 8)

<sup>78</sup> Floyd Dell, *Women as World Builders: Studies in Modern Feminism* (Chicago: Forbes, 1913) as quote in Clarke (1996), p. 18.

<sup>79</sup> Clarke (1996), p. 19. Kant and Hegel's ideas regarding art and the soul were strong influences on Marsden. Like Kant she 'positioned art as the ideal mediation ... between vital soul and reflective mind' and was an integral part of Marsden's Vitalist aesthetic. Clarke (1996), pp. 31, 38-40, 42, 88, 124, 174.

solidarities of sex and gender.<sup>80</sup> Quoting James Gibbon Huneker's 1909 book *Egoists: A Book of Supermen*, which chronicled and critiqued the 'currency of an egoistic idiom' in late nineteenth-century literature, Clarke identifies Marsden's main ontological premise:

'Where does Woman come into this scheme?' Huneker asks of Stirner's egoism, and replies: 'There is no Woman only a human ego. Humanity is a convenient fiction to harry the individualist. So, society, family are the clamps that compress the soul of Woman. If woman is to be free she must first be an individual, an Ego.'<sup>81</sup>

Clarke also explains that the type of 'freewoman' Marsden projected onto the pages of her magazine was an ideal, a reworked, feminist adaptation of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch*: a super human, egoistic, superwoman. The concept of the *Übermensch* was familiar to intellectual society in 1911 and had been satirised and popularised by G. B. Shaw's farcical comedy *Man and Superman* (1903) described by John Bertolini as 'a hilarious cocktail of farce, Nietzschean philosophy and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*'.<sup>82</sup> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by Nietzsche, within which the concept of the *Übermensch* is explored, which had been circulated in translation and parts since the late nineteenth century, had undergone a fresh translation into English in 1909 and was topical amongst the British intelligentsia often associated with little magazines.<sup>83</sup>

Benjamin Tucker and Stephen Bynnington, who were the driving force behind the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>81</sup> Clarke (1996), pp. 20-1. James Gibbon Huneker, *Egoists: A Book of Supermen* published in 1909 was a book of literary sketches that 'chronicles the currency of an egoistic idiom in the literary discussions of symbolists and decadents and places the idiom in a particular philosophical and aesthetic contexts from which Dora Marsden's London further developed and critiqued it. In 1909, Huneker's could expect his chosen audience to regard his title as witty, just as at the end of 1913 Marsden could expect a modest audience to respond positively to the ironic cachet of the Egoist as an appropriate renaming of the *New Freewoman*', p. 19.

<sup>82</sup> John A. Bertolini, 'Introduction' to G. B. Shaw, *Man and Superman and Three Other Plays* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004).

<sup>83</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*. Original translation by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003 [1883-1885]). For translation information see Patrick Bridgwater, *Nietzsche in Anglosaxony* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 1972).

translation, later became regular contributors to *The Freewoman*. Marsden's appropriation of such a topical and overtly counter-cultural concept – in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche declares that God is dead and that the Superhuman, the human embodiment of the Divine, is his successor – demonstrated that she shared the same philosophical vigour as her male contemporaries. She was capitalising upon a 'hot' philosophical ideal and claiming its possibilities as feminist. *Übermensch* was commonly translated as 'Superman' by Shaw and others, but Marsden legitimately translated it as a genderless 'Superhuman' thus expanding its meaning to encompass women.<sup>84</sup> Individualism marked women out as the capable, strong, intelligent authors of their own destinies, rather than as weak, subordinated victims of patriarchy or willing recipients of paternalism. Marsden's cult of the individual was fertilised by her suffrage, feminist, and political experiences. Lucy Delap identifies the resonance of the *Übermensch* for Edwardian society claiming it to be 'a political and aesthetic reaction to the massification of modern life'.<sup>85</sup>

Because the philosophy of individualism was topical amongst the proponents of the avant-garde during the early twentieth century it is unsurprising that it also appealed to artist and writer Wyndham Lewis and his fellow Vorticists. As shown in section three of this thesis the work of Stirner was particularly influential on Lewis's experimental play *Enemy of the Stars* first published in *BLAST*. However Lewis's adoption of Stirner's egoism, and its incorporation into *BLAST* remains – on the surface at least – traditionally masculine and as such the magazine acts as an

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<sup>84</sup> The translation of *Übermensch* from German to English is ambiguous. *Mensch* can refer to either 'man' or 'human being' or simply 'person' or sometimes to 'person of honour and integrity.' Its loose comparison in English is 'humankind.' In Bertholt Brecht's 1943 play *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* it translates as *The Good Person of Sezuan* and incidentally refers to a woman.

<sup>85</sup> Delap, 'The Superwoman' (2004), p. 111.



oppositional text to *The Freewoman*. Despite sharing a literary connection through Pound, *BLAST*'s reactionary tone can be interpreted as a reassertion of the *Übermensch* as male, denying Marsden's attempt to adopt the individual as a universalising, de-gendered term that embraced both sexes. However, as section three will demonstrate there is sufficient humour and paradox within *BLAST*'s pages to suggest ambivalence and ambiguity in its attitude towards contemporaneous feminism.

Individualism was blended with various other radical ideas about personal liberty, sexual morality, and gender identity by many of Marsden, West, and Lewis's contemporaries because the particular intellectual society within which they circulated was eager to embrace new and innovative ways of thinking and living. Clarke mentions that Marsden's ideas regarding individualism 'ingurgitated' selected doctrines including: Fabianism, Theosophy, aesthetic Vitalism, evolutionism, idealism, scientism and spiritualism. She also embraced modernist modes of expression, identifying strongly with Pound's Imagism. Individualism, as its name suggests, allowed flexibility in adapting various doctrines to serve the purposes of the individual, influenced by and embracing a wide variety of philosophies as it developed. It was this open-ended developmental approach to 'vivid new life-manifestations' for both men and women that powered *The Freewoman*'s dedication to promoting the cult of the individual.<sup>86</sup> Clarke alerts any potential scholar to the paradox of *The Freewoman* editor's work:

Marsden was not a single-minded polemicist but rather a mobile controversialist. Within this oppositional framework, Marsden divided her own writing into two contiguous and complementary modes: the affirmative, aggressive, and unified leader, followed by the reflective and multiform "Notes of the Week." Any given contribution of Marsden's to the *Freewoman*

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<sup>86</sup> Marsden, 'Bondwomen', *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2011), p. 2.

is taken somewhat out of context if isolated from the wider frame of its intended repercussions.<sup>87</sup>

Clarke's observation will be revisited in section 1:2 in relation to Sheila Jeffreys' interpretation of *The Freewoman* article 'The Spinster' authored 'By One'.

### ***The New Age of Suffrage?***

Clarke and Garner have both noted the important role played by co-editor and founder Mary Gawthorpe during the inception and execution of *The Freewoman* sequence. In 1911, during the planning stages of the magazine, Marsden 'relied heavily on Gawthorpe's connections with A. R. Orage and *The New Age*'.<sup>88</sup> Since their friendship had begun in 1907-8 Marsden looked to the established WSPU leader for support and guidance. The women had plenty in common as both began their professional lives as teacher-pupils in their respective northern hometowns before winning scholarships to university; Marsden went to Manchester whilst Gawthorpe attended Leeds. They met through their involvement with the WSPU, when Gawthorpe was a loyal and respected regional leader and considered one of the movements 'leading personalities'. She was described by Sylvia Pankhurst as: 'a Yorkshire lass, very tiny with a winsome face, sparkling with animation and with laughing golden eyes [who] had a gift of ready wit and repartee which, linked with imperturbable humour made her irresistible to the crowd'.<sup>89</sup> As Gawthorpe's health deteriorated and Marsden's energetic daring grew, the two became firm friends. As Garner observes Gawthorpe was often a cautious hand on Marsden's more impulsive arm, whilst Marsden provided much needed support for Gawthorpe as the pressures from St. Clements Inn

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<sup>87</sup> Clarke (1996), p. 58.

<sup>88</sup> Clarke (1996), p. 91 & Garner (1990), pp. 51-89.

<sup>89</sup> Garner (1990), pp. 28-9. See rest of chapter (pp. 22-50) for a fuller picture of Marsden and Gawthorpe's friendship and their working dynamic as colleagues within the WSPU.

grew. She was instrumental, alongside West, in navigating *The New Freewoman* into a more prominent literary orbit.<sup>90</sup> So in 1911, when Gawthorpe advised Marsden to seek Orage's advice about setting up a periodical, it is unsurprising that *The New Age* became the model upon which *The Freewoman* was based.

Gawthorpe's relationship with Orage extended back to 1902, when both were active members in the Independent Labour Party (of which Orage helped found the Leeds Branch)<sup>91</sup> and she became involved with his innovative society known as The Leeds Arts Club. Orage founded the club – with his *New Age* co-editor Holbrook Jackson and lifelong friend A. J. Penty – as a 'means of disseminating their ideas concerning the relationship between culture and the political and economic objectives of Socialism'.<sup>92</sup> It was Jackson who introduced Orage to the works of Nietzsche, which were to have a decisive influence over his subsequent writing:

There are books that appeal to sentiment, books that appeal to the mind, and books that appeal to the will. Nietzsche's belong to this last small but immortal section. Nobody can read his books without receiving a powerful stimulus in one direction or another.<sup>93</sup>

Nietzsche, so far as modern Europe was concerned, was viewed as 'a pioneer in the demolition of ancient habits of mind and moral prejudices'.<sup>94</sup> As such he appealed to 'modernists' determined to 'make it new.' Philip Mairet, in 1936, summarised the intention of these three socialist northern intellectuals as a desire for:

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<sup>90</sup> Garner (1990), p. 29. St. Clements Inn was the London based headquarters of the WSPU and considered the epicentre for decision making, much to the chagrin of regional organisers such as Marsden.

<sup>91</sup> Wallace Martin, *The New Age Under Orage: Chapters in Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967) p. 17.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. Quoted from A. R. Orage, *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age* (London: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1906), pp. 11-12.

<sup>94</sup> R. J. Hollingdale, 'Introduction' in Nietzsche (2003 [1883-1885]) p. 16.

[...] a movement for cultural reform. It was to be primarily aesthetic in its motives, but with much more far-reaching aims ... Their minds met in the idea of a reform of *taste* in art, manners, thought, and discussion. This aesthetic revolution was gradually to engender a social force capable of over-throwing the supreme evil of the age, Plutocracy.<sup>95</sup>

When the opportunity arose in 1907 to co-edit a new periodical, based in London and funded by an endowment from G. B. Shaw, Jackson and Orage took the next logical step.<sup>96</sup>

Orage's influence over *The Freewoman* was manifold but unsurprising given that *The New Age* can be considered one of the most important periodicals involved in the dissemination of Stirner's egoism. Ann L. Ardis' article 'Democracy and Modernism' mediates between the two schools of thought regarding *The New Age*. She poses the question:

Does *The New Age* under Orage's editorship (1907-1922) provide a 'comprehensive record of the emergence of modern culture from its Victorian and Edwardian Antecedents' [...] Or did it offer such an 'untidy mixture of socialism, Nietzscheanism, and mysticism' that it had 'little impact on the direction of English thoughts in its time'?<sup>97</sup>

In 1968 the *Times Literary Supplement* observed that 'the greatest appeal of such a farraginous chronicle [as *The New Age*] was to people like Orage, provincial intellectuals in search of a faith, and it is not surprising that such people made up a substantial number of both contributors and its readers'.<sup>98</sup> Marsden, West, and Lewis could be counted amongst those 'provincial' intellectuals to whom it appealed. The two publications share the same periodical codes with *The Freewoman* not only

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<sup>95</sup> Martin (1967), p. 19. Quoted from Philip Mairet, *A. R. Orage* (London: 1936), p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> Martin (1967), pp. 20-31. Martin gives a much fuller account of the purchase of *The New Age* and its subsequent development into the radical periodical envisaged by Jackson and Orage than is possible within the confines of this thesis.

<sup>97</sup> Ann L. Ardis, 'Democracy and Modernism: *The New Age* Under A. R. Orage (1907-22) in Brooker & Thacker (2010), pp. 205-225, p. 205.

<sup>98</sup> 'The New Age', *The Times Literary Supplement*, (25<sup>th</sup> April 1968), p. 437.

adopting the same format, but also choosing to publish on similar topics, often by writers from *The New Age* stable. It seems likely that, encouraged by Gawthorpe, Marsden became an avid reader of *The New Age* and absorbed a great deal from the articles it printed including those on psychology and psychoanalysis, which (as demonstrated in section two) heavily influenced the debut novel of Rebecca West.

When Marsden conceived the idea of producing a ‘new’ magazine in which to expand contemporaneous debates on the ‘Woman’ question, one would have assumed she would have looked to a long history of women’s publication from which to devise a template. She already had an established reputation in ‘journalism’ as a regular contributor to the suffrage paper *Votes for Women*.<sup>99</sup> In order fully to understand Marsden’s deviation from women’s publications formats it is important to compare *The Freewoman* with other ‘feminist’ periodicals, leaving aside for one moment its literary ambitions. Joannou claims that *Votes for Women* represented ‘the public face of suffrage’ whilst the *Freewoman* series aligned itself with the ‘aspirations of dissident feminists’ and had ‘a distinctive appeal to intellectuals.’<sup>100</sup> Rather than make claims of similarity and solidarity, Joannou identifies points of rupture or difference, and explores how these differences have fed into modern day ideas. Joannou claims that Marsden’s journal ‘demolished the solidarity which other women of her day considered essential to bring about social change.’<sup>101</sup> However, early twentieth-century feminism was far from a cohesive or uniform ideology and *The Freewoman* was symptomatic of the lack of solidarity amongst feminists. Given the number of vying

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<sup>99</sup> Garner (1990), p. 29. In September 1908 Marsden was asked to write a report on the Huddersfield gathering, in which she had stood on the platform alongside Emmeline and Adela Pankhurst, Rona Robinson, Mary Gawthorpe, and Flora ‘General’ Drummond before a crowd of 50,000. Garner notes this was a personal milestone for Dora.

<sup>100</sup> Maroula Joannou, ‘The Angel of Freedom: Dora Marsden and the Transformation of *The Freewoman* into the *Egoist*’ in *Women’s History Review*, 11:4 (Winter 2002), p. 599.

<sup>101</sup> Joannou (2002) p. 596.

factions, each with their own ideas regarding what was necessary to bring about the desired changes, *The Freewoman* was merely one voice in a cacophony. A direct comparison with *Votes for Women* can demonstrate the fractured and disputed territory occupied by the early twentieth-century feminist press.

*The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review* (and its subsequent incarnations) may have emerged amongst a plethora of feminist publications but it was to prove itself unique in many aspects throughout its eight-year life span. Dora Marsden's history of involvement in the Southport branch of the WSPU (whose motto was 'Deeds not words') is well documented.<sup>102</sup> Her anarchic individualism coupled with a 'literal' interpretation of the organisation's motto chafed against the constraints imposed by an autocratic central office. Marsden was an active political agitator, whose arrests made headline news, but by January 1911 her frustrations had peaked. Exasperated by the lack of autonomy afforded her by senior organisers and subjected to scrutiny and rumour over her handling of the Southport branch finances, she resigned. Joannou contends the reason behind this rupture was the result of a clash between the two identifiable strands of feminism that existed – in Marsden's own psyche as well as in society at large – at the time: the New Woman and the Suffragette. Whilst both served as proverbial thorns in the patriarchal side, their approach was fundamentally different. The New Woman was driven by 'deeply held principles' of a more individualistic bent, which 'did not commit her to collective modes of organisation, to political activity or to the voluntary association with other women which defined the women's suffrage movement'.<sup>103</sup> The vote was of

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<sup>102</sup> Garner (1990) reprised in Clarke (1995) and Jane Lidderdale & Mary Nicholson, *Dear Miss Weaver: Harriet Shaw Weaver, 1876-1961* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

<sup>103</sup> Joannou, *WHR* (2002), p. 597.

peripheral concern compared with exploring a ‘new personal morality’ or providing an outlet for ‘dissenting voices’, and the New Woman disregarded the desire to uphold the ‘respectable pieties’ of the Edwardian age.<sup>104</sup>

Marsden, according to Joannou, was an ‘archetypal New Woman: a university graduate, intellectual, independent, outspoken, and inventive’ whose ‘quasi-utopian visionary ideal of *The Freewoman*’ provided the discursive space in which she and others could challenge ‘social norms and conventional morality in the name of self-actualisation’.<sup>105</sup> This ethos was entirely compatible with the intellectual impulse behind the modernist aesthetics embodied by *The Egoist*. However, it was rather less compatible with the agenda of the suffragettes. The antipathy the New Woman felt towards the Suffragette was not one sided. Many women associated with ‘the Cause’ were reluctant or fearful of being associated with the New Woman, a much parodied and caricatured figure who was associated with ‘free love’ and considered a ‘sexual decadent’.<sup>106</sup> Marsden clearly identified herself more with the New Woman, writing articles and editorials throughout *The Freewoman’s* print run that condemned the Pankhurstian preoccupation with the vote, whilst working towards an increasingly gender-neutral individualism.

*The Freewoman* was initially created out of Marsden’s apostasy from the Pankhurstian ‘faith’ as espoused by the WSPU weekly, *Votes for Women*. The WSPU Had become increasingly autocratic and was controlled by a strict hierarchy, which held fast to a philosophy that prescribed female franchise as a panacea for all sexual

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<sup>104</sup> Joannou, *WHR* (2002), p. 597.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 597.

<sup>106</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 12.

inequalities, whilst neglecting or ‘not bothering’ to address wider feminist issues. However, this was not the whole reason; much of Marsden’s discontent stemmed from personal grievances between herself and Clements Inn.<sup>107</sup> West, in an account of *The Freewoman* written for *Time & Tide* (1928), expressed her dissatisfaction with Marsden whom she felt ‘formulated this feeling as an accusation against the Pankhursts and suffragettes in general.’ On reflection, West was able to acknowledge that the suffrage movements, though far from perfect, all served a necessary purpose in the fight for sexual equality. Equally, she applauds Marsden’s audacious move to ‘stand aside and ponder on the profounder aspects of feminism.’<sup>108</sup>

However, Marsden’s sour departure from the ranks of the WSPU ensured that any periodical she produced was unlikely to try to emulate the example of *Votes for Women* preferring instead intellectually stimulating publications like *The New Age*.<sup>109</sup> Given that *The New Age* had a rather ambivalent, sometimes hostile, attitude to women and suffrage in general, often arguing that through suffrage women were seeking to ‘double their privileges selfishly, by claiming both economic support and the vote’ it would seem an unusual example for Marsden to follow.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, there existed strong sympathies between Orage and Marsden and the former’s hostility towards the WSPU may have been a conducive, personal impetus for her to

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<sup>107</sup> For a full account of the personal disagreements see Garner (1990) pp. 22-50 and Clarke (1996), pp. 47-55.

<sup>108</sup> West, *Time & Tide*, 16th July 1926.

<sup>109</sup> Marsden, once a hero of militant suffragism, began to chafe at restrictions imposed upon regional decisions. Over a period of two years she ignored direct orders to avoid incurring legal costs that arrest and imprisonment caused and as a result relations soured between her and St Clements Inn. Her attempts to hold a grand fête in Southport, on the same scale as those being hosted in London, were thwarted as central office refused to endorse her expenditure. After a period of dispute Marsden resigned and rumours circulated that it was because she had mishandled WSPU funds; an accusation she strongly denied. Garner describes it thus: ‘An eventful and colourful association had come to a bitter and resentful end. [...] There was little love lost between Dora and the WSPU. Indeed, the row between them would become even more bitter and lasted for several years.’ Garner, (1990), p. 46.

<sup>110</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2004), p. 153.



seek his advice.<sup>111</sup> As previously shown, her philosophical roots were imbedded in the same fertile soil as that of *The New Age*, and Orage and many of his contributors supported her new venture. Despite pompously declaring that ‘there are not enough writers who understand feminism to run a paper and there are not enough to keep it going’, Orage offered advice and support, introducing her to Charles Grenville, owner of radical publishers Stephen Swift, who had a reputation for publishing advanced writers such as Katherine Mansfield and Reginald Wright Kauffman.

In spite of his statements to the contrary, Orage appears to have had some sympathy with Marsden’s ideas. Her notions of the ‘Freewoman’ – that of an economically autonomous individual, who preferred independence (emotionally, financially, sexually, and politically) to marriage – appears to endorse Orage’s masculinist view that a suffragist, as represented by the views of the WSPU, who espoused the cult of motherhood whilst seeking the vote, was guilty of ‘wanting her cake and eating it.’ However, like Marsden, despite this antipathy towards suffragism, he regularly published feminist opinion or articles discussing women’s issues. He also carried articles by prominent feminists such as Theresa Billington-Grieg thus encouraging lively debate via the periodical’s correspondence pages. Orage’s dialectical vigour, self-reflection, and intellectual engagement were traits Marsden wished to emulate within the pages of her periodical.

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<sup>111</sup> Cary Franklin ‘Freewoman: Dora Marsden and the Politics of Feminist Modernism’, Bodleian Library, Oxford University, 2002, MS.D.Phil c.16719, (provided in PDF format by kind permission of the author), pp. 25-50. Franklin’s chapter headed, ‘Autonomous Modernists: Mary Gawthorpe, Dora Marsden, and the Provincial Roots of the Freewoman Journal’ explains at length the strong association Gawthorpe, and latterly Marsden, had with Orage. Gawthorpe had previously edited *Labour News*, a journal of the Leeds Independent Labour Party, which also encouraged the formation of The Leeds Arts Club, founded by Jackson and Orage in 1903. Orage, like Gawthorpe and Marsden, was a teacher turned political activist and editor. Franklin makes a compelling argument to suggest that the *Freewoman* owes a large ideological and philosophical debt to this organisation and those who founded it, as it encouraged its members to investigate many of the modern intellectual arenas that Marsden was later to explore in her own work, such as Theosophy, Nietzscheism, Individualism, and socialist ethics.

### **The Case of Rebecca West.**

Whilst this thesis focuses primarily on the cultural context of the feminist and gender dynamics of *The Freewoman*, *The New Freewoman* and *BLAST*, the work of Rebecca West is an important component. West provides a case study writer, whose career was formed and developed through her involvement with an eclectic array of periodicals, both niche and mainstream. As a socialist-feminist commentator on the socio-political atmosphere of the Edwardian era, she provides an ‘excellent example for studying the formation of emerging feminist periodical culture.’<sup>112</sup> The timeframe of the thesis (1911-1918) encompasses West’s earliest journalism, reviews, shorter fiction, and her debut novel and she acts as an important feminist/gender link between *The Freewoman* series and *BLAST*. Rebecca West was far more than ‘just’ a feminist writer. Like the little magazines in which her work so frequently appeared, West’s work evades definition, eliding most of the literary taxonomies of the early twentieth century. Frank Swinnerton, in his 1935 anecdotal study *The Georgian Literary Scene*, segregates her – alongside Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair – from the major modern canonical movements, demarcating her as someone who ‘always brought to everything her own restless *élan*’.<sup>113</sup> Because ‘[a]uthors are born very untidily’ she fails to slot neatly into the early twentieth-century canon which habitually splits itself into vying (often gendered) movements: Edwardian, Georgian, Bloomsbury or the Moderns;<sup>114</sup> or as Bernard Schweizer puts it in *Rebecca West Today*, ‘she was not quite as smoothly canonized’ as her contemporaries.<sup>115</sup> Swinnerton challenges the

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<sup>112</sup> Green in Ardis and Lewis (2003), p. 222.

<sup>113</sup> Frank Swinnerton, *The Georgian Literary Scene: A Panorama* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Publishers Ltd., 1938), p. 404.

<sup>114</sup> Swinnerton (1938), p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Bernard Schweizer, (ed) *Rebecca West Today: Contemporary Critical Approaches* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), p. 21 Schweizer lists George Orwell, D. H. Lawrence and

veracity of these arbitrarily imposed literary labels, but the fashion for self-labelling during this time was an ‘increasingly characteristic feature of the intellectual and artistic landscape’ as coteries ‘rose like Pacific atolls above the sea’.<sup>116</sup> Equally, West, ever the individualist, sits uncomfortably within these self-defined coteries, appearing to resist the call to form alliances or define herself as part of a larger group. In anthologies or critical studies of modernism as a movement West is often cast as a literary ‘other’: indefinable, subversive and distinct. Feminist critics too, often struggle with the paradoxical feminisms in West’s work.<sup>117</sup> As such she epitomises Marsden’s re-visioning of the ‘individual’ that would also underpin *BLAST*’s artistic ethos.

West was a headstrong and outspoken feminist throughout the seven decades of her career. She was ‘proud to be embraced by [second wave] feminism’, despite the frequent antagonism some feminist critics felt regarding her consistent use of oppositional binaries and what they regarded as her ambivalence towards unconventional (or non-hetero) sexualities.<sup>118</sup> West, writing earlier in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, described her work as having ‘interstices [...] too wide’ to create a unified picture of her work, displaying a self-conscious determination to avoid being

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Virginia Woolf as examples of a more easily canonised contemporaries, though arguably both Orwell and Woolf’s inclusion into the canon was far from ‘smooth’.

<sup>116</sup> William C. Wees, *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1972), p. 53 Wees’ lists the following amongst the active coteries of the period: the Camden Town group, the Fitzroy Street group, the Cumberland Market group, the Grafton group, the London group, the Slade group, the Fry Group, the Lewis group, the John group, the English Review group, the New Age group, the Egoist group, the Georgian group, the Imagist group, the Vorticist group. It must be noted that at times the membership of these groups overlapped considerably.

<sup>117</sup> Ann V. Norton, *Paradoxical Feminism: The Novels of Rebecca West* (Oxford: International Scholars, 2000).

<sup>118</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism: Postmodern Feminist Readings of Woolf, West, and Barnes* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 2 Volumes, Vol. 2 p. 125.

labelled or absorbed into any ‘recognized school.’<sup>119</sup> It is therefore difficult to call her ‘modernist’ in its purest sense. In *Refiguring Modernism*, Bonnie Kime Scott justifies West’s inclusion in a modernist study, despite the eclecticism of her *œuvre* on the basis that she:

Addressed [the] major cultural dilemmas of the twentieth century: women’s political and economic rights, sexual freedom, socialism, the conditions of labour, two world wars, religion, the arts, empire, fascism, and [... looking] to art as a symptom of health in a nation or an individual and as an antidote to domination and corruption.<sup>120</sup>

Scott claims West was modernism’s:

most deliberate political thinker and its most outspoken polemicist – qualities that set her at odds with the traditional, aesthetic definitions of modernism, and the ‘charm’ expected in an earlier generation of women and with nonauthoritarian styles embraced by both feminism and the postmodern practice of deconstruction.<sup>121</sup>

Lyn Pykett endorses Scott’s opinion, arguing that West’s reputation as an ‘*enfant terrible*’ was the result of her repeated attacks on the ‘cultural and political shibboleths’ of her day coupled with her precocious ability to penetrate the vulnerabilities of ‘writers with established reputations or a current cachet (writers as different from each other as Mrs Humphrey Ward and H. G. Wells)’.<sup>122</sup> George Bernard Shaw, for example, commented that she could ‘handle a pen as brilliantly as ever I could, and much more savagely.’<sup>123</sup> Jane Marcus, in her 1980 introduction to West’s 1922 novel, *The Judge*, claims West was able to create ‘an adversary relationship between writer and reader, which holds us in her grip and keeps us

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<sup>119</sup> Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006 [1942]), p. 1084.

<sup>120</sup> Scott (1995), vol. 2, p. 123.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>122</sup> Pykett in Campbell (2000), pp. 170-190, p. 173.

<sup>123</sup> Victoria Glendinning, *Rebecca West: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), p. 5.

arguing with her even to the last page'.<sup>124</sup> Like Marsden, West consciously emulated the Socratic example of interlocution, inviting interrogation and response, rather than promulgating dogmatism or pedagogy. In her 1957 book, *The Court and the Castle* West wrote '[a]ny authentic work of art must start an argument between the artist and their audience'; she expanded on this statement to claim that the artist 'creates' a work of art through a process of 'analysis' and 'synthesis' of 'important experiences' [emphasis added], asserting that 'if the experience be one generally felt as important, the analysis scrupulous and searching, and the synthesis exciting, criticism will become a matter of either surrender or attack on the part of the reader'.<sup>125</sup> Art is described by West as a site of contention, a battlefield upon which the participants – author and reader, artist and viewer – skirmish for the truth. For West, it was the facts that mattered most. Writing in *The Meaning of Treason* (1949), she reflects:

The facts that, put together, are the face of the age [...] for if people do not have the face of the age set clear before them they begin to imagine it; and fantasy if it is not disciplined by the intellectual and kept in faith with reality by the instinct of art, dwells among the wishes and fears of childhood, and so sees life either as simply answering any prayer or as endlessly emitting nightmare monsters from the a womb like cave.<sup>126</sup>

Throughout her teens and into her twenties West featured prolifically in both mainstream and counter-culture publications, a period of creativity that is glanced over by the two leading West biographies: Victoria Glendinning's *Rebecca West: A Life*<sup>127</sup> and Carl Rollyson's *Rebecca West: A Saga of a Century*.<sup>128</sup> Her early journalism is acknowledged but both biographers understandably prefer to concentrate on her novels and her volatile personal intimacy with H. G. Wells. In the last three decades it

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<sup>124</sup> West, *The Judge* (London: Virago, 1980 [1922]), pp. 3-8, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> West, *The Court and the Castle* (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> West, *The New Meaning of Treason* (London: Viking Press, 1964) as quoted by Samuel Hynes in West, *The Essential Rebecca West*. Critical (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977), p. xiv.

<sup>127</sup> Glendinning (1987).

<sup>128</sup> Carl Rollyson, *Rebecca West: A Saga of a Century* (London: Hodder & Staunton, 1995).

has been recognised that this formerly neglected period in West's career is significant to her work as a whole. Jane Marcus, identifying this as one of the most defining times in West's career, has anthologised a large selection of her early writings in *The Young Rebecca: The Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-1917*. This collection covers much of West's early career as a 'firebrand essayist, acerbic reviewer, and radical journalist.'<sup>129</sup> Marcus charts her polemical input and editorial roles in Marsden's *Freewoman* and *New Freewoman* magazines, the *Clarion*, the *Daily Herald*, *BLAST*, the *Daily News*, *Everyman*, *Manchester Daily Dispatch*, and the *Daily Chronicle*, but omits her reviews for both *The English Review* and *New Statesman*.<sup>130</sup> Marcus' edited anthology gauges the dichotomous temper of West's writing during this period, deploying chapter titles distinctive for their play upon a blended rhetoric of typically 'male' aggression or violence and female stereotypes: 'The Lamp of Hatred', 'Battle Axe and Scalping Knife', 'A Reed of Steel' 'A BLAST from the Female Vortex', 'Fleet Street Feminist', 'Miscellaneous Slings and Arrows.'<sup>131</sup>

West's discursive violence is attributable in part to her own consideration that this period of her life was a 'time of war', not only in the literal sense of the impending Great War, but in the more ineffable sense of the 'sex-war.' This 'sex-war' is regularly interpreted as a literal and rhetorical battle between the oppositional forces of man and woman, which historically used the site of the woman's body as its

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<sup>129</sup> Schweizer (2006), p. 22.

<sup>130</sup> *The English Review* est. 1908 by Ford Madox Heuffer, during 1911-1917 it was edited by Austin Harrison. *New Statesman* est. April 1913 by Beatrice and Sidney Webb of the Fabian Society. Publications listed in the order they appear in Jane Marcus. *The Young Rebecca: Writings of Rebecca West, 1911-1917* (London: Virago, 1982).

<sup>131</sup> Marcus (1982). This contains the large body of writing excluded from *The Essential Rebecca West* collection.

discursive arena.<sup>132</sup> West's writing, however, is less paradigmatic than this definition suggests; she contemplated the conflict that occurred within the sexes, as well as between them. These single-sex clashes were played out in the contemporaneous discourses surrounding feminism, one example of which was the *Freewoman's* rhetorical battle against the militant strategies of Emmeline Pankhurst's WSPU; seemingly fighting for the same army, these rhetorical skirmishes demonstrated dissent amongst the ranks. Furthermore it can be argued that West also had a psychoanalytical interest in the inner conflicts of the individual, regardless of their biological sex, as many of her novels explore the inner gender divisions experienced by her main protagonists; or as Helen L. Paxton has labelled it: '[r]enegotiating the [p]ublic and [p]rivate [d]ivide'.<sup>133</sup> The 'cult of the individual' influenced West both privately and publicly, and many of her novels are particularly concerned with the

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<sup>132</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, (eds) *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, The War of the Words* Vol.1/3 (London: Yale University Press, 1988). This study, like the proto-feminists of the early twentieth century, utilises a militaristic rhetoric to express the eternal struggle with patriarchy in which women are embroiled and is based upon the literal and figurative 'battles' that dogged the woman writer. In a 1995 review of these volumes Suzanne Clark identified why Gilbert and Gubar were easy targets for critics, and these comments can be similarly applied to the feminists of the early 1900s, 1910s & 1920s:

Gilbert and Gubar have always made a large target for critics: in part this is because they have had large effects, and the enemies of feminism were their enemies. But it is also because they are not doing the kind of theoretical analysis that has characterized poststructuralist contributions. I don't mean to say they are not theoretically correct; I mean to say their major argument functions rhetorically at a different level, a level of explanation and consolidation necessary to insert women into the discipline. Their project of rewriting literary/cultural history inevitably plunges them into a narrative mode, trying to make sense of all this sexual/textual conflict (to evoke Toril Moi's famous intervention), rather than showing how it makes no sense. With great caution, perhaps we can now follow their lead, constructing our provisional histories over the abyss left by the demolition of master narratives (necessary because they did belong to the master) and proposing the subject of woman as a cultural construct neither essential nor (precisely because she is an effect of convention, as Saussure warned us) easily subject to change.

*Modern Fiction Studies* 41:2 (1995), pp. 395-397.

<sup>133</sup> Helen L. Paxton, 'Renegotiating the Public and Private Divide: Reconsidering Rebecca West's *The Judge*' in Schweizer (2006), pp. 189-205 Paxton's essay focuses on the external 'sexed' or gendered divide, whereas I am arguing here that West also considers the existence of a (perhaps confused or incoherent) gendered interior.

construction of characters as complex individuals, rather than exploiting literary generalisations or stereotypes.

West became widely known within the literary community, yet remained remote from the emerging literary and artistic coteries that proved such a draw to many of her contemporaries. Swinnerton claims that her popularity during this time was largely due to her skill as a reviewer wielding ‘a pen full of fire’.<sup>134</sup> He praised her as unique claiming: ‘I doubt whether any such brilliant reviews of novels were ever seen before; they certainly have not been seen since; for when Rebecca West left *The New Statesman* her peculiar combination of wit and justice could not be replaced’.<sup>135</sup> From the outset of her career West used her reviews as a platform for polemics from which she launched her resolute, unflinching feminism. Reviewing *The Position of Women in Indian Life* by the Maharani of Baroda and S. M. Mitra for *The Freewoman* in February 1912, West’s incendiary opening line ‘There are two kind of imperialists – imperialists and bloody imperialists’, indicated the polemical antagonism she felt towards her subject matter.<sup>136</sup> Perhaps as a result of this bracing style West was courted by George Lansbury’s *Daily Herald* to edit their woman’s page because they wanted something new and fresh, rather than the tired, formulaic fare offered to women in most publications. She jokingly claimed in a letter to Marsden, written in June 1912, that she had been ‘seduced’ by the *Daily Herald*, to reinvigorate their women’s pages:

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<sup>134</sup> Swinnerton (1935), p. 404.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 404.

<sup>136</sup> The use of the word ‘bloody’ was still relatively shocking in journalism. G. B. Shaw caused ‘gasps of scandalized laughter’ in 1913 by using the expletive in his stage play *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts*. See Glendinning (1987), p. 36.



The *Daily Herald* has seduced me into editing the Woman's page. They are tired of baby-clothes they say, and want "non-Gospel" talks to women. I fear this means trials for sedition, so I may not be long free.<sup>137</sup>

Like Robert Blatchford's *Clarion*, to which West also contributed, and unlike the majority of the mainstream presses the *Daily Herald* was sympathetic towards women's causes, including suffrage. West embodied the evolving post-Victorian New Woman: a modern, proudly professional, single woman (and from 1914, mother) who managed to balance both a critical and a creative career.<sup>138</sup> Unashamed of her work ethic West claimed: 'I earn my living as a journalist. People actually pay me the coin of the realm to write about literature [...] I consider the profession of journalism to be at least as honourable as that of medicine.'<sup>139</sup> As such West is an integral figure to the study of feminism and gender in early twentieth-century little magazines.

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<sup>137</sup> Letter to Marsden, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1912, reprinted in Scott (ed) (2000), p. 13, also quoted in Pykett in Campbell (2000), p. 174 and Scott (1995) Vol. 1 p. 234 N.B. Pykett's quotation (which she reprises from Scott (1995)) differs in wording and punctuation and reads as '*The Daily Herald* has seduced me into editing the woman's page. They are tired of baby clothes, they say they want 'Hot Gospel' talks to women. I fear this may mean trials for sedition, so I may not long be free'. Scott's version has a [?] after 'Non'.

<sup>138</sup> G. E. Hutchinson, *A Preliminary List of the Writings of Rebecca West* (Yale University Library, 1957) lists over 400 items under 'Articles in Periodicals' between 1912 and 1935. Joan Garret Packer has supplemented this work in *Rebecca West: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991).

<sup>139</sup> West, letter to the editor, *FW*, 2:37 (1<sup>st</sup> August 1912), p. 213.

**1.**

*The Freewoman and The New Freewoman*  
*1911-1914*

What torture lurks within a single thought  
When grown too constant, and however kind,  
However welcome still, the weary mind  
Aches with its presence. Dull remembrance taught  
Remembers on unceasingly; unsought  
The old delight is with us but to find  
That all recurring joy is pain refined,  
Become a habit, and we struggle, caught.  
You lie upon my heart as on a nest,  
Folded in peace, for you can never know  
How crushed I am with having you at rest  
Heavy upon my life. I love you so  
You bind my freedom from its rightful quest.  
In mercy lift your drooping wings and go.<sup>1</sup>

Amy Lowell

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Lowell, 'A Fixed Idea', *The Complete Poetical Works of Amy Lowell* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1955).

## 1:1

### ‘A Nauseous Publication’: Sex, Feminism, Rhetoric, and *The Freewoman*.

Some of my best work has been done purely ephemerally – I mean in newspapers and reviews.<sup>1</sup>

Rebecca West

I myself have never been able to find out precisely what a feminist is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute.<sup>2</sup>

Rebecca West

*The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review*, launched on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911, was conceived, founded, financed and edited by an apostasised WSPU activist, Dora Marsden, and her supportive but hesitant comrade Mary Gawthorpe.<sup>3</sup> Emerging from a history of suffrage campaigning, but unable to convince the Women’s Freedom League (WFL) to back her conviction that women's emancipation was more a state of mind than a state of politics, Marsden resorted to creating a feminist magazine that would provide a vehicle for her own brand of femino-anarchism.<sup>4</sup> Assisted by Gawthorpe and a regular band of like-minded contributors, who came to identify with the ethos of the magazine, Marsden created *The Freewoman* and invited readers to take part in controversial discussions on hitherto taboo topics. With a directness that

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<sup>1</sup> West, *BLGF* (2006 [1942]), p. 1084.

<sup>2</sup> West, ‘On a Form of Nagging’ in *Time and Tide* (31<sup>st</sup> October 1924), p. 1052.

<sup>3</sup> Gawthorpe’s ardent support of Marsden’s endeavours is unquestionable and well documented but she wished to take a less public role in the journal than sub editor. She had reservations about Marsden's written attacks on the WSPU leadership and was in poor health. Franklin (2002) provides a fuller picture of this situation, with research derived from the archives held at Princeton and Yale. Franklin also emphasises Gawthorpe’s oft elided but pivotal role in the formation and launch of the magazine.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke (1996), pp. 8, 21.

Edwardians were unaccustomed to, the magazine addressed issues of divorce, female sexuality, sexual consent, sexual 'inversion', masturbation, law reform, single mothers, the rights of women in marriage, the legality of marriage, the spinster, and the prostitute. The magazine speculated about the nature of consciousness, sought to understand the role of the emotions, and argued for the 'naturalness' of human passion, especially in literature, religion, sexuality, and politics.<sup>5</sup> In the history of little magazines *The Freewoman* series has gained a reputation for its radical approach to the 'Woman' question, yet it alienated as many leading lights of the feminist movements as it engaged. As Barbara Green observes: 'Dora Marsden insisted on stretching the purview of political activity beyond questions of citizenship and equal participation in the political sphere.'<sup>6</sup>

*The Freewoman* undeniably challenged extant sexual taboos by publishing frank articles concerning female sexuality; as Rebecca West noted, *The Freewoman* discussed sex 'loudly and clearly and repeatedly and in the worst possible taste.'<sup>7</sup> Maroula Joannou has called it 'pioneering', Lucy Bland 'notorious' and 'influential', and Bonnie Kime Scott 'radical'.<sup>8</sup> Despite the veracity of these statements, there are times when assumptions made about the periodical are based on its reputation rather than on fact. For example, when writing about West in *The Gender of Modernism*, Scott is mistaken when she states *The Freewoman* to be a 'radical suffragist journal'.<sup>9</sup> It was already well documented that, whilst its founding editors were all once

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<sup>5</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 225.

<sup>6</sup> Green in Ardis and Lewis (2003), p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> West in Dale Spender, *Time and Tide Wait for No Man* (London: Pandora, 1984), pp. 63-67.

<sup>8</sup> Joannou, *WHR* (2002) p. 595; Lucy Bland, 'Heterosexuality, Feminism and The Freewoman Journal in Early Twentieth-Century England' in *WHR*, 4:1 (Spring, 1995), pp. 5-23, p. 5; Bonnie Kime Scott (ed) *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) p. 560.

<sup>9</sup> Scott (1990), p. 560.

'fighting suffragettes' and Marsden had 'been in prison more than once', this little magazine was virulent in its opposition to a woman's movement driven by the singular desire for enfranchisement. 'The vote', Marsden wrote in her first issue, 'is only a rough and ready expedient, whereby the weak may be protected.'<sup>10</sup> It has also been called literary, but this label, whilst true of its successor *The Egoist*, is somewhat inaccurate when talking about the magazine in its earlier incarnations.<sup>11</sup> Whilst having literary ambitions, *The Freewoman* series published articles predominantly focused on individualism, sexuality, and inequality with the aim of bolstering women's confidence in their own abilities. In many comparative studies, scholars Gillian Hanscombe, Virginia L. Smyers and Jayne E. Marek have compared *The Freewoman* with American poetry publications, such as Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review* and Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*. These comparisons have developed because of three main points: the reputation of its literary successor, *The Egoist*; the connections between the artists and poets that were being (mutually) published in these magazines; and finally the visible influence or 'colonisation' by the irascible Ezra Pound. In fact, *The Freewoman* had no comparable American publication and its uniqueness resulted in considerable support across the Atlantic. Reading it inspired the journalist Floyd Dell to label Marsden 'The Max Stirner of feminism' and class her as one of his 'Women as World Builders'.<sup>12</sup> Whilst these comparisons offer a valid perspective, Franklin's unpublished doctoral thesis (2002) and Joannou's 2002 essay buck the trend to consider this 'feminist' publication's relationship with contemporaneous British feminist magazines, such as *Votes for Women*. As Franklin has identified,

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<sup>10</sup> Marsden, 'Notes on the Week', *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *The New Freewoman* in many ways acted as a bridge between the political *Freewoman* and the literary *Egoist*

<sup>12</sup> Dell (1913) in Clarke (1996), p. 18.

comparing a little magazine like *The Freewoman* to the arguably 'conventional' mass-marketed *Votes for Women* allows scholars to examine the publication's controversiality in terms of its feminist reputation and to explore the comparative freedom it enjoyed by allying itself with the avant-garde rather than with the larger more formulaic or manifesto driven feminist magazines.<sup>13</sup>

Defining a periodical as a little magazine, as Miller and Price have identified, can be problematic.<sup>14</sup> Equally, defining a magazine as feminist during the early part of the twentieth century presents a similar challenge. Lucy Delap *et al.* in *Feminism and the Periodical Press 1900-1918* claims that *The Freewoman* was the 'first journal to adopt an overtly feminist identity', however it would soon prove problematic for Marsden and her readers.<sup>15</sup> This was because, as Delap and bibliographers David Doughan and Denise Sanchez have identified, there were many 'feminist' periodicals being produced during this period and most were closely associated with a certain brand of emancipatory 'womanly' feminism that often reinforced the exact 'virtues' of purity, femininity, and domestic dependence that Marsden wished to repudiate. In their bibliography of feminist periodicals between 1855-1984, Doughan and Sanchez state: 'Periodicals in general are often under-estimated as a source for the social sciences' and this is 'especially true' of the feminist press.<sup>16</sup> For the purposes of this thesis it is important to establish what defines *The Freewoman* as 'feminist' and how

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<sup>13</sup> Cary Franklin, 'Marketing Edwardian Feminism: Dora Marsden, *Votes for Women* and *The Freewoman*' in *WHR* 11:4, pp. 631-642. Theresa Billington Grieg calls the WSPU and its periodical *Votes for Women* 'a common-place and conventional movement – a movement as conventional as Liberalism and Conservatism, and every other 'ism which to-day goes uncensored.' This will be discussed in section 1:3.

<sup>14</sup> Price and Miller (2006), pp. ix-xiii.

<sup>15</sup> Lucy Delap, Maria Diconzo, and Leila Ryan (eds) *Feminism and the Periodical Press, 1900-1918* (London: Routledge, 2006) in three volumes.

<sup>16</sup> David Doughan and Denise Sanchez (eds) *Feminist Periodicals 1855-1984: An Annotated Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (London: The Harvester Press, 1987), p. xi.

it can be distinguished from such publications as *Votes for Women* or *The Women's Penny Paper*. These differences also help determine its status as a little magazine.

One significant difference was Marsden's idiosyncratic editorial style that continued to flavour the magazine's content throughout its transitions from a 'feminist review' to a 'humanist review' and eventually to an 'individualist review'; this sequential 'renaming' reflected her increasing gravitation towards a state of gender-neutrality or androgyny. This rhetorical and philosophical influence was sustained even when it appeared that control had been wrested from her by 'les jeunes': Richard Aldington, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound.<sup>17</sup> Circulation figures for *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman* however, are not well established; Delap *et al.* speculate that at its peak it was selling around two and a half thousand, whereas other estimates suggest a more modest (and possibly more accurate) figure of four to five hundred per issue.<sup>18</sup> It ran for approximately eleven months from November 1911 until September 1912, initially as a weekly, then fortnightly, and latterly monthly magazine, collapsing after its main distributor W. H. Smith imposed a distribution boycott on the magazine claiming:

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<sup>17</sup> Wees (1972), p. 76. Ford Madox Ford considered himself the 'self-styled Doyen' of 'les jeunes', which included figures such as Lewis and Pound, whom he had published in *The English Review* in 1909. Clarke (1996) and Robert Scholes & Clifford Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), maintain that despite surface appearances, Marsden 'remained firmly in charge' of the journal until the end of its print run, offering as evidence her incitement of Pound to write his important series of articles 'The Serious Artist' *The New Freewoman*, 1: 9, 10, 11, (15<sup>th</sup> October 1913, pp. 161-163; 1<sup>st</sup> November 1913, pp. 194-95; 15<sup>th</sup> November, 1913 pp. 213- 14 respectively.) Hereafter *NFW*.

<sup>18</sup> Lidderdale and Nicholson (1970), p. 61 state that the *NFW* started with optimistic print runs of 2,000 copies. This would suggest an estimate based upon sales figures generated by its forerunner. It's debatable as to how many of these sold.



[W]e have come to the conclusion that the nature of certain articles which have been appearing lately in *The Freewoman* are such as to render the paper unsuitable to be exposed on the bookstalls for general sale. We have decided that in future we cannot do more than supply it when it is specially ordered<sup>19</sup>

This boycott exacerbated the financial problems being experienced by *The Freewoman's* publisher Stephen Swift & Co., resulting in the publisher's bankruptcy and the periodical's demise. During this period the journal focused primarily on scientific and philosophical articles and, as a 'feminist review', it contained no distinctive literary content; after it was re-launched as *The New Freewoman: An Individualist Review* the balance shifted. On the back of renewed financial investment from individual subscribers such as Amy Lowell and Harriet Shaw Weaver and due in no small part to the literary editorship of Rebecca West, the periodical realigned onto a more literary axis.<sup>20</sup> West contributed twenty-five articles and reviews to *The Freewoman* and had assumed the role of literary editor by the time it had adopted the soubriquet *The New Freewoman*. Thereafter she appeared weekly writing both articles and reviews, most notably her introduction to the 'new poetry', 'Imagism.' Through a chance meeting at a literary soiree at the home of Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) and Violet Hunt, she introduced Ezra Pound to the little magazine. His subsequent long-term involvement would help to create its more literary atmosphere as it developed into one of the most iconic modernist magazines of its age: *The Egoist*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from W. H. Smith and Son to Stephen Swift & Co., (28<sup>th</sup> August 1912) as quoted in Gillian Hanscombe & Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for Their Lives: The Modernist Woman, 1910-1940* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1987), p. 165.

<sup>20</sup> Harriet Shaw Weaver was a staunch supporter of Marsden. She became the magazine's treasurer and was involved in setting up The Thousand Club to raise monies via subscriptions. When Marsden stepped aside as editor of *The Egoist* it was Weaver who took over, ensuring that Marsden was accorded the necessary space to continue her writing. She was also a patron of James Joyce and instrumental in the publication of *Ulysses*.

<sup>21</sup> These events have become common currency through the scholarship of Jayne E. Marek, Hanscombe and Smyers, and Clarke, each of whom track the power struggles within the covers of the *FW* sequence. For a more detailed account of this transition also see Joannou in *WHR* (2002).

Prior to *The Freewoman* 'feminist' publications largely circulated around specific causes or movements, be it temperance, suffrage, or employment and were primarily organs of self-promotion. The majority of titles were overt in declaring their affiliation and some examples include: *The Common Cause*, *Votes for Women*, *The Suffragette*, *The Business Girl*, *The Church League for Women's Suffrage*, *The Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review*.<sup>22</sup> A few, like *The Englishwoman's Review*, attempted to be 'literary,' but on the whole feminist publications usually reviewed books and plays that related to the woman question or the representation of the suffrage movement and its principle players. Nearly all cost one penny, a price, which had (at least in Marsden's view) become synonymous with poor quality. As Theodore Peterson has observed, the choice of magazines available to women was limited to a few expensive 'quality' periodicals or 'the cheap weeklies, the sentimental story papers, the miscellanies. Between there were few magazines of popular price and general appeal.'<sup>23</sup> Katherine Mansfield expressed her awareness of this gap in quality women's periodicals when she wrote to Gawthorpe about *The Freewoman*:

Yes I remember hearing about the paper in the Spring from Miss Marsden – I think – at B. H.'s [Beatrice Hastings] room in Chancery Lane ... I should be grateful if you'd put me in touch with Miss Marsden – Are particulars obtainable – on policy – price – weekly or monthly etc? Heaven knows we're short of something that is not a newspaper or a Miss [Ball?] – although we certainly don't deserve it.<sup>24</sup>

Publications aimed at women attracted little professional respect and were considered to be amongst the most inferior in the periodical pantheon. Articles focused largely

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<sup>22</sup> Delap *et al.* (2006).

<sup>23</sup> Scholes and Wulfman (2010), p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Faith Binckes, *Modernism, Magazines, and the British Avant-Garde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 25.

upon the stereotypically domestic, including fashion, housekeeping, the rearing of children, cookery, and sensationalist society gossip.<sup>25</sup> From its inception, *The Freewoman* aimed to be different. Whilst its competitors maintained a 'womanly' or virtuous silence about sex, *The Freewoman* (according to West) 'had such a bad name for candour that I was forbidden to read it by my family.'<sup>26</sup> Like many little magazines it was conceived with the intention of repudiating the thrust of mass-culture periodicals and to represent 'counter-spheres'<sup>27</sup> of discourse, politically, socially and artistically.

However, the methods independent little magazines used to create these counter-spheres varied. *BLAST*, for example, chose to use textual disruption and anti-manifesto rhetoric. *Rhythm* and *The Blue Review* created liberating spaces in which experimental art and literature could be exhibited, discussed and reviewed and, as we shall see in this section, *The Freewoman* deployed conscientiously deliberative and judicial rhetoric that distinguished it from the hyperbolic panegyrics of franchise-driven periodicals such as the iconic suffrage magazine, *Votes for Women*.<sup>28</sup> Franklin describes Marsden and Wyndham Lewis as 'brash exponents of an uncompromisingly individualistic philosophy' who wished to transform 'language from a means of explication and preservation, into a weapon with which to fight convention'.<sup>29</sup> For such a low circulation and short-lived periodical 'its reputation was notorious and its

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<sup>25</sup> Sally Ledger & Roger Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Taurus Parke Paperbacks, 2001), p. 270.

<sup>27</sup> Ledger & Luckhurst (2000), pp. 9, 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms, Second Edition* (London: University of California Press, 1991), p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 184.

influence of some significance in feminist and radical circles.'<sup>30</sup> Whilst this analysis can be attributed to hindsight, many contemporaneous high-profile 'feminist' readers such as Olive Schreiner and suffragists Maude Royden and Millicent Fawcett were outraged not only by its abrasive tone but by its discursive treatment of sex. Maude Royden called it 'a nauseous publication' whilst Olive Schreiner deemed it 'unclean'.<sup>31</sup> Its reputation for causing controversy has grown exponentially over the past century and there are still questions to be asked of this periodical and of its position within the history of feminism.

As outlined in the introduction, this section will undertake an analysis of *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman* as they sit in context within contemporaneous discourses regarding early twentieth-century gender and sexuality. Aside from this introduction, this section consists of two parts. Firstly, it will examine *The Freewoman*'s notoriety by placing its unique brand of feminism in context with its sister publications, exploring the impact discussions centred on female sexuality had on its reputation as a 'feminist' publication. As the first periodical to adopt an overtly feminist identity *The Freewoman* provides an appropriate case-study for an analysis of the diverse streams of feminist culture in the 1910s, as its rhetoric contrasts starkly with, and often contradicts, the feminist discourses generated through 'in-house' suffrage publications. Given that *The Freewoman* was born out of one of the highest-profile movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – suffrage – its virulent opposition to franchise-focused feminism invites interrogation. Secondly it will examine the peculiar rhetorical ticks deployed by Marsden in her writing, with

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<sup>30</sup> Bland, *WHR* (1995), p. 5

<sup>31</sup> Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis (7th August, 1912) accessed from Oliver Schreiner's Letters Online: <http://www.oliveschreiner.org/vre?view=collections&colid=137&letterid=506> [last accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2012]. Quoted in Bland (2001), p. 265.

particular focus on her use of syllogisms and her methodology of framing or linking her editorials to published articles or readers' correspondence. Careful consideration is given to Marsden's simultaneous eschewal and exploitation of cultural taxonomies. Aesthetically she espoused a rhetoric that was vitalistic, often violent and irrational, rejecting the 'nice and tidy' prose common to Edwardian writers. *The Freewoman* showed disdain for romantic idealism and liberal enthusiasm, and spurned the predominant socialist or Fabian discourses that Marsden considered 'dull', and largely responsible for 'the negation of individuality, personality, of variety, rebellion, and of passionate conviction'.<sup>32</sup> She believed that 'impenetrable respectability' stultified art, breathing new life into Oscar Wilde's 1891 observation in *The Soul of Man* that beauty and art are impossible in a society inundated with 'sickly cant about duty [...] or any hideous cant about self-sacrifice'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Marsden, 'Topics of the Week' in *FW* 1:18 (March 12th, 1912), p. 343.

<sup>33</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' in *Oscar Wilde: Plays, Prose Writings and Poems* (London: Everyman Library, 1991 [1930]), p. 416.

## 1:2

### The ‘Licentious Male’ or ‘The Freewoman’?

#### Gender, Controversy, and Feminism

Women, as we have said, are social ascetics. They have become ascetic through their long exercising of restraint. They have restrained themselves in order to remain ‘pure.’ They have remained ‘pure’ because men like them ‘pure.’ [...] many women are coming to realise their own psychology, and are abandoning their long mistrust of life, with its impulses and pleasures. They are beginning to realise that capacity for sense-experience is the sap of life.<sup>1</sup>

Dora Marsden

Women advocate for equality, yet marry men and lose their identity in that of the man by taking his name. Why do they not assert the supremacy of motherhood, insist on the negation of the conception of woman now abroad as an instrument of man’s lust, put an end to man’s power to send innocent girls and women on the road to prostitution, by daring to form free-love unions, and preserving their own names, without fear or shame?<sup>2</sup>

Guy Aldred

It was the open discussion of the ‘profounder aspects of feminism’ – as Marsden called them in her launch campaign literature – that generated *The Freewoman’s* reputation for being controversial, sensational, and radical. These terms applied not only to the readers of her own generation but also to feminists who subsequently analysed her contribution to feminism. Her attempts to neuter or de-gender the sexes have led to compelling arguments that the magazines were heterosexist (Joannou, Jeffreys, Bland) and masculinist (Jeffreys) and at times homophobic (Bland, Jeffreys). It is easy to understand why these claims have been made. Superficially the magazine

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<sup>1</sup> Marsden, ‘The New Morality – II’ in *FW*, 1:6 (4<sup>th</sup> January 1912), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Aldred, ‘*The Freewoman*,’ in *FW*, 1:9 (18<sup>th</sup> January 1912), p. 179.

did not look like a paper addressing itself to women. It was un-illustrated and adopted the style and tone of the well-known masculinist review, *The New Age*. As Olive Schreiner observed, the contributor demographic of *The Freewoman* was predominantly male and resonated with his ‘brutal self-indulgent selfish’ tone.<sup>3</sup> However, whilst these arguments make some clear and evidenced claims, there is also a more nuanced argument to be made when comparing Marsden’s *Freewoman* series to the works of her predecessor, Mary Wollstonecraft, and such successors as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Monique Wittig.

Marsden’s own opinions regarding sex were expressed in a series of articles entitled ‘Interpretations of Sex’, which ran for several weeks. In these articles she articulated her belief that ‘putting the begetting of children [...] aside [sex] in the first instance [...] lent itself to pleasure, and in the second to passion’.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis throughout her articles and the periodical as a whole was that sexual desire was not determined or dictated by the urge to procreate. Her decision to allow so much of the journal to be given over to open discussion about sex was perhaps attributable in no small part to the Pankhursts’ puritanical preservation of ‘the angel in the house’; a perpetuation of the Victorian cult of motherhood, apostles of which were chaste, domestic, and essentially maternal. However, it is well documented that not all of Marsden’s fellow ‘feminists’ were impressed. The courage and candour required to express the unpalatable psychological truths Marsden published, did not obey the

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<sup>3</sup> Bland (2001), p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> Marsden, ‘Interpretations of Sex’ in *FW*, 1:24 (2<sup>nd</sup> May 1912), p. 461.

dictates of a ‘civilised’ society.<sup>5</sup> Schreiner was unequivocal and disapproving in her letter to Havelock Ellis (a contributor), writing:

I think it ought to be called the *Licentious Male*. Almost all the articles are by men and *not* by women, and the whole tone is unlike even the most licentious females or prostitutes. It is the tone of the brutal self-indulgent selfish male. There is something that makes one sick, as if on board ship. It is unclean. And sex is so beautiful! It can’t be discussed scientifically ... philosophically ... from the poetic standpoint ... from the matter of fact standpoint ... from the personal standpoint ... and it is all beautifully clean and natural and healthy.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Maude Royden publically attempted to dissociate the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) from *The Freewoman*. In a strongly-worded letter to the Editor of *The Times*, Royden rebuked anti-suffrage campaigner Mrs. Humphrey Ward for her assertion that *The Freewoman* represented ‘the dark and dangerous side of the “Woman Movement.”’ Royden – despite having strong links to *The Freewoman* and quoting it regularly in her own publication, *The Cause* – denounced the magazine as ‘nauseous’ and suggested that Mrs. Ward read ‘official’ suffrage presses before reaching such defamatory conclusions. Mrs Ward, she suggested, should: ‘Let those who oppose us read [*The Cause*], and oppose us for what we hold, not for what others hold, for whom we have no responsibility, and with whom we have no common ground’.<sup>7</sup> Both Schreiner and Royden were high profile and well-established advocates of rights for women, but their reactions demonstrated that Marsden’s frank and unorthodox approach proved as divisive amongst feminists as Mrs. Pankhurst’s autocratic, puritanical, vote-obsessed vision.<sup>8</sup> Schreiner’s

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<sup>5</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 235.

<sup>6</sup> Bland (2001), p. 265.

<sup>7</sup> Maude Royden ‘Letter to the Editor of *The Times*’ p. 8 (12<sup>th</sup> June 1912), from *The Times Digital Archive 1785-1985*: [http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/828/56/165803825w16/purl=&dyn=91!pdy\\_3\\_0FFO-1912-JUN17-003-F?sw\\_aep=stand](http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark/828/56/165803825w16/purl=&dyn=91!pdy_3_0FFO-1912-JUN17-003-F?sw_aep=stand) [last accessed 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012].

<sup>8</sup> The suffrage movement was dogged by political divisions. The Pankhursts’ struggle to bring about the vote caused antagonism, not just externally but internally with party members and not least between



observation challenged Marsden’s right to call *The Freewoman* ‘feminist’; by drawing attention to the disproportionate number of male contributors, Schreiner intimates that the journal is not reflective of female sensibilities at all, but rather perpetuating those of the ‘licentious male’. Schreiner’s indignation also suggests that Marsden’s approach failed to redress the well-established journalistic pattern of using ‘authoritative’ male commentators to speculate upon matters regarding the ‘woman question.’ For example on February, 1911, *The New Age* (as the introduction has shown, the model for *The Freewoman*) published a supplement edited by Huntley Carter – one of many *New Age* writers who became frequent contributors to Marsden’s little magazine – entitled ‘A WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE SUPPLEMENT’. This sixteen-page supplement contained the published responses to questions ‘put by *THE NEW AGE* to representative persons in science, ethics, art, politics, and economics’ concerning matters relating to suffrage. The questions ran thus:

1. What in your opinion is the most Powerful argument –
  - (a) For, or
  - (b) Against woman’s suffrage?
2. Is there any reasonable prospect of obtaining woman’s suffrage in the present Parliament, and this immediately?  
or
3. Have the militant methods in your opinion failed, succeeded?
4. What alternative methods would you suggest?<sup>9</sup>

Of the fifty-eight addressed, forty-nine respondents were male; they included Hilaire Belloc, Arnold Bennet, G. K. Chesterton, Havelock Ellis, Allen Upward, and H. G.

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Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters. The WSPU underwent several high profile defections and endured much criticism from supporters and anti-suffragists alike. See Introduction f/n 9, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Huntley Carter, (ed) ‘A Symposium on Woman’s Suffrage’ in ‘A Women’s Suffrage Supplement’ in *NA*, 8:14 (2<sup>nd</sup> February 1911).

Wells, all of whom would later make regular appearances between the covers of *The Freewoman* series. The remaining nine were female and of those nine, six were married, and only three were unmarried. The nine women were drawn from various areas of feminist activism and would have been familiar names to many of the readers of *The New Age*. A small proportion of the male responses were evidently for comedic effect rather than serious consideration, demonstrating the extent to which ridicule was common currency in discourses relating to the Woman Movement as, for example, the succinct response proffered by Belloc showed :

MR. HILAIRE BELLOC.

1. (a) Fun. (b) Sex.

2. Yes

3. Yes.

4. Bribery.

Given the proportion of male contributors, all of whom had well established literary, journalistic, or political reputations, it is unsurprising that Schreiner challenged the feminist or woman-centred credibility of *The Freewoman*. Schreiner’s remark disputed Marsden’s contention that her little magazine was a radical ‘feminist’ departure from ‘those specialised offerings for women, edited by men’ such as *Woman at Home*, *The Ladies’ Realm*, *Home Notes*, and *Titbits*, that had hitherto provided the staple reading diet for prospective contributors and readers of Marsden’s new little magazine.<sup>10</sup>

Marsden wanted to provide a new morality that welcomed the discussion of women’s sexual and psychological lives, and ‘championed the fluid, sensual, vitalistic

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<sup>10</sup> Gawthorpe (1962), p. 124.

aesthetics’ of modern literary experimentation,<sup>11</sup> but Schreiner had little faith in the viability of such ventures perhaps as a result of her previous involvement with The Men and Women’s Club of the late 1880s.<sup>12</sup> This club was conceived by Karl Pearson with the help of Mrs Elizabeth Cobb and was set up to allow men and women to come together for a free exchange of ideas. Its members were carefully chosen and Schreiner, then one of the most prominent to be involved, was amongst the inaugural fourteen. The gathering of mainly unmarried men and women, ‘for the formation of friendships and radical discussion’, contravened the male/female social etiquette of the period and Schreiner’s membership lasted only eighteen months, though the club ran for four years. Lucy Bland explains the problems, observing that although the club paid ‘initial lip service to feminism’ Pearson later confessed that his motivation for starting the club had been a selfish ‘desire to understand women’s standpoint and modes of thought’.<sup>13</sup> Schreiner’s involvement with the club soured as tensions between the sexes grew; it had become increasingly obvious to the women involved that rather than being treated as equals their male counterparts were determined to view them as ‘objects of scrutiny, both in general and as participants in the club discussions, and this dismayed the female members’. Maria Sharpe, a founder member, realised that while ‘the women [...] wanted knowledge of acts generally [...] the men wanted primarily to add to their knowledge a special branch, i.e. Knowledge of the way in which women looked at things’.<sup>14</sup> The club in many ways was a forerunner to the ‘sex inclusive’ *Freewoman* ‘Discussion Circles’, though far more elitist and less publicly accessible. In this context, Schreiner’s remark leads to the

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<sup>11</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed history of The Men and Women’s Club in Bland (2001[1995]), pp. 3-46.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

reasonable conclusion that she anticipated *The Freewoman* would end up facilitating a similar situation to that of The Men and Women’s Club. As laudable as Marsden’s aim to produce a magazine for the free exchange of ideas between the sexes was, Schreiner flagged up the risk of women once again being manipulated into a subordinate and objectified position by men. Given the large proportion of male contributors, some of whom she had previously encountered in ‘The Club’, Schreiner’s statement begins to take on a warning rather than a condemnatory tone.

Some modern scholars, such as Sheila Jeffreys, share Schreiner’s antipathy towards *The Freewoman*. Jeffreys claims that *The Freewoman* gave some women writers a platform from which to ‘deride and undermine’ other women, largely the spinsters who were ‘proud to proclaim that they were happy, fulfilled and had made a deliberate choice’ to live a life of sexual abstinence.<sup>15</sup> The thrust of Jeffreys’ opposition to *The Freewoman* appears to rest on its stance that sex was a physical need for both sexes and that when either sex was denied the fulfilment of this need it stunted the intellectual and emotional development of the individual, resulting in spinster-like qualities. For Jeffreys, women who chose abstinence were ‘defending their right not to engage in sexual intercourse with men’, thus reiterating the concern expressed by some *Freewoman* readers, such as Caitlin Dhu, who disputed that: ‘to make our morality on a plane with men’s would [not] improve our position.’<sup>16</sup> It was, and to some extent remains, a common misconception that the advocacy of equal sexual rights for women promotes sexual promiscuity or, as Christabel Pankhurst described it, encouraged a ‘tendency to preach to women the observance of a looser

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<sup>15</sup> Jeffreys (1997 [1985]), p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

code of morals than they have observed hitherto’.<sup>17</sup> Marsden however, was quite clear that this was not the case stating that ‘for anyone who has ever got any meaning out of sexual passion the aggravated emphasis which is bestowed upon physical sexual intercourse is more absurd than wicked.’<sup>18</sup> She firmly maintained that: ‘We women unmarried and under thirty, from half a life’s experience, affirm that the practice of complete chastity has had an incontrovertibly untoward influence on both mental and physical health.’<sup>19</sup> Jeffreys interprets Marsden’s support for women’s equal sexual freedom as a denunciation of women’s right to choose chastity or abstinence in the absence of marriage. However Marsden is highlighting the fact that in 1911 there was no choice available to make. In her experience abstinence was the only option available to single women, which she argued denied them the pleasure, experience, and self-fulfilment of a natural, human desire if they so wished.<sup>20</sup> *The Freewoman* used essays and articles concerning female sexuality to sketch out ‘a female psychology that blended the life of the sexual body with that of the intellect.’<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jeffreys (1997 [1985]), p. 98.

<sup>18</sup> Marsden, ‘The New Morality – II’, *FW*, 1:6 (28<sup>th</sup> December 1911), p. 102.

<sup>19</sup> Marsden, ‘Topics of the Week’, *FW*, 1:3, (15<sup>th</sup> February 1912), p. 243.

<sup>20</sup> Marsden, ‘Interpretations of Sex’, *FW*, 1:24, 25, and *FW* 2:26, 27 (2<sup>nd</sup> May, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 16<sup>th</sup> May and 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1912 respectively). These articles articulate Marsden’s complex view of sex as part of her Egoist principle of individualist fulfilment. Sex is transcendent of physical materiality is described in terms of the soul, which is ungovernable by human law, society or culture:

The individual has no final guide, save the inner voice, and if he is deaf to that, he travels without chart or compass. That is the reason why freedom is demanded so constantly – that we may follow the voice. It is why we believe in free institutions, and why in the last resort we recognise there is no law save the law of our own being, why we are anarchists, in short. (*FW*, 2:27, p. 2.)

<sup>21</sup> Green in Ardis and Lewis (2003), p. 227.

### **‘The Danger of Having Only One Eye’: Feminism in Question<sup>22</sup>**

The identification of *The Freewoman* as ‘feminist’ was (and possibly still is) controversial because of what Delap has called ‘its uncertain relationship’ with suffragism.<sup>23</sup> Marsden nonetheless operated initially under a feminist banner in order to attract potential readers by exploiting her connections as a former high-ranking WSPU Leader. *The Freewoman* rejected the approach of a suffrage style periodical and instead pursued a flexible ‘open review style’<sup>24</sup> which adopted a ‘rhetorical style of polemic and controversy’ familiar to *New Age* readers. This, according to novelist and Fabian Mary Patricia Willcocks, was a format that lent itself to the ‘loosening of the shackles of chained and fettered thought’.<sup>25</sup> By adopting the open review format exemplified by *The New Age* and pricing the periodical at threepence (rather than the one penny price tag associated with other feminist/women’s magazines), Marsden was making a statement about the purpose that drove the periodical forward. Defending the ‘higher’ price tag of threepence Marsden explained:

Since the announcement that THE FREEWOMAN was to appear, and the price at which it was proposed to publish it, we have had communications from people, quite reasonable in other walks of life, protesting against the high price, i.e., threepence. Our reply must be that if women’s penny papers are wanted, these already exist in great numbers, and that we are not proposing writing for women whose highest journalistic needs are realised at a penny. The quality of each article we consider good enough to publish is far above anything that can honestly be expected in a penny journal. Those, of course, who do not require articles of such quality will not be among our subscribers, and those who do must be prepared to pay a market price for what they get. As our review will be the first attempt on the part of women to produce anything better in quality than can be obtained for a copper weekly, at the outset women

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<sup>22</sup> Title of West’s ‘The Danger of Having Only One Eye: Suffragists and the Irish Party’ in *The Clarion* (1<sup>st</sup> November 1912).

<sup>23</sup> Lucy Delap entry for ‘The Freewoman Circle’ in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ONDB*). <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/themes/96/96362.html> [last accessed 16<sup>th</sup> November 2011].

<sup>24</sup> Franklin, *WHR* (2002), pp. 631-64.

<sup>25</sup> Delap, *ONDB*.

will probably feel the higher price to be an obstacle in the way of its ready acceptance, not being, as men are, accustomed to accord a fair value to intellectual effort. We feel that if the paper cannot compare in what it gives of culture, thought, interest, and pleasure with a very fractional proportion of the price paid for the cheapest theatre ticket or the cheapest amusement, it is not worth readers’ while reading it, nor the editors’ while producing it; and it is therefore with the greatest confidence that we offer our review to the public, price three pence.<sup>26</sup>

This long quotation was a mission statement that expressed Marsden’s desire to create ‘a valuable medium of self-expression for a clever set of young men and women’.<sup>27</sup>

Marsden consciously aimed to elevate *The Freewoman* above the usual women’s penny paper fodder, which Margaret Beetham argues ‘represented “tit-bits” journalism in its purest form’,<sup>28</sup> and she quickly came to realise the problems associated with calling her magazine *A Weekly Feminist Review*. Marsden was conscious that her magazine was likely to find itself in conflict with traditional definitions of feminism, which during the early part of the 1900s was synonymous with the Suffrage movement. A feminist label did not sit comfortably with the magazine’s much broader editorial remit and Marsden removed the paper’s explicit ‘Feminist’ label in May 1911, eventually landing upon its more permanent identity of ‘individualist’. As Karen Offen has observed, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the term ‘feminism’ was problematic and controversial. She remarks that it was capable of arousing ‘a visceral response – indeed even [...] fear among a sizeable proportion of the general public.’<sup>29</sup> During Marsden’s lifetime Virginia Woolf would try to ‘symbolically incinerate its written representation’ in her

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<sup>26</sup> Marsden ‘Notes of the Week’, *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Weaver to Marsden undated[1912] in Dora Marsden Papers as quoted by Delap in *ONDB*.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman’s Magazine, 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 194.

<sup>29</sup> Offen, (1988), pp. 119-157.

political treatise *Three Guineas* (1938).<sup>30</sup> Marsden clearly viewed the term feminism as culturally troublesome and perhaps too ambiguous to cover her journalistic ambition, which was to broaden rather than regurgitate extant discussions about the vote. Marsden explained to *Freewoman* readers that the publication was motivated by a desire to mark ‘the point at which Feminism in England ceases to be impulsive and unaware of its own features, and becomes definitively self-conscious and introspective’.<sup>31</sup> Robin Hicks has argued that this shift in no way detracted from Marsden’s feminist commitments for she saw ‘individualism as the apotheosis rather than the antithesis of feminism’.<sup>32</sup> Further evidence of this can be found in a letter from Harriet Shaw Weaver to Marsden that discussed the name change. Weaver wrote: ‘I have told Allen Upward you are thinking about a change of name. I quite like your suggestion of “The Egoist” [sic]. It is a good challenge to sentimentalists’.<sup>33</sup> Sentimentalists were anathema to both modernists and Freewomen alike.

The ever-iconoclastic Marsden intuited that cultural ‘labels’ came burdened with limitations, expectations, and strong, mostly gendered associations, yet was still able to recognise their interpellative power.<sup>34</sup> Words such as ‘feminist’ were politically and socially sculpted into meaning and to call her magazine ‘feminist’, she concluded, was to collude with that label’s referentiality, as it was generally understood in 1912. Initially Marsden did not anticipate any conflict to publishing under a feminist banner, but by declaring that ‘Feminism has as yet no defined creed’ she clearly hoped to loosen the concept from its strong suffrage association.

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<sup>30</sup> Offen (1988), p. 120. Also Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth, 1938), pp.184, 250.

<sup>31</sup> *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 3 .

<sup>32</sup> Robin Hicks, “Gender of the Self,” Dora Marsden and the *Freewoman*: Feminist Beginnings of the *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist*. Duke Humphries Library, Oxford University, 1990. MSS. M.Litt. c936.

<sup>33</sup> Weaver to Marsden (15<sup>th</sup> September 1913) in Franklin (2002), p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2004), p. 154



Consequently, after a barrage of criticism from her correspondents, she came to realise that whilst publishing under a feminist banner had initially attracted readers, it was under the misconception that she was offering them yet another suffrage journal.<sup>35</sup> In some part, her reiteration of anti-suffrage invective was a way of anchoring her reputation as an individual as opposed to one of the Pankhursts’ centrally controlled suffragettes. Modern scholars, such as Joannou, have argued that this conflicts with or impairs the periodical’s ‘feminist’ standing, but despite Marsden’s own troubled battle with the rhetorics of gender, the magazine was still a progressive and radical textual space in which matters pertaining to women’s sexual, political, and moral rights could be openly discussed and debated. In attempting to debunk the mythology of womanhood and counter the creation of the over-sentimentalised Victorian ‘Angel in the House’, Marsden opened the door to the possibility of radical change to the position of women in society, giving them options outside their normative functions as daughter, wife, mother, or maiden aunt.

Irrespective of its unstable feminist identity *The Freewoman* provided fertile soil out of which conversations grew organically and, unlike *Votes for Women*, it regularly published correspondence that challenged or disagreed with the magazine’s endorsed material. Not renowned for her modesty about her own writing, Marsden uncharacteristically noted that in her ‘opinion the correspondence is the most fruitful part of the paper’.<sup>36</sup> It created such an intensely dialectical atmosphere – or what

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<sup>35</sup> During this period the terms ‘Feminism’ and ‘Feminist’ had developed a euphemistic association with suffrage and as such any periodical operating under this banner would carry with it the expectation of following a prescribed pattern of policy and reportage, the example of which was set by *Votes for Women* or *The Cause*. Initially, Marsden exploited this connection, but quickly recognised that her readership’s correspondence indicated a wide chasm between what they expected of the paper and what she was prepared to deliver. In order to retain readers’ respect and support Marsden prudently began to disassociate herself from labels that could possibly mislead.

<sup>36</sup> Marsden, Note to Correspondents, *FW*, 2:43 (12<sup>th</sup> September 1912), p. 339.

Marsden herself termed ‘a living interest [...] aroused amongst thinking men and women’ – that after a mere three months in print, Marsden, in response to several requests from her readers, lodged an editorial appeal:

It has been pointed out to us by friendly critics that *The Freewoman* contains each week matter so highly debatable, and of such a serious human import, that it is difficult to digest all it contains, and to find one’s bearings, in view of the many articles which express opposing points of view. It has been suggested, therefore, that *Freewoman* clubs, or informal gatherings of men and women, should be started for discussions, of which the weekly *Freewoman* would form the basis. Of this suggestion, coming from several members, we highly approve, and pass it on to other readers for their consideration.<sup>37</sup>

These Discussion Circles formed in order to continue the debate beyond the parameters of the page; *The Freewoman* had ‘set into motion a minor whorl in the fluid dynamics of radical London’.<sup>38</sup> Future subscribers were drawn into these circles, including Harriet Shaw Weaver, who was to become a ‘perfect treasure’ to Marsden, providing her with the emotional and financial means to regroup and re-launch under the banner *The New Freewoman*.<sup>39</sup>

West and several other regular contributors were instrumental in the formation of the Circles, which met fortnightly in London to review aspects of the journal that warranted further discussion. Contributors were invited to give talks that would initiate discussion on topics raised in the magazine and a report of the groups’ activities became a feature of the periodical. The committee included Barbara Low, Charles Grenville, Henry Birnstingl, and E. S. P. Haynes, and amongst those invited to speak were Guy Aldred, Charles Drysdale, Mrs. Havelock Ellis, Selwyn Watson,

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<sup>37</sup> Marsden, ‘An Appeal’ in ‘Notes on the Week’ *FW*, 1:3 (7<sup>th</sup> December 1911), p. 244 and Clarke (1996), p. 75.

<sup>38</sup> Clarke (1996), p. 75.

<sup>39</sup> Lidderdale & Nicholson (1970), pp. 66-107.

and Rona Robinson.<sup>40</sup> The initial meeting was planned for twelve to fifteen people (a similar size to those organised by The Men and Women’s Club) but to Marsden’s surprise and ‘great amazement [...] 100 people crowded into the room to hold half that number, all immensely interested and eager to accept responsibility in regard to the club’.<sup>41</sup> It was the interactive nature of the periodical coupled with the formation of these discussion groups that made *The Freewoman* a distinctively dialectical enterprise as it encouraged individuals (and in particular women) with ‘freer views on social and moral questions’ to meet, debate and provide reciprocated support. To quote Caroline M. Boord, an early contributor to the journal and an attendee of the circles, in a letter to Marsden dated 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1912: ‘You cannot have any idea of the absolute lack of opportunity for mental development I have had since I married or indeed before.’<sup>42</sup>

*The Freewoman* challenged convention and it is largely because of its willingness to allow contributors and correspondents to express themselves freely and without constraint that its ‘feminist’ identity has become distorted. The material it contained was too broad-ranging and diverse to represent a unified or cohesive viewpoint. It was defiantly heterogeneous in both its choice of subject matters and its selection of contributors offering an ‘open circle of cultural debate among feminists, socialists, anarchists, sex radicals, neo-Malthusians (birth-control advocates), ‘Uranians’ (homosexuals), suffragists, spiritualists, money cranks, poets, and

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<sup>40</sup> These individuals were all frequently published within the pages of Marsden’s magazines. Barbara Low became the club secretary, whilst publisher Charles Grenville reluctantly accepted the chair. Further details of the Club’s participants and activities can be found in Garner (1990), pp. 73-75.

<sup>41</sup> Letter quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 73

<sup>42</sup> Garner (1990), p. 74

aesthetes’.<sup>43</sup> Its polyvalence was one of its strengths but paradoxically also one of its weaknesses. Marsden was undoubtedly an *agent provocateur* when it came to debate, as much in thrall to the intellectual exercise as to any particular viewpoint. Her feminism was ever evolving and rarely accordant with contemporary opinion. She rejected anything that generated what Wilde had described as ‘monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of the machine.’<sup>44</sup> She was, to adopt a term coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, a human ‘floating signifier’. A more mature West, writing in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, recalls (or invents) an interview with a student in Vienna who wished to make her the subject of her doctoral Study. West could be describing Marsden’s own intellectual process when she states:

I explained that I was a writer wholly unsuitable for her purpose: that the bulk of my writing was scattered through American and English periodicals; that I had never used my writing to make a continuous disclosure of my own personality to others, but to discover for my own edification what I knew about various subjects which I found to be important to me<sup>45</sup>

Writing for West was a process for determining her own opinion and both she and Marsden subscribed to Ibsen’s concept of ‘the dynamism of ideas’ rather than valuing the conclusion of the argument.<sup>46</sup> *The Freewoman* stood for the fluidity and flexibility of open debate and discourse rather than the promulgation of set manifestos. When this lack of ‘creed’ or cause became an issue, Marsden – anticipating *BLAST*’s ‘Our Cause is No-Man’s’ – addressed her audience thus: ‘Dear friends and readers, THE NEW FREEWOMAN *has* no Cause. The nearest approach to a Cause it desires to attain, is to destroy Causes, and for the doing of this it finds its reward and incentive in its

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<sup>43</sup> Clarke (1996), p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Wilde (1891), pp. 50-51.

<sup>45</sup> West, *BLGF* (1993 [1942]), p. 1084.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1085.

own satisfaction’.<sup>47</sup> Many contributors and readers found *The Freewoman’s* ‘lack of policy’ or coherent philosophy unsettling. H. G. Wells was amongst those to question Marsden’s fluid editorial style claiming she had ‘no “constructive” theories.’ Typically, Marsden evaded giving a direct response, instead deconstructing the question put to her:

What does “constructive” mean, applied to life? It would be so much to the good if we could persuade even great novelists to be precise in their terms, especially when things which matter are presumably to hang on them. To our thinking, to have “constructive” theories in regard to society is to possess a very extraordinary mind. Because, forsooth, society is made up of living men, “things” that change even as one calculates on their suitable niche in the structure, and which, even when placed there, are as likely as not to leap out of their places. One can “construct” with bricks and blocks of wood, but not with living trees, and not with living men. One can have no “constructive” scheme for a patch of lilies. They can only have their ground space, with air and water and light.<sup>48</sup>

Jeffreys’ indictment of *The Freewoman* for its sustained ‘abuse’ of the Spinster – a closer examination of which is to follow – negates the journal’s significant contribution to feminism. *The Freewoman* played a significant role in providing women with a public voice. It allowed women to express their ideas and opinions on a broad spectrum of subjects, freely, without the need to moderate or self-censor for a specific audience. As Clarke observes: ‘Apparently Jeffreys assumes that because Marsden gave a platform to critics of spinsterhood, she agreed with them. Such assumptions are clearly unwarranted, but it is often the case that doctrinaire readers have difficulty in appreciating just how libertarian Marsden’s editorial attitude was.’<sup>49</sup> Marsden held the belief that a new mode of writing was needed to counter realist, socially homogenising Edwardian prose and poetry that she and other writers felt

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<sup>47</sup> Marsden, ‘Views and Comments’ in *NFW*, 1:2 (1<sup>st</sup> July 1913), pp. 24-5.

<sup>48</sup> Marsden, ‘The Policy of the Freewoman’ in *FW*, 2:41 (29th August 1912), pp. 301-2.

<sup>49</sup> Clarke (1996), p. 68.

lacked sufficient candour, intuition, and psychological depth. Women, according to Marsden, were better situated than their male counterparts to navigate the terrain of this unorthodox ‘new world’ writing.<sup>50</sup> This new world writing was a reaction against what Clarke has described as: ‘the ambivalent gifts of the nineteenth century: anxious and exhausted capitalist empires, intrusive heavy technologies, polarized class and gender conflicts, powerful and tendentious sciences.’<sup>51</sup> This stance taken by Marsden was not without its drawbacks. In the very early issues, Marsden drew her readers’ attention to the fact that she was subject to abuse from ‘female bullies’; accusations were hurled at her and her fellow female writers in such quantities that she had insufficient space to print the letters, but was forced instead to précis them.<sup>52</sup> For the period this was an innovative and instinctively feminist action; Jeffreys may be justified in taking issue with what some of Marsden’s women contributors had to say, but on balance this does not take into account the level of courage required for them to say it. Nor does it necessarily follow that it made them all perpetrators of patriarchy. In order to refute Jeffreys’ belief that the magazine was heterosexist and anti-lesbian it is important to first understand her argument.

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<sup>50</sup> Marsden aligned herself very early on with avant-garde aesthetics, allowing *The Freewoman* to be the first British publication to promote the radical poetry of the Imagists. She also practiced a far more ‘violent’ rhetoric than most women writers, rejecting the normative modes of feminine writing and encouraging her contemporaries to do the same. She resisted the homogenizing social pressure of socialism, Fabianism, and the moral pedagogy of Victorian and Edwardian reformists such as H. G. Wells. See Clarke (1996) pp. 2, 22, 27, 41, 68, 70, 110, 174 and Franklin, “‘The Fatherly State’ and the Birth of British Modernism’ in Franklin (2002), pp. 152-210.

<sup>51</sup> Clarke, (1996), p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Marsden, ‘Notes on the Week’, *FW*, 1:2, (30<sup>th</sup> November 1911), p. 23 and 2:3 (6<sup>th</sup> December 1911), p. 42.

**‘A Most Gallant Wielder of the Battle-axe’: Language, Gender, and Subjectivity<sup>53</sup>**

The question that remains to be asked is why Marsden’s ‘feminist’ little magazine caused such controversy amongst women, especially those already considered radical? The key to this possibly lies within the public conception of the spinster, who by 1911 was a much-debated figure and the subject of a series of essays discussing the sexual life of the unmarried woman. These essays, Barbara Green contends, ‘isolated the “Spinster” as a cultural type and distinguished her from those other modern women of interest to Marsden, “Bondswomen” and “Freewomen”.’<sup>54</sup> As part of a general prerogative, contributors to radical magazines such as *The Freewoman* and *BLAST* despised the imperatives of ‘uniformity of type and conformity to rule.’<sup>55</sup> The *Freewoman* essays challenged the social origins of such a ‘withered’, ‘bloodless and boneless’ creature, with one author claiming that ‘if prurience has slain its thousands, chastity has slain its tens of thousands.’<sup>56</sup> The Spinster formed part of a wider discourse on ‘indissoluble monogamy’ that Marsden felt forced women into the roles of wife, mother, spinster, and prostitute. The derogatory term ‘surplus women’ – which re-emerged with far greater discursive force after the Great War – was already an identifiable social trope.<sup>57</sup> As early as the 1860s, W. R. Greg in his essay for the *National Review*, ‘Why are Women Redundant?’, described spinsters as ‘a number

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<sup>53</sup> West, *T&T* (16<sup>th</sup> July 1926).

<sup>54</sup> Green in Ardis and Lewis (2003), p. 227.

<sup>55</sup> Dollimore (1991), p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> ‘The Spinster: By One’, in *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), pp. 7-8. The authorship of this article is unknown, but its strap-line ‘By One’ suggests that the author was a self-identifying spinster and that the article is itself, something of an exercise in self-remonstrance.

<sup>57</sup> Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2008).

quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which, positively and relatively, is indicative of an unwholesome social state.’<sup>58</sup>

The maiden aunt made a regular appearance in literature, and the role was rarely, if ever, flattering. Fussy, prudish, largely ridiculous, sentimental, and frustrated these characters were either benign backdrops to family life, tragic warnings, comedic interludes or sinister meddlers in affairs that did not concern them. In 1901 a guidebook entitled *The Spinster Book* by Myrtle Reed was published offering ‘sound’ advice for single women.<sup>59</sup> Despite its title this book does not offer a guide to being single, but on the contrary it is a compendium of hints and tips in how to secure a husband. This ‘valuable’ tome offers advice on such matters as ‘Notes on Men’, ‘The Philosophy of Love’ and ‘The Consolations of Spinsterhood.’ Its tone is romantically sentimental offering such insights as: ‘There is nothing in the world as harmless and as utterly joyous as man’s conceit. The woman who will not pander to it is ungracious indeed’ (p. 4); ‘Man’s interest in himself is purely altruistic and springs from an unselfish desire to please’ (p. 4); ‘Theoretically, men admire “reasonable women,” with the uncommon quality which is called “common sense,” but it is the woman of caprice, the sweet, illogical despot of a thousand moods, who is most often and most tenderly loved’ (p. 8). In the quest to secure a husband Reed tells her reader that: ‘Woman has three weapons – flattery, food, and flirtation, and only the last of these is ever denied her by Time’ (p. 17). Its concluding chapter intended to offer consolation to the women who are destined to spend their adult years with no husband or children

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<sup>58</sup> Melissa Edmundson, ‘Avenging Angels: The Social Supernatural in Nineteenth-Century British Women’s Writing’, University of South Carolina, MSS. PhD, 2007. p. 83.

<sup>59</sup> Myrtle Reed, *The Spinster Book* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam & Sons/ The Knickerbocker Press, 1907 [1901]) available from Project Gutenberg at: [http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=1510751](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1510751) [last accessed 20<sup>th</sup> August 2013] Page numbers in parenthesis refer to the online version of this text.



reads as a litany of woes, warning against ‘jealous wives’, ‘proper indifference’, ‘idle flirtations’, and most importantly against the ‘dazzling allurements offered by various “careers”’ which always prove ‘barren, [as the spinster] does not realise that it is love for which she hungers’ because ‘[t]he world is full of pain and danger for those who face it alone’ (p. 60).

In 1910 the Fabian Society Tract: 149 ‘The Endowment of Motherhood’, concludes its proposals by highlighting the concerns regarding the unbalanced ratio of women to men in a chapter headed ‘Superfluous Women’.<sup>60</sup> In mainstream press the spinster or single female was often scapegoated and ridiculed, held up as an example of the fate awaiting women who failed to secure a good marriage and as such the spinster was regularly used to enforce traditional patriarchal gender roles. The emergence of the New Woman in the late 1800s offered the unmarried women in society a more positive outlook, offering possibilities beyond marriage, providing the opportunity for ‘the development of a class of spinsters proud to proclaim they were happy, fulfilled, had made a deliberate choice and were vital to the political struggle of women.’<sup>61</sup> However, as the introduction to this thesis explained, these New Women posed an even larger threat to the status quo and as Jeffreys observes this development was met ‘with serious opposition.’ She also notes that ‘it was not just men who wanted to deride and undermine the position of these women. Some feminists also went on the attack.’<sup>62</sup> She identifies *The Freewoman* as one magazine that ‘gave the

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<sup>60</sup> Henry D. Harben, The Fabian Society Tract: 149, ‘The Endowment of Motherhood’ (London: The Fabian Society, 1910) pp. 21-3, The London School of Economics at: [http://lib-161.lse.ac.uk/archives/fabian\\_tracts/149.pdf](http://lib-161.lse.ac.uk/archives/fabian_tracts/149.pdf) [last accessed 19<sup>th</sup> August 2013]. This tract will be discussed further in 1:3.

<sup>61</sup> Jeffreys, (1985/97), p. 93.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

opposition its platform.’<sup>63</sup> Jeffreys never acknowledges that Marsden (or any of the Freewomen) were actually members of this new breed of proud spinsters. There is little recognition of Marsden’s campaign to free women from the material realities of their existence, or her position as an editor who published material that challenged the commodification of women’s bodies. Rather than accepting *Freewoman* individualism as a philosophy that not only recognised and respected cultural diversity and difference but ‘positively enjoyed them’, Jeffreys claims that Marsden’s publication was nothing more than a platform from which to deride other women and to mock the status of the spinster in particular.<sup>64</sup> However it can be argued that *The Freewoman*, by the proposal of an individualism that was an affirmation of cultural as well as personal differences, was offering a counter-cultural discourse to the steady diet of sentimental ‘mush’ that single women had been force-fed for centuries. Marsden, West and their peers were writing against what Oscar Wilde had previously identified as the ‘immoral idea of uniformity of type and conformity which is so prevalent everywhere and is perhaps most obnoxious in England.’<sup>65</sup>

By 1911 then it is fair to say that the spinster had become both a symbolic and a discursive commodity within debates concerning the ‘Woman Question.’ However, whilst it is evident that *The Freewoman* certainly exploited the ‘idea’ of the spinster, Jeffreys’ contention that the magazine was merely ‘spinster-baiting’ is still up for debate.<sup>66</sup> The little magazine sought to use the spinster in two ways: first as a metaphor for artistic/creative/intellectual sterility, atrophy, or impotence and second as an example of gender-based patriarchal hypocrisy. Marsden and her colleagues

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<sup>63</sup> Jeffreys (1997 [1985]), p. 93

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-101.

<sup>65</sup> Wilde (1991 [1891]), p. 418.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

aimed to prove that the figure of the spinster was ridiculous not because of her sex, but because of what she symbolised in society: as West explained ‘the spinster is ridiculous because she is limited. (I write as a most typical spinster.)’<sup>67</sup> Rather than dismiss an entire generation of women as a useless economic burden, society should be seeking ways of tapping their potential; in a comedic aside West during her review of Hubert Wales’ novel *The Spinster* commented that:

I was held from the very first page, whereon I read: ‘There were reservoirs of love in her – of wife-love and of mother-love – accumulating reservoirs, which had never been tapped.’ This is luscious imagery. ‘The Tapping of the Spinster’ would be an exquisite title for a poetical play.<sup>68</sup>

Jeffreys views *The Freewoman* through what could be described as a ‘lesbocentric’ lens with the specific purpose of uncovering suppressed early twentieth-century lesbian narratives. This is made explicit in the chapter ‘Continence and Psychic Love’ in which Jeffreys examines ‘the theories and strategies of those feminists who were involved in relationships with men’<sup>69</sup> in order to ‘challenge the dominant male ideology of sex’.<sup>70</sup> Because of this, she often categorises heterosexual women together as largely ‘lesbophobic’ perpetrators of a coercive hegemonic heterosexuality.<sup>71</sup>

Jeffreys estimations of *The Freewoman* as ‘lesbophobic’ or ‘spinster-baiting’ are gathered by viewing the little magazine as though the universe were arranged in, what West called, ‘antithesis, in dichotomies’. However, one of the challenges in creating a little magazine such as *The Freewoman*, was to alert readers to the ‘insensible gradations that there are between light and darkness, life and death,

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<sup>67</sup> West, letter to the Editor re: ‘Spinsters and Art’ in *FW*, 1:37 (1<sup>st</sup> August 1912), p. 213.

<sup>68</sup> West, ‘Spinsters and Art’ in *FW*, 1:34 (11<sup>th</sup> July 1912), pp. 147-9, p. 147.

<sup>69</sup> Jeffreys (1997 [1985]), p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>71</sup> The terms lesbocentric and lesbophobic are applied here because Jeffreys’ study focuses upon the lesbian experience and this influences heavily her interpretation of *The Freewoman* journal.

pleasure and pain’<sup>72</sup> in order to ‘challenge naive abstractions with the subtleties of experience’.<sup>73</sup> Jeffreys takes the standpoint that *The Freewoman*’s mockery of the spinster is an attack on non-heterosexual existence. However it was more of an attack on the negative female-gendered stereotype. As Craig Owens observed in 1983:

The stereotype is truly an instrument of subjection; its function is to produce ideological subjects that can be smoothly inserted into existing institutions of government, economy, and perhaps most crucially, sexual identity [...] The stereotype inscribes the body into the register of discourse; in it, the body is apprehended by language, taken into joint custody by politics and ideology.<sup>74</sup>

The spinster, for those writing for *The Freewoman*, was a symbolic figure within patriarchy, an example of the negative repercussions brought about by a society in which a woman’s sole worth was measured by her marital and maternal prospects. Writers such as Stella Browne, West, and Marsden certainly took issue with the idea of ‘the spinster’, but does this lead to the natural conclusion that they were deriding other ‘women’? *The Freewoman* editor often sought to undermine or defamiliarise accepted definitions of words such as ‘mother’, ‘prostitute’, ‘housewife’, and ‘woman’ in order to ‘strip them of their cultural and political freight’ and endow them with alternative values and associations.<sup>75</sup> By doing so Marsden and her fellow *Freewoman* writers challenged the authority of culturally dominant ideologies (in particular patriarchy) and institutions to determine the meaning of language. As this section will demonstrate, a more sympathetic or informed study might conclude that this aggressive attack on the spinster was an indictment of the imposed patriarchal

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<sup>72</sup> West, ‘I Believe’ in Rebecca West, *Woman as Artist and Thinker* (New York: iUniverse Inc., 2005), p. 34.

<sup>73</sup> Nattie Golubov, ‘Rebecca West’s “Strange Necessity”’: Literature, Love and the Good’ in Schweizer (2006), pp. 206-222, p. 209.

<sup>74</sup> Craig Owens, ‘The Medusa Effect or, The Spectacular Ruse’ in *We won’t play nature to your culture*, catalogue of an exhibition of works by Barbara Kruger at the ICA, (London: 1983), p. 7, in Tickner (1987), p. 167.

<sup>75</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 131.

gendered ‘performativity’ of purity rather than a sub-textual anti-lesbian narrative. It was also part of a much larger, and more complex, discourse that dealt with a woman’s right to ownership of her own body.

In 1911, the spinster was regarded as, in literary terms, a cautionary character that was instantly recognisable by her pathology of repression, prudery, bitterness, weakness, stupidity, and naivety. So ridiculous had the figure become it represented a societal paradox, simultaneously holding the positions of paragon and pariah, a social stigma that made them both highly visible and wholly invisible. Throughout literary history she was caricatured as the stalwart maiden aunt who regularly meddled, gossiped, and was nearly always a focus for derision and ridicule.<sup>76</sup> Being weak, ineffectual, uneducated, sentimental, and entirely ignorant of worldly matters, she epitomised the negative pole of the female/male binary division. For men she exemplified everything that they considered wrong in the other sex. Whilst superficially the writers of *The Freewoman* perpetuated this stereotypical figure they simultaneously challenged the social construction of this paragon of social inadequacies. In effect, Marsden and West denied that the cultural stereotype of the spinster was only applicable to women; whilst the ‘gender’ of a spinster remained distinctly feminine, the sexed body became ambivalent. Marsden and West argued that the spinster was a cultural figure that typified sexual and intellectual ignorance and was as easily embodied by a man as a woman. This slippage between sex and gender allows Jeffreys to interpret Marsden’s (and West’s) anti-spinster stance as lesbo-phobia. Similarly C. H. Norman in his article ‘The New Prostitution’ challenged

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<sup>76</sup> Shakespeare had described the fate of a woman dying unmarried as being to ‘lead apes into hell.’ William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing* in Stephen Greenblatt *et al.* (eds) *The Norton Shakespeare Based on the Oxford Edition* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), pp. 133-201 (2:1, ll. 32-34, p. 161), pp. 1381-1444, (2:1, ll. 30-35, p. 1398).

the assumption that sexed body of the prostitute was inherently female by applying the term to male journalists.<sup>77</sup> Whilst the metaphor is less challenging than Marsden and West’s handling of the term ‘spinster’ it nevertheless attempted to revision, re-label, and defamiliarise the term. Marsden saw both the spinster and the prostitute as ‘successful bait’ for a variety of propagandists, including the WSPU.<sup>78</sup>

Many of Marsden’s critics, despite being vociferous protesters for women’s rights, were married or widowed (such as Millicent Fawcett and Mrs. Pankhurst) or of an older, Victorian generation (Olive Schreiner and Maude Royden) and their ideas of ‘freedom’ were not only linked to their marital status or generation but also, according to Marsden:

culled out of an unthought-out and nebulous feminism, and at most have amounted to nothing more than half-hearted and sentimental allusions to prostitution, sweating, child-assault, race-deterioration, and what not. But all real understanding of what these things mean, and discussion as to how they are to be remedied have been systematically discouraged.<sup>79</sup>

Whilst married women would quite naturally become sexually active, Edwardian singletons were expected to be abstemious. Lisa Tickner observes:

There was no agreement on the nature and rights of female sexuality in the Edwardian period, but suffragists were chiefly successful in pushing to the margins of their campaign a dissident tradition that argued for ‘free unions’ and women’s rights to equal sexual expression with men. Male sexual radicals like Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, and the advocates of birth control and free unions including Annie Besant, Stella Browne and the libertarian Dora Marsden, offered a challenge to the social purity position which continued to dominate the Edwardian women’s movement [...] This challenge ... represented in some respects the most “modern” position on female sexuality.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> C. H. Norman, ‘The New Prostitution’, *FW*, 1:21 (11<sup>th</sup> April 1912), pp. 401-402.

<sup>78</sup> Marsden, ‘Topics of the Weeks’, *FW*, 2:33 (4<sup>th</sup> July 1912), p. 123.

<sup>79</sup> Marsden, ‘Notes of the Week’, *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Tickner (1988), p. 223.

It is telling that much of the initial legislation that led towards emancipation involved the rights of ‘married’ women rather than women as a whole. The taxonomies that governed female status in society correlated primarily to her economic value as a wife and mother, but this also had strong implications for a woman’s sexual development; whether a woman was married or single determined her position in the social (and female) hierarchy of the day. The economics of being female were double-edged and prohibitive. Women were by law limited in how they could earn a living, and the most important career for a woman was still that of a profitable marriage. Should a woman be unable to secure a husband she became dependent upon the capricious generosity of her male relatives. Teaching was the first profession that allowed women to secure respectable and reasonably well paid employment and consequently members of its ranks grew to share a strong affiliation with the Woman Movement and suffrage in particular.<sup>81</sup> It is because of this commodified version of womanhood that the spinster/single woman/unmarried female attracted so much attention.

The spinster had been for many years the object of ridicule, a burden on society, an unsolvable economic conundrum that was exacerbated by the increasing population of single women. Jeffreys’ argument against *The Freewoman* centres on an article anonymously authored ‘By One’, called ‘The Spinster’, that appeared in the first issue of the new periodical.<sup>82</sup> This article, at first glance, appears to collude with the general consensus that the spinster is a figure to be mocked and is, according to Jeffreys, a ‘vicious indictment of the spinster’ that ‘scapegoated her for all the ills of society’. The clue that this article is biting satire and polemically cruel is in the

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<sup>81</sup> See f/n 9, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> By One, ‘The Spinster’, *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), pp. 10-11, all further references are to this article.

pseudonymous by-line –‘By One’– which implies the author is (her/himself) a spinster. The article magnifies the sins of the spinster to ridiculously comedic proportions. However, it also called attention to the societal inequities that gave rise to such a figure, highlighting the preposterous slew of contradictory and defamatory connotations of the term ‘spinster’. Marsden’s readers could not fail to recognise the culturally constructed character the article presents. The common trope of the spinster, so readily derided, represented one instance of the cruel inequality that patriarchal labels imposed upon women and it became one against which *The Freewoman* took up arms. Similarly Marsden’s relabeling of the term wife as ‘The Drudge’, ‘drone’, ‘slave’, ‘herd’, and ‘Bondwoman’ was not aimed at putting women down but at de-mystifying and de-romanticising the performativity that such a role required. It flew in the face of *Votes for Women* that habitually over-emphasised the value of the domesticated woman. As Marsden put it, somewhat tongue in cheek, ‘[t]here is nothing productive, for instance, about the lifting of dirt from one place into another.’<sup>83</sup>

West capitalised on the satire used in ‘The Spinster’ with an article called ‘Spinsters and Art’ which appeared in *The Freewoman* on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1912.<sup>84</sup> West’s reviews had already gained a reputation for their sharp wit and sarcastic candour. She used the attention-grabbing method of juxtaposing literary criticism with topical references that often publicly mocked well-known figures such as Mrs. Humphrey

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<sup>83</sup> Marsden, ‘The Drudge’, *FW*, 1:12 (8<sup>th</sup> February 1912), pp. 221-3. This article was formulated as a response to Wells’ social reform plan to pay mothers to raise their own children. Marsden rebutted this notion of industrialised, almost eugenicist, motherhood with the observation that motherhood was ‘the right of every woman who prepares for it, and takes the risks of it ... [It] is an individual affair... it is not a collective affair.’ *FW*, 1:17 (14<sup>th</sup> March 1912) p. 323.

<sup>84</sup> West, ‘Spinsters and Art’, *FW*, 2:34 (11<sup>th</sup> July 1912), pp. 147-9. All quotations are taken from these pages. It is worth noting that Jeffreys does not refer to West’s article or the correspondence it generated when arguing her case against *The Freewoman*.



Ward and H. G. Wells. ‘Spinsters and Art’ was ostensibly a review of *The Considine Luck* by H. A. Hinkson, *The Spinster* by H. Wales, and *The Trespasser* by D. H. Lawrence that compared Lawrence's literary ‘vision’ to the ‘baldness and badness’ of ‘popular novels’. The crux of her criticism was the manner in which male authors insisted on constructing emotionally unstable female characters, producing heroines that ‘transfer [their] allegiance with horrid facility’ from one male character to another, such was their desperation to avoid the stigma of enduring the life of a spinster.<sup>85</sup>

In the case of the novels by Hinkson and Wales, West argues: ‘it would not be unkind to say that [they] need never have been written’.<sup>86</sup> Their heroines are stereotypical and one-dimensional. Hinkson’s Flo Dallas demonstrates ‘startling promiscuity’ in an instant switching her affections from one man to another, whilst Wales’ spinster is ‘another lady of trying habits’ who resembles ‘the terribly confidential old lady in the crowded railway carriage who will tell us about the operation her son has just undergone, and how it runs in the family’.<sup>87</sup> The reader would need, West claims, to have a ‘tireless imagination [...] to perceive joy in these bare chronicles’. Lawrence’s novel however, West claims is ‘on a different plane’ announcing ‘[t]he book is magic’. Yet, despite her loquacious praise she still manages to take issue with Lawrence for his scornful treatment of the deserted wife. In West’s

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<sup>85</sup> De Beauvoir describes the plight of the unmarried girl in 1946 thus:

Marriage today still retains this traditional form. And, [...] it is imposed far more imperiously on the girl than on the young man. There are still many social strata where she is offered no other perspective; for peasants, an unmarried woman is a pariah; she remains the servant of her father, her brothers and her brother-in-law [...] In some bourgeois classes, a girl is still left incapable of earning a living; she can only vegetate as a parasite in her father’s home or accept a lowly position in a stranger’s home. (*Second Sex* pp. 455-6)

<sup>86</sup> West, ‘Spinsters’, *FW*, 2:34 (11<sup>th</sup> July 1912), p. 147.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

opinion Beatrice is ‘the most pathetic figure in the world, however contemptible she may be, for she has based her whole life on the false assumption that the love of a man is a static rather than a rhythmic condition’. The review continues with a comparison of the two female protagonists in Lawrence’s novel: Helena, Siegmund’s ‘sentimentalist’ pupil and lover and Beatrice, his ‘shrewish wife.’ Yet despite her role as the lover and the woman who takes Siegmund from his family and home, West contends that Helena was ‘the spinster through and through.’ Helena’s constant ‘revulsion for some physical lustiness of Siegmund’s’, as well as her tendency to shudder at ‘the sight of his strong throat above his flannel shirt, his childish trick of whistling through his teeth, his great bull-like strength’ demonstrated a spinster’s prudery, albeit one that suggests an erotic/sexual frisson. The denial of her sexual self allows her to ‘withdraw to the sentimentalist’s voluptuous chamber of self-torture to become a self-scourging moralist [...] receding from him into the nook of some obscene fastidiousness, some icy distaste for Life’.<sup>88</sup>

West’s deployment of the term ‘spinster’ within this review raises questions as she uses the word in several contexts. She applies the term to Flo Dallas, who exhibits ‘startling promiscuity’, then compares Wales’ spinster to ‘the terribly confidential old lady’ who by the admission of a son is clearly married, and finally uses the word to describe Helena, the immoral, yet physically repressed, seducer of Siegmund who abandons his long-suffering wife Beatrice. ‘Spinster’, whilst being applied here to female characters, is not being deployed in a traditional sense. For example, when West draws parallels between the spinster and the married old lady she challenges the referentiality of the term spinster as one wholly relating to a virginal or unmarried

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<sup>88</sup> West, ‘Spinsters’, *FW*, 2:34 (11<sup>th</sup> July 1912), p. 148.

state; it was not a question of physical virginity but one of emotional sterility. Similarly, H. G. Wells demonstrated the same ‘obscene fastidiousness’, the same ‘icy distaste for Life’ as Lawrence’s Helena in his novel *Marriage*, thus prompting her to label him ‘the old maid amongst novelists’.<sup>89</sup> For West the spinster was someone continually ‘looking out on the world through the drawn curtains of the boarding-school or the equally celibate boarding-house’ who ‘sees men as trees walking – large, dignified, almost majestic [...] she refuses to see their helplessness, their pathetic defeats in the strife against circumstances and temperament. Perpetually she conceives them as masters of their situation.’

West urges her readers to consider ‘how many books are written by spinsters, how many more for spinsters. In all these men are drawn as strong gods.’ Somewhat unfortunately West concludes her polemic with an attack upon the credibility of Charlotte Brontë’s hero Rochester, whom she declared as unbelievable on the basis that he was ‘marred by a perpetual dignity’ because Brontë was ‘drunk with a spinster’s ethereal conception of man.’<sup>90</sup> This prompted several letters to the magazine’s next edition as readers took issue with West’s perceived denigration of an esteemed woman author. Yet West’s attack can be understood as an intersection point between her modernist sensibility and her feminist affiliations: sentimentality was anathema to writers with a modernist bent. As Suzanna Clark has observed: ‘modernism reversed the increasing influence of women’s writing, discrediting the literary past and especially that sentimental history. Women themselves participated

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<sup>89</sup> West, ‘Marriage’, *FW*, 2:44 (19<sup>th</sup> September 1912), p. 346.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

in this unwarranting.<sup>91</sup> One thrust of the modernist aesthetic was to sever literature from the unnecessary clutter that Victorian sentiment imposed. West’s excoriation of Brontë stood as one example of the modernist distaste for the sentimental, a premise that underpinned Ezra Pound’s *Des Imagistes* and his *cri de coeur* to ‘make it new’. The figure of the spinster also provided modernist writers with a useful symbol as she embodied the aesthetic values that the avant-garde wished to eschew.

Marsden, West, and *The Freewoman* aimed to challenge the associations between the cultural construct and the biological sex of the spinster. Spinsterish-ness, they argued, was as much a male trait as it was a female one and West’s article insists that male writers were also infected by the spinster’s ‘ethereal conception of man’. This spinsterish quality contaminated literature as West claimed ‘very few men have ever succeeded in creating men as they have succeeded in creating women’. Yet in a final exhortation, West muddies the waters by criticising the current state of education for its perpetuation of the state of spinsterhood:

Today there are hundreds and thousands of spinsters all over the country, produced for the most part by educational systems. Hence you have a large population deprived of the possibility of wifhood and motherhood. The only people to whom such a deprivation could be of any value are artists. But then again, a spinster is usually a sentimentalist and therefore incapable of Art.

So, what is the good of all these spinsters?<sup>92</sup>

It was this ending that prompted a flurry of objections addressed to the Editor, taking issue with West’s audacity in attacking Brontë’s talent as a writer and her ‘tactless’ dismissal of ‘spinsters’ as sentimentalists incapable of producing ‘Art’. Yet the review ends somewhat ironically by asking: ‘What are we to do with all these spinsters?’

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<sup>91</sup> Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> West, ‘Spinsters’, *FW*, 2:34 (11<sup>th</sup> July 1912), p. 149.

This statement is sufficiently ambiguous to cheekily infer that it is the male writers to which West refers, rather than the characters they have created.

On the surface it would appear as though West was artlessly dismissing the population of single women, but aside from being one herself, it is clear that she did not use the term spinster as a traditionally hetero-normative taxonomy. There is considerable slippage between West’s nuanced referentiality and that being applied by correspondents who feel West’s comments are ‘surprising to find [...] in a modern feminist journal’ as they ‘seem to belong to the Early Victorian Age, when jeers at the spinster and the mother-in-law were mistaken for wit.’<sup>93</sup> West’s response to both ‘A Disappointed Reader’ and ‘X’ (who cast doubts as to whether West had ever actually read Brontë’s novels) addressed their complaints with her trademark disdain. After dismissing ‘A Disappointed Reader’ as someone who ‘appears to be stepping down the primrose path in order to please the Editor of THE FREEWOMAN and myself’, West declares boldly: ‘spinsterhood is not necessarily a feminine quality. It is simply the limiting of experience to one’s own sex, and consequently the regard of the other sex from an idealist’s point of view. Walter Pater and A. C. Benson are typical spinsters: Miss May Sinclair, though an unmarried woman, is not’.<sup>94</sup> Like ‘The Spinster, By One’ in issue one of *The Freewoman* West supports the idea that in a spinster ‘[t]he field of consciousness is charged with an all-pervasive unrest and sickness, which changes all meanings and queers all judgements, and which, appearing outwardly we recognise as sentimentality’.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Correspondence, ‘A Disappointed Reader’ in *FW*, 2:36, (25<sup>th</sup> July 1912), p. 198.

<sup>94</sup> West’s reply to ‘A Disappointed Reader’ in the Correspondence, *FW*, 2:37 (1<sup>st</sup> August 1912), p. 213.

<sup>95</sup> ‘One’, *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 11.

In her letter, West continues to clarify what she means by a neutered or ‘de-sexed’ spinster by arguing that: ‘I thought my reference to “the spinster, looking out on the world through the drawn curtains of the boarding school or the equally celibate boarding-house” made it plain that spinsterhood implied a segregation from the opposite sex. Portia, for instance, accustomed to manage men and suitors from her girlhood, was not a spinster.’ Jeffreys argues that by 1911 the meaning of the word spinster was evolving; where it had once merely referred to a woman’s marital status it was now being used to denote a woman’s lack of sexual experience.<sup>96</sup> She asserts that West (and other writers such as Stella Browne) were guilty of using the word ‘spinster’ as a derogatory term to ‘attack women who were not experienced with men’ but this does not stand up to close scrutiny given West’s application of the term ‘spinster’ to both sexes. When West declares that ‘Miss May Sinclair, though unmarried, is not a spinster,’ she was not crudely referring to May Sinclair’s sexual history, but more her capacity as an artist and a writer. Similarly the character Helena that West calls ‘the true spinster’ in Hinkson’s novel was Siegmund’s lover and therefore one would assume unlikely to be a virgin; she was, however, a sentimentalist.

West was fearless when it came to challenging the well-established authority figures such as Mrs. Humphrey Ward or literary giants like Wells. In ‘The Gospel According to Mrs. Humphrey Ward’ West attacks not only the writer’s anti-suffrage stance, but also her perpetuation of the false Victorian values that continued to subjugate not only women but the lower classes, thus ensuring that control remained

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<sup>96</sup> Jeffreys (1997 [1985]), p. 175.

firmly in the hands of a class which, according to West, ‘lack[ed] Honour.’<sup>97</sup> Reviewing her two novels, *Robert Elsmere* and *The Case of Richard Meynell West* takes issue with the heroine Catherine Leyburn whose ‘face works with emotion and is illuminated by a burning flush’. Catherine epitomised a figure lacking in awareness and who indulged in the ‘spinsterish’ practice of over-sentimentalising life. Adroitly, West interprets Catherine as an example of a woman who:

dies as easily as she has lived. What a life! Never once had she earned the bread she ate. She had spent her life in thinking beautiful thoughts, in being a benign and beautiful influence ... Never will Woman be saved until she realises that it is a far better thing to keep a jolly public-house really well than to produce a cathedral full of beautiful thoughts.

It was this ‘life spent in thinking beautiful thoughts,’ as opposed to a life spent in meaningful industry, that fuelled the sentimentalism that was anathema to modernist writers. Mrs. Humphrey Ward, according to West, was a woman who ‘will not think’<sup>98</sup> and consequently produced literature full of sentimental, overly romantic heroines. The implication is that West considers Mrs Ward, like Wells, to be a ‘an old maid’.<sup>99</sup> Marcus describes the attack made by a young West on the formidable Mrs. Ward as ‘a brave and foolhardy’ act for ‘a young woman with literary aspirations,

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<sup>97</sup> West, ‘The Gospel According to Mrs Humphrey Ward’, *FW*, 1:13, (15<sup>th</sup> February 1912), pp. 249-50.

<sup>98</sup> West ‘Letter to the Editor of *The Freewoman*: A Reply to Mr Hubert Wales’ in *FW*, 1:17 (14<sup>th</sup> March 1912), p. 331.

<sup>99</sup> Over six decades later, West harks back to her *Freewoman* days by calling her scathing review of Lidderdale and Nicholson’s biography of Harriet Shaw Weaver, ‘Spinster to the Rescue’ – a metaphoric nod to ‘Spinsters and Art’. *Sunday Telegraph* (11<sup>th</sup> November 1970), p. 12 reprinted in Scott (1990) pp. 577- 580. In this review she mocks the authors’ representation of Weaver as ‘asexual’ and showing ‘a total lack of interest in the other sex, except as human beings’. In a tone derisive of the biographers’ perpetual references to Weaver’s chastity, West subtly refutes the notion that Weaver was in any sense of the word, a ‘spinster’. Arguably could someone so immune to sexual feelings be the ‘St Bernard in human form who kept on and on rescuing James Joyce from the continuous Alpine storm of misfortune which raged about him’. In dialogue with ‘Spinsters and Art’ this 1970 review demonstrates how divorced the term had become for West (and Marsden) from its patronymic definition. It was part of a linguistic programme to ‘disentangle words from the weight of history’ or as William Carlos Williams phrased it, from ‘the burden science, philosophy and every higgledy-piggledy figment of the law and order have been laying upon them in the past.’ Gilbert &Gubar (1988), p. 247. William Carlos Williams was making this observation about Gertrude Stein.

equivalent to a young man expecting to launch his career with insults to Henry James’.<sup>100</sup>

This analysis of West’s review suggests that Jeffreys’ ‘doctrinaire’ reading of *The Freewomen* fails to grasp the ethos of writers who, with considerable difficulty, were trying to destabilise the binarism that existed within language itself. In 1911 the word ‘gender’ related to the biological sex of a body. The idea of gender as an existentialist concept, social construct, as a performative rather than a natural role or as a product of environment rather than biology was something yet to be articulated; ‘he’ was authoritatively male, as she was female and as such their gender was innate and unequivocally correlated to their sex.<sup>101</sup> Jeffreys’ assessment of how early twentieth-century women writers used the term ‘spinster’ as ‘a dirty word to attack women who were not sexually experienced with men’ is arguably reductive as it elides the rhetorical struggle that Marsden, West, and Browne – writers who were arguably trying to redefine the reputation of women writers such as themselves – were experiencing. Jeffreys also concluded that ‘[a]ny attack on the spinster is inevitably an attack on the lesbian’.<sup>102</sup> This implies a false syllogism that Marsden would have no doubt found amusing to deconstruct: all spinsters are unmarried; all lesbians are unmarried; therefore, all spinsters are lesbians. In the face of West’s deployment of the term ‘spinster’ in a far more nuanced way and Marsden’s own personal intimate (possibly lesbian) female relationships, this conclusion loses some of its authority. Garner notes in his biography that:

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<sup>100</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 18.

<sup>101</sup> Linda L. Lindsay, *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective* 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), Chapter One: ‘The Sociology of Gender: Theoretical Perspectives and Feminist Frameworks’, pp. 1-21.

<sup>102</sup> Jeffreys (1997 [1985]) p. 100.



All her close relationships were with women, none with a man. Indeed, how could she have the independence and freedom she so desperately yearned for if she had become involved in an orthodox relationship with a man? Whether any of her friendships with women were sexual cannot be determined – certainly they were close and certainly too, Dora’s personality and fragile beauty inspired many endearing comments from her friends [...] Whether Dora was gay in the modern sense is unknown. Yet if the term is redefined, as suggested by Faderman, to include women who derive all their emotional and loving support from other women without necessarily expressing this sexually, then Dora Marsden was indeed gay.<sup>103</sup>

Bland also comments that to make a conscious attack on something the attacker must be aware of its existence and lesbianism was at this point in history, a relatively new and largely unarticulated sexuality as the case of Kathlyn Oliver will show.

Kathlyn Oliver was a reader of and correspondent to *The Freewoman* whose letters, written over a period of several issues, expressed her belief that celibacy was voluntary, satisfactory and a valid lifestyle choice for single women. In her first letter, written to support fellow correspondent E. M. Watson, she declares herself to be ‘neither a prude nor a Puritan’ but rather ‘an apostle of the practice of self-restraint in sex matters’ and dismisses the idea – proposed in a previous *Freewoman* article – that abstinence is injurious to a woman’s health. She concludes:

I am an unmarried woman, nearly thirty years of age, and have always practised abstinence; and though I am not a powerful person, I enjoy the best of health, and have never troubled a doctor since I was six months old. My married women friends, on the contrary, have always some complaint or something wrong.

Who has not seen the girl married at twenty almost immediately degenerate into a nervous, haggard wreck? I deny absolutely that abstinence has any bad effect on my health.<sup>104</sup>

During the period Oliver was corresponding with the magazine she had yet to identify herself as lesbian. Unable to articulate or even recognise her own sexuality,

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<sup>103</sup> Garner (1990), p. 48.

<sup>104</sup> Kathlyn Oliver, ‘Acetism and Passion’, *FW*, 1:13 (15<sup>th</sup> February 1912), p. 252.

she adopted the more ‘natural’ culturally prescriptive orthodoxy of celibacy. Her letters attracted replies from an anonymous contributor, called A New Subscriber, whom it was at first assumed to be male, but was later revealed as the writer Stella Browne. In the following issue ‘A New Subscriber’ replies to Oliver and Watson accepting that ‘one must admit that there are many women whose constitution and temperament are what Professor Forel calls “sexually anaesthetic,” without thereby suffering any lack of mental or motor energy, or of capacity for affection, or even the maternal instinct.’ However, New Subscriber continues: ‘Let women so constituted by all means abstain from what affords them no pleasure; but do not, therefore, let them make their temperamental coldness into a rigid standard for others.’<sup>105</sup> She continues:

There is probably a far greater range of variation sexually among women than among men, and the sister or friend of the cool-blooded woman may be capable of intense sexual emotion. I have known specimens of all varieties intimately, and I can assure E. M. Watson and Kathlyn Oliver that the health, the happiness, the social usefulness, and the mental capacity of many women have been seriously impaired and sometimes totally ruined by the unnatural conditions of their lives. That there is a psychological side to the question as well as a physiological, I should be the last to deny, nor do I deny that many women have been made ill and wretched by the unrestrained indulgence of married life with ignorant or brutal husbands. There is surely a middle path between total abstinence and excess; the abuse of a natural pleasure does not make it entirely injurious and to be deprecated.

This exchange, Jeffrey claims, made Oliver a victim of Browne’s lesbian-hating diatribes as ‘we see [Browne] taking up the cudgels against spinsters as she did against lesbians.’<sup>106</sup> Jeffrey describes Browne as a ‘socialist feminist campaigner for birth control and abortion [who made] a bitter attack on a ‘spinster’ who criticised male sexuality, was interested in sex reform and a disciple of Havelock Ellis.’<sup>107</sup> Yet

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<sup>105</sup> Stella Browne ‘A New Subscriber’, ‘The Chastity of Continence?’, *FW*, 1:14 (22<sup>nd</sup> February 1912), p. 270.

<sup>106</sup> Jeffrey (1997 [1985]), p. 96.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

in the extract from Browne’s letter it is clear that Browne is not prescriptive or limited in her understanding of female sexuality. Oliver’s indignant reply on the other hand, gives no quarter assuming that:

I guess I am not far wrong in surmising that ‘A New Subscriber,’ who in this week’s issue protests against the plea of E. M. Watson and myself for Purity as well as freedom among men and women, is of the male persuasion.

This is meant as an obvious slur given that in her original letter she had coupled men together with the ‘lowest animals.’ Oliver claimed that she:

quite anticipated when I stated in your columns that abstinence had no bad effect on my health, I should be accused of not being normal.

I have been told this before by another of the male persuasion.<sup>108</sup>

However Browne responded:

I did not use the word ‘normal’ in connection with Miss Oliver, but with reference to physiological facts, e.g., to hetero-sexual intercourse in contradistinction to auto-erotism, and to the habits of those ‘lower animals’ of whom Miss Oliver disapproves so much, and knows so little. I dislike the use of the word ‘normal’ as applied to certain types of mind and temperament. There is more in human nature than most people admit.<sup>109</sup>

The exchange between Oliver and Browne lasted over several issues and was not a case of one-sided bullying. Both women were determined to articulate their points, but Browne appears to be the far more open-minded and less dogmatic of the two.

Lucy Bland observes that Browne, like Marsden, was also acutely aware of the limitations of language when discussing sex matters. In a talk given to the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, Browne stated:

The realities of women’s sexual life have been greatly obscured by the lack of any sexual vocabulary. While her brother has often learned all the slang of the street before adolescence, the conventionally ‘decently brought-up’ girl, of the

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<sup>108</sup> Kathlyn Oliver, ‘Chastity and Normality’, *FW*, 1:15 (29<sup>th</sup> February 1912), p. 290.

<sup>109</sup> Stella Browne, ‘Who are the “Normal”?’’, *FW*, 1:16 (7<sup>th</sup> March 1912), p. 313.

upper and middle classes, has no terms to define many of her sensations and experiences.<sup>110</sup>

The paper was entitled ‘The Sexual Variety and Variability among Women and Their Bearing upon Social Reconstruction’: given the use of the phrase ‘variability and variety’ the tone of Browne’s stance on heterodox sexualities sounds far from determined. Jeffreys’ assessment of Browne’s exchange with Kathlyn Oliver also elides Browne’s public declarations on same-sex relationships. As Sheila Rowbotham explains, Browne, whilst not necessarily advocating lesbian relationships as ideal, was arguably open-minded enough to warrant them as significant to women’s sexual development. ‘On the contrary’ Rowbotham observes, Browne understood that ‘women needed to recognise that we had within us both the “experimental love of variety and the permanent preference for one mate” but that women’s sexual oppression required the particular acknowledgement of “free experiment”’.<sup>111</sup> Browne stated in the same address:

Many women of quite normally directed (heterosexual) inclinations, realise in mature life, when they have experienced passion, that the devoted admiration and friendships they felt for certain girl friends had a real, though perfectly unconscious, spark of desire in its exaltation and intensity, an unmistakable indefinable note, which was absolutely lacking in many equally sincere and lasting friendships.

This statement is not the vociferous ‘lesbophobic’ opinion that Jeffreys’ critique might indicate, and as Rowbotham observes:

The emphasis on women’s sexual liberation through relations with men rather than with women seems to have been a general feature of the sex reform movement in the early twentieth century [...] Indeed the conscious assertion

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<sup>110</sup> Stella Browne, ‘The Sexual Variety and Variability among Women and Their Bearing upon Social Reconstruction’, given to the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, 1915, reprinted in Sheila Rowbotham, *A New World for Women: Stella Browne – a Socialist Feminist* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), pp.103-4, also in Bland (2001), p. 274

<sup>111</sup> Rowbotham (1977), p. 72.

of female sexuality may have contributed to a more defined cultural notion of the lesbian after the First World War.<sup>112</sup>

Browne’s argument with Oliver opposed the denial of sexual fulfilment; one that Oliver, when she identified her own latent lesbian sexuality, also agreed was no longer easy to suppress. It is worth noting that when Oliver began to accept her heterodox sexuality (in 1913) she turned to *Freewoman* contributor and author of *The Intermediate Sex*, Edward Carpenter. This decision suggests that the open-minded attitude of *The Freewoman* was ultimately a liberating environment for her. It’s arguable that the challenging exchange with Browne may have led to her final acceptance of her own sexuality, which she had hitherto denied.

Lesbians, like many heterosexual women, were struggling to articulate their desires out-with the extant hetero-normative modes of expression available to them. As Bland notes in her chapter ‘Marriage: Its Iniquities and Its Alternatives’: ‘even when there was clearly a physical relationship between two women, they did not necessarily see it as sexual, let alone lesbian’.<sup>113</sup> That lesbians existed is not in question but it is fair to say that their existence had only been partially articulated within the cultural discourses of the period. From the late nineteenth century, sexologist such as John Addington Symonds, Carpenter and Ellis began to examine the variations in sexual orientation, whilst authors such as Henry James introduced fictional representations of same-sex relationships.<sup>114</sup> By the inter-war period same-

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<sup>112</sup> Rowbotham (1977), pp. 72-3.

<sup>113</sup> Bland (2001), pp. 1124-185, p. 170.

<sup>114</sup> Carpenter, (1908). John Addington Symonds, *The Problem of Greek Ethics: A Studies in Sexual Inversion* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2002 [1883]), Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Vol. 1: Sexual Inversion* (London: Watford University Press, 1897), and Henry James, *The Bostonians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1886]). In this novel James coined the term ‘Boston Marriages’ to describe female same-sex marriage and Olive’s attraction to Verena observing that ‘she had found what she had been looking for so long – a friend of her own sex with whom she might have a union of the soul’, pp. 74-5.

sex relationships between women had become sufficiently recognised and considered ‘suspect’.<sup>115</sup> However, it is not conclusive that this ‘suspicion’ was aired or endorsed by *The Freewoman*. Bland comments that the nature of *The Freewoman*’s debate on sex was largely ‘a mixture of old and new, rooted in past feminist concerns and explanations but developing new ideas and formulations [...] Sex as “naturally” heterosexual was still implicitly assumed and lesbianism was barely mentioned’ but *The Freewoman* ‘held up a woman’s right to control her own body and fertility’.<sup>116</sup> It argued strongly against the representation of a woman’s sexuality as solely procreative, whilst advocating economic independence from marriage and familial ties. That it chose to follow a predominantly heterodox sexual agenda was more a reflection of the era within which it existed, rather than evidence that it pursued a conscientious policy of anti-lesbianism. The magazine printed material on Uranianism and whilst this was an androcentric discourse, it nevertheless challenged heteronormative sexual practices, and was, given the controversy in the wake of the Wilde trial, risqué.<sup>117</sup> Commentators – including Jeffreys – who focus on *The Freewoman*’s lack of non-heterosexual discourses, could be considered overly critical, especially in light of the fact that the magazine was banned from newspaper stands for its explicit and contentious content.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, a close reading of ‘The Spinster’ reveals that Jeffreys’ selective approach, choosing to extract passages to support her argument that the journal was anti-lesbian, removed them from their wider, clarifying context. As mentioned earlier

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<sup>115</sup> Bland (2001), p. 171.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 269-271

<sup>117</sup> Harry J. Birnstingl, ‘Uranians’, *FW*, 1:7 (4<sup>th</sup> January 1912), pp. 127-9, & ‘Uranians II’, *FW*, 1:10 (25<sup>th</sup> January 1912), pp. 189-90.

<sup>118</sup> See earlier reference p. 9, f/n. 17.

Clarke warns that ‘any given contribution of Marsden’s to *The Freewoman* is taken somewhat out of context if isolated from the wider frame of its intended repercussions.’<sup>119</sup> It is transparent that when the article is viewed in context, it is far from critical of individual spinsters but rather of the pathological ideology that constructed the spinster as a cultural ‘warning’. It reveals itself to be not only an article critical of the pervasive cult of motherhood that dominated the social, cultural and sexual development of girl children, but also a socialist indictment of the class structure that produced (socially and economically) redundant middle-class women, with no practical function. Through a series of parodies, the article operates on several discursive levels. What Jeffreys interprets as a dismissal of the spinster as a figure of ridicule, Judith Butler’s concept of performativity allows to be viewed as a critique of the role single women were forced to adopt. In Butler’s terms the spinster can be interpreted as a coercive category of identity:

It is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of significant absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purported to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.<sup>120</sup>

*The Freewoman* article is a parody of masculinist rhetoric, that defines the spinster as ridiculous and inferior, whilst declaring her to be ‘the High Priestess of Society’ who commands unparalleled ‘power and dominion’ as man’s ‘social Nemesis’. These statements are ironic and obviously meant to be tongue-in-cheek, for the one figure in

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<sup>119</sup> Clarke (1996), p. 58.

<sup>120</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble; Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 185.

society who held absolutely no power – legal, moral, or social – was the single woman. Even after the vote was granted to women by The Representation of the People Act, 1918, it was parsimonious, enfranchising only women over the age of thirty who were members of, or married to a member of, the Local Government Register, meaning many single women were still left politically powerless.<sup>121</sup>

Rather than criticising the spinster, then, ‘The Spinster’ offers a trenchant critique of biological determinism:

See how she is made, and from what. She is mothered into the world by a being, who, whatever else she may be, is not a spinster, and from this being she draws her instincts. While yet a child, these instincts are intensified and made self-conscious by the development, in her own person, of a phenomenon which is unmistakable, repellent, and recurrent with a rapid and painful certainty. This development engenders its own lassitude, and in this lassitude new instincts are set free. Little by little, the development of her entire form sets towards a single consummation, and all the while, by every kind of device, the mind is set towards the same consummation. In babyhood, she begins, with her dolls. Why do not the parents of a prospective spinster give her a gun or an engine. If Society is going to have spinsters, it should train spinsters. In girlhood, she is ushered into an atmosphere charged with sex-distinctions and sex-insinuations. She is educated on a literature saturated with these. In every book she takes up, in every play she sees, in every conversation, in every social amusement, in every interest in life she finds that the pivot upon which all interest turns is the sex interest.<sup>122</sup>

This is clearly satirical and at points borders on the absurd. How, for example, can a mother identify ‘a prospective spinster’? It antagonises traditional notions of gender by suggesting that the ‘prospective spinster’ be offered the same toys as her male counterpart; notably guns and engines that symbolise masculinity and are the antithesis of appropriate feminine activity. Aside from its satirical take on the spinster, this passage also reiterates a long-held traditional feminist premise that the key to

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<sup>121</sup> Van Wingerden (1999), p. 169: ‘To ensure that men voters would retain a majority, age and property qualifications were placed on the measure of women’s suffrage.’

<sup>122</sup> *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 10.



emancipation lay in education. In 1792 Wollstonecraft articulated the same concerns.

Criticising the poor quality education available for girls she wrote:

Educated in the enervating style recommended by the writers on whom I have been animadverting; and not having a chance, from their subordinate state in society, to recover their lost ground, is it surprising that women every where appear a defect in nature? Is it surprising, when we consider what a determinate effect an early association of ideas has on the character, that they neglect their understandings, and turn all their attention to their persons?<sup>123</sup>

In 1949, de Beauvoir stated the stultifying experience of being raised female:

Femininity is a kind of prolonged childhood that sets women apart from the ‘ideal type of race’. This biological infantilism expresses an intellectual weakness; the role of this purely affective being is that of spouse and housewife, no match for man: ‘neither instruction nor education is suitable for her.’<sup>124</sup>

*The Freewoman*’s perceived attack on the spinster was not one centred on the sex-life of single females or aimed at suppressing a woman’s choice to be sexually abstinent or lesbian, but one drawn from a legacy of individualist thinking, that poor education for girl children led to infantilism or spinsterish-ness in adults. *The Freewoman* was also determined to exploit the fact that this feeble-mindedness was as prevalent in men who persistently withdrew to ‘the sentimentalist’s chamber of self-torture to become [...] self-scourging moralist[s].’

‘The Spinster’ also challenged the traditional role and example represented by the figure of the mother, which throughout the Victorian period had become an almost sanctified position within society. Claudia Nelson argues that:

The Victorian cult of domesticity was above all a cult of maternity. The moral superiority that the nineteenth-century convention attributed to women was firmly tied to a woman’s ability to mother. Pregnancy and childbirth were often seen as evidence of an innate female predisposition to sacrifice for others

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<sup>123</sup> Wollstonecraft (1792), p. 118.

<sup>124</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]), pp. 130-1.

[...] In addition that the responsibilities of child rearing enforced an association between women and young children, who were presumed by those who accepted sentimental and Romantic tradition to be at once innocent and spiritually wise, was considered to extend this sanctifying process.<sup>125</sup>

‘The Spinster’, then, challenges not the spinster but the mother, who sets herself as an example for a child statistically unlikely to be able to follow in her footsteps. It echoes Marsden’s opening remarks in ‘Bondwoman’, that women are partly responsible for their own condition by centuries of collusion with patriarchy. As Franklin observes: ‘after the female sex had been tainted by Eve’s sin, motherhood came to signify purity, love, and redemption and became the ‘justifying function’ of women in a postlapsarian world’.<sup>126</sup> In an earlier part of the article the writer accuses society of constructing its morals and mores around the innocence of the spinster: ‘All our outward morality is made to accommodate her, and any alien, wild life impulse which clamours for release is released in secret, in shame, and under the sense of sin’.<sup>127</sup> *The Freewoman* contended that marriage and motherhood should not be held up as the only goal for woman and the over-pathologised figure of the single woman should not be contained by pejorative labels like ‘spinster’ but offered viable, fulfilling alternatives. Similarly, sentimentalism fuelled and perpetuated all idealised traditionally feminine roles for women. To summarise, the attack on the spinster is not a one-dimensional woman-hating invective as Jeffreys suggests, but a complicated polemic concerning the manner in which society inculcated women with a belief in the cult of motherhood, however unrealistic that goal may have been for many.

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<sup>125</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Greenwood ebooks, 2007), p. 46 at: <https://www.dawsonera.com/abstract/9780313050282> [Last accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2013].

<sup>126</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 127.

<sup>127</sup> *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 10.

Whilst it is true that *The Freewoman*’s relationship with the spinster is not an easy one and at times it veers perilously close to condemning those that it wished to empower, it is a motif with a distinct rhetorical purpose. The spinster is a metaphor for an over-sentimentalised version of womanhood, a caricature of lost potential, futility, and frustration. When viewed from a Nietzschean perspective – justifiable given his significant influence over Marsden – the little magazine’s relationship with the spinster can be understood in terms of its rhetorical value or referentiality and the desire for her ultimate rehabilitation into the Freewoman/individual: ‘Why do not the parents of a prospective spinster give her a gun or an engine?’ The spinster is a figure that has come into existence by a process of male and to some extent female (in the form of the mother) interpellation. For Marsden it is logical then that she can be re-interpellated, renamed, refigured, and retrained for purposes other than marriage and motherhood.

Jeffreys is not the only reader not to ‘get the joke’. In issue three a letter signed by ‘A Spinster’ opens with the lines:

I am somewhat puzzled to know whether the article on spinsters in THE FREEWOMAN of November 23<sup>rd</sup> is a heavy joke, or meant to be taken seriously. I stoutly deny that the majority of spinsters are “bloodless, boneless, meek, or shamefaced.” On the contrary, being free lancers, we are apt to have too much impetuous, unspent energy, which runs the danger of becoming tiring and tiresome, if not used and turned into a proper channel.

Ironically, whilst failing to understand the nuanced parody of the article, the correspondent pinpoints one of its key arguments by identifying herself as a breed of woman with ‘too much impetuous’ and ‘unspent energy.’ There is a strong parallel drawn between the cultural representation of the spinster and what Marsden identified as ‘the Bondwoman’: a concept that was the antithesis of the ‘Freewoman’ ideal. It is clear from the earlier articles she writes for *The Freewoman* that economic

dependence and lack of employment opportunity are closely tied up with a woman’s early education and matrimonial expectations. Marsden does not identify herself as ‘a spinster’ because she had not allowed herself to be confined to the traditional role of one. Marsden’s glib editorial response to the question posed by ‘A Spinster’ is a nod to the tone of the original article and leaves the reader in no doubt that the editor of *The Freewoman* is engaging in a cat and mouse game of wits. On being asked:

As for the everlasting question of sex, I cannot believe that all spinsters are in a perpetual state of inward moaning over an unfulfilled destiny. Surely by the time they have finally settled into the condition of spinsterhood their sense of the fitness of things should make them put this aspect of life behind them. They do not need to have violently suppressed it. Can they not think of such things as, at the age of forty-five, one would think of wearing a white muslin gown and pink ribbons?<sup>128</sup>

Marsden retorts: ‘[We have heard that there are women who can. – ED. THE FREEWOMAN.]

Writing about the periodical in 1926, West credited Marsden’s little magazine with ‘shattering, as nothing else would, as not the mere cries of intention towards independence had ever done, the romantic conception of women’. Unlike *Votes for Women*, *The Freewoman* had no intention of maintaining the feminine norms associated with the Victorian ‘cult of motherhood’ and marriage. It was also determined to disavow men of the notion that women were largely concerned with material comforts, domestic arrangements, and procreation. Unlike *Votes for Women*, which closely allied itself to modern, domestic consumerism, the *Freewoman* would concern itself not with what women could acquire but with what they could become, believing that authentic reality consisted of thought and perception rather than in

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<sup>128</sup> Letter to the Editor from ‘A Spinster’, ‘Correspondence’, *FW*, 1:3 (7<sup>th</sup> December 1911), pp. 53-4.

purchasable goods.<sup>129</sup> It denounced the idea that sex was purely a procreative urge, regularly drawing attention to the hypocrisy that existed concerning matters of female sexuality. Marsden’s intention was to refigure the language and terminology that continued to bind women to an historic and cultural (but no longer valid) image. It was important for women to gain sufficient power with which to liberate themselves from dependency on male relatives; Marsden’s egoistical individualism emphasised the importance of women taking control of their own destiny regardless of the social status quo. It was to this end that she, West, and others wrote religiously about the rights of the single woman in a modern society. The spinster was a *fin-de-siècle* figure that carried a sexually charged symbolic currency. For many feminists (including those involved with the *Freewoman*), she had come to represent a ridiculous figure that embodied all the flaws inherent in a patriarchal policy of raising female offspring for the sole functions of marriage and motherhood, functions that were becoming harder for many women to fulfil. Politically she stood for Victorian morality that denied women any claim over their own bodies and her reputation for prudery and over-sentimentalising of life provided fertile grounds for social criticism. She was the ideal fulcrum around which discourses concerning female sexuality could pivot. Whilst the figure of the spinster remained ‘feminine’, the writers of the *Freewoman* can be identified as beginning to question the inherent or deterministic nature of the sexed body: men could be spinsters (albeit the negative traits are still ‘female’ traits). Writers for *The Freewoman* were exploring the notion that the sexed body could be

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<sup>129</sup> Franklin (2002), pp. 105-151. Franklin explores the close ties that the suffrage movement had with the development of the department store. Marsden was repulsed by what she saw as the British retailers usurpation of the militant women’s suffrage movement. This became so customary in the pre- Great War years that Gordon Selfridge once claimed: ‘I helped emancipate women [...] I came along just at the time they wanted to step out on their own. They came to my store and realized some of their dreams’, pp. 99-100. Franklin does not include West’s articles, featured in *The Clarion* and *The Freewoman*, which also explore this relationship.

distinct from a person’s personality/gender and that biology was not deterministic; the spinster was the site upon which these ideas began to develop.

**‘The Isles of the Wicked’: *The Freewoman* and the Language of Sex.**<sup>130</sup>

*The Freewoman* was an example of the anti-sentimental, political, non-activist, early modernist *oeuvre* in which politics was, according to Jean Michele Rabaté, ‘filtered by a reflexive attitude’ towards ‘the issues of language, culture and history.’ He concludes: ‘In that sense, it was perhaps the first self-conscious “modernist” review’.<sup>131</sup> Putting aside its position as an early example of modernist aesthetics, Rabaté’s comment highlights a key aspect of *The Freewoman*: its self-conscious reflexivity. Marsden rejected the fixed creed and considered those espoused by others as self-limiting and hortatory. Under her editorial influence, *The Freewoman* ‘blasted’ many of what Julian Warde called ‘the commonest shibboleths of the modern movement’ and which made the magazine a fundamentally iconoclastic Feminist publication.<sup>132</sup>

In 1935, Helena Swanwick observed that the suffrage movement ‘was not primarily political; it was social, moral, psychological and profoundly religious.’<sup>133</sup> Sex and female sexuality were defining concerns of the movement, originating with Josephine Butler’s campaign against the Contagious Diseases Act in the late nineteenth century. However, whilst Butler’s campaign brought discussions of women and sex out into the open, there had been no advance in the debate about woman’s sexual desire or her right to want sex. The focus thus far in feminist history was

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<sup>130</sup> Title of West Article in *The Clarion* (28<sup>th</sup> March 1913), Marcus (1982), p. 166.

<sup>131</sup> Jean Michele Rabaté, ‘Gender and Modernism: the *Freewoman* (1911-1912), the *New Freewoman* (1913) and the *Egoist* (1914-1919) in Brooker & Thacker (2010), p. 272.

<sup>132</sup> Julian Warde, ‘The Immorality of the Marriage Contract’, *FW*, 2:31(20<sup>th</sup> June 1912), pp. 81-3.

<sup>133</sup> Kent (1987), p. 3.

largely upon a woman’s right to refuse sex, to be protected from sexual exploitation by men and her position with regards to the law. The pages of *The Freewoman* approached the issue from the opposite angle, refusing to see woman as a victim but rather as an active sexual subject with needs and desires of her own. As has been shown, the magazine revelled in candid discussions about controversial topics and was determined to rectify the belief that sex was a province of masculine urges imposed upon women, declaring it instead an area ripe for female liberation. Marsden was keenly aware of the potentially coercive nature of language and pursued a rigorous individualism demonstrating her strong desire for women to retain or gain their individuality in the face of homogenising social pressures. To some extent the magazine nurtured the idea that equality had to be universal and embrace all aspects of individual existence – corporeal, mental and spiritual – rather than purely political and confined to the vote.

One area of feminism in which *The Freewoman* was distinct from other periodicals was its frank approach to matters of sexual pleasure. Despite the distaste and disapproval shown by eminent feminists such as Schreiner, Fawcett and Royden, demand continued to grow for *Freewoman*-style discussions that addressed what Stella Browne considered to be ‘the realities of women’s sexual life,’ which had, she claimed ‘been greatly obscured by the lack of any sexual vocabulary.’<sup>134</sup> Browne’s observation identified a key concern of Marsden’s: women were continually excluded from discourses of sex. Many issues of the magazines contained forthright articles that focused on sex; for example, the issue dated Thursday May 16<sup>th</sup> 1912 led with an editorial entitled ‘Interpretations of Sex – III’. The same issue lists ‘A Sex Heresy’ by

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<sup>134</sup> Bland (2001), p. 270.

Charles J. Whitby, M.D. and included correspondence covering such topics as: ‘The Problem of Illegitimacy’; ‘The Right to Love’; ‘Passion in Procreation’; and ‘The Right to Produce.’<sup>135</sup> The ‘Interpretations of Sex’ series (from No. 24, May 2, to No. 27, May 23, 1912) was authored by Marsden and set out her position regarding sex-related issues. In the first part of the four-part editorial, she tackled the manner in which sex is discussed:

It is incumbent upon anyone who writes on ‘Sex’ that they should read dull. Whether dulness arises out of the nature of the theme, or whether dulness is a discreet buffer placed between reader and too fascinating a study, we may not presume to say, but dulness and sex discussion appear twins.<sup>136</sup>

These articles pleaded with the magazine’s readership to stop treating sex with prudish timidity: ‘In real life’, Marsden observed, ‘we flutter round sex like moths round a light, but no one is prepared to state outright what they want from it.’<sup>137</sup> A major contention for Marsden is the issue of privacy. Adopting the Millsian standpoint that some matters were out-with the realm of legislation or public concern,<sup>138</sup> Marsden, having argued that satisfaction and passion were normal parts of a non-procreative, natural sexual female urge, insisted that sexual relationships should be of no public concern stating that: ‘passion can take, and rightly take, all or any forms of expression natural to it. Its expression is a private and individual affair of no more concern to the community at large than the arrangements of one’s private room.’<sup>139</sup> The ambiguities of this statement provide further evidence to refute Jeffrey’s claim that Marsden’s periodical facilitated the perpetuation of hegemonic

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<sup>135</sup> Contents List, *FW*, 1:26 (16<sup>th</sup> May, 1912), reproduced as image in *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>136</sup> Marsden, ‘Interpretations of Sex’ in *FW*, 1:24 ( 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1912), pp. 461-2, p. 461.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> Mill, *On Liberty* (1991 [1859]), ‘Part IV: Of the Limits of the Authority of Society Over the Individual’, pp. 83-103. This essay challenges the rights of government over certain ‘private’ areas of any given individual’s life asking: ‘How much of human life should be assigned to individuality, and how much to society?’ (p. 83.) This was also a philosophical wrangle for Marsden.

<sup>139</sup> Marsden, ‘Interpretations of Sex’, *FW*, 1:24 ( 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1912), p. 461.



heterosexuality. This quotation argues for a right to privacy and control of one’s body; it is also possible that Marsden is referring to desires out-with the parameters of the normative heterosexual practices being discussed in the rest of the magazine.

Discussions over meaning, vocabulary, and referentiality dominated the magazine’s content and the conversations during the Discussion Circles highlighted the ongoing argument that language was sexed: ‘The misunderstanding lies where, between men and women, it always does lie – in the use of the same words with different meanings.’<sup>140</sup> Miriam, the heroine of Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*, pinpoints the issue by declaring that ‘by every word they use men and women mean different things [...] in speech with a man a woman is at a disadvantage because they speak different languages. She may understand his. Hers he will never speak nor understand.’<sup>141</sup> Jeffreys concedes that:

the language with which these feminists described sexuality, in terms such as ‘sexual excess’ and ‘continence’, has proved a stumbling block for contemporary feminist historians. The language available to them when they were trying to express their anxieties and their hopes was not created by the women themselves.<sup>142</sup>

Marsden rose to the intellectual challenge of redefining contemporaneous female taxonomies and their inherent cultural meanings, often framing her editorials in response to a query or argument offered by a correspondent to the journal. This subjection to external scrutiny and self-examination was typical of Marsden’s scrupulous approach to her work, as was her refusal to accept biology as destiny. Her

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<sup>140</sup> Emma Brooke in Bland (2001), p. 274. ‘Speaking of Sex’ pp. 250-296 outlines the problematic nature of talking about sex as a function by tracing back the historical trajectory of gendered language. Discourses about sex and sexuality are overtly phallogocentric and they fail to allow for the expression of female sexuality.

<sup>141</sup> Dorothy Richardson, *Pilgrimage* (1915-1938) Vol. I-IV, (London: Virago, 2002), Vol. IV, pp. 93, 230.

<sup>142</sup> Jeffreys (1997 [1985]), p. 27.

concern for the manner in which things were expressed or rather, could not be expressed, featured heavily in the ‘Interpretations’ series. These articles aimed to distinguish between ‘lust’ and ‘passion’ and developed ideas about free love, marriage, legal prostitution, same-sex attachment and more. Sex was a subject Marsden considered to be ‘too fascinating a study,’ discussion of which was hampered by the inability to sufficiently articulate such delicate matters:

When the most outspoken have said all they have to say, one is left with the impression that the part which exercised the fascination is the very one of which all remains unsaid. Is it, then, that there is nothing to say, or is it that we have not formed the concept and shaped the phrases to clothe it?<sup>143</sup>

Much of late Victorian traditional feminism assumed that women were morally superior to men who were at the mercy of an inherently licentious and promiscuous nature. This ‘natural’ male behaviour was considered responsible for the ruination of women (prostitution) and the contamination of the bodies and minds of the innocent and respectable alike. Yet in spite of this it was the women who were held legally responsible for the spread of venereal diseases and who were liable to prosecution for solicitation and prostitution. Josephine Butler’s campaign to repeal the controversial Contagious Diseases Act caused shock and disquiet; respectable women were assumed ignorant of sexual matters, especially those concerning prostitution.<sup>144</sup> After an arduous campaign, Butler succeeded in repealing the act in 1888, a move that implicitly shifted the blame and responsibility from the women to the men who used them. As previously stated, this campaign encouraged discussion about women and sexuality albeit in less explicit ways than those adopted by Marsden and her *Freewoman* staff. Likewise, Mrs Pankhurst had no qualms in discussing prostitution,

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<sup>143</sup> Marsden, ‘Interpretations’, *FW*, 1:24 (2<sup>nd</sup> May 1912), p. 461.

<sup>144</sup> Mary Turner, *The Women’s Century: A Celebration of Changing Roles* (Richmond Surrey: The National Archives, 2003), p.14.

publishing a pamphlet called *The Great Scourge and How to End It* in 1913, reiterating her feelings in 1914 declaring that the main motive behind the suffrage campaign had been Mrs Pankhurst’s ‘horror at the prevalence of filthy sexual disease and moral squalor.’<sup>145</sup> Despite this frank approach to the sex trade, Mrs Pankhurst was almost prudish when it came to discussing the sexuality of ordinary women. These debates firmly placed sex in the public sphere, making the prostitute an easy sentimental reference point and a matter for legislative and moral reform, but failed to open up discourse on issues relating to sex within the home or as a source of private female self-actualisation and/or sexual liberation. Writers such as D. H. Lawrence resented these ‘protective’ reforms as it was felt they coagulated into repressive legislation:

You can obtain one kind of Perfect Citizen by suppressing individuality and cultivating the public virtues: which has been the invariable tendency of reform and of social idealism in modern days. A real individual has a spark of danger in him, a menace to society. Quench this spark and you quench the individuality. You obtain a social unit, not an integral man. All modern progress has tended and still tends, to the production of quenched social units: dangerless beings, ideal creatures.<sup>146</sup>

These reforming movements also appalled Marsden, who rejected them as a symptom of a growing socialist ethic that aimed to homogenise society, lamenting ‘the disorder of living according to the law, the immorality of being moral and the monstrosity of the social code.’<sup>147</sup> Consequently in her editorial of December 14<sup>th</sup> 1911 Marsden, as Franklin argues:

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<sup>145</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own from Charlotte Bronte to Doris Lessing* (London: Virago, 2003 [1978]), p. 233.

<sup>146</sup> D. H. Lawrence, ‘Education of the People,’ in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, (ed) Michael Herbert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 133.

<sup>147</sup> Marsden, ‘New Morality’, *FW*, 1:4 (14<sup>th</sup> December 1911), p. 61.

propounded a new morality, encouraged the discussion of women’s sexual and psychological lives, and championed the fluid, sensual, vitalistic aesthetics that resurfaced during and after the war in works such as *The Rainbow*, *The Garden Party*, *Life and Death of Harriet Freen*, and *To The Lighthouse*.<sup>148</sup>

Marsden attributed the cultural reluctance to discuss sex frankly as a consequence of the orthodox belief that sex is a function only experienced within marriage and for the sole purposes of procreation: ‘We must consider sex neat. For it is surely a fallacy’ she claims ‘to hold that sex is primarily experienced with the motive of continuing the race.’<sup>149</sup> Marsden’s argument relied on the premise that contemporaneous thinking was based upon another false syllogism: all humans are animals; that animals only have sex to procreate; therefore humans only have sex to procreate. By disputing the major premise that human beings were subject to the same biological or physiological criteria as animals, Marsden challenged the culturally normative, quasi-religious assumption that sex is a primordial procreative urge rather than a pleasure impulse. Her stance aligned itself more with Freud and the growth in psychoanalytical thinking. This methodology of turning cultural norms into presumptive syllogisms, then proving through the use of argument that those syllogisms are at best flawed and at worst irrefutably false, was a common rhetorical ‘tick’ deployed by Marsden across the board of her writing.

The *Freewoman* was contentiously outspoken about the physical act of sex, an outspokenness that disturbed and offended a large proportion of more traditional feminists. However, despite the obvious moral differences between the *Freewoman* and journals such as *Votes for Women*, one thing that they agreed upon was the moral and ethical injustice created by the legislative inequities imposed upon women and

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<sup>148</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 24.

<sup>149</sup> Marsden, ‘Interpretations of Sex – III’, *FW*, 1:26 (16<sup>th</sup> May 1912), pp. 501-2.

their bodies. One such example was the case of ‘a much-wronged woman’, Miss Jessie Brown, which spanned two decades and several publications. Glaswegian born Miss Brown’s treatment at the hands of the legal profession had a profound impact on women across the political and feminist spectrum, to the extent that reports were still appearing over a decade after the proceedings originally took place. Miss Brown became symbolic of the outrageous legal authority men retained over the female body; a unifying concern for *Votes for Women*, *The Freewoman*, and a decade later, *Time and Tide*.

In summary: On the evening of Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> December 1907, Miss Jessie Brown was walking home and stopped to look in a shop window. She was then arrested by two plain-clothes constables for ‘having importuned five men for the purposes of prostitution.’ She was detained in custody from Friday to Monday when she appeared before the magistrate and was convicted on the sole testimony of the two officers with no other evidence being offered. After her admonishment and discharge, she took steps to vindicate her character by undergoing medical examinations but despite the affirming testimony of two eminent specialists, the residing magistrate refused her appeal. Repeated attempts to restore her reputation were rebutted, further defaming her character and the Personal Rights Association took up her case.<sup>150</sup> Three years later in an article entitled ‘A Woman’s Honour’, *Votes for Women* asserted that ‘Suffragists know that such cases are all too common. We protest against a law that makes “soliciting” a punishable offence for women but not a punishable offence for men.’<sup>151</sup> Two years after this a letter reprising the on-going case from the secretary of

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<sup>150</sup> The Personal Rights Association was founded in 1871 by Individualist Joseph Hiam Levy. Miss Jessie Brown was one of their highest profile cases.

<sup>151</sup> *VFW*, No. 188 ( 13<sup>th</sup> October 1911).

the Personal Rights Association, J. H. Levy, was published in the correspondence column of the first issue of *The New Freewoman*, although Marsden offered no editorial comment. Almost a decade later, *Time and Tide* revisited the case as part of a review of the Scottish Courts system, in particular as it related to the prosecution of prostitutes. The case of Miss Jessie Brown was one that transcended feminist factions, signalling that a woman’s right to autonomy over her own body was a concern for most women. The Brown case demonstrated that the division between social purity feminists and feminists supporting sex reform presents what Bland has called ‘a false dichotomy’, disguising the fact that ‘feminist politics were complex, contradictory, and not easily compartmentalized into two opposing camps’.<sup>152</sup> Nonetheless, within this fluid and ideologically-charged context, battle lines were drawn and *The Freewoman* became remarkable not only for the positions it took, but also for the language and rhetoric through which it prosecuted or defended them.

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<sup>152</sup> Bland (2001), p. xix.

### 1:3

#### **‘Our War is With Words [...] in Their Every Aspect’: Marsden, Rhetoric and *The Freewoman* Series.<sup>1</sup>**

Men, reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist’s state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over. Her imagination could work no longer. This I believe to be a very common experience with women writers – they are impeded by the extreme conventionality of the other sex.<sup>2</sup>

Virginia Woolf

But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.<sup>3</sup>

George Orwell

To blast the Word, to reduce it to its function of instrument [sic] is the enfranchisement of the human kind: the imminent assertion of its next reach in power.<sup>4</sup>

Dora Marsden

‘It is never a waste of time to study the history of a word,’ argues Lucien Febvre, and it was the dialectical engagement with words – their etymology, history, symbolism, and social effect – that underpinned Marsden’s rhetorical strategy as editor of a little magazine.<sup>5</sup> Helen McNeil traces this strategy throughout the magazine’s three incarnations claiming:

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<sup>1</sup> Marsden, ‘I Am’, *The Egoist: An Individualist Review*, 2:1 (1<sup>st</sup> January 1915), pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Woolf, ‘Professions for Women’ (1931) in *Virginia Woolf Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) (ed) David Bradshaw, pp.140-145, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> George Orwell, ‘Politics and the English Language’, (1946) in Carolyn Logan (ed) *Counterbalance: Gendered Perspectives on Writing and Language* (Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd., 1985), pp. 86-97, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> Marsden, ‘I Am’, *Egoist*, 2:1 (1<sup>st</sup> January 1915), pp. 1-4, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Lucien Febvre, ‘Civilisation: Evolution of a Word and a Group of Ideas’ (1930) in Peter Burke (ed) *A New Kind of History: From the Writings of Lucien Febvre* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) p. 219. Quoted in Offen (1988), p. 120.

Her shifts of emphasis are not only integral to her role of editor, they evidence the cultural role of generating responsive audience-texts. Launching her magazine from a suffragette platform, she immediately split feminism off from suffragettism and so lost the audience which put the WSPU first. After losing the symbolic capital of the suffrage struggle, Marsden’s discourses designated other audience-texts, notably those of sex reform, theosophy and later, linguistic debate. Throughout, individualism is assumed to be a given by almost all her journalists and correspondents<sup>6</sup>

What McNeil implies with the phrase ‘audience-texts’ is the readership appeal the magazine content had for any given readership. Launched on the back of her suffragist connection *The Freewoman* was targeting a specific demographic consisting of supporters of suffrage. That Marsden chose to re-name her little magazine several times showed an acute awareness of the journal’s deviation from its initial remit and from ‘traditional’ feminist discourses. These changes of nomenclature were in response to audience feedback, which expressed concerns at her anti-Pankhurstian stance. This writer/reader interactive discourse created by the editorials and articles she published created text that was consciously – according to Roland Barthes’ later identification – *scriptible*/writerly;<sup>7</sup> her articles aimed to attract interlocutors, readers who would engage dialectically rather than read passively. According to Roland Barthes, novels are either readerly or writerly; a readerly text is one that requires little effort on the part of the reader, as it presents a realistic and recognizable world and characters, unlike a writerly text that requires a far more active reader, who is required to think in order to make sense of the material.<sup>8</sup> McNeil also acknowledges Marsden’s prowess with language: ‘As a lead writer, Marsden was a rhetorician, and she knew the power of her tools, whether blunt or sharp, in other

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<sup>6</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2000), pp. 141-169, 152.

<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (London: Cape, 1957), trans. Richard Millar.

<sup>8</sup> According to the *Penguin Reference Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 725-6: ‘a writerly text tends to focus on how it is written, on the mechanics of it, the particular use of language, [it] tends to be self-conscious; it calls attention to itself as a work of art.’



hands as well as her own.’<sup>9</sup> Peter Barry asserts that during the early twentieth century there was a resurgence of interest in a ‘born-again form of Rhetoric’ as demonstrated by the linguistic experimentalism practiced by modernists and the avant-garde. Whilst modernist luminaries such as Woolf and Joyce wrote novels that intentionally challenge the reader’s passivity by creating a dynamic, synergetic, symbiotic writer/reader relationship, Marsden developed an interactive ‘writerly’ space within *The Freewoman*. Her editorials were not prescriptive, nor did they anticipate a passively accepting audience; they actively sought to be interrogated.

Modernists were the vanguard of an aesthetic and intellectual backlash against the well-intentioned, pedagogic morality of much popular Victorian literature, and the emergent mass-market realist ethos of Edwardian prose, favouring instead the writing of ‘audience-texts’ that assumed a level of intellectual engagement (or in the case of Marsden, individualism) in one’s reader. In *The Freewoman* series Marsden encouraged not only readership participation but also debate between contributors, often juxtaposing articles in order to emphasise their different stand points; for example in *The New Freewoman* October and November (1913) editions, she orchestrated a public debate with Ezra Pound by publishing a set of his articles entitled ‘A Serious Artist’, to which she replied with a series of stage-managed responses.<sup>10</sup> Given the evidence Bruce Clarke provides, this theoretical joust – instigated by Marsden – gave her the forum in which to exercise her prowess as a

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<sup>9</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2000), p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘A Serious Artist’ in *NFW*, 1:9, 10, 11 & 12. See Clarke (1996), pp.109-117.

wordsmith; Marsden parried each thrust of Pound’s argument with ‘cogent, unified and incisive’ responses that proved ‘equal to their subject.’<sup>11</sup>

Traditional modes of expression frustrated Marsden who complained that language failed ‘to advance parallel with the new differentiations of thought.’<sup>12</sup> A fascination with semiotics, signification, and deconstruction of identity and language would define the contours of her philosophical topography throughout her career. Marsden embraced new modes of expression characterized by violent imagery, black humour, and individualism.<sup>13</sup> On the cusp of the magazine becoming the *Egoist* Marsden was adamant:

*The New Freewoman* is not for the advancement of woman, but for the empowering of individuals – men and women; it is not to set woman free but to demonstrate the fact that ‘freeing’ is the individual’s affair and must be done first hand, and that individual power is the first step thereto.<sup>14</sup>

Confrontational and challenging, this rhetorical mode went against the rallying exhortation employed by *Votes for Women*, which resulted in prose that had mass-market appeal and was often, as Franklyn describes it, ‘dramatic, hyperbolic, frequently sentimental, and punctuated with exclamation points.’<sup>15</sup> Fascinated by the manner in which language was constructed around referentiality, Marsden anticipated the concept of the ‘floating signifier’, which Lévi-Strauss later defined as words that ‘represent an undetermined quantity of signification, in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning.’<sup>16</sup> For example her progressive and continual analysis

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<sup>11</sup> Clarke, (1996), p. 113.

<sup>12</sup> Marsden, *FW*, 1:26 (16<sup>th</sup> May 1912), p. 503.

<sup>13</sup> It must be noted here that Marsden’s later career, post-*The Egoist*, is marked by the degeneration of her mental health. This is the cut off point for the purposes of this thesis.

<sup>14</sup> Marsden, *NFW*, 1:2 (1<sup>st</sup> July 1913), p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics for Beginners* at The University of Aberystwyth: <http://users.aber.ac.uk/dgc/Documents/S4B/sem02a.html> [last accessed 20th August 2013].

and re-analysis of the word ‘woman’ established Marsden’s belief that ‘meanings established through language are innately fluid, indeterminate, and shifting.’<sup>17</sup> In January of 1913 she asks her readership:

Woman? Is there such a thing even as *a* woman sensed from the inside? If so, we have got to learn what it is. Never in the course of a long life have we felt ‘There, I feel *that* as a woman.’ Always things have been felt as individual and unique, as much related to other women as to other men—which is none at all; everything has been sensed as of *Ourselves*, of which the gender has yet to be learnt: the gender of the self we have yet to learn.<sup>18</sup>

In this instance, the meaning of the word ‘woman’ was so fluid, indeterminate and shifting that by July 1913, Marsden concluded it to be ‘an empty concept.’<sup>19</sup> But equally she determined that ‘we should soon have heard the last of Woman and Man spelt with capitals, and the day of the individual would be at hand.’<sup>20</sup> *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman* – in tandem with the formation of the Discussion Circles – allowed Marsden to carve out a distinct dialectical arena not only to accommodate a polyvalent conversation about sex and gender hitherto not experienced in print, but also to express her quarrel with language. In issue two of the *New Freewoman* she explained:

Our quarrel with things in general is difficult to state in words for the precise reason that the biggest part of our quarrel is against words – against ‘thoughts.’ It is a quarrel with human culture, with the kinds of labels put on things [...]<sup>21</sup>

As this quotation indicates, Marsden was prone to scrutinise philosophical problems through a philological lens and ‘demonstrated a widespread dissatisfaction with

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<sup>17</sup> Barry (2002), p. 204.

<sup>18</sup> Marsden, ‘Views and Comments’, *NFW*, 1:2 (1<sup>st</sup> July 1913), p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

grammatical structure in this form or that.’<sup>22</sup> She tackled many cultural conundrums as though they were simply problems of lexicology. Andrew Thacker claims that Marsden ‘introduced a critique of the suffragette arguments for their concern with words rather than things’.<sup>23</sup> However, it’s clear that Marsden’s complaint against the suffrage movement and *Votes for Women* was not for their concern with words, but for their lack of concern; they perpetuated a set of patriarchal significations that reinforced traditional notions of womanhood. Choosing the magazine model as her weapon of choice, Marsden could be said to be privileging the word over the body, in contrast to the Pankhursts’ policy of encouraging physical protest in which the resultant physical suffering (via arrest, imprisonment, hunger striking, and force-feeding) privileged the body over the word. Yet, paradoxically the content of *The Freewoman* focused its gaze firmly upon the corporeal woman, in particular her sexual and legal autonomy over that body. However, this can also be seen as a question of language, as Marsden’s struggle was ‘centred on the critical issue of woman’s command of language, as against language’s command of woman.’<sup>24</sup> Marsden’s rhetoric in the leaders, serials, and correspondence of *The Freewoman* periodicals demonstrated a remarkable flare for dialectics as well as a strong desire to interrogate the language that constructed the cultural, social, political, and symbolic body of woman.

Cary Franklin argues that ‘Marsden’s decision to reject the more populist and accessible style of *Votes for Women* and cast her journal as an avant-garde little

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<sup>22</sup> Thacker, *ELT* (1993), p. 188.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert & Gubar (1981), p. 236.

magazine was a decisive step in the development of feminist modernism in Britain’.<sup>25</sup>

Franklin argues:

Although Dora Marsden embraced individualism, anti-traditionalism, and anarchism, the *Freewoman’s* version of these attributes of early modernism differed from Pound’s. Whereas his taste for this political cocktail led Pound to embrace Imagism and Vorticism, Marsden’s individualism, anti-traditionalism, and anarchism led her to issue manifestoes calling for the replacement of Edwardian realist prose with writing that was sexually frank, psychologically introspective, and feminist. Well before the emergence of heroines like Miriam Henderson and Harriett Frean, Marsden began to encourage women writers to shift their focus inward ‘upon the agonized writhings of the creative soul’.<sup>26</sup>

However, Thacker proposes that as the magazine became home to Pound’s poetic coterie, Marsden’s writing colluded increasingly with, rather than differed from, his Imagist manifesto, almost at the expense of her feminism. He claims that her ‘war against the political terminology employed by the suffragettes thus develops into a more general, more emphatically modernist, critique of all words.’<sup>27</sup>

The little magazine she edited for nearly a decade existed in three guises and it is arguable that in the transition from ‘feminist’ to ‘humanist’ to ‘individualist’ Marsden’s periodical lost its feminist way. As *The Freewoman* evolved into *The New Freewoman* and subsequently *The Egoist*, so too did her feminism evolve; Marsden used this transition as an opportunity to unshackle herself from her original feminist philosophy, which was based upon the premises of ‘bondwomen’ and ‘freewomen’, creating instead the concept of a gender-free ‘individual.’ Critics such as Thacker and Joannou have argued that this shift in nomenclature signifies a decline in Marsden’s feminist preoccupation. However, whilst Marsden was concerned with the title of her

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<sup>25</sup> Marsden, ‘A Plea for Psychology,’ *FW*, 1:10 (25<sup>th</sup> January 1912), p. 181.

<sup>26</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Thacker, *ELT* (1993), p. 189.

magazine, this reflected her changing perception of what feminism was or had become, rather than a desire to slough off her feminist skin completely. Commenting in her final ‘Views and Comments’ column of the *New Freewoman* Marsden explained:

In adopting the neutral title THE EGOIST and thereby obliterating the ‘woman’ character from the journal, we do not feel that we are abandoning anything there would be wisdom in retaining [...] ‘Feminism’ was the natural reply to ‘Hominism,’ and the intent of both these was more to tighten the strings of the controversy than to reveal anything vital in the minds of the controversialists. [...] What women – awakened, emancipated, roused, and whatnot – what they *can* do, it is open for them to do; judgement as unbiased as ever it is likely to be, is ready to abide by the evidence of their work’s equality.<sup>28</sup>

Marsden clearly felt that, within the space of her magazine, the polarised concepts of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ had evolved or mutated into a more egalitarian idea of the individual, whose merit was measured by worth and ability rather than by sex. Marsden continually wrestled with the contemporary taxonomies of womanhood, so this idea of eradicating the concept of ‘woman’ was not a surprising shift. In the first issue of *The New Freewoman* Marsden began addressing how ‘Woman’ should be defined:

For fear of being guilty of supporting the power of another ‘empty concept’ we hasten to add that the term ‘Woman Movement’ is one which deserves to go the way of all such – freedom, liberty and the rest – to destruction. Accurately speaking, there *is* no ‘Woman Movement.’[sic] ‘Woman’ is doing nothing – she has, indeed, no existence. A very limited number of individual women are emphasising the fact that the first thing to be taken into account with regard to them is that they *are* individuals and cannot be lumped into a class, a sex, or a movement. They – this small number – regard themselves neither as wives, mothers, spinsters, women, nor men. They are themselves, each cut off from and differing from the rest. What each is and what each requires she proposes to find by looking into her *own* wants – not ‘*class*’ or ‘*race*’ wants – which explains her repudiation of ‘descriptions by function.’ If primarily women are to regard themselves as Woman or Mother, their satisfactions as individuals will be subordinate to an external authority: the

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<sup>28</sup> Marsden, ‘Views and Comments’, *NFW*, 1:13 (15<sup>th</sup> December 1913), p. 244.

requirements of the development of Woman or Mother as *such* – Empty concepts again.<sup>29</sup>

Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle credit Marsden’s efforts with ‘strengthening women’s resistance to universalising prescriptions about their nature and role.’<sup>30</sup> However, Marsden’s impulse to remove the term ‘woman’ once again reasserted the masculine paradigms as universally desirable goals for both the sexes. It deprived women of the opportunity to be ‘female’ and free, for freedom seems dependent upon the removal of ‘woman’, which for Marsden had become a defunct category. This approach to the problem of how to achieve equality for women ironically seems to reinforce what Jacques Derrida later identified as phallogocentrism or the privileging of the masculine in the construction of meaning.<sup>31</sup>

Referentiality was a key factor in Marsden’s ‘war on words’ and this conflict was demonstrated by her constant dissatisfaction with the name and subtitle of the periodical. When it launched Marsden was committed to a ‘feminist’ journal, one that could explore largely ignored areas of the ‘woman question’, but as previously argued feminism had a distinct meaning for women of the early twentieth century. Joannou asks the salient question, ‘How did a pioneering periodical, *The Freewoman*, turn into *The Egoist*, a flagship of literary modernism?’ continuing that ‘[t]he key stages in [Marsden’s] personal development, from New Woman to suffragette, from feminist to anarchist, taking in philosophical individualism and literary modernism en route, can

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<sup>29</sup> Marsden, ‘Views and Comments’, *NFW*, 1:1 (15<sup>th</sup> June 1913), p. 5 Marsden’s use of the phrase ‘Woman Movement’ is quite deliberate. Her use of grammar, punctuation, and language is at times idiosyncratic and unorthodox, but rarely unintentional.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Dowson & Alice Entwistle, *A History of Twentieth-Century British Women’s Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ellen K. Feder & Emily Zakin, ‘Flirting with the Truth: Derrida’s Discourse with ‘Woman’ and Wenches’ in Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson & Emily Zakin (eds) *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 21-51.

only be understood in relation to the influential intellectual currents of her day.’<sup>32</sup> The article goes on to attribute Marsden’s shifts as symptomatic of a greater cultural mood whereby artists resisted the traditions of Victorian and Edwardian ideologies in an attempt to locate a ‘new modern identity’. This is an observation that Joannou connects with Woolf’s reflective assertion that ‘[i]n or about December, 1910, human character changed.’<sup>33</sup>

It is common for critics to associate the respective labels ‘feminist’, ‘humanist’ and ‘individualist’ with the three incarnations of the magazine, but one point often overlooked by Joannou and others is the very short life-span that the label ‘feminist’ enjoyed. Many see it as the demarcation point at which the journal became more ‘literary’. However it can also be interpreted as a rhetorical slight-of-hand executed by Marsden to allow greater latitude in the material she printed, by distancing herself from a word very closely associated with the main thrust of the suffrage movement. She clearly saw the term as problematic, and adopted the term ‘humanist’ by issue 27 of the magazine. She explains the shift in her editorial note ‘The Freewoman’:

WE mark the beginning of the second volume of THE FREEWOMAN by a change in the sub-title of the paper, which in future will be described as a Weekly ‘Humanist’ Review in place of ‘Feminist’ – a description which might have been applied to the paper from the commencement, save for the fact that what was nothing more than masculinist had been accepted as ‘humanist’ in a culture which is largely male.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Joannou, *WHR* (2002), p. 595.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 595.

<sup>34</sup> Marsden, *FW*, 2:27 (23<sup>rd</sup> May 1912), p. 17.



Marsden’s naming and renaming of her little magazine was symptomatic of her preoccupation with labels, in particular those that defined women in culture. She continued:

All the reviews which are termed simply reviews are essentially masculinist, and we hold it to the credit of THE FREEWOMAN that while it has insisted that there is a neglected feminist point of view, it has never limited itself to the merely feminist. In duality of interest, in range of subjects discussed, and especially in the temper of these discussions, it has from the outset been humanist, and now that the emphasis which we have placed upon the existence of a feminist point of view has done its work, we feel we can, without danger of misinterpretation, assume that description of THE FREEWOMAN which is truer to the nature of its work and ideals.<sup>35</sup>

Marsden interpreted the referential scope of ‘feminism’ to be too limiting and exclusive. The term reflected neither the content nor the ambitions of the periodical, which she explained was about, and relevant to, both sexes.

It can, we think, be stated that the most striking feature of THE FREEWOMAN is that the earnestness of the women contributors in seeking to comprehend the masculinist point of view has been equalled by a corresponding eagerness on the part of the men contributors to comprehend the feminist, an earnestness and eagerness which have not ruled out mutual criticism. That is, we think, as it should be, and is the basis of the dual interest which we should describe as humanist. Hence the change.<sup>36</sup>

Marsden here posits the progressive notion that feminism was a universal concern; traditional gender roles, as defined by patriarchy, were destructive to men and women and equality was not merely a matter of concern for women but for men also. It is suggestive of Butler’s later contention that all gender roles are performative. In the following paragraph she also refers to the financial situation of the magazine and its need to capitalise on a broader readership, indicating that flying under a feminist banner could deter a lucrative male readership. This is a portent of the swift sidestep she performs when the magazine metamorphoses into *The Egoist*, justifying the shift

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<sup>35</sup> Marsden, *FW*, 2:27 (23<sup>rd</sup> May 1912), p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

as a response to the increasing redundancy of the word ‘woman’. How much of Marsden’s motivation to change the journal’s subheading to ‘humanist’ was prompted by the close association the term ‘feminist’ had with suffrage is a matter of conjecture, but given her increasingly virulent attacks on the WSPU, it would be logical to suggest that the shift was an embittered act of further dissociation, as well as a renegotiation of philology. The change also coincided with Gawthorpe stepping aside as sub-editor, a role she had adopted with great reluctance: Gawthorpe had advocated that Marsden curb her enthusiastic vituperation of the Pankhursts and her departure may well have liberated Marsden from the restraints imposed upon her by the loyalty and respect she held for her dear friend. It is somewhat reductive to attribute Marsden’s lexical juggling to the literary development of the successive periodicals: her vision was never a wholly literary one and the association with the avant-garde had as much to do with their determination to break the rules – ‘to make it new’ – as with synchronic aesthetic ambition. Whilst Marsden was encouraged by West, Pound, and Weaver to direct the periodical in a far more literary way, her editorials continued to privilege language and philosophy in order to forge a gender-neutral individualism.

Rhetoric was not just a matter of the syntactical arrangement of words; it also involved the physical placement of those words on the page.<sup>37</sup> By adopting a strategy of placing lead articles on the front page, Marsden deviated from the standard practice of news presses to lead with announcements or news summaries. Throughout its run, *The New Age*’s front page was dedicated to a summary of the preceding week’s

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<sup>37</sup> This is far more evident in a magazine such as *BLAST*, which is consciously intent on textual disruption.

political developments, initially called ‘The Outlook’, then ‘Notes on the Week’.<sup>38</sup> Marsden adopted the ‘Notes on the Week’ column but in contrast to *The New Age* this was always situated within the magazine. *The Times* favoured Births, Marriages and Deaths over attention-grabbing headlines, retaining main stories for inside pages.<sup>39</sup> In *The Freewoman* lead articles were presented under bold banner-style headlines and followed by sophisticated – albeit subjective – oratory, which attracted readers from the moment they picked up the journal. These leaders always resonated with Marsden’s distinctive ‘accent’; accent is defined here as ‘a mode of utterance peculiar to an individual, locality or nation’ with these terms mapping onto Marsden, the magazine, and the concept of the Freewoman/individual respectively. As Stanley Fish has remarked, ‘he who speaks “in accent” speaks from a particular *angled* perspective into which he tries to draw his auditors; he also speaks in the rhythms of song, (etymologically “accent” means “song added to speech”), which [...] “*charms* the sense.”’ Whilst Marsden’s ‘accent’ could be persuasive or charming to those situated within the ‘locality’ of the magazine or who constituted a citizen of the ‘nation’ it sought to create, it could also be abrasive to the ear of those with little tolerance for her specific dialect. She used a language that reflected her own partisan agenda and desires, to the effect of colouring and distorting the facts.<sup>40</sup> This distinct ‘accent’ in some ways replaced the obligatory ‘creed’ espoused by the suffrage journals and thus helped to establish a common body or society – that of the Freewoman. Yet the creeds of other suffrage journals can also be seen as ‘accents’ and operationally these accents

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<sup>38</sup> There are one or two exceptions to this – e.g. 6:1 (4<sup>th</sup> November 1909) led with a full page illustration titled ‘UNMASKED.’

<sup>39</sup> Again, there was the odd exception to this when *The Times* led with a prominent story – however it was standard practice to lead with Announcements.

<sup>40</sup> Stanley Fish, ‘Rhetoric’ in Frank Lentricchia & Thomas McLaughlin (eds) *Critical Terms for Literary Study* second edition (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 203-222, p. 205.

or creeds functioned similarly to manifestos. While Marsden appeared to circumvent this way of creating a collective identity (which would have been antithetical to her idea of the individual), by claiming to promote no single cause, nevertheless her ‘accent’ performed similarly to suffrage journal creeds.

A common feature of Marsden’s ‘accent’ was her use of rhetorical ‘ticks’ or strategies, in particular: the repetition of key words such as ‘Freewoman’, ‘Bondwoman’, and ‘individual’ which help formulate an oppositional cult to that of motherhood; the cult of the individual; the linking of editorial to correspondence or published articles; the deconstruction of cultural syllogisms. One such tick was Marsden’s rhetorical deployment of the Nietzschean master-slave trope, which was common currency in Edwardian discourse. Theresa Billington-Grieg for example, had made use of this trope in a series of articles for *The New Age* called ‘Emancipation in a Hurry’, in which she articulated her feelings about the limitations of suffrage:

In breaking my long connection with the militant suffrage movement I win back for myself that right of frank and free speech which membership and official position have denied me. It is my intention to make a first use of this new liberty to analyse the militant movement itself and to survey the gains and losses that have accrued from our five years’ campaign of emancipation in a hurry [...]<sup>41</sup>

Billington-Grieg, like Marsden, rejected the notion that the vote would provide women with ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ as the militants proclaimed. Having no desire to ‘belittle the effect of what will amount to a national acceptance of sex-equality’, Billington-Grieg argues that the protagonists of the WSPU:

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<sup>41</sup> Theresa Billington-Grieg, ‘Emancipation in a Hurry’ published in three parts in *The New Age: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature and Art*, 8:11-13, (12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup> January 1911 respectively). Inaccurately referenced in Garner (1990) as appearing in issue 8:20 ( 16<sup>th</sup> March 1911), 8:11, p. 246. See MJP at: [http://dl.lib.brown.edu/mjp/render.php?view=mjp\\_object&id=1158589415603817](http://dl.lib.brown.edu/mjp/render.php?view=mjp_object&id=1158589415603817) [last accessed 20<sup>th</sup> August 2013].

do not recognise that the woman with a restricted outlook can only express herself within its limits, and that the crude shallowness, sex-opinionation, and resentment which pass for enthusiasm among them, do not supply the best training for the serious work of emancipation by law-making.<sup>42</sup>

Billington-Grieg understood that the narrow political remit of the vote would not open all the doors necessary for women to become fully emancipated from centuries of patriarchal dominance. She anticipated the *Freewoman* perspective:

The vote cannot secure of itself any single woman’s emancipation. It is a tool; and the kind of work that can be done with it depends first upon the nature of the tool and, second upon the capacity of the person who uses it. Both these conditions seem to have been forgotten by the militant apologists. They fail to see that large areas in which emancipation is needed lie entirely outside the scope of the vote. They forget that a slave woman with a vote will still be essentially a slave.<sup>43</sup>

In the same series Billington-Grieg also called for: ‘a new statement of the feminist position – I suggest the discontented and disgusted feminists – and those who are merely truth seekers! – should combine to provide a feminist platform in every town and city in the country.’<sup>44</sup> This statement mandated the need for a new woman’s periodical that could broaden the scope of current feminist debate.

The idea of woman as ‘slave’ to man’s ‘master’ was also familiar to contemporary readers as it regularly appeared in literature, including H. G. Wells’ *Ann Veronica*. Despite Wells’ eponymous heroine successfully carving out a niche for herself as a freethinking Bohemian ‘new woman’, Ann Veronica eventually succumbs to the ‘natural’ inevitability of marriage to a ‘superior’ man:

[A woman needs] a proper alliance with a man, a man who is better stuff than herself. She wants that and needs it more than anything else in the world. It may not be just, it may not be fair, but things are so. It isn’t law, nor custom, nor masculine violence settled that. It is just how things happen to be. She

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<sup>42</sup> Billington-Grieg, ‘Emancipation’, *NA*, 8:13 (26<sup>th</sup> January 1911), p. 294.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

wants to be free—she wants to be legally and economically free, so as not to be subject to the wrong man; but only God, who made the world, can alter things to prevent her being slave to the right one.<sup>45</sup>

It was this biblical determinism that Marsden was challenging in ‘Bondwomen’. The editorial ‘Bondwomen’ opened with the question ‘Who are the Freewomen?’ claiming their number to be about ‘ten in the British Isles’, one of whom is the actress Ellen Terry. Of the rest she announces: ‘the inquisitors must be content with being enabled to arrive at the conception of Freewomen by way of a description of Bondwomen.’ In the absence of concrete examples, the Freewoman becomes, in Saussurean terms, a ‘relational concept’ and can only be defined in context with its antithesis, the ‘Bondwoman’. So, what then are ‘Bondwomen’? Marsden writes:

Bondwomen are the women who are not separate spiritual entities – who are not individuals. They are complements merely. By habit of thought, by form of activity, and largely by preference, they round off the personality of some other individual, rather than create or cultivate their own. Most women, as far back as we have any record, have fitted into this conception, and it has borne itself out in instinctive working practice.

At this juncture, there are two distinct sexes: man and woman; or to be more precise, man and ‘Bondwoman’. ‘Freewomen’ are defined by their alterity to ‘Bondwomen’. The ‘Freewoman’ is no longer a woman in the same sense that a ‘Bondwoman’ is. Marsden continues:

And in the Midst of all this there comes a cry that woman is an individual, and that because she is an individual she must be set free. It would be nearer the truth to say that if she is an individual she *is* free, and will act like those who are free. The doubtful aspect in the situation is as to whether woman are or can be individuals – that is free – and whether there is not danger, under the circumstances, in labelling them free thus giving them the liberty the action which is allowed to the free. It is doubt and fear which is behind the opposition which is being offered in the vanguard of those who are “asking for

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<sup>45</sup> H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2010 [1904]), p. 131.

freedom” [...] The opponents of the Freewoman are not actuated by spleen or by stupidity, but by dread.<sup>46</sup>

The Freewoman is somehow transcendent and has become an ‘individual’, a term which whilst problematic, strives towards a goal of de-categorising ‘women’ as a ‘natural group’. Marsden’s words anticipate the aims of later feminists such as Monique Wittig and Simone de Beauvoir when questioning of the relevance of the word ‘woman.’ De Beauvoir claims that woman is merely a myth stating: ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychical, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society: it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch, that is called feminine.’<sup>47</sup> In a passage from *Les Guérillères*, that shares a strong philosophical resonance with Marsden’s ‘Bondwoman,’ and adopts the same Nietzschean master/slave trope so familiar to *Freewoman* readers, Wittig states:

Men have expelled you from the world of symbols and yet they have given you names, they have called you slave, you unhappy slave. Masters, they have exercised their right as master. They write, of their authority to accord names, that it goes back so far that the origin of language itself may be considered an act of authority emanating from those who dominate [...] the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you.<sup>48</sup>

Whilst not specifically dealing with sexuality, Marsden anticipates Wittig’s argument that ‘woman’ becomes a redundant category for those who do not identify with the rules that dictate gender expectations. Thacker also argues that Marsden, by ‘jettisoning the discursive comfort of the symbolic’ in favour of the Imagist’s call for ‘direct treatment of the thing’ was acting similarly to other female modernists who were also investigating the relationship between women, representation, and

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<sup>46</sup> Marsden, ‘Bondwomen’ in *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]) p. 293. Quoted in Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985 [c.1971]), p. 112.

language. She, like so many, had become disheartened with the Pankhursts’ appropriation of the female body as a site for ‘symbolic public martyrdom.’<sup>49</sup> Wittig’s claim that early feminists ‘still believed as men do, that the cause (origin) of their oppression lay within themselves,’ accounts for the problem some modern-day feminists face whilst grappling with Marsden’s ‘masculinist’ linguistic register.<sup>50</sup> Even though Marsden expressed the opinion that women were often complicit in their oppression she never goes as far as to blame them as the origin of it; however, she did hold them as entirely responsible for their own emancipation from it. Like Wittig, Marsden did not attribute the source of woman’s oppression to the essentialist ideas of nature or biology but to social, political, cultural, and economic circumstances.<sup>51</sup> She also anticipates Wittig’s idea that ‘the category “woman” as well as the category “man” are political and economic categories not eternal ones.’<sup>52</sup>

Throughout her article ‘Bondwomen’ Marsden’s reiterates the words ‘free’ and ‘individual’ whilst reinforcing their meaning with the synonyms, ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ to maximise the effect of association on the reader. However, Marsden never clarifies or determines what exactly she means by ‘individual’ even though the intention is for it to replace ‘mother’, ‘wife’, ‘spinster’, and other symbolic female labels. However, she does suggest that men have colonised the term ‘individual’ and that in order for women to become residents within this privileged terrain, they must think themselves free, a mental process that would enable them to traverse the boundaries impenetrable to the ‘Bondwoman’. It is unclear whether Marsden’s

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<sup>49</sup> Thacker, *ELT* (1993), p. 185.

<sup>50</sup> Wittig (1992), p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Wittig writes: ‘It so happens that feminism in the last century could never resolve its contradictions on the subject of nature/culture, women/society. Women started to fight for themselves as a group and rightly considered that they shared common features as a result of oppression. But for them these features were natural and biological, rather than social.’ Wittig (1992), p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> Wittig (1992), p. 15.



intention is to create a new society of individuals who are androgynous, wholly masculine or something as yet unexplained; it is unclear whether the term would deny, tolerate or embrace ‘feminine’ states of being. In an interview with the *Evening Standard* and *St James Gazette* given in the October prior to *The Freewoman’s* launch, Marsden claimed the periodical would redefine the term ‘feminism’ to ‘give it new significance’ insisting that:

Woman is a distinct entity [...] she must be taught that she is not an adjunct to man [...] in an ideal condition she would be released from the narrow conditions of the household and free to make her own contribution to the labour of mankind in that sphere to which she had a bent.<sup>53</sup>

The phrase ‘Woman is a *distinct* entity’ (emphasis added) is categoric. However, in ‘Bondwomen’ the entity of ‘woman’ is less than distinct; it becomes multiple and blurred. It is unclear that when Marsden refers to ‘woman’ as a ‘distinct entity’ whether or not she means all women, bonded or free, or merely Freewomen, a category that, by her own recommendation, should be subsumed by the term ‘individual.’ The ‘Bondwoman’ article attempts to determine the logic behind man’s low opinion of women, claiming:

Out of his own experience of her, he knows her to be a follower, one who has always been ready to sacrifice herself to him and his interests. He would have sacrificed himself for nothing, save his own ideas; but she has always revelled somberly in sacrificing herself for anything or anybody, for duty, for peace, husband, parents, children. And this, after all, is what speaks far more eloquently than a tome of argument to the ordinary man. It tells him that nothing has ever crossed her mind regarding herself which has appeared to her too good to be sacrificed to anything on earth, itself excepting. He therefore quite naturally argues that she has acted like a second because she felt herself a second.<sup>54</sup>

But on the matter of how this situation has arisen Marsden is less forthcoming stating that: ‘How women have fallen to this position is a moot point. It is yet to be decided

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<sup>53</sup> Garner (1990), p. 57.

<sup>54</sup> Marsden, ‘Bondwoman’, *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911) p. 2.

whether they ever did fall – whether man and woman have not been, from their creation, master and servant.’<sup>55</sup> Despite opposing biological determinism Marsden here asserts that the hierarchical relationship of man and woman was part of a natural order; an order that women must somehow revoke through a self-conscious awakening. As Thacker has observed:

The difficulty for certain women of ‘growing’ their own subjectivity does not seem to have troubled Marsden. Creation of self-identity for Marsden is a Nietzschean effort: strenuous, solitary and distinct from any sense of feminist community. Language only stifles the individual ego, male or female, from self-realization. Raymond Williams has argued that this position, where language is seen as ‘blocking or making difficulties for authentic consciousness,’ is one of two attitudes towards language that are wide-spread in modernism.<sup>56</sup>

This cogent dismissal demonstrates Garner’s assertion that Marsden’s opinion often ‘lacked realism and was expressed in inexorable prose’ based upon ‘unsubstantiated assertion’ rather than solid argument: in other words, she was entranced more by the artistry of the argument, rather than by its practical application.<sup>57</sup> Woolf’s ‘woman’s sentence’ presents a similar conundrum to Gilbert and Gubar who conclude that Woolf is not seeking to ‘revise woman’s language but woman’s relation to language’; she is playing out what is essentially a ‘fantasy about a utopian linguistic structure.’<sup>58</sup> When faced with any philosophical ‘obstacles’, Marsden was not averse to sidestepping the issue with ambiguity or subterfuge. Though in this instance the question of ‘why’ women were always subordinated was partially addressed in 1913,

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<sup>55</sup> Marsden, ‘Bondwoman’, *FW*, 1:1, (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Thacker, *ELT*, (1993), p.189.

<sup>57</sup> Garner, (1990), pp.145,147.

<sup>58</sup> Gilbert & Gubar (1988), pp. 229-30.

when Marsden published a series of six articles called ‘The Eclipse of Woman’ in *The New Freewoman*.<sup>59</sup>

Irrespective of her argument, there is strong evidence to suggest that Marsden adopted a masculinist style, especially when using phrases such as: ‘Woman [...] is an empty concept and should be banished from the language’; and ‘in adopting the neutral title of *The Egoist* and thereby obliterating the “woman” character from the journal, we do not feel we are abandoning anything there would be wisdom in retaining’.<sup>60</sup> However, this rhetorical gendering is problematic. When talking about West’s early writings Lyn Pykett claims that ‘much of West’s early journalism was produced in a milieu which was still largely the domain of men, and there is almost certainly an element of male mimicry in the voice she developed to establish herself in that milieu.’<sup>61</sup> It may seem harsh to conclude that a woman who writes with wit, clarity, acerbity, authority and independence is somehow merely performing an act of male mimicry or ventriloquism, but in fact it was almost compulsory for a woman of this era to perform in this way in order to gain credibility in the professions. In the early part of the twentieth-century women were unable ‘to name, and thus claim, even, the functions of their body’ with the language available to them.<sup>62</sup> Pykett identifies the problem faced by women writers such as Marsden and West, who, in order to eradicate the sentimental idioms that characterized ‘feminine’ writing and lacking any credible alternative, were forced to adapt a language that was not representational for women but was associated with the dominant educated masculine

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<sup>59</sup> F.R.A.I., ‘The Eclipse of Woman’, *NFW*, 1:1 (15<sup>th</sup> June 1913) pp. 11-12, 1:2 (1<sup>st</sup> July 1913), pp. 29-30, 1:3 (15<sup>th</sup> July 1913), pp. 47-8, 1:4 (1<sup>st</sup> August 1913), pp. 69-70, 1:5 (15<sup>th</sup> August 1913), pp. 85-6, 1:6 (1<sup>st</sup> September 1913), pp. 106-7.

<sup>60</sup> Marsden, ‘Views and Comments’, *NFW*, 1:13 (15<sup>th</sup> December 1913), p. 244.

<sup>61</sup> Lyn Pykett, ‘The Making of a Modern Woman Writer: Rebecca West’s Journalism, (1911-1930)’ in Campbell (2000), pp. 170-189, p. 185

<sup>62</sup> Gilbert & Gubar (1988), p. 232.

idiom. As de Beauvoir observed in 1948: ‘Representation of the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with truth.’<sup>63</sup> The symbolic power and productiveness of language represented different things for men and women, as it often implicitly reasserted the sexual power and subordination that existed between them.

The ‘masculine’ tenor of Marsden – and equally West’s – rhetorical style has caused modern critics to question their commitment to feminism. The problems that faced women writers because of the manner in which they chose to express themselves was one that Woolf also faced in her early career. Writing in ‘Professions for Women’ Woolf outlined the situation that she and many of her contemporaries had faced in their quest to become professional writers. The ‘Angel in the House’ was something of a spectre at the feast for many of Woolf’s female contemporaries and Woolf describes her as ‘a certain phantom’ claiming:

it was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. You who come of a younger and happier generation may not have heard of her – you may not know what I mean by the Angel in the House.<sup>64</sup>

Though Woolf is writing at the beginning of the 1930s, her acknowledgement of her audience as the ‘younger and happier generation’ indicates that she is referring back to an earlier time at the start of her professional career, which coincided with the period in which Marsden and West came to prominence. She further describes the Angel as:

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<sup>63</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]), p. 164.

<sup>64</sup> Virginia Woolf, ‘Professions for Women’ (1931) in Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*, (ed) David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), pp. 140-45, p. 141.

intensely sympathetic ... immensely charming ... utterly unselfish ... excelled in the difficult arts of family life ... sacrificed herself daily ... if there were a chicken, she took the leg; if there were a draught she sat in it ... she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others ... she was pure.<sup>65</sup>

The similarities between Woolf’s depiction of the angel and Marsden’s account of the Bondwoman’s self-sacrifice are considerable; just as the Bondwoman inhibits a woman’s ability to become an individual, so the angel inhibits Woolf’s capacity to write as herself. When Woolf comes to write her reviews of male novels she hears the angel whispering to her:

‘My dear you are a young woman. You are writing about a novel by a famous man. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be pure.’ And she made as if to guide my pen.<sup>66</sup>

As a metaphor, the Angel represented generations of cultural conditioning that cast women in a prescribed role, a role that was hard to cast off. It summarises aptly the stultifying way in which women were expected to write and why many, including Marsden and West, chose not to flatter, sympathise, or to use all the wiles of their sex, but to speak frankly, honestly and with less restraint than their forbears. Pykett’s uncomfortable term ‘male mimicry’ implies a certain deference or admiration, but for Marsden, West and others it was an essential step in the process of silencing the Angel’s pervasive whisper because at this point women writers were still labouring under the assumption ‘that “men’s language” [was] “language.”’<sup>67</sup> As a reviewer West gathered a reputation for her strenuous critique especially of formidable male writers, and it can be argued that this was one way in which she could, like Woolf, slaughter

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<sup>65</sup> Woolf (2008 [1931]), p. 141.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>67</sup> Gilbert and Gubar (1988), p. 236.

the Angel because ‘[k]illing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer.’<sup>68</sup>

Adopting a masculine tone was part of a woman’s rebellious repertoire in seeking to defy the sentimental expectations imposed upon her sex. It was not adopted to flatter or inflate the male ego but rather to prove a point; a point that demonstrated the brain was not fixed in its sexed gender and that women were equal. Woolf expressed her dissatisfaction with this kind of ‘mind gendering’ in her 1929 feminist tract *A Room of One’s Own* in which she asserted the need for a creative androgyny. In the words of Elizabeth Wright this would allow ‘men and women the chance to write without consciousness of their sex – the result of which would ideally result in uninhibited creativity.’<sup>69</sup> Marsden and West were innovators in attempting to write in an androgynous fashion, though in attempting to do so they were vehemently critical of nearly all things deemed ‘feminine’, which created an unfortunate paradox by once more privileging the masculine. As Wright explains, Woolf’s androgynous mind was more balanced in its gendering and represented:

a way of thinking that would enable women and by implication men to write as themselves, still in a sexed body, but without the attendant prejudices and discriminations that are connected to the body by society. To write without consciousness of sex is to see the piece of work for itself not as its author.<sup>70</sup>

When Stella Browne wrote under the epithet of ‘A New Subscriber’ the assumption was made that she must be male. If West’s reviews and articles had been similarly anonymous her peers would have found it difficult to ‘sex’ the author and the assumption would have been likely made they were written by a man, for women did

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<sup>68</sup> Woolf (2008 [1931]), p. 142.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Wright, ‘Re-evaluating Woolf’s Androgynous Mind’, *University of Durham Postgraduate English*, Issue 14, 2006 at: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english/journal1.htm> [last accessed 23rd September 2013].

<sup>70</sup> Wright (2006), p. 8.

not discuss sex frankly or criticise male authors so intelligently and with such acerbity. Readers were often unaware of the sexed body that wrote articles signed off with an ambiguous pseudonym. For example, the series of articles entitled ‘The Eclipse of Women’, was anonymously authored by a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, whose sex remains a mystery.<sup>71</sup> Yet, in mitigation of the case against the ‘male impersonator,’ these women never lost sight of their feminist values or allegiances.

In an age that derided the ‘sentimental mush’ associated with the majority of woman’s writing, the balance between male mimicry and female masculinity was far more nuanced and difficult to determine. Reflecting back, West considered the problem in her essay ‘Woman as Artist and Thinker’ (1931) declaring that ‘[t]here have been very few women thinkers and artists [...] that is to say women who have not adopted masculine values as a basis for their work’.<sup>72</sup> In this article, which echoes Woolf’s sentiments in *A Room of One’s Own*, she argues that women have the same intellectual capacity as men and create art in a similar fashion, yet they were perpetually held to a different standard purely on the basis of their sex.<sup>73</sup> This different standard partly relied upon society’s expectation that women be chaste; or as West phrased it: ‘The first and most deadly factors are the reactions of the community to

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<sup>71</sup> This series is authored by F.R.A.I. an organisation that first admitted women to its fellowship in 1875 but it seems likely that this series of articles was actually written by C. Gasquoine Hartley (Mrs. Walter Gallichan) the author of *The Truth About Woman* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1913) the contents of which contain material remarkably similar in content and style to the ‘Eclipse’ articles. An advert for this book appears in *NFW*, 1:3 ( 15<sup>th</sup> June 1913), pp. 11-12 and is situated in the middle of article III of the ‘Eclipse’ series. However Hartley does not appear on the register of Fellows in 1912 nor 1913. Information kindly provided by Sarah Walpole, Archivist and Photo Curator for the Royal Anthropological Institute. Preliminary enquiries have been unable to ascertain the identity of the author.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted by Hynes in West, (1983 [1978]) (source unidentified), p. ix.

<sup>73</sup> Carl Rollyson, *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2007), p. 82.

two physical attributes peculiar to women: the hymen and the uterus.’<sup>74</sup> These essentialist attributes, which designated women’s main purpose as wife and mother were antithetical to Marsden and supporters of *The Freewoman*. Marsden considered: ‘Monogamy was always based upon the intellectual apathy and insensitiveness of married women, who fulfilled their own ideal at the expense of the Spinster and the Prostitute.’<sup>75</sup>

Monogamy, like chastity or promiscuity, was part of the greater discourse that circulated about a woman’s rights over her own body. It perpetuated the ideal of ‘purity’ even for women who were ‘legitimately’ sexually active. Quoting Marsden, Garner describes it thus: ‘Monogamy’s four cornerstones were “men’s hypocrisy, the spinster’s dumb resignation, the prostitute’s unsightly degradation and the married woman’s monopoly.”’<sup>76</sup> She went even further to describe marriage as an institution of ‘indissoluble monogamy’, which she considered to be ‘blunderingly stupid’ as it allowed married women to fulfill their ‘own ideal at the expense of the Spinster and the Prostitute [...] producing deceit, sensuality, vice, promiscuity and an unfair monopoly.’<sup>77</sup> The idea that monogamy was a married woman’s ‘own ideal’ is controversial, but Marsden deployed it as a weapon against marriage’s moral monopoly on sex. In her eyes it deprived the single woman the right to a sexual life and encouraged prostitution: ‘Thus, monogamy has maintained itself by means of the support of men’s hypocrisy, the spinsters’ dumb resignation, the prostitutes’ unsightly degradation, and the married women’s monopoly and satisfaction.’<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> West (2005 [1931]), p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> Marsden, ‘The New Morality – III’, *FW*, 1:7 (4<sup>th</sup> January 1912), pp. 121-2.

<sup>76</sup> Garner, (1990), p. 65.

<sup>77</sup> Marsden, ‘The New Morality – III’, *FW*, 1:7 (4<sup>th</sup> January 1912), pp. 121-2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.



West shared Marsden’s view of monogamy, picking up the idea of ‘indissoluble monogamy’ in much of her early fiction. She also defended women writers such as George Sands, who, because they were ‘polyandrous’, were deemed to be sluts: ‘Her books are spoken of as if they were the equivalent of a too opulent bosom heaving behind a soiled kerchief above shamelessly constricting corsets.’<sup>79</sup> After describing Sands’ relationships with Flaubert and Chopin she denounces the prevalent claims that Sands’ creativity was some by-product of her relationship with two great male minds (a sensitive issue for West whose relationship with Wells coloured her early career.) West states:

But the true story has had no chance to survive in the face of the public’s desire to see the creative woman as a vampire who must owe her own creativeness (since that cannot be conceded as natural to her sex) to her theft of some man’s virility. It is the same accusation that is made in the book of proverbs against an unchaste woman. “For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulterous will hunt for the precious life.”<sup>80</sup>

West here explores the cultural notion that a woman artist is nothing more than an incubus succored by the talents of her male lover, rather than in command of any talent of her own. As Samuel Hynes has pointed out in his introduction to *The Essential Rebecca West*, West was not defining women artists and thinkers as those that were ‘explicitly or exclusively feminine, but rather [suggesting] that they should be free to realize their gifts without considering the roles that social definitions and gender impose.’<sup>81</sup> Just as Woolf’s androgynous mind was ‘resonant and porous [...] naturally creative, incandescent and undivided’ so West believed the mind should be a

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<sup>79</sup> West, (2005 [1931]), p. 16.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> Hynes in West (1983 [1978]), p. ix.

‘mirror in which to reflect life’ rather than an organ that reflected the self.<sup>82</sup> This was very much an ethos underpinned by *The Freewoman* series; Marsden held firm that regardless of their sex, contributors and correspondents should be free to express themselves, on whatever subject matter they regarded as important, without the incumbent male/female prejudices imposed upon them.

Much of Marsden’s writing can and does cause modern-day feminists some consternation and inevitably raises questions regarding Marsden’s peculiar brand of feminism; yet its influence on West was considerable, and is crucial to an understanding of the younger woman’s ‘sex antagonism’. Marsden was part of an early twentieth-century movement of women writers trying to invent strategies of ‘unnaming’ and ‘renaming’ their patronymic identities.<sup>83</sup> Marsden saw egoism or individualism as the perfect antidote to the oppressive Victorian doctrine of self-control. It transgressed the patriarchal mores governing women’s behaviour, which advocated the suppression of the female self and ego in order to fully participated in their designated social roles: ‘it was the ego that was thought to get in the way of smoothing back into one’s accepted social role and creating such chaotic unhappiness. Bad to have an ego. One must exercise self-control.’<sup>84</sup> For a woman to declare herself a Freewoman/individual/egoist during this period was an act of transgression that confronted normative gender roles. Freewomen believed the Stirnerean Gospel that: ‘There is no Woman, only a human Ego. Humanity is a convenient fiction to harry the individualist. So society, family, are the clamps that compress the soul of woman. If

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<sup>82</sup> Woolf (1993 [1929]), p. 89.

<sup>83</sup> Gilbert & Gubar (1988), p. 237.

<sup>84</sup> Kate Zambreno, *Heroines* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012), p. 54.

woman is to be free she must first be an individual, an Ego.’<sup>85</sup> Marsden’s individualism was part of a literary pattern created by early twentieth-century women writers who sought a route to self-signification by de-mythologising the taxonomies of patronymic traditions. ‘Bondwomen’ were guilty of trading their individualism or freedom in return for male protection. Becoming a ‘Freewoman’ was a conscious act of ‘becoming’ that hinged upon the desire *to be* a ‘Freewoman’ without which women were destined, by their own lack, to be enslaved. Marsden made no allowances for centuries of cultural conditioning or male oppression. She denied biology any significance, claiming that: ‘If we take “female organs” away from this concept Woman, what have we left? Absolutely nothing, save a mountain of sentimental mush, such as a we have when we take away the definite action of breaking through a barrier from the concept “freedom.”’<sup>86</sup> These confrontational comments were ameliorated in part, by Marsden’s explication in *The Egoist* (1<sup>st</sup> January 1915) that the ‘only task in a Verbal age like this is to break the hypnotic spell, to blast the stupefactions of – The Word.’<sup>87</sup> Her war was with the language that valorized the masculine and constructed the idea/concept of woman through its patriarchal rhetoric, rather than with woman herself. At times it can be argued that Marsden’s feminist rhetoric adopts an eristic tone, whereby she seems to argue with no goal other than to win a somewhat pyrrhic victory in the sex war.

Taxonomies, labels, definitions, and stereotypes were clearly a problem for Marsden who struggled with recalibrating the way in which culture and society branded Woman. However, her decision effectively to replace one set of taxonomies

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<sup>85</sup> James Huneker, *Egoists: A Book of Supermen* (New York: Scribner’s, 1909), p. 361.

<sup>86</sup> Marsden, ‘Views and Comments’, *NFW*, 1:2 (1<sup>st</sup> July 1913), p. 24.

<sup>87</sup> Marsden, ‘I AM’, *Egoist*, 2:1 (1<sup>st</sup> January 1915), p. 1.

with another was equally problematic, no matter how she tried to conceal this through hyperbole or wit. However, given its context at a time when women were trying to establish their eligibility for the most basic legal rights already accorded to men (including the vote), it is not surprising that Marsden balked at the restrictions imposed upon women by the common female taxonomies. Labels such as wife, mother, spinster, and daughter were all taxonomies that denied women any public or legal autonomy and confined them to the domestic sphere. Marsden in effect was challenging the referentiality of language by undermining the authority of pejorative female/ feminine signifiers. As has been argued by feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, women’s access to language, both historically and contemporarily, is problematic as language automatically privileges the masculine, thus demoting women to a secondary or ‘othered’ positioning.<sup>88</sup> Marsden (perhaps in a ‘spontaneous, naïve, and humanistic’ way) deduced that the excision of these cankerous labels offered one solution to the problem.<sup>89</sup> Whilst it is easy to criticise early feminists who wrestle with these concepts, it is worth acknowledging the difficulties of their socio-cultural concept and the obstacles to be surmounted. In order to gain ‘male’ respect they were forced to eschew what could be perceived as ‘feminine’ modes of expression. Janet Lyon claims that ‘[by] linking their cause rhetorically with the democratic struggles that had traditionally driven the evolution of political modernity,

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<sup>88</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ in Vincent B. Leitch (Gen. Ed.) *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (London: WW Norton, 2001) pp. 2039-2056 and Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). Both Cixous and Irigaray explore ways in which women can be released from the restrictions imposed on them by a patriarchal language. Cixous does this through the development of *l’écriture féminine*, whilst Irigaray exposes the perceived masculine philosophy that underpins language encouraging the development of a new ‘feminine’ language that would empower women to be able to fully express themselves without compromise.

<sup>89</sup> Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974) p. 422 translated in Clark (1991) p. 51. This idea has been adapted from Clark’s hypothesis about the Symbolist revolution upon poetic language and how its radical turn to musicality raised questions about language’s referentiality. Clark is referring to Emma Goldman, but the idea is broadly applicable to other feminist writers and poets, including Marsden.

suffragists sought to make their manifestos intelligible within an established liberatory framework.’<sup>90</sup> Feminist publications and movements all sought to utilise masculine tropes to endorse their cause, as is evidenced in the militaristic campaigns of the suffrage organisation, and the bombastic tone of suffrage publications produced at the turn of the century.<sup>91</sup>

At several junctures throughout the eight year editorship of the little magazine, Marsden struggled to reconcile her personal individualist philosophy, her deep-rooted feminist and socialist ideology, her strong desire for radical cultural and sexual revolution with the financial and ethical demands of running a small journal. Perhaps her successive shifts from ‘feminist’ to ‘humanist’ to ‘individualist’ can be interpreted as pandering in some way to a sensitive and precarious male readership? Even if the economics of publishing were one of Marsden’s core concerns she and her journal deserve credit for the editorial provocation that persistently and relentlessly challenged feminists to rise above ‘mental cliché and doctrinal equivocation’.<sup>92</sup> *The Freewoman* presents something of a paradox in terms of what it claims to have set out to do and what it actually achieved. By claiming no creed it declares itself unlike extant periodicals advocating rights for women; *The Freewoman* did not present itself as a form of ‘pulpit’ press. In other words, it claimed not to preach to the converted or to try to convert the unenlightened, but preferred instead to encourage its readership to engage in a dialectical process, requiring them to think and question its contents through the process of logical debate. Unlike many magazines created during this period (including *Votes for*

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<sup>90</sup> Janet Lyon, ‘Manifestoes of the Sex War’ in Bonnie Kime Scott, (ed) *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), p. 69.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. Ch. 3 gives a comprehensive guide to the rhetoric used in Suffragette publications.

<sup>92</sup> Clarke (1990), p. 115.

*Women*) it ostensibly avoided adopting a unifying creed or manifesto, and did not employ the typifying rhetoric of exclusivity that ‘parceled out political identities across a polarized field, claiming for “us” the moral high ground of revolutionary idealism, and constructing “them” as ideological tyrants, bankrupt usurpers, or corrupt fools.’<sup>93</sup> Yet, paradoxically, by claiming no creed and encouraging women to become ‘Freewomen’ Marsden inadvertently created just another polarized field. However, unlike its contemporaries, *The Freewoman* invited antagonists rather than followers: ‘After the foregoing it will be an easy matter to make clear what we mean when we claim to be an “open” paper. We do not mean “open” in the sense that we have no editorial point of view, but “open” in the sense that we are prepared not only to accept, but to welcome opposing points of view.’<sup>94</sup> Arguably it was this ‘open’, dialogic, dynamic free flow of conversation that differentiated the periodical’s overtly ‘feminist’ position from other feminist periodicals. Whilst some modern feminists may view Marsden’s approach as phallogocentric, it can be argued that Marsden identified, early in the feminist struggle, the need to divorce the female body from its political and categorical construction. So it is not as surprising as one might think that the masculinist *BLAST* may have been unconsciously influenced by the feminist *Freewoman* literary stable.

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<sup>93</sup> Lyon, (1999), p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Marsden, ‘Notes on the Week’, *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 3.

**2.**

**‘A Training in Truculence’:**

**The Literary Apprenticeship of Rebecca West**

Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,  
Such an intruder on the rights of men,  
Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd,  
The fault, can by no vertue be redeem'd.  
They tell us, we mistake our sex and way;  
Good breeding, fassion, dancing, dressing, play  
Are the accomplishments we shou'd desire;  
To write, or read, or think, or to enquire  
Wou'd cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,  
And interrupt the Conquests of our prime;  
Whilst the dull mannage, of a servile house  
Is held by some, our outmost art, and use.<sup>1</sup>

*The Introduction by Anne Finch, Lady Winchilsea*

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Finch, *The Introduction*, in *The Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea*, edited by Myra Reynolds (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1903) pp. 4-6, ll. 9-20.



### Rebecca West and 'The Sex War'

Women were vexed human beings who suffered intensely from male adaptation to life, [...] they were tortured and dangerous if they were not allowed to adapt themselves to life. That admission is the keystone to the modern Feminist movement.<sup>2</sup>

Rebecca West

Many prostitutes lived freely; some of them earned their living well. As in the period of courtesans, high gallantry provided more possibilities for feminine individualism than the life of an 'honest woman'.<sup>3</sup>

Simone de Beauvoir

I find myself saying briefly and prosaically that it is much more important to be oneself than anything else.<sup>4</sup>

Virginia Woolf

In 1926, Rebecca West recalling her formative years on *The Freewoman*, wrote in *Time and Tide* that the largely forgotten periodical had 'left us a heritage in the unembarrassed honesty of our times.'<sup>5</sup> According to West:

The greatest service that the paper did its country was through its unblushingness [...] *The Freewoman* by its candour did an immense service to the world by shattering, as nothing else would, as not the mere cries of intention towards independence had ever done, the romantic conception of women.<sup>6</sup>

In 1911 romantic feminine ideals precluded women from the ownership of a legitimate sexual identity yet they still remained categorized by the sexual status of their bodies. West's contemporary William Foss – in 'Man the Sentimentalist' for *The Freewoman* – phrases it thus: 'Men know three kinds of women: Women of the

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<sup>2</sup> West, *T&T* (16<sup>th</sup> July 1926).

<sup>3</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]), p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> Woolf (1993 [1929]), p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> West, *T&T* (16<sup>th</sup> July 1926).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

streets, Ladies one kisses and the sort of Girl one marries'; evidence that the prevailing cultural opinion of women was still tethered to the ideals of the virgin and mother and their antithesis, the whore, the spinster, and the crone.<sup>7</sup> Single, independent women such as West were highly suspect to Edwardian society as they demanded jobs, equality, and respect. In the most recent biography of West, Lorna Gibb explains:

Feminism for the young passionate Rebecca was not about denial; it was about fighting, while at the same time celebrating the joys of womanhood. She wrote of the joys of Christmas shopping and the fact poor women need the beauty of nice things as much as the wealthy. She sees defiance in a working-class girl wearing an extravagant hat because 'she is a better rebel than a girl who accepts her poverty as a matter of fate and wears its more durable badge of drab garments'.<sup>8</sup>

Despite a near-penurious upbringing in a well-educated, yet impoverished middle-class family, West refused to accept the circumstances of either her sex or her class. Her reviews and articles were always 'bold', often 'choked with rage', 'begged no forgiveness' and showed no 'lingering guilt' for the 'transgression [that coloured] her attacks on the most revered authorities [and] writers – even Tolstoy.'<sup>9</sup> She 'refused to embrace the sobriety that usually accompanied' serious discussion of profound ideas, infusing her work with 'analytical trenchancy and deflationary wit.'<sup>10</sup> As Gibb has

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<sup>7</sup> William Foss, 'Man the Sentimentalist' in *FW*, 1:18 (21st March 1912), pp. 349-50. This is situated directly beneath West's Macaulay review. There is no information available about Foss other than he contributed several articles for *FW* and one for *NFW* including a series entitled 'The Problem of Illegitimacy' I, II, and III in *FW*, 1:25, 27, and 31. It is possible that Foss was a pseudonym for another writer. 'His' articles mainly appear alongside West's and appears to support her political and Individualist sympathies.

<sup>8</sup> Lorna Gibb, *West's World: The Extraordinary Life of Dame Rebecca West* (London: Macmillan, 2013), p. 41. West quoted from Rebecca West, 'A New Woman's Movement: The Need for Riotous Living' in *The Clarion* (20<sup>th</sup> December 1912). See Marcus (1982), pp. 130-135.

<sup>9</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 294.

<sup>10</sup> Victoria Glendinning, 'Introduction' in Rebecca West, *The Return of the Soldier* (London: Virago, 2007 [1918]), p. 5.

observed: ‘this was a feminism way beyond its time.’<sup>11</sup> As discussed in the introduction West’s early journalism provoked both approbation and opprobrium. Her biting reviews for *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman* attracted the attention of literary figures such as Ford Madox Ford, D. H. Lawrence, and H. G. Wells – whom she ‘later dubbed her avuncular “uncles” in literature’<sup>12</sup> – as well as daily newspaper editors including Robert Blatchford (*The Clarion*), Henry Dent (*Everyman*), A. G. Gardiner (*The Daily News*), and George Lansbury (*The Daily Herald*). By 1913 the Marsden-West relationship underwent an interesting inversion of the teacher-pupil roles they had formerly adopted when West’s literary editorship of *The New Freewoman* (and her support and encouragement of Marsden’s literary talents) helped steer the magazine towards its more literary future.<sup>13</sup>

Jane Marcus remarks that West’s ‘absence from the history of English journalism is striking’.<sup>14</sup> During the period 1911-1918, West’s contribution to British journalism was prolific. Inculcated into the profession through her association with the founders of *The Freewoman* she was invited to work for many other higher profile periodicals and newspapers that enjoyed much wider circulation and broader readerships. Her articles and reviews provided space to expound her own brand of individualist feminism and to act ‘as a social critic of the patriarchal attitudes [...] in literature and in politics,’ a role that often stirred controversy, generating ‘hundreds of arguments in letters to the editor’.<sup>15</sup> During her two-year involvement with Marsden’s little magazines West contributed over thirty-one reviews and articles to

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<sup>11</sup> Gibb (2013), p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 293.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>15</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 293.

*The Freewoman* and a further seven to *The New Freewoman*, including the first ever treatise of Imagism. In addition to this she composed numerous letters to the editor.<sup>16</sup> She also corresponded frequently with the little magazine – sometimes pseudonymously as Rachel East – addressing objections or criticisms of her previously published work, or querying the work of her fellow *Freewoman* contributors.<sup>17</sup> Concerned primarily with women, art, and labour, she also ‘attacked anti-Semitism, irresponsible pacifism and the cult of mother-earth’.<sup>18</sup> Following the lead of Marsden – whom West called ‘one of the most marvelous personalities that the nation has ever produced’<sup>19</sup> – she embraced individualist feminism, and affected a form of sex-blindness that allowed her to champion women’s rights whilst challenging their weaknesses. Despite being a strong and dedicated worker for the WSPU from the age of 14 – Marcus calls her a ‘teenage dogsbody in the Pankhursts’ organization’ – West had become ‘ragged and worried from wearing a Votes for Women Badge.’<sup>20</sup> Disillusioned she began to question the direction the movement was taking. She was not alone, as Theresa Billington Greig’s summary of the increasing disenchantment with the WSPU reveals:

There was some justification for the women of part who resented the suppression of their individuality and the denial of opportunity and liberty, for it was obvious that during the course of time all women who had shared the burden and publicity of the early days were gradually being edged out of the public eye, silenced, exiled from the centre of the movement and excluded

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<sup>16</sup> West, ‘Imagisme’, *NFW*, 1:5 (15<sup>th</sup> August 1913), pp. 86-7.

<sup>17</sup> Rachel East, ‘The Normal Social State’, ‘Correspondence’, *FW*, 2:42 (5<sup>th</sup> September 1912), pp. 312-13. This letter to the editor appears alongside H. G. Wells correspondence on the same subject. It criticises Marsden’s idealistic, ‘immoral’, and ‘uneconomic’ stance on how to create an ideal social state set forth in the previous issue. It is a prime example of *Freewoman* contributors’ freedom to criticise their editor’s views and opinions. West predilection for nicknames and pseudonyms is well documented.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>19</sup> West, *T&T*, (16<sup>th</sup> July 1926).

<sup>20</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 4.

from positions in the society to which their work entitled them. “Where is Annie Kennedy?” people had begun to ask. “Where is Mary Gawthorpe?”<sup>21</sup>

This section will look at the contribution West made to *The Freewoman* journals and the magazines’ long term influence on West’s broad ranging corpus, analyzing her idiosyncratic methodology, her role in the ‘sex war’, her ‘masculinist’ rhetoric, and her belief in a gender-neutral or intellectually androgynous territory for artists.

### **‘A Duty of Harsh Criticism’: West’s War on Women.**

A postulant in the order of Marsden’s cult of the individual, West was often vehement in response to the apathy of her own sex, especially when it came to literature. West’s underlying philosophy, when pared back to its starkest form, was a simple one: any willing participant in patriarchy or peddler of anti-feminist sentiment was eligible to be challenged, regardless of their sex. There was no solidarity in sex; no safe-haven or protection from criticism. The general consensus at *The Freewoman* was that, for centuries, many women had colluded in a system of paternalist ‘protection’. That this collusion was brought about out of fear or reluctance to challenge a punitive system was never questioned; what was in question was women’s continued reluctance to challenge a coercive, unequal status quo. From its inception *The Freewoman*’s position that women’s ‘consent’ had far-reaching personal and psychological consequences for the sexes and was not confined purely to the political. Just as she and Marsden challenged the taxonomies that restricted women’s advancement, West also challenged anything that suggested humanity in terms of representative ‘types’. Individualism recognised that any single person’s

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<sup>21</sup> Theresa Billington-Greig, ‘The Militant Suffrage Movement: Emancipation in a Hurry’ in Carol McPhee and Ann FitzGerald (eds) *The Non-Violent Militant: Selected Writings of Theresa Billington-Greig* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 172.

psychological make-up was constructed of infinite variables. In her review of Rose Macaulay's 'exquisitely written book' *Views and Vagabonds* (1912), West criticises Macaulay for making her heroine Louie, 'a representative type of the poor' and for suggesting that 'vitality decreases in direct ratio to social position and that Louie with her weak grip on life is a typical peasant'. West argues against this supposition claiming that if it were the case:

It would be an excellent thing to form immediately an oligarchy with the proletariat in chains. But the proletariat isn't like that. Even agricultural labourers have shown in their peasant revolts that they have courage and passion. [...] To appeal for love towards the poor on the grounds of their occasional imbecility is treachery.

She extends the idea of Macaulay's argument that 'we ought to forgive the poor their vulgarities, because of their weaknesses, not because of their strengths' to women:

And that, by the way, is a treachery women often commit in the name of feminism. They say that they too 'give up all solutions of immediate problems'. They allege that they 'fall back on the wisdom of the ages'. Which is a transparent trick. And they appeal for equal rights with men because of their weakness. In other words, they claim liberty because they are natural slaves.<sup>22</sup>

Passion, courage, virility, and strength are the key words for West and women should be judged by these qualities rather than excused for their weakness. Throughout her career she refused to accept that women were characteristically weak and rebuked any writer who attempted to typify women in this way in the same way she rebuked Macaulay for using Louie to typify the poor.

Much of West's writing revolves around the creation of dichotomies. It is easy to detect polarities, oppositions, or warring factions as she pits herself against an

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<sup>22</sup> West, 'Views and Vagabonds', *FW*, 1:18 (21<sup>st</sup> March 1912), pp. 348-9.

array of perceived adversaries. She symbolised what Hanscombe and Smyers called ‘the stand of the individual against the immensities.’<sup>23</sup> West rarely represents womanhood in terms of unity, conformity or as a singularity. Her quest for emancipation is a solitary one in which she acts as a lone critical voice, unfettered by loyalties or group doctrines. Her propensity to attack figures of authority such as Mrs Humphrey Ward, Olive Schreiner (whom she deeply respected) and H. G. Wells (with whom she became romantically involved) was symptomatic of *The Freewoman’s* iconoclastic atmosphere; West’s policy was to destabilise the status quo by challenging the authoritative narrators of the age, in order to rattle the complacency of the bourgeoisie, and unnerve the puritanical, prudish, or doctrinaire. In order to do this she developed a gender-neutral narrative voice arguably breaking the professional ground of journalism for herself and fellow Freewomen as the first of their kind to speak out without the shackles of presumptive femininity. West’s frustration with her own sex was often palpable in her writing and was born out of a desire to erase woman as an inherent ‘type’. But it was also related to patriarchal resistance, for she felt ‘English women were handicapped by the fact that men have passed laws encouraging female morons.’<sup>24</sup> This image of woman was not one in which she could trust since it had been manufactured by a patriarchy that had dictated the language and the form through which the image of woman should be communicated. The aggression that features so strongly in her *Freewoman* pieces – which were often part-review, part-feminist tract, part-fiction, part-autobiography, part-criticism, part-battle cry – was symptomatic of a woman who felt she was

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<sup>23</sup> Hanscombe & Smyers (1987), p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 11.

writing towards those in society who were (perhaps deliberately) deaf and dumb to change. In 1912 she wrote: ‘ladies of Great Britain, we are clever, we are efficient, we are trustworthy, we are twice the women that our grandmothers were, but we have not enough devil in us.’<sup>25</sup> West used incendiary rhetoric to light a metaphorical fire under a female populace that she felt was lacking the fighting spirit necessary to win the ‘sex war’. Accounting for West’s controversial methodology Marcus claims: ‘She roused women to do battle with their own masochism, to weed out the natural slave, the victim in their souls. It was the dead souls of women she wanted to resurrect.’<sup>26</sup> In West’s own words, feminism was ‘something more than a fight for the vote. It was a fight to grow in art, in science, in politics, in literature: it is a fight for a place in the sun’; Woman ‘must no longer choose a role of the woman behind the great man, mother, sister, lover or wife of genius. She must stop being the muse and become the mistress of her own art, her own science, herself.’<sup>27</sup> Anticipating de Beauvoir, West felt that ‘the kept woman – wife or mistress – is not freed from the male just because she has a ballot paper in her hands [...] she remains a vassal, imprisoned in her condition.’<sup>28</sup>

West was scathing about anything that she deemed furthered the anti-feminist case. Articles such as ‘Spinsters and Art’ demonstrated her revulsion at mental sterility in both sexes, particularly when evident in literature. She deemed it a misconception that any women in authority automatically assisted the Cause, asserting that ‘the arguments of oppression are not less dangerous from the lips of a

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<sup>25</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 295.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]), p. 737.



woman than they are from men'.<sup>29</sup> In line with her socialist and Fabian sympathies the main thrust of her vitriol was reserved for 'the parasitic women' and the 'sheltered women' from among the upper class; women whom she claimed had all the advantage of privilege yet 'refused to think'.<sup>30</sup> West characterized them as having:

A smooth brow, that has never known the sweat of labour; the lax mouth, flaccid for want of discipline; eyes that blink because they have never seen anything worth looking at; the fat body of the unexercised waster. And within, the petulance of those who practise idealism on the easiest methods: a pastime that develops the conceit of the artist, with none of the wisdom and chastening of art.<sup>31</sup>

The language West uses in this extract suggests impotence or atrophy: lax, flaccid, fat, unexercised, petulant, conceited. These women lack vitality, strength, and vigour. Notably these adjectives are not generally associated with the feminine but rather conjure up images of male failing; removed from its context the passage could easily be referring to men. It is also an anti-capitalist invective, arguing against the mental decay caused by a life of indolence and privilege. As de Beauvoir claims half a century later 'the system based on [woman's] dependence collapses as soon as she ceases to be a parasite; there is no longer a need for a masculine mediator between her and the universe.'<sup>32</sup> As Hanscombe and Smyers have noted, West is here allying herself with a growing contemporary revolutionary movement to 'link economic inequality resulting from capitalism to the oppression of women.'<sup>33</sup> This contrasted

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<sup>29</sup> West quoted in Marcus (1982), p. 9. Source unreferenced.

<sup>30</sup> West could best be described politically as a Syndicalist. Broadly speaking Syndicalism proposed a new ethical economic system in place of capitalism, but as an alternative to state socialism, believing that democratic trade unions could manage the economy fairly to safeguard the interests of all people.

<sup>31</sup> West, 'The Gospel According to Mrs Humphrey Ward' in *FW*, 1:13, (15<sup>th</sup> February 1912), pp. 249-50, p. 250.

<sup>32</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]), p. 737.

<sup>33</sup> Hanscombe & Smyers (1987), p. 166.

sharply with suffragists, who were proposing to enter into the existing political system rather than aiming to change it.<sup>34</sup>

West's aversion to 'feminine' forms of writing, in favour of 'male mimicry' or 'ventriloquism', can be disconcerting for some critics as it creates a sense of female erasure or eradication – a failure to amplify history's silenced women – but it can also be argued that she is clearing a space for a certain kind of writing, an intense female voice that gave permission to other like-minded women to write in a similar way. In effect her early work can be said to be an exploration of taboo textual spaces previously only accessible to men, which addressed the sexual inequality arising from the fact that woman 'does not have the same past as a boy; society does not see her with the same eyes; she has a different perspective on the universe. Being a woman poses unique problems to an autonomous human being'.<sup>35</sup> This was an essential step in the struggle for women's emancipation because, as Anthony Downey observed:

Lives lived on the margins of social, political, cultural, economic and geographical borders are lives half lived. Denied access to legal, economic and political redress, these lives exist in a limbo-like state that is largely preoccupied with acquiring and sustaining the essentials of life.<sup>36</sup>

West and Marsden were inventing 'the spaces of modernism with their networks and their little magazines.'<sup>37</sup> *The Freewoman* was also attempting to alleviate women's position within what Giorgio Agamben has called 'the zone of indistinction' – an

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<sup>34</sup> Hanscombe & Smyers (1987), p.166.

<sup>35</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]), p. 739.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony Downey, 'Zones of Indistinction: Giorgio Agamben's "Bare Life" and the Politics of Aesthetics' in *Third Text*, 23:2 (March 2009), pp. 109-125.

<sup>37</sup> Zambreno (2013), p. 295.

area occupied by members of society who are subject to but not fully recognised by the law – by providing a new textual and philosophical space for women writers.

In her early years, according to Nattie Golubov, West was ‘combative and irreverent; she thrived on the polemical denunciation of exploitative class and gender relations.’<sup>38</sup> In *The Freewoman* she used her position as reviewer to bring about what Debra Rae Cohen describes as her ‘own sly intervention in contemporary debates over canonicity and artistic tradition.’<sup>39</sup> She believed that ‘the arts [...] are necessary for the survival of humans as a species because they are a record of a community’s experience, a condition for social cohesion because they offer moral beliefs and practices that are not arbitrary but communal criteria that express and shape behavior.’<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is in the arts that women must be more exacting in their own standards, less compliant to patriarchal stereotypes, for they are a reflection, a mirror, to life. For example her article ‘So Simple’, which appeared in number forty-six of *The Freewoman*, opens with the confrontational lines:

THE worst of being a feminist is that one has no evidence. Women are capable of all things, yet, inconveniently, they will not be geniuses. This is brought home to one during the publishing season. Reading the advertisements of new books by men such as Wells or Conrad or Bennett is like planning a journey to the Isles of Greece on the map. The names of two women, Violet Hunt and May Sinclair, rouse in one something of the same excitement, but no certainty. In spite of their first-rate intelligences and sense of character they escape genius. It would be hard to say why women have refused to become great writers.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Nattie Golubov, ‘Rebecca West’s “Strange Necessity”: Literature, Love and the Good’ in Schweizer (2006), pp. 206-222, p. 207.

<sup>39</sup> Debra Rae Cohen, ‘Sheepish Modernism: Rebecca West, The Adam Brothers, and the Taxonomies of Criticism’ in Schweizer (2006), pp. 143-156, p. 143.

<sup>40</sup> Golubov in Schweizer (2006), p. 206 – this is a précis of West’s *A Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928).

<sup>41</sup> West, ‘So Simple’ in *FW*, 2:46 (3<sup>rd</sup> October 1912), pp. 390-91.

Mocking and provocative, West suggests that women make a deliberate choice by refusing to become ‘great writers’; their lack of genius is an inconvenience to the feminist cause. It echoes Marsden’s first ‘openly ironic’ leader ‘Bondwomen’, in which women’s complicity in their own oppression is challenged; women will only be free when ‘they are perceived to be – and perceive themselves to be – “separate spiritual entities”, independent and individual’.<sup>42</sup>

Just as Marsden’s editorial provocation aimed to make her readers question the status quo, so West used her reviews to challenge women held in estimable public positions. ‘So Simple’ is a review of three books authored by prominent feminists: Olive Schreiner’s *Dreams, and Dream Life and Real Life*, Theresa Billington Grieg’s *The Consumer in Revolt*, and Louise Heigler’s *The Naked Soul*. West’s critique is not merely a review of the novels but also an analysis of the factors responsible for holding women – such as Schreiner, Billington Grieg, and Heigler – back from literary greatness. They fail, according to West, because they do not take enough risks for art, preferring to adopt instead a ‘so simple’ fainéance thus falling into the trap of what West describes as an ‘undiscriminating ascetism’.<sup>43</sup> Her desire to unleash repressed female genius fit was in line with Marsden’s quest to create exceptional individualist Freewomen. As Delap has argued, however, this has caused unease within some feminist contexts because it is clearly at odds with the feminist keystone of equality, but for many Edwardian feminists the ‘exceptional individual’ was key to their hopes for social change.<sup>44</sup> Having observed that ‘undoubtedly marriage eats like

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<sup>42</sup> Hanscombe & Smyers (1987), p. 162.

<sup>43</sup> West, *FW*, 2:46, p. 391. West uses this phrase in reference to Schreiner’s philosophy that: ‘By having the hell of a time, we shall have the heaven of an eternity.’

<sup>44</sup> Delap (2004), p. 102.

a cancer into the artistic development of women', West asserts that they are also afflicted by:

their timidity towards adventure and lack of faith in life. Accustomed to have in her hands the comfort of her husband and children, she feels less adventurous than brutal when she walks empty-handed out of her safe home and treads new paths. This fear of taking risks influences her in the choice of an occupation. Women flinch at the risk of taking up an artistic career and gravitate towards safe professions like the Civil Service, not in any white passion of statecraft, but because it is notorious that the Government forgives all crimes in its female employees except marriage.<sup>45</sup>

After wrapping up her disdain for both the civil service and marriage (labeled a cancer and a crime) in one neat paragraph, West continues:

Another vice incident to woman at present is spiritual pride. She has found the first steps of man's journey upwards quite easy. He had pretended they were difficult, so he gets what he deserves if woman assumes that all the other steps are just as easy, and that the government of Empires is as easy as getting a University degree. This attitude is a little irritating. Everything becomes *so* simple. The Mother Soul of which Mrs. Pethick Lawrence talks is going to solve problems that have vexed civilisation since the beginnings by sheer motherliness and soulfulness. The possession of the vote is going to release women wage slaves from the power of the capitalist.<sup>46</sup>

West here demonstrates her lack of faith in the Suffrage hyperbole that fueled the campaign for the vote; *Votes for Women* (owned and edited by the Mrs Pethick Lawrence mentioned in this extract) anticipated that the vote would bring women a plethora of incidental solutions to the many problems raised by the 'Woman Question'. They were not brokering new solutions but as mentioned in an early quotation falling back on the wisdom of the ages. This review provides an example of the tendency of West's work to 'exhibit a playful generic iconoclasm and a

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<sup>45</sup> West, *FW*, 2:46, p. 390.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

particularly sophisticated and idiosyncratic intertextual chatter.<sup>47</sup> According to Cohen, these are ‘qualities that stymie attempts to taxonomize’ West and perpetuate a ‘critical tendency to practice a kind of horizontal or vertical dissection of West’s extended, contradictory, and extraordinarily varied oeuvre’.<sup>48</sup> It also creates problems for some later feminist critics – as we have seen in the case of Sheila Jeffreys – in interpreting West’s distinctive idiomatic ‘Freewoman’ individualist (as opposed to relational) rhetoric.

Two common motifs in West’s corpus are the figure of the parasitic woman and the image of mental sterility. The parasitic woman is a figure that also featured in the work of de Beauvoir, who like West argued that women’s emancipation was linked to her role in the economy and ultimately upon her participation and reputation within public, rather than domestic, spaces. In ‘The Gospel According to Granville-Barker’ West reviewed his play *The Madras House* as ‘a judgement on womanhood’ of which he ‘shows many types and they are all spiritually sterile.’ She states: ‘sterility is the deadly sin’ arguing that:<sup>49</sup>

[T]oday so many of our activities are sterile. Our upper classes are impotent by reason of their soft living. Our lower classes have had their virility sweated out of them by their filthy labours [...] Parliament, built up by the lawyers, the fine flowers of the intellectual classes of England, is a barren thing. Our art is an anaesthetic rather than an inspiration.<sup>50</sup>

Granville-Barker’s ‘types’ include the three recognisable female ‘stereotypes’ of spinster, wife and crone:

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<sup>47</sup> Cohen in Schweizer (2006), p. 143.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>49</sup> West, ‘The Gospel According to Granville-Barker’, *FW*, 1:16, pp. 307-309, p. 308.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

The six Miss Huxtables, who exist in idle maidenhood [...] getting nothing from life, giving nothing of life. Old Mrs Madras, who refuses to cultivate the qualities of her humanity and her womanhood [...] worst of all Jessica Madras, the married woman, who by virtue of being Philip's wife and the mother of one child, has secured the right to complete idleness for the rest of her life.

Jessica Madras is the 'Bondwoman' 'whom the world excuses on the ground of her grace, her culture and her motherhood'. Addressing the character of Jessica Granville-Barker admonishes: 'You consume much, but you produce nothing. You live by your sex. When you walk abroad you distract men's thoughts to petty sensuousness. You must either be shut up in a harem or you must be a freewoman' adding 'there is a price to be paid for free womanhood I think ... and how many of you ladies are willing to pay it? Come out and be common women among us common men.'<sup>51</sup> The idea of women becoming 'common women among us common men' was a problematic one, as de Beauvoir later identified in 1949:

Misogynists have often reproached intellectual women for 'letting themselves go'; but they also preach to them: if you want to be our equals, stop wearing make-up and polishing your nails. This advice is absurd. [...] The individual is not free to shape the idea of femininity at will. By not conforming, a woman devalues herself sexually and consequently socially because society has incorporated sexual values. Rejecting feminine attributes does not mean acquiring virile ones.<sup>52</sup>

This quotation from *The Second Sex* summarises the struggles early twentieth-century individualist feminists faced in trying to articulate their rejection of objectified identities, without 'mutilating' their sex in the process. Renouncing the feminine traits often used to ensure their subjugation was one tactic many women writers of this period employed. It is this criticism that is sometimes leveled at *Freewoman* writers who appeared to revoke femininity in order to enter into the

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<sup>51</sup> West, *FW*, 1:16, p. 308.

<sup>52</sup> De Beauvoir (2010 [1949]) pp. 739-40.

privileged discourse of the male. However, West would be the first to object to this criticism. Neither she nor Granville-Barker addressed such superficialities as women's clothing, appearance, or physical femininity but rather criticised their intellectual frivolousness and tendency to cling to conventional 'coquettish' modes of womanhood. West was more concerned with demolishing the Romantic edifice of femininity as created through patriarchy. Her quest, like that of many *Freewoman* contributors, was to explore the possible alternatives to a femininity that many generations of women were indoctrinated to perform within a Western Christian society. What was the reality of 'femininity' as opposed to man's projected feminine ideal? This attitude is part of a much wider modernist aesthetic that rejected sentimentalism. According to Suzanne Clark, 'women found themselves caught in the contradiction of needing to recuperate a woman's tradition and yet participating in a revolution against forms that included gender.'<sup>53</sup>

For writers such as West the sentimental tradition had to some extent pathologised and ghettoised women's literature. West's complaint about the lack of women geniuses is another way of articulating Woolf's later speculation in *A Room of One's Own* regarding 'the effect of tradition and the lack of tradition upon the mind of the writer.'<sup>54</sup> Sentimentalism – which was effectively a Victorian hangover that continued to marginalise women's writing – masqueraded as the only culturally acceptable female literary tradition available. However, it was not a tradition inhabited solely by women writers. Many of West's reviews were concerned with identifying male sentimentalists who exploited and perpetuated a stereotypical vision

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<sup>53</sup> Clarke (1991), p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Woolf (1993 [1929]), p. 22.



of woman as romantic, emotional, and preoccupied with the questions of marriage and motherhood. Her argument was never against, or aimed at discrediting, her female literary predecessors (though as Clark contends this may have been an indirect consequence of modernist anti-sentimentalism) but rather it was aimed at debunking literary sentimentality as a solely womanly or feminine trait. As shall be demonstrated in the next section, her tactics were largely focused upon neutralising these previously gendered territories by exposing their hypocrisy. This is a difficult path to follow, for the very language and modes of discourse at West's disposal operated on a culturally accepted male/female binary: man equals strong, woman equals weak. There seem few ways to escape this centuries-old dichotomy. If women writers embraced their femininity they were discredited and excluded from mainstream discourse and the canon; if women rejected their femininity they were considered suspect by both sexes.

By 1911 femininity was viewed by many New Women/ Freewomen as a debilitating gendering that was culturally imposed and, in part, responsible for their continued objectification and subjugation.<sup>55</sup> It was something of an aesthetic hurdle to clear in order for them to finally rid themselves of limiting perceptions of woman as the weaker sex. All of this ties in with West's individualism which, as Jonathan Dollimore has argued, is linked to a 'transgressive aesthetic' of difference as well as a radical separation from bourgeois morals.<sup>56</sup> Although Dollimore's arguments are linked to Oscar Wilde's ideas on socialist individualism, they map effectively onto

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<sup>55</sup> Woolf (1993 [1929]), p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, 'Different Desires: Subjectivity and Transgression in Wilde and Gide' in *Genders* 2 (Summer 1988), p. 27.

*Freewoman* individualism, which similarly to Wilde's is transgressive in the sense that it encouraged disobedience and disruption of normative/performative notions of gender; for feminists like West, individualism was less to do with reforming woman's 'spiritual essence' and more concerned with the socio-cultural potential created by questioning the 'public voices' that sought to 'police culture' and promised a 'radical possibility of freedom'.<sup>57</sup>

West, in her focus on the image of women in the arts, was part of the vanguard for a later, second-wave trend of feminist criticism that focused on the study of female stereotypes in literature. To reiterate Cohen's point, West's strong belief that the arts were necessary as a social record of a community's experience highlights how important it was to scrutinise the textual and artistic representation of women. Toril Moi, in *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985) analyses a key text in this field, Susan Koppleman Cornillon's 1972 text *Images of Women in Fiction*, and finds that the fundamental outlook of the book, reflected in its twenty-one essays, 'accuses women writers of being *worse* than male writers in this respect [the creation of stereotypical or 'unreal' female characters], since they, unlike the men, are betraying their own sex.'<sup>58</sup> This echoes West's sentiments in 'So Simple'; the challenge for women was not to assume a naturalised female position in male discourse by playing it safe and relying on 'the wisdom of the ages' but to take the risks necessary to achieve literary greatness. The ease with which West criticised her female contemporaries is easy to interpret as a form of misogyny but, as Moi asserts, to do

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<sup>57</sup> Dollimore (1991), p. 8.

<sup>58</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Routledge, 2008 [1985]), p. 42.

so would be a ‘denial of authentic feminist states of mind, namely the “angry and alienated ones”’.<sup>59</sup> When critics such as Elaine Showalter claim that writers like West were attempting to ‘flee’ their female identity by ‘embracing the idea of androgyny’, Moi responds (discussing the negative feminist perceptions of Woolf’s writing) by insisting that there is an alternative ‘positive political and literary assessment’ of writers who appear to have fallen into this trap. She argues that Woolf ‘seems to practice what we might now call a “deconstructive” form of writing, one that engages with and thereby exposes the duplicitous nature of discourse’.<sup>60</sup> Arguably this perspective can be applied to the work of West, whose iconoclastic wit disrupts and unsettles conventional perceptions of how women should write.

Although West’s writing is in many ways different from the high modernism of Woolf, she and her fellow *Freewoman* writers were at the forefront of this aesthetic and exhibited the modernist bent for deconstructing language albeit in a protean form. It is understandable that women of West’s generation found the idea of a de-sexed or neutered identity, divorced from all the reductive labels that held women to a biological destiny, appealing. It is a component of the first part of what Julia Kristeva describes in ‘Women’s Time’ as women’s historical and political struggle for liberty.<sup>61</sup> Moi summarises Kristeva’s idea schematically as a three-tiered process:

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<sup>59</sup> Moi (2008 [1985]), p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’ in *Signs*, 7:1 (Autumn 1981), pp. 13-35, pp. 33-4.

1. Women demand equal access to the symbolic order. Liberal feminism. Equality.
2. Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity extolled.
3. (This is Kristeva's own position) Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical.<sup>62</sup>

The struggle of *Freewoman* writers such as West can be seen to fit within both the first and third tiers of Kristeva's schema. *The Freewoman* demanded equality and entry into the male symbolic order, whilst also making a (perhaps) naïve attempt to reject the dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine. West's desire for political, artistic, and cultural androgyny is an integral component of the wider discourses that articulated the search for a new non-patriarchal, non-paternalistic definition of womanhood. It also formed an attack on the stability of language. *Freewoman* writers demonstrated that language was far from fixed but rather 'structured as an endless deferral of meaning' and that 'any search for an essential, absolutely stable meaning must therefore be considered metaphysical'.<sup>63</sup> For individualist feminists the ego was transcendental and not hampered by bodily restrictions. The case that Moi makes in defense of Woolf can be employed on West's behalf in order to make sense of her 'playful shifts', deliberated iconoclasm, and irreverent attitude towards convention as 'something rather more than a willful desire to irritate the more serious minded feminist critic.'<sup>64</sup> The war on women was West's strict, non-partisan approach to anyone expressing anti-feminist dogma; she had no tolerance for inferior thinking, and was not prepared to excuse her female contemporaries' literary or political mediocrity on the grounds they lacked an

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<sup>62</sup> Moi (2008 [1985]), p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

adequate historical female influence. At *The Freewoman* there was no room for resting on existing moral or ethical codes. Women no longer had a coherent identity to hold onto. The ‘romantic conception’ of woman – rather than her physical sex – was the very thing to which West, Marsden and supporters of *The Freewoman* were opposed.

### **‘Men are Poor Stuff’: West’s War on Men**

West’s attacks on her own sex have at times opened her up to accusations of being masculinist, but men were more often the target of her scrutiny. As shown earlier, in ‘Spinsters and Art’, her comparison of Hinkson, Wales, and Lawrence took no prisoners and provides a prime example of West’s early acidic reviewing style. She continually challenged male authority especially in their representations of, or hypotheses about, women. In the review ‘Woman Adrift’ West’s opening gambit sets the tone:

R. HAROLD OWEN is a natural slave, having no conception of liberty nor any use for it. So, as a Freewoman, I review his anti-feminist thesis, ‘Woman Adrift,’ with chivalrous reluctance, feeling that a steam-engine ought not to crush a butterfly.<sup>65</sup>

West immediately reverses the gendered identities of reviewer and reviewed, applying the common feminine trope of the ‘natural slave’ to the male author. In contrast she casts herself in the role of authority wielding the power of a ‘steam-engine’ that ‘ought not to crush a butterfly’ such as Owen. This reversal of gender roles – with West as the masculine authoritarian figure and Owen as the weak, sentimental feminine figure – escalates throughout the review. In summary Owen’s

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<sup>65</sup> West, ‘Woman Adrift’, *FW*, 1:19 (28<sup>th</sup> March 1912), pp. 368-9, p. 368.

'respectable piece of journalism' contends that 'men are salt of the earth and women either their wives or refuse' and concludes: 'Woman is wholly superfluous to the State save as a bearer of children and a nursing mother.' West's response to this assertion is to claim that Owen has proved that which West already knew, that 'all men are fools and a great many of them something worse.' One of West's rhetorical strategies in her early journalism was to channel commonly used complaints about women's writing and direct them at her male counterparts. It was a form of reciprocity, a way of redirecting the poisonous barbs regularly used against women towards their progenitors; a brazen West adroitly deflected anti-feminist taunts and used them against the male psyche. Owen's 'anti-feminist thesis' is soon turned on its head to become an anti-man thesis, as West illuminates that the assertions made to support Owen's misogyny can in fact be read as an indictment of man. When Owen resorts to quoting John Stuart Mill's 'The Subjection of Women' to argue against the benefits of educating women, West's response is derisive:

Again, Mr. Owen gives his sex away in the course of his remarks on Mill's 'The Subjection of Women.' He quotes a passage in which Mill pleads that the higher education will increase domestic happiness by creating a community of interests between men and women, and he triumphantly points out that after fifty years of the higher education, women have begun to turn their backs on marriage. How naïve, how frank! If I belonged to a sex that was so transparently undesirable, that after only fifty years of the higher education women recoil from it in aversion, I should bury myself tidily in quicklime.<sup>66</sup>

Each objection Owen raises to support the notion that the only function for a woman in society is that of wife and mother is met with idiosyncratic Westian derision. She concludes that Owen's 'Woman Adrift' is tantamount to a 'stealthy attack on his own

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<sup>66</sup> West, *FW*, 1:9, p. 368.

sex' in which he portrays men as 'brawny and immoral prigs, with their swelled heads up in the clouds and their feet firmly planted in the gutter!' She concludes her review with a salient reminder that the time is at hand when the sex-privilege of the male should be set aside:

And I think that this is an occasion to remind all men, as well as Mr. Owen, that a time has come when their work must have some value beside the sex-privilege of the worker. I believe that the ordinary thing to do would be to compliment Mr. Owen on his sincerity; but sincerity is an easy thing for one who labours in a vainglorious cause. Deprived of this merit, the book has few others, for it is ill-informed and loosely reasoned. I say this in all kindness, because I believe Mr. Owen might do better work if he did not waste his time pluming himself on being of the same sex as Shakespeare.<sup>67</sup>

The final line of West's review once more alludes to the foolhardiness of relying upon traditional sex roles as a model for current and future generations to follow; it reiterates that earlier rebuke to women who 'fall back on the wisdom of the ages.'

Exposing male superiority to be a fallacy is a common Westian strategy and the subject of her review of Arnold Bennett's collection of short stories 'The Matador of Five Towns.' In it she warns society against perpetuating the female/male divisions writing:

We may become Supermen and Superwomen as fast as we will, but we can never earn the right to despise anybody [...] How nice to be a Tory, and have half a nation to despise. How nice to be a male anti-Feminist, and have half the world's population to despise. These are the *menus plaisirs* one must renounce in embracing theories of liberty.<sup>68</sup>

The individualist philosophy, as promoted by *The Freewoman*, was a clear attempt to eradicate a centuries-old tradition of binary thinking. Arguably, *The Freewoman* subscribed to a policy of challenging patriarchy on the grounds that it made prisoners

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<sup>67</sup> West, *FW*, 1:9, p. 369.

<sup>68</sup> West, 'The Matador of Five Towns', *FW*, 1:20 (4<sup>th</sup> April 1912), pp. 387-8, p. 387.

of both sexes. Although men were given privilege over women, individualists were able to acknowledge that male roles in society could be in many ways as prescriptive as women's. Accepted notions of masculinity and femininity were particularly problematic for those of a non-heteronormative sexuality. Individualist thinking enabled writers to navigate the complex terrain of gendered identities and was ahead of its time in its anticipation of second-wave feminism's deconstruction of oppositional binaries.

West, despite a perceived eagerness to berate women who she felt were traitors to feminism, was ever ready to defend her sex when necessary. Writing in 1913, in an article for *The Clarion* 'The Sex War: Disjointed thoughts on Men', she presents several observations on men. She opens her article:

We have asked men for votes, they have given us advice. At present they are also giving us abuse. I am tired of this running comment on the war-like conduct of my sex, delivered with such insolent assurance and such self-satisfaction. SO I am going to do it too.

Men are poor stuff.<sup>69</sup>

West's alliance to her fellow woman is affirmed. Compare the worst of her sex with Mr J. L. Garvin, editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*. West assures the reader:

Messalina was no better than she ought to have been. Mrs Brownrigg flogged her 'prentices to death. Mrs Humphrey Ward is a shocking bore, and Eve brought sin and death into the world. But my sex has produced nothing like Mr J. L. Garvin.<sup>70</sup>

Summarising the 'shocking manner' in which Garvin 'celebrates with solemn ghoulissh enjoyment the anniversary of the Titanic disaster' in an article entitled 'The

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<sup>69</sup> West, 'The Sex War: Disjointed Thoughts on Men', *The Clarion* (18<sup>th</sup> April 1913), Marcus (1982), pp. 174-178, p. 174.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.



Year of Mourning,'<sup>71</sup> West highlights Garvin's neglect of the true horror of the disaster which she identifies as: 'the shocking manner in which the American millionaires [...] sent out the liner with neither seamen nor boats.' Garvin prefers instead to 'pass tactfully to the dead'. Disgusted with Garvin's 'brooding over the soft, maudlin sentences and sucking their sentiment like toffee' as he over-sentimentalises the purported male Anglo-Saxon heroics, West juxtaposes his lyrical waxing about 'fortitude, constancy, self-sacrifice, self-control' with the contrasting rhetoric used to attack women suffragists. Inspired by Mrs Pankhurst's recent release from gaol, Garvin asserts:

If the police force of this country is not adequate to the safeguarding of property it might well be spared the duty of protecting the advocates of crime from the crowds which are justly incensed at their audacity. The attitude of those who attempt to prevent suffragette meetings under present conditions is thoroughly warranted, however distasteful may be its aspects of violence.<sup>72</sup>

'In other words' West concludes, 'man may take an arrogant pride in the work of his hands if this includes a clod flung in the face of a suffragette in Hyde Park.' This compromises the notion of the universal code of chivalry that was regularly proffered as one of the benefits of being a woman.<sup>73</sup> The actions of banner-waving, art-damaging, public-protesting Suffragettes were considered transgressive, and male violence acted upon female protesters was accepted by many as a justifiable consequence to punish their behaviour. In an article, again for *The Clarion*, called 'A Training in Truculence', West points out that as a girl she had received an education

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<sup>71</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 175.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>73</sup> Marsden, 'Chivalry', *FW*, 1:23 (25<sup>th</sup> April 1912), pp. 441-443. A week after West wrote her article for the *Clarion* Marsden's leader took up the topic of chivalry as it related to the Titanic disaster, showing that West by this juncture was possibly having as much of an influence on Marsden as Marsden was on West.

in which ‘moral passions were discouraged, and there was engendered in girls a habit of compromise.’<sup>74</sup> When a woman fell out of step with social expectations – by abandoning the ‘cardinal virtues’ of ‘piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity’ – she could expect, consequentially, to be excluded from the ‘normal’ protection that society offered ‘true’ women.<sup>75</sup> The prevailing sensibility was, as West points out, that women should ‘know that we are the sheltered sex and lie enfolded by man’s protection and respect; therefore the demand for the suffrage so rashly made by some of our sex is an impertinence and an ingratitude.’<sup>76</sup> She concludes her polemic against Garvin with the phrase, floating alone on a separate line for emphasis: ‘Men are very poor stuff.’

The Garvin article continues to highlight other significant examples of male hypocrisy. West attacks the inconsistent governmental policy espoused ‘in a House pledged to woman suffrage’ when only ‘eight members voted for Keir Hardy’s amendment to the “Cat-and-Mouse Bill”’, which would have curtailed the coercive measures then being meted out to suffragist prisoners. ‘Members’ she points out ‘peevishly rebuked the suffragettes as a seasick man might rebuke the Atlantic in a gale.’<sup>77</sup> She concludes this section, again on a separate line, with the lament: ‘Oh, men are very poor stuff indeed.’ Continuing her invective West questions the authority man has commanded ‘since the beginning’ through an attack on the law.

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<sup>74</sup> West, ‘A Training in Truculence: The Working Women’s College’, *The Clarion*, (14<sup>th</sup> February 1913), Marcus (1982), pp. 154- 157, p. 154.

<sup>75</sup> Lindsey (1990), p. 65.

<sup>76</sup> West, ‘The Sheltered Sex: ‘Lotus Eating’ on Seven-and-Six a Week’, *The Clarion* (4<sup>th</sup> July 1913), Marcus (1982), pp. 184-88, p. 184.

<sup>77</sup> West, ‘The Sex War’ in Marcus (1982), p. 177.

She asks the question: With sole control over the construction and dispensation of the law what exactly have men achieved?:

I begin to doubt whether they are ever reasonably efficient in the sphere in which they have specialised. They do not claim to be good. Collectively they do not claim to be beautiful, though private enterprise in this direction is brisk. But they certainly claim to be clever. And looking round at the confusion of undertakings which we call the City one begins to doubt. One doubts it still more if one ponders on the law which men had to themselves since the beginning.<sup>78</sup>

She goes on to claim – with the typical irreverence that demonstrates what Rollyson calls West’s ‘ambivalence to the male prerogative’<sup>79</sup> – that the law is: ‘badly done’ and ‘preposterously expensive.’ Its long-winded processes and vicious unfairness West comments, made ‘divorce [...] a luxury. One could have four operations for appendicitis as cheaply done as one can get rid of one cruel and adulterous husband.’ It was unsurprising that so many Suffragettes felt driven to break laws that were not only ‘intolerably tedious’ but ‘brutally cruel’, ‘discourteous’ and ‘so unsafe in the hands of men that no decent woman can submit to it.’<sup>80</sup> Each indictment is supported by coherent, witty general examples leaving the reader with a sinking-heart feeling that, as her last solitary line of the article asserts: ‘Oh, men are miserable poor stuff.’

West’s early journalism was prolific, polemical, combative and challenged notions of sex and gender alongside class and culture. The examples shown here are the mere tip of her journalistic ‘iceberg’ and there is scope for a much more in-depth analysis of this aspect of West’s career. Her articles, across several periodicals and newspapers, demonstrate her deep feminist commitment to expanding not only the

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<sup>78</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 177.

<sup>79</sup> Rollyson (2007[1998]), p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177-8.

political and social rights a woman held, but also her psychological emancipation. She was also convinced that challenging the aesthetic and cultural representation of women within the arts, as well as their participation and reception as artists, was an integral component in the struggle for women's real freedom. Her goal in *The Freewoman* was to help create a journal in which the political and the literary program coalesced, inspired by Marsden's individualist 'gospel'.<sup>81</sup> Publically and professionally, she identified herself as an individual rather than as a 'woman' and rejected the notion that women could be grouped together generically as a universal type. However, many accounts portray West in person as extremely 'womanly' and feminine. Her most recent biographer, Lorna Gibb, attributes her with the ability to 'act as social commentator on a period that was yet to come, and, while doing so, to beguile and enchant her reader.'<sup>82</sup> Describing West, as seen in a black and white film clip of her running round Max Beaverbrook's garden, Gibb sees a carefree West as she was:

laughing by the rose bushes, flirting madly with a handsome young man, running down a path then turning to shout back at her beau in that lovely actressy rich voice. Not a beautiful girl in a classical sense, but someone you were compelled to watch, someone who lit up the garden and commanded it. Then she was gone: the long white frock, the piled auburn hair, faded from mind, leaving the garden and, more importantly her words, millions upon millions of them, the only things that might help me conjure her again.<sup>83</sup>

It is hard to marry this flighty, romantic, and yes, somewhat over-sentimentalised image of the young West with her image as a hard-bitten firebrand journalist. Violet Hunt describes her as flamboyantly dressed wearing a pink dress and a large brimmed straw hat, exuding 'a slightly academic air *tres chic*, worn with a Paris

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<sup>81</sup> Rollyson (2007 [1998]), p. 12.

<sup>82</sup> Gibb (2013), p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

gown.’<sup>84</sup> Marcus writes that ‘her articles were daring, and often joyously so – a counter to all those who felt then, as too often now, that feminism represents something gloomy and sour.’<sup>85</sup> West gave the impression that she was ‘a woman whose keen-edged mind might, one would think, be reflected in a disdain for feminine frivolities and any conformity to fashion.’<sup>86</sup> However on a lecture tour in America in the 1920s British journalists ‘hardly knew whether to fill their columns with her intelligent remarks or with elaborate descriptions of her looks, clothes, and personality.’<sup>87</sup> Her articles for *The Clarion* were ‘refreshing to read’ for she was a feminist freedom fighter who was able to ‘not only recognise, but revel in female sexuality’ claiming ‘good food, good books and pretty clothes [were] as necessary to working women’s liberation as equal pay and intrepid trade unions.’<sup>88</sup> West then was a paradoxical figure who refused to be boxed-up or categorised neatly. She personified the tension that existed within the divided self; the split between mind/body and politics/art that she so often wrote about or criticised in her reviews.<sup>89</sup> Her feminism was never static or doctrinaire but constantly evolving. She argued that ‘the ultimate wisdom of feminism’ could only be obtained gradually, over a long period of time and by ‘fletcherising [her] experience’.<sup>90</sup> As Rollyson has observed, ‘In the first two decades of the twentieth century, West reported on and analyzed the crisis of a patriarchal society.’<sup>91</sup> As a writer she was multi-faceted and hard to define, often contradicting her own philosophy when it came to the portrayal of women. The

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<sup>84</sup> Brooker (2007), p. 89.

<sup>85</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, (1982) p. 10

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92

<sup>89</sup> Rollyson (2007 [1998]), p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

influence of *The Freewoman* on her early work, in particular *The Return of the Soldier* (1918), *The Judge* (1922) and *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy* (1929), is tangible. As with much of her work, her three earliest novels explore the contradictory nature of femininity and power and show distinct signs of the *Freewoman* ideas she forged during her apprenticeship.

## 2:2

### **‘Woman as Artist and Thinker’: Rebecca West, Debut Novelist.**

‘I know that had I been able to do what I liked [...] I’d have written nothing but novels. Fiction and poetry are the only way one can stop time and give an account of an experience and nail it down so that it lasts forever.’<sup>1</sup>

Rebecca West

Marsden’s profound influence on West has still yet to be fully appreciated, but in *The Return of the Soldier* it is evident that West’s ‘training in truculence’ at *The Freewoman* had paid off. In this slim novella, West explores the ideas she developed through her journalism in *The Freewoman* and *The Clarion*. As well as giving West journalistic experience, Marsden had coached the literary ingénue towards a modernist aesthetic that privileged the internal over the external and promoted woman’s adaptation to a ‘man’s world’ by the development of ‘the subtle intuitive faculties which are virtually life-feelers, tentacles which push up into new conceptions of life.’<sup>2</sup> As Franklin has observed: ‘armed with these “life-feelers” women were specially equipped to integrate new insights into literature from the field of psychology.’<sup>3</sup> *The Freewoman* helped shape West’s aesthetic sensibilities and this is evident not only in her journalism for other magazines and newspapers, but also in most of her early fictional writing. The novels all contain experimental narrative strategies, psychological or proto-psychoanalytical ideas, disruptive notions of sex and gender, as well as many of the social and political ideas she developed

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca West, Broadcast for BBC Radio 4, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1976, transcribed in *The Essential Rebecca West: Uncollected Prose* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pearhouse Press, 2010) pp. 47-56, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Marsden ‘Topics of the Week’, *FW*, 1:11 (1<sup>st</sup> February 1912), p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 228.

during her time as a Freewoman. 'Indissoluble Matrimony' (as shall be argued in Section three), explores the impact of *The Freewoman* upon the traditional role of the wife. Similarly, *The Return of the Soldier*, *The Judge*, and *Harriet Hume* bear all the hallmarks of Marsden's literary and political tutelage as well as a nascent, developing literary aesthetic that for the purposes of this thesis shall be called 'vortextuality'.<sup>4</sup>

Marsden wrote in 'A Plea for Psychology' that:

As things were, the story of the emotional life of a healthy, virile, vitalised woman still belongs to those books which remain to be written, as do thousands of other records besides. We believe that in this sphere the novel is going to rediscover itself – the novel and the autobiography.

This statement is prescient of the modernist shift towards 'stream of consciousness' and encouraged apprentice writers to develop a new kind of writing, one that focused on the 'emotional life'. Writers such as James, Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, and Virginia Woolf were amongst those who, like West, embraced the innovation of interiority as a narrative tool.

### ***The Return of the Soldier: A Freewoman Novel***

West's first novel *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) is the novel most indebted to her experiences on the staff of *The Freewoman*.<sup>5</sup> Victoria Glendinning describes it as 'a bitter sweet tale turning on the loss of memory of Chris Baldry, the central male character, which makes him forget his charming wife and their ten years of marriage and remember only an earlier humbler love' but the novel is far more than this

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<sup>4</sup> Section 3: *BLAST* explores this neologism more fully.

<sup>5</sup> West, *The Return of the Soldier* (London: Virago, 2004 [1917]). Hereafter *ROTS*. All page numbers in parenthesis refer to this edition.



summary would suggest.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after its release *The North American Review* named it their book of the month. The review praises West as a writer whose mind was:

truculent, challenging, cruelly contemptuous of the anserine, a mind that takes fire from beauty and the contemplation of difficult honesties, a spirit both communal and patrician [...] unbending in its intellectual disdain of the flabby and the platitudinous.<sup>7</sup>

The review further describes her as an 'implacable realist' and a 'burning pillar of intellectual scorn' whose debut novel escapes the 'sticky abyss of sentimentalism.'

*The Return of the Soldier* was critically greeted as:

an authentic masterpiece, a one act drama with music – the music of Miss West's superbly imaginative prose: prose that is not easily to be paralleled in its range and flexibility; for it has wit at the pitch of virtuosity, and loveliness at the pitch of lyrical rapture, and on its noblest levels, a depth of tenderness of vision that belongs to an understanding which has seen through to the sources of spiritual beauty.<sup>8</sup>

Within its pages West galvanises many of the key ideas developed through her involvement with the esoteric philosophy of Marsden's leaders and the socialist realism of her *Clarion* essays. Despite its short length West tackles several themes simultaneously, including issues of class, gender, sex, and an exploration of the (modern) phenomenon of 'shell shock'. Its pages contain characters instantly recognisable from West's early journalism. Her triumvirate of women include: Kitty the 'sterile' parasitic woman perpetually surrounded by 'a little globe of ease' (p. 15) and living in a home 'full of brittle beautiful things' (p. 15); Jenny the incumbent family spinster with the suppressed intelligence, passion, and virility of a Freewoman, whose mind goes 'creeping from room to room like a cat' (p. 15); and

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<sup>6</sup> West, *ROTS* (2004 [1917]) – Victoria Glendinning 'Introduction', pp. 1-8, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Gilman, 'The Book of the Month: *The Return of the Soldier* by Rebecca West' in *The North American Review*, 207:750 (May 1918), pp. 764-768, p. 765.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 765-6.

Margaret Allington/ Grey, the intrusive lower-class wife and mother, worn down through an impoverished life that has left her 'repulsively furred with neglect and poverty' (p. 25). Her male 'heroes' include Chris, 'the good soldier' who epitomises the privileged, heroic, yet obligated middle-class male in whom one saw 'any collapse into bad temper as a calamity startling as the breaking of a leg' (p. 16); the Reverend cousin Frank who authoritatively confirms the 'unreliable' confession of Margaret; and Doctor Andrews, avuncular and reliably 'modern' in his approach to Chris's condition.<sup>9</sup> With the exception of Margaret, these are archetypal examples of the comfortable middle-classes whose lives would be fundamentally dislocated by the events of the Great War. The unmarried Jenny, the traditionally silenced and sidelined 'spinster', is given control as the sole narrator upon whom the reader is dependent; by trusting the narration to Jenny, West empowers the only unmarried figure in the book.

The novel opens in what appears to be the present-day, but mid-way through, Jenny – exhibiting a curious refusal of time and precision – reveals that she has 'lived so long with the story which he told me that [she] cannot now remember his shy phrases' (p. 70). Jenny bears witness to the tangled relationships that develops between the neurasthenic amnesiac Chris, his wife Kitty, and his erstwhile lover Margaret. When the narration appears to shift Chris's recounting of his youthful courtship of Margaret, it is merely Jenny ventriloquising on his behalf. The potentially unreliable narrator is one of the distinctly modernist tenets of the novel

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<sup>9</sup> Norton (2000), p. 8. Norton identifies Kitty and Jenny as 'parasitic women' who are created through a dominant patriarchal structure based on the economics of marriage and class; a motif she suggests is common to West's fiction, including the character of Isabelle in *The Thinking Reed* (London: Virago Press Ltd., 1984 [1936]).

and is a central feature of Ford's novel *The Good Soldier*, an early extract of which was featured alongside West's 'Indissoluble Matrimony' in *BLAST*.<sup>10</sup> The opening chapters describe in minute detail the 'brittle' perfection of Baldry Court, created by Chris and the architects 'who had not so much the wild eye of the artist as the knowing wink of the manicurist, and between them they massaged the dear old place into a matter for innumerable photographs in the illustrated papers' (p. 12). Although Jenny credits Chris for the remodelling of Baldry Court it soon becomes clear that the real architects are herself and Kitty, reflecting that:

by the contriving of these gardens that lay, well-kept as a woman's hand, on the south side of the hill, Kitty and I had proved ourselves worthy of the past generation that had set the old house on this sunny ledge, overhanging and overhung by beauty. And we had done so much for the new house.

I could send my mind creeping from room to room like a purring cat, rubbing itself against all the brittle beautiful things that we had either recovered from antiquity or dug from the obscure pits of modern craftsmanship, basking in the colour that glowed from all our solemnly chosen fabrics with such pure intensity that it seem to shed warmth like sunshine. Even now when spending seemed a little disgraceful I could think of that beauty with nothing but pride. (p.14)

West juxtaposes the physical perfection and beauty of the house against two disruptively disturbing images of death and decay: Jenny's nightmares about the front and the death of Chris and Kitty's infant son Oliver. These images symbolise the imminent threat posed to the idyllic lives of the governing classes by war and the ever-shifting ideas of social and cultural modernity. West contrives to destabilise constructions of ideal womanhood through her portrayal of Jenny, Kitty, and Margaret. Kitty, who 'looked so like a girl on a magazine cover that one expected to find a large "7d." somewhere attached to her person' (p. 11) is frequently compared

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<sup>10</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010 [1915]) – in *BLAST* it appeared as 'The Saddest Story.'

to her unassuming rival, Margaret, who appears like a blot on the landscape, wearing a 'yellowish raincoat and a black hat with plumes whose sticky straw had but lately been renovated by something out of a little bottle bought at a chemists' (p. 23-4). Yet it is Margaret who 'saves the day'; her black hat recalling the rebellious symbolism of a working class girl wearing an extravagant hat because 'she is a better rebel than a girl who accepts her poverty as a matter of fate and wears its more durable badge of drab garments.'<sup>11</sup> Repeatedly Jenny refers to the hat as evidence of Margaret's resistance to her circumstances. West contrasts the two women most important to Chris's life in terms of their class and their intelligence. Kitty is shallow, vain, and petulant, whilst the reader is informed that Margaret is 'such good company. She's got an accurate mind that would have made her a good engineer' (p. 74). Kitty's fine delicate elegance and impeccable materialist taste is found lacking when compared to the transcendental quality of Margaret's soul. Jenny tries hard to define Margaret by her class and lack of social status using a continuous stream of unflattering descriptions about her physiognomy: she has a 'face sallow with heat' that is covered in 'beads of perspiration' which 'glittered in the deep dragging line between her nostrils and the corners of her mouth' (p.92). Moreover she was 'seamed and scored and ravaged by squalid circumstance' (p. 90). Yet Jenny comes to realise that none of these superficial details matter in the face of Margaret's personality that was 'sounding through her squalor like a beautiful voice singing in a darkened room' (p. 96).

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<sup>11</sup> Lorna Gibb, *West's World: The Extraordinary Life of Dame Rebecca West* (London: Macmillan, 2013) p. 41. Quoted from West, 'A New Woman's Movement: The Need for Riotous Living' in *The Clarion* (20<sup>th</sup> December 1912), Marcus (1982), pp.130-135.

*The Return of the Soldier* could be described accurately as a tale of three women and according to Margaret D. Stetz is a meditation on 'the Wildean ideal of the House Beautiful'. Such domestic perfection, as evidenced in the meticulous creation of Baldry Court, was symptomatic of the aesthetic obsession with the home that many women succumbed to as a result of being denied alternative outlets for their intelligence and creativity.<sup>12</sup> Kitty is simultaneously creator and victim of this immaculate existence, a figure that generates feelings of revulsion and pity. She is symbolic of female repression and the reader is left with the distinct impression that Kitty's character in the narrative is merely going through the motions, performing her role and living up to the social expectations imposed upon women of her class and status; a role that has soured her countenance and personality. Kitty symbolises West's revulsion for the avaricious consumerism of the upper and middle-classes, enabled by industrialisation, mass-production and the exploitation of the worker, a topic which she explored at length in her *Clarion essays*. These articles were primarily discourses of 'feminine appetite and feminist sexuality' that focused on the cultural significance of the consuming woman.<sup>13</sup> Kitty's materialist obsession is contrasted with Margaret's desperate attempts to look respectable. Jenny's scorn of Margaret's 'yellowish raincoat looking sick and bright in the sharp sunshine, her black plumes nodding like pines above, her cheap boots making her walk on her heels; a spreading stain on the fabric of our life' (p. 37) are emblematic of West's

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret D. Stetz, 'Rebecca West, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of Oscar Wilde', Schweizer (2006), pp. 157-169, p. 161.

<sup>13</sup> Green in Ardis and Lewis (2003), p. 231.

observation: 'It's amazing how angrily the well-to-do speak of a poor girl's love of finery.'<sup>14</sup>

Margaret is the fictional embodiment of West's repeated political defence of the working-class woman. However, whilst West insists upon radicalized, sexualised and feminist acts of consumption in her political essays, her character Margaret falls victim to the cultural expectations of her class by submitting to the 'sin of self-sacrifice' of the Bondwoman that, West claimed, was 'the basis of the anti-feminist position'.<sup>15</sup> Whilst Margaret represents the transcendental ego of Marsden's individualism, she fails to act as an individual, instead accepting that her fate is predetermined. When Jenny stumbles upon Margaret and Chris at rest in a garden grove 'englobed in peace as in a crystal sphere' (p. 143) she believes that it 'means that the woman has gathered the soul of the man into her soul and is keeping it warm in love and peace so that his body can rest quiet for a little time' (pp. 143-4). Though Jenny's description of Margaret reeks of the spinsterish sentimentalism that West regularly criticised, it also echoes Marsden's sentiments in 'A Plea for Psychology':

Passion is psychic union. Its method of communication is vibrant intimacy, and in such intimacy it realises itself and finds its pleasure. In passion one travels long leagues into the consciousness of another, and, having travelled, it must be left to do what to itself seems good with the outer temple of the mind, which is the body.<sup>16</sup>

*The Return of the Soldier* is liberally seasoned with Freewoman philosophy. West's anti-establishment politics colour her representation of Baldry Court as a bastion of debilitating paternalism that not only encourages the vacuous existence of women

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<sup>14</sup> West, 'Riotous Living', Marcus (1982), p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> West, 'The Sin of Self-Sacrifice', *The Clarion* (12<sup>th</sup> December 1913) in *Ibid.*, pp. 235-8.

<sup>16</sup> Marsden 'A Plea for Psychology', *FW*, 1:10 (25<sup>th</sup> January 1912) p. 182.

like Kitty but also binds otherwise free-spirited men like Chris to duty and obligation. Margaret affords Chris an escape by 'leading him into this quiet magic circle out of our life, out of the splendid house which was not so much a house as a vast piece of space partitioned off from the universe and decorated partly for beauty and partly to make our privacy more insolent' (p.145). Margaret's generosity extends to all at Baldry Court as:

[S]he was the sober thread whose interweaving with our scattered magnificences had somehow achieved the design that would otherwise have not appeared. Perhaps even her dinginess was part of her generosity, for in order to fit into the pattern one sometimes has to forgo something of one's individual beauty. (p.145)

Jenny even muses that 'the deep internal thing that had guided Chris to forgetfulness had guided her to poverty so that when the time came for her meeting with her lover there should be not one intimation of the beauty of suave flesh to distract him from the message of her soul' (p.146). Margaret, Kitty and Jenny are all characters in bondage to social expectation yet West allows the reader to see the paradoxes, the nuances, the individualism, the performativity of each woman as she adjusts to unfolding events and the inevitability of Chris's 'cure'.

One of the most interesting scenes in *Return* is one that rarely attracts analysis. When Margaret agrees to attempt to restore Chris's memory by confronting him with possessions of his dead son, Oliver, she asks Jenny to take her to the child's nursery (pp.169-177). Upon entering the nursery Margaret becomes transfixed contemplating both her past and her future and eventually she breaks down. She cannot bear to execute the task Dr Andrews has assigned to her, to confront Chris with his forgotten reality and bring him back into the present, a present in which she has no place. It is in this moment that Jenny and Margaret contemplate transgressing

their dutiful, subservient roles, and confront what Dollimore has called the 'lawful sense of self', an unconscious, oppressive sense of self that transfixes a person within their socio-legal identity.<sup>17</sup> Margaret confesses that her purpose in getting Jenny to escort her to the nursery was not motivated by her desire to return Chris's memory but from a personal desire to 'get near Chris's boy' (p. 177). Addressing Jenny, Margaret asks: "'You thought I meant to take them out to Chris?'" She wrung her hands, her weak voice quavered at the sternness of her resolution. "How can I?" (p. 177). Jenny tries to 'de-moralize' Margaret encouraging her doubts and pleading 'Why should you bring him back?' (p. 178). The dialogue that follows reveals Margaret's battle between her own desire to keep Chris for herself and the expectation placed upon her by Kitty (and society) to restore him to the role of husband:

'Either I should never have come,' she pleaded, 'or you should let him be.' She was arguing not with me but with the whole hostile reasonable world. 'Mind you I wasn't sure if I ought to come the second time, seeing we both were married and that. I prayed and read the bible, but I couldn't get any help. You don't notice how little there is in the Bible really till you go to it for help. But I've had a hard life and I've always done my best for William, and I know nothing in the world matters so much as happiness. If anybody's happy you ought to let them be. So I came again. Let him be. If you knew how happy he was just pottering round the garden. He could just go on. It can go on so easily.' (But here was a shade of doubt in her voice; she was pleading not only with me but with fate.)' (p. 178).

A dispirited Margaret, with encouragement from Jenny, contemplates transgressing her oppressive orthodox morality, in order to exact a different, happier future for Chris, albeit one sustained by his delusion. She cries out 'But Oh! I can't do it. Go out and put an end to that poor love's happiness! After the time he's had, the war and

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<sup>17</sup> Dollimore (1991), p. 4.



all. And then he'll have to go back there! I can't! I can't!' (p. 179-180). Jenny feels 'an ecstatic sense of ease' that 'everything was going to be alright' liberated by the promise of a different outcome to the situation. When Margaret asks 'I oughtn't to do it, ought I?' Jenny replies emphatically, 'Of course not! Of Course Not!' (p. 180), but her enthusiasm dies as both women realises that standing in the doorway is Kitty: 'The poise of her head had lost its pride, the shadows under her eyes were black like the marks of blows, and all her loveliness was diverted to the expression of grief [...] her face puckered with tears as she looked at us' (p. 180-81).

The sudden, intrusive vision of Kitty reminds both women simultaneously of their duty to abide by the 'truth' of society, to submit to the social order and to restore and uphold normality. No matter how superficial or shallow Jenny evaluates her grief to be (Jenny callously attributes Kitty's grief-stricken appearance as a consequence of seeing the 'strange ugly woman moving about among her things' p. 181), her presence stymies any thought of transgression: 'The rebellion had gone from her eyes and they were again the seat of all gentle wisdom' observes Jenny of Margaret as she leaves to speak to Chris. In one final act of transgression the two women kiss 'not as women, but as lovers do; I think we each embraced that part of Chris the other had absorbed by her love' (p. 184). This scene is arguably the crux or crisis point of the novel, the outcome of which will affect all that is to follow. It demonstrates West's 'dramatic instinct' to bring the novels denouement 'cleanly and impulsively' to its climax.<sup>18</sup> West's complex tale explores the consequences of both transgression and conformity, and is an example of what Dollimore has described as

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<sup>18</sup> West, 'Wings of Desire', *FW*, 1:22 (18<sup>th</sup> April 1912), pp. 433-4, p. 433.

a 'transgressive desire which makes its opposition felt as a disruptive reaction upon, and inversion of, the categories of subjective depth which hold in place the dominant order which proscribes that desire.'<sup>19</sup> Margaret and Jenny's transgressive desire culminates in a lover's kiss that propels them back towards their relative normative subjectivities.

**Psychoanalysis: Rebecca West, David Eder and *The Return of the Soldier*.**

One of the most significant influences *The Freewoman* had upon West's early career as a novelist was in its promotion of psychoanalysis; *The Return of the Soldier* was fundamentally shaped by this new discourse of modernity and has been extensively analysed and criticised through its prism. In 2008 Steve Pinkerton wrote that 'two critical trends have persisted with surprising resilience in scholarship on [the novel]: first the wholesale dismissal for psychoanalytic as well as purely literary reasons, of amnesiac Chris Baldry's climactic "cure," and second, the underestimation and general neglect of Chris's sweetheart, Margaret Allington.'<sup>20</sup> Pinkerton, drawing on the work of François Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière, makes a convincing argument that 'the soldier's cure in fact emerges as a highly convincing transferential encounter in light of recent advancements in trauma therapy, and that Margaret – an intuitive analyst and therapist – is critical to Chris's final transformation, for better or worse.'<sup>21</sup> Misha Kavka, presents the novel as 'a critical exploration of masculine trauma on the one hand and an ambivalent engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis on the other', whilst Wyatt Bonikowski 'traces a parallel movement in Freud's

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<sup>19</sup> Dollimore (1991), p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Steve Pinkerton, 'Trauma and Cure in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*', in *Journal of Modern Literature* 32:1, (Fall 2008), pp. 1-12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

theories of traumatic neurosis and the death drive [...] and the metaphors of penetration and shattering around which West structures Jenny's narrative.'<sup>22</sup> However, Bonikowski, Kavka, and Pinkerton do not consider the contemporaneous British research that influenced and informed West's portrayal of Chris's illness and cure. It is important to note that, from the evidence available, West likely enjoyed a personal friendship with the father of British Psychoanalysis, Dr. M. D. Eder. Commonly known as David Eder, he compiled the first study of Great War psychoses and neuroses in 1917 entitled *War-shock: The Psycho-Neuroses in War Psychology and Treatment*. This publication appears key to West's lay understanding of the symptoms and cure of her returned soldier 'hero'.<sup>23</sup> West had a keen interest in the workings of the mind, which was informed and encouraged by *Freewoman* editorials. As Franklin has observed: '*The Freewoman* was one of the first British journals to express an interest in psychoanalysis and it called upon writers to direct their gaze inward, away from material reality and into the workings of the mind.'<sup>24</sup> This enduring fascination with psychoanalysis was linked to the editor's strong affiliation with and emulation of *The New Age* in which Eder was regularly published crusading for psychoanalysis.<sup>25</sup> Like West, Eder was a Fabian and Syndicalist who pioneered the Endowment of Motherhood, a scheme that Wells supported and wrote

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<sup>22</sup> Misha Kavka, 'Men in (Shell-) Shock: Masculinity, Trauma and Psychoanalysis in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*' in *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature*, 22:1, (Winter 1998), pp. 151-71. Wyatt Bonikowski, 'The Return of the Soldier Brings Death Home' in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 51:3, (Fall 2005), pp. 513-535.

<sup>23</sup> M. D. Eder, *War-shock: The Psycho-Neuroses in War Psychology and Treatment* (London: William Heinemann, 1917).

<sup>24</sup> Franklin (2002), p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-238.

about in *The New Machiavelli*.<sup>26</sup> Hobman describes Eder as 'a political pugilist' a term that could perfectly describe West's journalistic style.<sup>27</sup> Eder was a leading exponent of the psychoanalytic creed amongst a limited number of practicing Freudians in London. In the summer of 1911, just prior to *The Freewoman's* launch, he gave the first reading of a paper outlining in simple terms, the treatment of a case of hysteria and obsession by Freud's psycho-analytic method to the British Medical Association, causing the entire delegation to walk out in disgust. He was also a follower of the 'individualist anarchism' adopted and promoted by the *Freewoman*. The brother-in-law of fellow *Freewoman* Barbara Low (an influential figure in the formation and running of the *Freewoman* Discussion Circles), Eder was scheduled to appear alongside West in the first edition of the new periodical, but due to the confines of space his article, 'Doth a Man Travail with Child' – like West's 'The Position of Women in Indian Life' – was held over until the next issue.<sup>28</sup> Although

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<sup>26</sup> H. G. Wells, *The New Machiavelli* (London: Cassell, 1920). The Fabian Society released a tract entitled 'The Endowment of Motherhood' in March 1910 which outlined propositions to provide financial support for expectant and nursing mothers, through a proposed scheme of Maternity Pensions and specific insurances that would off set the 'initial expenses of maternity. See Fabian Tract No. 149, from The London School of Economics Archive at [http://lib-161.lse.ac.uk/archives/fabian\\_tracts/149.pdf](http://lib-161.lse.ac.uk/archives/fabian_tracts/149.pdf) [last accessed 12th August 2013].

<sup>27</sup> J. B. Hobman (ed) *David Eder: Memoirs of a Modern Pioneer* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1945). Foreword by Sigmund Freud.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Details collated and summarised. Low was a regular correspondent to *The Freewoman* and the primary instigator, organiser, and secretary of the Discussion Circles, which West regularly attended. Low was also responsible for the English translation of Anna Freud's work on psychoanalysis and educational psychology as well as a practising psychoanalyst. See Franklin, pp. 222-3. Franklin also provides a more detailed list of Eder's *Freewoman* connections alongside a summary of his fiery correspondence with Marsden, who challenged his theories presented in *The Endowment of Motherhood* (1908) pp. 221-3. Franklin's chapter 'Psychoanalysis and the *Freewoman*' details Marsden's relationship with Eder and her on attitude to psychoanalysis which led to an article in the magazine called 'A Plea for Psychology' in *FW*, 1:10, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1912 pp. 181-2. Franklin suggests Eder's theories contributed to the creation of characters like West's Chris Baldry, Woolf's Septimus Smith, and Thomas Mann's Hans Castorp, who began to populate the literary landscape suggesting that 'the British avant-garde had already begun to turn inward, into the mind and its psychology prior to 1914.' (Franklin *MSS* p. 228) Unlike Hutchinson, Franklin argues that 'this turn inward united little-magazine and psychoanalytic communities in London before and during the First World War, and instilled in writers like David Eder, D. H. Lawrence, and Marsden [and arguably West] the sense they were in hovering on the brink of a new world.' (Franklin [2002], p. 228)

little is known about the specifics of Eder's relationship with West, it is fair to assume they were well acquainted, shared mutual interests, were politically allied, that West would have been very familiar with his research, and if not close friends they would have shared many friends in common including the writers Lawrence, Wells, and John Middleton Murry. Hobman claims 'the literary side of David Eder was remarkable in range and insight', and both Eder and West were passionate about the work of D. H. Lawrence.<sup>29</sup> They also shared a sharp sense of humour; in his 'Introductory Sketch' Hobman recalls he 'once overheard him surprise a woman friend, who was discussing the martyred sense of domestic duty under the family fetish, which burdens so many good souls, by saying "Madam, my job in life is to cure people of a sense of duty."' <sup>30</sup> After his death in 1936 West paid tribute to him, writing:

I suppose everybody has sung his praises and so it's useless to add to them – he was just somebody about whom there could be no two minds [...] I realise he must have left an unbelievable vacuum in the life of everybody who was near to him when I think how warmly I felt about him, though I saw him so rarely.<sup>31</sup>

Pinkerton's compelling argument for the novel's 'psychoanalytic plausibility' rests on modern developments in trauma theory, but research undertaken in the course of this study shows there is a strong case for locating West's fictional character within the expert knowledge of its own era and to the very real case histories Eder recorded in *War-shock*.

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<sup>29</sup> Hobman (1945), p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

Despite West's later denial that the novel was a study in psychoanalysis it is circumstantially evident that she drew upon Eder's research not only to create the credible psychological profile of Chris within contemporary understanding, but as a basis for the composition of symbolism in Jenny's dreams.<sup>32</sup> It is also possible that she references Eder in the character of Dr Andrews. This avuncular figure is usually interpreted as a cameo of Wells with whom Eder shared a similar physiognomy. West's 1928 letter to *The Observer* aimed to set the record straight about the genesis and development of *The Return of the Soldier*. Mr St. John Ervine had published a review of the novel claiming it had been:

written at a time when London's intellectuals were suffering from the first impact upon their minds of the Herren Jung and Freud, and were inclined to believe that the solution to all our ills could be found in psychoanalysis ... Miss West's novel was, in brief, a modern Tract for the Times; it was brilliant journalism.<sup>33</sup>

West claimed that the novel 'was complete in my mind in the middle of 1915 and complete in typescript, except for a few corrections, not very much later; and that at the time not one percent of London's intellectuals or any other class had heard of psychoanalysis.' West's assertion is ambiguous, careful never to make a first person denial that she was unfamiliar with psychoanalysis in 1915, as this would not fit with the evidence. *The New Age* and Eder 'introduced [...] readers and writers to the subject long before the rest of English press had discovered its existence'.<sup>34</sup> Wallace Martin observes that West's lover Wells was at the forefront of the cultural awakening regarding psychoanalysis. In *Tono-Bungay* (1908), *The New Machiavelli*

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<sup>32</sup> Rebecca West, Letter to the Editor of *The Observer*, pub. 24<sup>th</sup> June 1928 in *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 57:1/2 (October 1982), pp. 66-71. Prefatory note by G. E. Hutchinson.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Martin (1967), p. 5.

(1911) and *The Passionate Friends* (1913), Wells 'recognized [sic] the need for a new outlook in psychology earlier than did most of his contemporaries.'<sup>35</sup> Eder had published on several aspects of psychoanalytic theory in the years preceding West's debut novel. His papers and articles included 'Freud's Theory on Dreams' (1912), 'The Present Problem of Psycho-Analysis' (1913), 'Doctors and Dreams' (1913), not to mention the numerous articles contributed to *The New Age*, a periodical recognised for 'offering a platform to new ideas and unpopular causes.'<sup>36</sup> Given West's close connection to Wells, *The New Age*, and Barbara Low, it is probable that Eder's ground-breaking work undertaken in Malta during 1916 would have been a much discussed topic. He published most of his findings in *The Lancet* in 1916 before completing his book a year later.<sup>37</sup> As early as 1911 Hutchison claims West was collecting cuttings that demonstrated a growing interest in psychological dissociation and amnesia.<sup>38</sup> Her novel was in near-completed form by October 1917 as confirmed in a letter to Sylvia Lynd, and was the subject of negotiation for serialisation in *Century Magazine*.<sup>39</sup> In the published biographies the consensus regarding *The Return of the Soldier* is that West 'by the middle of 1915 had conceived the plot of her novel [and that] in early 1916 she had reached the last chapter.'<sup>40</sup> The letter to Lynd suggests that even though the novel was finished in late 1916, West spent some considerable time revising her work, as by October 1917 she describes it herself as being 'almost' complete. This suggests that despite the book being completed before

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<sup>35</sup> Martin (1967), f/n. p. 139.

<sup>36</sup> Hobman (1945) p. 55

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>38</sup> Hutchinson, Prefatory Note, *YULG* (1982) p. 66.

<sup>39</sup> West to Sylvia Lynd, (10<sup>th</sup> October 1917) in Scott (2000), pp. 28, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Rollyson (2007[1995]), p. 44. Rollyson is the most specific about timings though Gibb, Glendinning, and Ray correlate roughly to this time frame.

the publication of *War-shock*, West was still working on her manuscript; the two intervening years between 'completion' and publication gave a prodigious West plenty of scope to integrate some of Eder's more useful observations into her novel.

Reading West's novel in conjunction with Eder's *War-shock* reveals many parallels between his specific research into wartime psycho-neuroses and Chris's illness. Chris begins to emerge as a composite of several of Eder's patients. In her letter to *The Observer* West writes:

I got the idea for the story from two sources which have both nothing whatsoever to do with psycho-analysis. It happened that in 1914 I heard of one of the first cases of amnesia the war produced; this reminded me of a paper in a medical journal I had read before the war in which a factory doctor had recorded without comment the case of the elderly factory hand who fell down a staircase on his head and come to himself under the delusion that he was a boy of twenty; and later gave great pain to his wife by repudiating her and demanding a sweetheart from whom he had been separated for many years.<sup>41</sup>

This quotation raises two salient facts: first that West read medical journals, making it likely that she followed Eder's professional publications in journals such as *The Lancet*, *The Universal Medical Record*, and *Transactions of the Psycho-Medical Society*, and second that the inspiration for Chris Baldry's psychological illness and cure is taken from medical facts as West was aware of them. In the introduction to *War-shock* Eder describes the difference between an hysteric and a psychasthenic asserting that: 'Each forward step, babyhood to childhood, childhood to puberty, puberty to adolescence is fraught with difficulties for the psychasthenic; he cannot fit himself into the real world which his subconscious self has already foreshadowed.'<sup>42</sup> Continuing the descriptor Eder states: 'To avoid the difficulties [of dealing with the

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<sup>41</sup> West, *The Observer* (24<sup>th</sup> June 1928).

<sup>42</sup> Eder (1917), p. 10.



present and or the future] which loom so tremendous, his mind busies itself in the creation of phantasies centering round the past.'<sup>43</sup> These two statements can be linked clearly to Chris's symptoms as West reveals them to be at specific points in the novel. Not only does Chris grow up under the shadow of weighty family expectation, but in late adolescence he experiences a traumatic set-back when his father's mismanagement of his business affairs – about which he makes 'braggartly cheerful hints of impending ruin' (p. 109) – consequently forces Chris to Mexico to 'keep the mines going through the revolution, to keep the firm's head above water and Baldry Court sleek and hospitable, to keep everything bright and splendid save only his youth, which after that was dulled by care' (p. 110).

Evidence to support Chris's diagnosis as a psychasthenic continues as Eder, quoting lines from Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality'<sup>44</sup> asserts:

'Shades of the prison house begin to close

About the growing boy.'

The prison becomes the incest motif, the 'terrible mother', the temptress, the serpent; the fear of the father.<sup>45</sup>

Familial duty and obligation overwhelm Chris and redirect the course of his life, taking him away from his 'soul-mate' Margaret and eventually into marriage with the more 'suitable' Kitty. Eder also remarks that 'it is to be noted that all cases of psychasthenia had an antebellum history' which fits the scenario West creates for Chris, whose cure is effected by the revelation that he had once had a son who died

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<sup>43</sup> Eder (1917), p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' part V in William Wordsworth, *The Complete Poetical Works* with introduction by John Morley (London: Macmillan & Co., 1888); Bartleby.com, 1999. [www.bartleby.com/145/](http://www.bartleby.com/145/) [last accessed 7<sup>th</sup> September 2013].

<sup>45</sup> Eder (1917), p. 10.

in early childhood, five years prior to the War.<sup>46</sup> Chris's lack of any physical injury is accounted for by Eder's observation that 'shell shock is rare among the seriously wounded. In all these patients physical energy is sufficiently occupied with something very concrete and real; there is none to spare for the creation of phantasies.'<sup>47</sup> The symptoms and treatments described by Eder across several case histories are compellingly similar to those exhibited by Chris. For example in the history of patient no. 100, Eder asserts that 'the process of self-deception must end if any harmony is to be established', which is the tack Dr Andrews takes when treating Chris's delusion. Patient no. 99 is described as having a subtle 'comprehension of his delusion' which Chris also exhibits when he sits with Jenny after Margaret has left for the day: "I want to tell you that I know it is all right. Margaret has explained it to me" after which he 'sat like a blind man waiting for the darkness to lift.' (pp. 124-5) In his paper given at the Malta Medical Conference on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1916, Eder attempted to 'convince his audience of the reality of the Freudian unconscious and the value of Freud's concepts of hysteria and symbolic conversion in understanding the symptomology of war-neuroses' concluding that 'For such patients [...] "the bitter self-realisation" of a Jungian analysis was needed. Like Ursula and Birkin in *Women in Love* they must be brought to sacrifice their infantilism and, distinguishing the unconscious from its deathly simulacrum, accept the responsibilities of individual living.'<sup>48</sup> In *The Return of the Soldier* it is Margaret who delivers Chris's 'bitter self-realisation' by reminding him of his dead son Oliver, and in doing so Chris is forced

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<sup>46</sup> Eder (1917), p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> John Turner, 'David Eder: Between Freud and Jung' in *D. H. Lawrence Review* 27:2-3 (1997-1998), p. 302.

to 'sacrifice the infantilism' and 'accept the responsibilities' hitherto kept at bay by his amnesia. When he returns to the house looking 'Every inch the soldier' Kitty sucks her breath in satisfaction: "He is cured!" she whispered slowly. "He's cured!" (p.189).

West's debut novel owes a debt to her training on the staff of *The Freewoman* and not least to her friend and mentor Marsden who was one of the strongest advocates of a new kind of literature, one that expressed the subjective interiority of existence rather than the material objectivity of external facts. As the magazine became more literary during its *New Freewoman* period West became more involved with the experimentalism of the avant-garde and she brought this experience to her fictional writing. She also became associated with figures that were to have a life-long influence on her authorial style. One of West's first fictional short stories 'Indissoluble Matrimony' debuted in Wyndham Lewis's *BLAST*, the avant-garde journal in which she featured next to Ford Madox Ford's 'The Saddest Story.' Ford's central character Edward Ashburnham – 'a handsome member of the governing classes with a "fatal touch of the imagination"' – is claimed to have inspired the character of Chris Baldry.<sup>49</sup> Peter Brooker observes: 'A picture does emerge therefore, in which West's feminist, "Devilish well informed and yet *tres femme*" drifts towards Lewis's devilish superior, smouldering Tyro.'<sup>50</sup> West's protean literary aesthetic reflects Marsden's philosophical egoism which Thacker claims is 'replete with modernist motifs of surface versus depth and abstract versus concrete' so

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<sup>49</sup> Rollyson (2007 [1995]), p. 24 and Norton (2000), p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Brooker (2007), p. 90.

prevalent in *The Return of the Soldier*.<sup>51</sup> Despite never becoming integrated into any of the various 'movements' that emerged during these early modernist years, West's fiction displayed many of the modernist literary devices that would become integral to women's writing of the period.

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<sup>51</sup> Thacker, *ELT* (1993), p. 190-1.

**3.**  
***BLAST***

Watch the reporters spit,  
Watch the anger of the professors,  
Watch how the pretty ladies revile them:

‘Is this,’ they say, ‘the nonsense  
that we expect of poets?’

‘Where is the Picturesque?’  
‘Where is the vertigo of emotion?’

‘No! His first work was the best.’  
‘Poor Dear! He has lost his illusions’

Ezra Pound <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra Pound. ‘Salutation the Second’, *NFW*, 1:5 (15<sup>th</sup> August 1913), p. 88.

### 3:1

#### ***BLAST*, and the ‘Cult of the Individual’**

With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.<sup>1</sup>

Oscar Wilde

The ‘Poor’ are detestable animals! They are only picturesque and amusing for the sentimentalist or the romantic! The ‘Rich’ are bores without a single exception, *en tent que riches!*

We want those simple and great people found everywhere  
Blast represents the art of the Individuals.<sup>2</sup>

Wyndham Lewis.

As has been examined in the introduction and section one, the concepts of the self and the individual gained increasing prominence during the first two decades of the twentieth century and some writers – such as Dora Marsden and Rebecca West – used the idea of the individual to carve out a third neutral gender or discursive space. By arguing for a self that was ‘genderless, solitary and unique’<sup>3</sup> Marsden *et al.* sought a solution to what has been described by Rebecca West as a prevailing ‘sex-antagonism’ between men and women.<sup>4</sup> Alternative little magazines like *The Freewoman* challenged the ‘grand narrative’ of feminism by offering women the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilde (1991[1891]), p. 395.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, ‘Long Live the Vortex!’ in *BLAST* No. 1 (20<sup>th</sup> June 1914) (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Marsden, ‘Views and Comments’, *NFW*, 1:1(15th June 1913) p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> West, ‘An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty: The Beginnings of Sex-Antagonism’ in *The Clarion* (27th September, 1912), Marcus (1982), pp. 97-101.

opportunity to 'consider her sex as incidental as men do.'<sup>5</sup> As Marsden viewed it, the biologically reinforced/essentialist male/female roles were compounded by a language that was constructed around a dominant patriarchal symbolism that automatically designated 'woman' as secondary or other. As Lisa Tickner observed, opposition to feminism was based upon complementarity that:

Drew heavily upon the Victorian ideology of 'separate spheres': 'Man for the field and woman for the hearth/ Man for the sword, and for the needle she;/ Man with the head, and woman with the heart;/ Man to command, and women to obey;/ All else confusion'.<sup>6</sup>

These taxonomies also had the effect of categorising and grouping together swathes of society, contributing to the collective 'grand narrative' or history of the era. Marsden achieved this, as Helen McNeil has indicated, by 'privileging discourse over politics and aesthetics.'<sup>7</sup> Beckett and Cherry observe that in the case of the female Vorticists, individualism may have been an attractive philosophy to follow because it offered to 'spring the trap of binary opposition which locate[d] them within the feminine and defines the feminine as not-masculine.'<sup>8</sup>

It is worth noting that Jean-François Lyotard identified the early twentieth-century as the point at which grand narratives – all encompassing and totalizing – began to disintegrate, being replaced with more localised or small histories.<sup>9</sup> Arguably, this disintegration was due at least in part, to the cumulative impact of increasingly radical ideas circulating during the latter half of the nineteenth century:

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<sup>5</sup> Marsden, 'Bondwomen', *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Tickner (1987), p. 154. Quoting Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Princess* (1847), part v, ll. 437-41.

<sup>7</sup> McNeil in Campbell (2000) pp. 141- 169, p. 146. See also in Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernity, Modernism' in Paul Edwards. (ed) *BLAST: Vorticism, 1914-1918* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 59-72.

<sup>8</sup> Beckett & Cherry in Edwards (2000), p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> Jim McGuigan, *Modernity and Postmodern Culture* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), pp. 6, 9-14, 29-30, 33, 46-7, 50, 59, 151, 153.



Darwinism (which shattered the fundamental religious dogma of Divine creation); psychoanalysis (which broke down the interiority of the self); theosophy (which re-evaluated religion and the existence of the soul); egoism (also known as individualism and aimed at the promotion of the self over all); and existentialist philosophy (which regarded the existence of the self as an emotional, thinking, dynamic, and responsible autonomy). Each of these ideological developments, all of which were influential on Marsden's intellectual and philosophical journey, attempted to deconstruct society into its component parts; over a period of about fifty years the emphasis in society gradually shifted from the collective to the individual and the participation of that individual in public and private spheres. These intangible changes in the human psyche were strongly reflected in the break down of traditional narrative forms, and the reconceptualisation of literary form became characteristic of Modernist aesthetics.

If Marsden's ideas were read in isolation from their publication context, it would be easy to conclude that her developing feminist appropriation of the individual is somehow representative of a widespread shift in the way the general populace viewed changing sex dynamics. However, when read in conjunction with *BLAST* it can be shown that Marsden's ideas were part of a much wider discourse. This section demonstrates how the men associated with *BLAST* were as keen as Marsden to maximise the potential of the individual as a motif of their aesthetic cause. The individual, in a similar fashion to *The Freewoman*, was incorporated into all *BLAST* promotional materials prior to its publication and, again like *The Freewoman*, the concept was reiterated throughout its pages, both in its manifestoes and its literary contributions. Reviews and articles that both criticised and praised Vorticism emphasised its individualist nature. However, in each instance the individual is figured male and as such it appears that Lewis' magazine sought to undermine the

feminist egoism that Marsden was developing. In this light *BLAST* becomes a main protagonist in the sex-war that Rebecca West insisted dominated the age. However, what this section will also demonstrate is the inconsistent nature of these 'antagonisms,' the points at which 'masculinist bravado' as Paul Edwards has called it, disintegrates and vorticism becomes a 'liberatory movement [for women] more than an oppressive one.'<sup>10</sup>

In order to contextualise Marsden's feminism, it is important to acknowledge that Modernism was a literary phenomena preoccupied with what can be understood as the 'cult of the individual.' Individualism, the solitary artist, the internalised self, stream of consciousness, destabilised narration and the literary 'personality' figured prominently and were played out in the creation of myriad little magazines that rapidly emerged and as equally rapidly disappeared during this period. Whilst mass media publications such as *The Times* can be described as the media tool of grand narrative discourses or the 'mouthpiece of society' in general, little magazines – of which *BLAST* was an epitomising example – can be described as organs of counter-cultural or contrapuntal individualism that often opposed the metanarrative of mass culture during this period.<sup>11</sup> Many groups that emerged during the early twentieth century such as the Fabians and Socialists, aimed to reconfigure dominant systems of class and wealth and were founded on the premise of universal equality, which ironically translated into a form of individualism. Georg Simmel, writing in 1908, identified that the corollary of mass culture was the development of the individual:

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<sup>10</sup> Edwards (ed) (2000), p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Mark S. Morrison. *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences and Receptions 1905-1920* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); Suzanne W. Churchill & Adam McKibble. (eds) *Little Magazines & Modernism: New Approaches* (Padstow: Ashgate, 2007); Scholes and Wulfman (2010), in particular ch. 2 pp. 26-43.

'Surely no one can fail to recognize' (he wrote in his essay 'Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality') that 'the style of modern life – precisely because of its mass character, its rushing diversity, its unboundable equalization of countless previously conserved idiosyncrasies – has led to unprecedented levelings of the personality form of life.'<sup>12</sup> For some, like the Freewomen, individualism offered an escape from the increasing homogeneity of humanity. The cultural milieu of literary London was preoccupied with continental philosophy and the newly emergent field of psychoanalysis. Freud, Nietzsche, Stirner and Bergson, whose work, Bruce Clark as identified, was integral to Marsden's developing feminist theories, used diversely innovative approaches and ideas concerning the construction of the self and of time, which challenged the authority of universalising concepts by highlighting the significance and impact of an individual's interiority on society.

In the cases of the magazines examined in the course of this study, it can be shown that the concept of 'individualism' and even the interpretation of the word 'individual' is a gendered affair. Marsden's attempts to appropriate the individual as part of a feminist renegotiation of gender is rebuffed by the Vorticist assertion of the individual as male, which highlights the problematic nature of Marsden's feminist egoism. Lewis, like Marsden, is drawing upon the work of Max Stirner, and as William Wees notes, Stirner's influence is particularly strong in Lewis' dramatic prose/play 'Enemy of the Stars.'<sup>13</sup> These opposing perspectives may originate from the same source: egoism, but the results are contrasting. Viewed in this way, it is possible to examine the polarity of attitudes and discourses that circulated around

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<sup>12</sup> 'Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality' in Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms Selected Writings*, edited by Donald N. Levine (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 251-293, p. 290.

<sup>13</sup> Wees (1972), pp. 184-6.

gender or sexuality. Even when theories appeared to have the same intellectual foundation the discourses produced were often contradictory; a contradiction that was often based upon a male/female binary. Nowhere is it recorded whether, when Wyndham Lewis conceived *BLAST*, it was his intention to enter the already fraught arena of gender debates being played out in many other publications; rather it is widely accepted that he was intent on providing a controversial vehicle for his artistic manifesto.<sup>14</sup> Whatever his intention, he created a magazine that provides a lucrative resource when looking at the 'sex-antagonisms' of the 1910s. *BLAST* is evidence of the anomalies that existed in ideas surrounding the emancipation of women and the de-codifying of gendered taxonomies. Whilst men and women of this period appeared to express ideas sympathetic to feminism or divergent sexualities, these sympathies regularly disintegrate under scrutiny. This section examines the role that the 'cult of the individual' played in the creation of *BLAST* and its consequential impact upon the discourses of gender and sexuality therein. Given the scope of the material contained, the chapter will be divided into two parts. Part one will focus on the dialogic nature of the feminist periodical *The Freewoman* and its avant-garde contemporary little magazine, *BLAST*, contextualising the discourses of gender they contain. In part two, the focus of the chapter will shift to Rebecca West and her appearance in *BLAST*. This thesis will offer a fresh interpretation of the discourses of gender contained within her short story 'Indissoluble Matrimony', revising the current critical readings to consider how it 'fits' within a Vorticist context.

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Cork. *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age: Volume One, Origins and Developments* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), Vol. 1/2, pp. 239-67.

3:2

## ‘The Epoch of the Gadding Mind’: Individualism and Gender in *The Freewoman* and *BLAST*<sup>1</sup>

**BLAST!**

OYEZ. OYEZ. OYEZ.

Throughout the length and the breadth of England and through three continents **BLAST** has been **REVILED** by all save the intelligent.

**WHY?**

Because **BLAST** alone has dared to show modernity its face in an honest glass.<sup>2</sup>

Wyndham Lewis, ‘Chronicles’, 1915

*The Freewoman* and *BLAST* are both prime examples of little magazines that were controversial products of individualist thought and ambition. The *Freewoman* sequence was one example of an individual’s disaffection with mainstream militant suffragism and the Pankhurstian obsession with the vote as a panacea for all the injustices hitherto suffered by women. Similarly when taking a magazine such as the avant-garde Vorticist publication *BLAST*, the ‘cult of the individual’ and the socio-historical significance of the individuals responsible for that publication cannot be ignored. This little magazine is both unique to and paradoxically representative of the modernist impulse. Vorticism is an important, if short-lived, component in the

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<sup>1</sup> Marsden, ‘The Lean Kind’, *NFW*, 1:1 (15<sup>th</sup> June 1913), pp. 1-2, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *BLAST: Review of the Great English Vortex No. 2*, July, 1915 (London: John Lane, 1915), reprint (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), p. 85

development of modernism. Its main protagonists were already involved to varying degrees in other literary and artistic endeavours. In his introduction to *Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde* William Wees lists an eclectic array of disparate 'definitions' for this violent, disruptive, artistic force that erupted onto the literary and artistic landscape during the early 1910s.<sup>3</sup> Historically, there seems to have been some difficulty in defining Vorticism, which Lewis himself later summarised as 'what I, personally did and said, at a certain period.'<sup>4</sup> It remains according to one critic 'something of an oddity in Britain's artistic culture' though very much a product of its time, a time in which 'a much cherished individualism' liberated artists from the burden of adhering to aesthetic traditions.<sup>5</sup> Lewis defined it thus:

By Vorticism we mean (a) ACIVITY as opposed to the tasteful PASSIVITY of Picasso; (b) SIGNIFICANCE as opposed to the dull or anecdotal character to which the naturalist is condemned; (c) ESSENTIAL MOVEMENT AND ACTIVITY (such as the energy of the mind) as opposed to the imitative cinematography, the fuss and hysterics of the Futurists [and] definite POPULAR acceptance should never be aimed at.<sup>6</sup>

Like Marsden's definition of the Freewoman, Vorticism was defined in antithesis to what it opposes; it was that, which it was not. It followed a similar vitalist ethos as encouraged by *Freewoman* articles and similarly opposed all forms of sentimentalism, sterility, flaccidity, passivity, placidity, and derivative thought preferring instead to represent a 'certain fluid force against circumstance, as CONCEIVING instead of merely observing and reflecting.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Wees (1972), p. 3-7

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Adams, 'Futurism and the British Avant-Garde' in Jonathan Black, Christopher Adams, Michael J. K. Walsh and Jonathan Woods (eds) *BLASTing the Future: Vorticism in Britain, 1910-1920* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2004), pp. 9-18, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Note* in the catalogue of the Vorticist exhibition at the Doré Gallery, June 1915.

<sup>7</sup> 'Vortex Pound' in *BLAST 2* (1915), p. 153.

In his recent contribution to Brooker and Thacker's critical anthology, Andrzej Gasiorek contends that 'Vorticism and *BLAST* were group phenomena and accounts that focus only on Lewis conceal complex origins and varied practices', which – while usefully drawing attention to the polyvalence of the journal – also gives the impression that Vorticism was a cohesive coterie or milieu, an idea that was never perpetuated by the artists or writers involved.<sup>8</sup> However, later in the same article Gasiorek re-evaluates the emphasis on a group dynamic by including evidence of its strong individualist foundations. '*BLAST*' he explains, 'allegedly set out to be a vehicle for Vorticist ideas. But its contributors did *not agree* about what these were.'<sup>9</sup> He also highlights the overwhelming effort and editorial power that Lewis exerted, referencing a letter from Lewis to the Editor of *Parisienne Review* (April 1949) in which Lewis takes the magazine to task for overemphasising Pound's (and other) contributions to *BLAST*. Gasiorek demonstrates Lewis's possessiveness over Vorticism. Lewis wrote, reclaiming his role as sole protagonist in the genesis of *BLAST*:

[J]ust let me say it, and then forget it once and for all. I, Wyndham Lewis, had the not very original idea of founding an art paper, to advertise and popularise a movement in the visual arts which I had initiated. As I am of a somewhat literary turn, I decided to have writing in it too [...] It was with regret I included the poems of my friend Ezra Pound: they "let down", I feel the radical purism of the visual contents, or the propaganda of the same.

That *Blast* was my idea, that I was the editor, that in short the whole show was mine, finally that *Vorticism* was purely a painter's affair (as *imagism* was purely a literary movement, having no relation whatsoever to *Vorticism*, nor anything in common with it) need not worry you.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gasiorek in Brooker & Thacker (2009), p. 295.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

<sup>10</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, edited by W. K. Rose (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1963), pp. 491-2.

It is reductive, as Gasiorek points out, to completely ignore peripheral figures in the cultivation of Vorticism and *BLAST*, but it is equally reductive to try to perpetuate the impression that a definable 'group' of Vorticists existed. The idea of a fraternity (or *confrères*) is more useful here, as the term more adequately explains the way in which those involved in Vorticism and *BLAST* freely associated as equals, for a mutually beneficial purpose, without necessarily adhering to an overarching artistic or aesthetic doctrine. The term 'group' strongly implies unity and cohesion, which is arguably antithetical to any understanding of Vorticism. The use of the word 'fraternity' also alludes to the phallogocentric atmosphere that Vorticism seemed to generate. It also sits more comfortably with Gasiorek's later assertion that: 'Vorticism comprised of a diverse set of practices and was not a tight-knit movement' and his reference to Ulrich Weisstein's theory that Vorticism was most akin to Expressionism, which 'expressed the artist's private vision, in which abstraction, distortion, and defamiliarization played an important role'.<sup>11</sup>

Writing his autobiographical *Blasting and Bombardiering* in 1937, Lewis took pains to remind his readers that those involved in the production of *BLAST* were:

not a herd or a flock, however small, in the sense of the French *cénacle* or the London 'Bloomsburies'. Indeed that sort of grouping necessarily implies that the people composing it are of far more interest together than they are apart. I think I may claim for the individuals ... that it would be pretty difficult to coexist with them communistically for many weeks at a stretch. They mean a great deal more apart than they would with their somewhat irregular contours worn smooth in log-rolling and in back-scratching.<sup>12</sup>

The modern age was certainly characterised by its numerous literary and artistic coteries and niche periodicals – such as *BLAST* – were by necessity the product of

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<sup>11</sup> Ulrich Weisstein, 'Vorticism: Expressionist English Style', *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1973), p.168 as quoted by Gasiorek, in Brooker & Thacker. (2009), p. 304.

<sup>12</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 14.



more than one person, yet in this quotation Lewis emphasises the primary significance of the individual, and that individual's personality in the process of creating art. His comment also reminds the reader that literary and artistic circles were fluid enterprises, as individuals sought to make a name for themselves by jumping onto various popular or controversial 'bandwagons'. Ezra Pound built and betrayed numerous expedient creative alliances, acting like a literary 'courtesan' as he flitted from one periodical after another, appropriating several coteries and publications in order to promulgate the evolving cause of *vers libre*. In the case of *The New Freewoman* Pound, writing in 1913 to the literary critic Milton Bronner, commented on the pliability of female editors, but despite his best efforts, as Scholes and Wulfman observe 'he never got the control he wanted, and he attributed this in part to Marsden's editorship.'<sup>13</sup>

The individual was a motif capitalised upon in order to announce *BLAST*'s upcoming publication and became a common refrain of the Vorticists, as Pound's comment in the *Egoist* demonstrates: 'The Vorticist movement is a movement of individuals, for individuals, for the protection of individuality.'<sup>14</sup> He wrote at the time that, '[w]e worked separately, we found an underlying agreement, we decided to stand together.'<sup>15</sup> This point was reiterated in *BLAST*'s opening statement:

*BLAST* will be popular essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class and description of people, but to the fundamental and popular instincts in every

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<sup>13</sup> Scholes & Wulfman (2010), p. 11. Pound's formidable female editorial opponents are listed alongside Marsden as an example of how he courted and then abandoned various publications when he failed to seize control.

<sup>14</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Edward Wadsworth, Vorticist' in *Egoist*, 1:16 (15<sup>th</sup> August 1914), p. 306.

<sup>15</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Vorticism,' *Fortnightly Review*, XCVI, (1914) p. 461. Also quoted in Michael Levenson, *The Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908-1922* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), p. 137.

class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL. [...] We are against the glorification of "the People."<sup>16</sup>

These comments echo the rhetorical strategy employed by Marsden to promote the idea of individualism through her persistent antagonism towards a collectively devised 'cause.' Marsden's idea of the individual as a feminist principle is difficult to reconcile with modern feminist thought, as like the Vorticist individual it privileges androcentric ideals, measuring female emancipation by a masculine yardstick.

**'The *Reductio ad Absurdum* of Mad Modernity': *BLAST* in context.**

*BLAST* was both the apotheosis and the swan song of the British avant-garde literary 'little magazine.' Using the criteria set out by David Miller and Richard Price, *BLAST* fulfils the majority of conditions for being denoted as a 'little magazine':<sup>17</sup> *BLAST*'s prose and artwork had a strong connection to poetry; it intended to run for more than one issue; it was published on a non-commercial basis; it had the 'explicit [...] intention to assert its content's difference' from the artistic (and to some extent literary) 'norm', 'centre', or 'establishment'; it was the work of a singular, independent group – the Vorticists; it produced works that asked to be 'measured' against traditional modes in terms of its originality; it worked within 'notionally hybrid genres', including art, literature, poetry and drama; its contents were derived from a small number of contributors; and it had a 'self-conscious sense of the physical and graphic design of the magazine being in tune with the content'. In addition to this

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis, *BLAST I* (1914), p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Miller & Price (2006), pp. ix-xi. This anthology focuses purely on magazines that championed poetry. The term 'little magazine' for the purposes of this study has been broadened, to include a spectrum of heterogeneous periodicals in line with Brooker and Thacker (2009). This more recent study allows magazines or periodicals to be included based on their positioning within contemporaneous countercultural discourses, but do not necessarily comply with all of Miller and Price's criteria. It is sufficient for a magazine to comply with one or two of the criteria to be called a 'little magazine'.

it expressed strong opinions regarding art, literature, and society that demonstrated an awareness and engagement with artistic movements abroad, often to 'the point of vituperation'. In the case of *BLAST* the targets included Marinetti's Italian Futurism, as well as the continental Post-Impressionism embodied in Fry's Omega collective.<sup>18</sup>

Given the brevity of its print run, its significance and influence in both literary and artistic terms has grown exponentially over successive decades. Violent, brash, anarchic, virile, scornful, it was considered 'an affront to good taste' clad in a 'chill pink flannelette cover [that] recalls the catalogue of some cheap East-end draper'; it was described by one contemporary critic from the *New York Times* as 'the *reductio ad absurdum* of mad modernity.'<sup>19</sup> Its impact on the literary scene was far from discreet; its bold typeface heralding its even bolder ambitions had the added advantage of propelling Lewis to prominence. Describing the experience in *Blasting and Bombardiering* Lewis wrote:

At some time during the six months that preceded the declaration of the war, very suddenly, from a position of relative obscurity, I became extremely well-known. Roughly this coincided with the publication of *BLAST*. I can remember no specific morning upon which I woke up and found that this had happened. But by August 1914 no newspaper was complete without news about 'vorticism' and its arch-exponent, Mr. Lewis.<sup>20</sup>

In a 1947 letter to James Thrall Soby, Lewis reflected that this period of his life was 'a little narrow segment of time, on the far side of world war i. [sic] That first war, you have to regard, as far as I am concerned, as a black solid mass, cutting off all that

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<sup>18</sup> Miller and Price cite *BLAST* as an example.

<sup>19</sup> Wees (1972), p. 193.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis (1967), p. 32.

went before it.<sup>21</sup> In summary *BLAST* was unique, countercultural, transgressive and out to make a lasting impression.

Lewis was determined to set Vorticism apart from its artistic progenitors: Post-Impressionism and Futurism. *BLAST* was devised ostensibly as a literary vehicle for Vorticism as the individuals of the Rebel Art Centre coterie attempted to define their 'new' art; a necessary step after an acrimonious and defining split with Roger Fry's Omega Workshop collective.<sup>22</sup> Planned as a quarterly review, its aggressive, anarchic language, and avant-garde flavour lasted a mere two issues, published almost a year apart. Aiming to shock, *BLAST* exploited all the symbols of 'virile' masculinity it could muster: brutish language, aggressive typeface, geometric layouts, curt parataxis, 'nasty' poetry, satire, and moral opprobrium burst from between its garish puce covers. Lewis described it as 'a hard unromantic external presentation of kinetic forces, an arrangement of surfaces.'<sup>23</sup> Constructed around a scaffold of contradictory dualisms, the magazine used a dichotomous 'BLAST & Bless' format, which lambasted high profile members of society and traditional modes of art and literature. It encouraged disobedience and relied upon a traditional tropology of war. Featuring a number of high quality glossy reproductions of art by Edward Wadsworth, Wyndham Lewis, Frederick Etchells, W. Roberts, Jacob Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Cuthbert Hamilton and Spencer Gore, the majority of the text was authored by Lewis, (albeit much of the content was regurgitated from conversations and correspondence with other members of his literary and social circles such as Pound). Poetry was

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<sup>21</sup> Lewis (1963), p. 406. Letter to James Thrall Soby dated 9th April, 1947.

<sup>22</sup> Wees (1972), 'Coteries', pp. 52-72. Kate Lechmere invited Lewis to run a rival atelier to the Omega Workshop and The Rebel Art Centre, which became the home of Vorticist activity in London, opened in March 1914.

<sup>23</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 265.

singularly attributable to Pound, who was asked by Lewis to 'give me something nasty for *BLAST*';<sup>24</sup> Pound's response was to proffer several experimental haiku style verses, plus a 'revenge' poem 'Salutation the Third' that attacked *The Times* for an unfavourable review.<sup>25</sup> Lewis wrote an experimental drama entitled 'The Enemy of the Stars', whilst prose was provided by an initial instalment of Ford's novel *The Good Soldier* – here given the title of 'The Saddest Story' – and Rebecca West's complete short story 'Indissoluble Matrimony'. West was the only female contributor to the first issue of the magazine.<sup>26</sup>

The magazine opened and closed with 'vitalist' manifestos with bold headings declaring: 'LONG LIVE THE VORTEX'; 'LIFE IS THE IMPORTANT THING!'; 'FUTURISM, MAGIC AND LIFE' and 'THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE.'<sup>27</sup> Despite its glorification of rebellion and upheaval, *BLAST*'s textual ballistics intended to invigorate and revitalise English art and life; a regenerative exercise compatible with the modernist motto of 'make it new'. It was anarchic without being nihilistic, part of a period described by Lewis as a time punctuated by a series of artistic '*Putsches*':

*Putsches* took place every month or so. Marinetti for instance. You may have heard of him! [...] Well Marinetti brought off a Futurist *Putsch* about this time.

It started in Bond Street. I counter-*Putsched*. I assembled in Greek Street a determined band of miscellaneous anti-futurists.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> As quoted by Paul Edwards, 'Foreword' in *BLAST* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2009), p. viii.

<sup>25</sup> *BLAST*, 'Salutation the Third' (p. 45), 'Momentum Aere, Etc.' & 'Come My Cantilations' (p. 46), 'Before Sleep' (p.47), 'His Vision of a Certain Lady Post Mortem', 'Epitaphs' & 'Fratres Minores' (p. 48), 'Women Before a Shop', 'L'Art', 'The New Cake Shop' & 'Meditatio' (p. 49), 'Pastoral' (p. 50).

<sup>26</sup> Ford Madox Ford was known during this period as Ford Madox Hueffer, however he is more broadly known as Ford and is referred to as Ford throughout.

<sup>27</sup> *BLAST*, pp. 7, 129, 132 and 146 (*BLAST* was published on July 2nd 1914, but the date was set as June 20th 1914)

<sup>28</sup> Lewis (1967), p. 33.

Viewed in this way *BLAST* and Vorticism both represent a stage in the aesthetic development of Modernism, which Michael Levenson proposes centred upon the London-based 'male' figures of Pound, T. E. Hulme, Ford, Lewis, Eliot, and 'evolved through the stages of Impressionism, Imagism, [Futurism], Vorticism and finally Classicism [...] and which, as Elliot and Wallace point out, was 'philosophically rooted in sceptical *individualism* developed through egoism, and moved towards authoritarianism' (emphasis added).<sup>29</sup>

### ***BLASTing Woman: The Rhetorical Ballistics of the 'Sex War'.***

Lewis' 'masculinist' magazine was a consciously gendered endeavour and its physical manifestation was orientated around the erect phallus; it used the prescriptively 'male' tropes of war, valour, sovereignty and dominance in its structure and rhetoric, aesthetically arranged around a hard linear textual arrangement that is punctuated by erect phallus-like black bars. Its content was heavily influenced by a Poundian 'imagist' aesthetic, embracing the masculine paradigms of directness, precision and the concrete: 'as much like granite as it can be [...] austere, direct, free from emotional slither'.<sup>30</sup> Vorticist art consciously avoided curved lines, fussiness, and any traditional motifs of femininity. Pound was already familiar with *The New Freewoman* and both he and Aldington were two of signatories on both the letter to Dora Marsden, which precipitated the name change to the *Egoist*, and on the Vorticist manifesto. Aldington and Pound, as well as Lewis, went on to become involved with *The Egoist* working closely with Harriet Shaw Weaver. The example of *BLAST*

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<sup>29</sup> Levenson (1984), p. vii & Bridget Elliot and Jo-Ann Wallace, *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Prologomena' *Poetry Review* 1 (February 1912), pp. 72-6 as quoted in Wees (1972), p. 126.

suggests that women were simultaneously integral to and excluded from the enterprises underpinning modernism.

Although women were involved with, and indeed instrumental to the Vorticist 'movement', such as it existed, their male colleagues regularly regarded them with derision. Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders, both active Vorticist artists and regulars at the Rebel Art Centre, willingly signed the manifesto but Lewis failed to include a single piece of their work in the magazine.<sup>31</sup> The only contribution made by a woman to issue one, was the 'non-Vorticist' short story by Rebecca West: 'Indissoluble Matrimony'. In her essay 'Finding a Voice' Georgina Taylor suggests that women writers sought out little magazines as they provided 'a platform to develop that was democratic in access and allowed all to participate as writers and critics, with new writers appearing alongside [and indeed in a position to critique, as in the case of West] much more established writers.'<sup>32</sup> Given that little magazines had become the egalitarian writing fields of the sex war, upon which both men and women could parry with some sense of rhetorical equality, *BLAST* seemed determined to 'buck the trend'. The repeated and consistent use of masculine tropes clearly denied any notion of gender democracy/neutrality, firmly re-enforced the binary in the field of art and literature, within which the male dominated. It certainly exudes an atmosphere of being a 'boys only club', a feeling endorsed by J. C. Squires, who described the Vorticists in *The New Statesman* as 'a heterogeneous mob suffering

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<sup>31</sup> Both women do contribute considerably to *BLAST: Review of the Great English Vortex*, No. 2, dated July 1915. Whether this is due to a shortage of male contributors, many of whom were at the front, is speculative. *BLAST 2* is far less substantial and more subdued than its predecessor and is concerned with the actual War, as opposed to the rhetorical one.

<sup>32</sup> Georgina Taylor, 'Finding a Voice: Women's Writing in Little Magazines, 1913-1920' in Paul Edwards (ed) *The Great London Vortex: Modernist Literature and Art* (Bath: Sulis Press, 2003), pp. 194-203, p. 194.

from juvenile decay.<sup>33</sup> Yet, like many of the little magazines that contributed to the genesis of modernism, *BLAST* was dependent on female endeavour and financial support. It was on Kate Lechmere's suggestion to Lewis that both the Rebel Art Centre and consequently, *BLAST* came into existence; she bankrolled both enterprises, underwriting the art centre expenses and issuing Lewis with a loan that financed *BLAST*. Lewis, like his colleague Pound, had no qualms about using women as stepping-stones in order to advance his literary and artistic ambitions; a pattern of behaviour that was repeated in several little magazines throughout Britain, America, and Europe. Several personal and business altercations between Lechmere and Lewis and the non-repayment of the loan brought their association to an acrimonious end.<sup>34</sup>

*BLAST* does not directly 'blast' the concept of woman per se, despite C. R. W. Nevinson's declaration that 'I won't have any damn women in it.'<sup>35</sup> It is worth bearing in mind that Nevinson never fully committed to the Vorticist movement, preferring instead to follow the doctrines of Marinetti's Futurism, however, his sentiment is symptomatic of a general male antipathy towards women artists at this time and the magazine is suffused with misogyny. Pound's 'tendency towards misogyny' was revealed in some of his letters to lawyer John Quinn in which, according to Scholes and Wulfman, 'he proposed a "male review" which would not allow any contributions from females because "most of the ills of american [sic] magazines (the rot of medieval literature before them for that matter) are (or were) due to women."<sup>36</sup> Vorticist misogyny took place largely 'off stage', unlike Marinetti's public

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Geoff Gilbert, *Before Modernism Was: Modern History and the Constituency of Writing* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Wees (1972), p. 68.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>36</sup> Scholes & Wulfman (2010), p. 11.



vituperation of the female of the species which glorified 'the contempt for woman' and dehumanised them by cataloguing 'woman' as an abstraction alongside inanimate categories such as: cars, cinema, clothing, war, sculpture, politics, drama, music.<sup>37</sup> In 'Against *Amore*' Marinetti more directly emphasises his 'scorn for women':<sup>38</sup>

This hatred, precisely, for the tyranny of *Amore*, we express in a laconic phrase: "scorn for women."

We scorn woman conceived as the sole ideal, the divine reservoir of *Amore*, the woman-poison, woman the tragic trinket, the fragile woman, obsessing and fatal, whose voice, heavy with destiny, and whose dreaming tresses reach out and mingle with the foliage of forests drenched in moonshine.<sup>39</sup>

The Futurists' position on the question of woman is complicated by the support it showed for the suffrage movement. However Lyon makes a convincing argument when she suggests this support was largely superficial and relied upon Marinetti's belief that women's ascension to political power would bring about the inevitable destruction of traditional political structures, against which he pitted his idea of futurism as an antidote.<sup>40</sup> It has been argued that the rhetoric Marinetti uses regarding 'woman' was a backlash against the sentimental romantic paradigms that were, and to some extent still remain traditionally classed as feminine, rather than against an entire sex, but this seems tenuous. Female contemporaries of Marinetti, such as Valentine Saint-Point and Mina Loy clearly felt his efforts were over-weeningly misogynistic, enough so to compose counter manifestos that, in different ways, attempted, as Lyon has observed, to 'recuperate "femininity" as a primary psychic and biological life force worthy of Futurism's veneration'.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Filippo Thomas Marinetti. 'Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism' in Scott (2007), pp. 81-84.

<sup>38</sup> Emphasis added as here the word is plural which marks it as less conceptual and more biological

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>40</sup> Lyon (1999), pp. 92-123.

<sup>41</sup> Lyon in Scott (2007), pp. 66-93, p. 66.

In contrast to Marinetti's scathing scorn, the *BLAST* standpoint on the conceptual issue of 'woman' remains ambiguous and at times they are both blessed and blasted in equal measure. However, the textual content of *BLAST* is not always what it seems. *BLAST* pulsates with the irreverence and sardonic wit of Wyndham Lewis. It was fuelled by his personal jibes, satirical bite and a desire to best old adversaries. Deploying a great deal of satire, Lewis toys with the notion of a bifurcated male/ female gender discourse using it to suit his own ends. Reading *BLAST* involves a negotiation of the distance or slippage that exists between text and meaning; using parataxis, juxtaposition and satire *BLAST* regularly occupies a self-contradicting position stating the opposite of what it means. This paradoxical approach is made evident in points one to four of 'Manifesto I' (fig. 1 & 2), which sets out to destabilise its own textual authority.<sup>42</sup> It warns the reader to beware of taking too much at face value, as once convinced on one side of the argument, the tables are likely to be turned. Number seven on the manifesto boldly states 'Cause is NO-MAN'S', which given the dichotomous nature of the majority of the text would suggest gender neutrality or to use a contemporary expression of this neutrality – androgyny. By taking the term 'man' to be a phallogocentric universalism, it also satirises the 'cause' as being relevant to no one (neither male nor female). Many of the signatories to *BLAST*'s manifesto and contributors to the magazine, went on to become part of the *Egoist*'s stable, where Marsden's evolving 'metaphysical individualism' also encouraged a form of gender-neutrality, but in this context male paradigms or ideals are merely reasserted over the female.<sup>43</sup> This negation of the

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<sup>42</sup> All Bless, Blast, and Manifesto pages are reproduced as figures 1-9 in the Appendix, pp. 261-265.

<sup>43</sup> West, in Spender (1984) pp. 63-68. West declared in this article that the demise of *The Freewoman* newspaper was due to a 'psychic death' that was precipitated by Marsden embarking:

feminine can be highlighted by comparing *BLAST* to a contemporary magazine in publication at the same time, *Rhythm*, and its successor *The Blue Review* both of which, in contrast to *BLAST*, embraced women artists, showcasing the female protégées of Scottish artist J. D. Fergusson and featuring the writer Katherine Mansfield.

One example of how Lewis used feminine paradigms to pejorative effect can be seen in comparing blast no. 2 (fig. 3) and blessing no. 4 (fig. 4). Blast no. 2 'OH BLAST FRANCE' (p.13), focuses on the masculine concepts of the 'complacent young man', 'Papa and his son!' and 'Stupidly rapacious people at every step', whilst associating them with 'SENTIMENTAL GALLIC GUSH', 'SENSATIONALISM' and 'FUSSINESS', concepts traditionally seen as feminine. Both the blast and the blessing of France inverts the traditional gendered ideals; traits associated as acceptably feminine or womanly are attributed to men and thereby perverted or pathologised and vice versa. France is in both cases being treated like a fussy woman or an immature, arrogant adolescent; toying with national stereotypes *BLAST* casts France to the satirical winds, denouncing her men as effete and fussy, and her women as hard, combative and daring. 'FEMALES' and 'FEMALE QUALITIES' are juxtaposed against the 'PREHISTORIC APACHE', and the 'Voyou type', thereby aligning the feminine with acts of violence, boldness and audacity, yet another inversion of the traditional gender binary. *BLAST*'s carefully crafted duality is designed to obfuscate meaning and

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'on a train of thought which led her to metaphysics. She began to lose her enthusiasm for bringing women's industry on equal terms with men, because it struck her that industrialism destroyed more life than it produced. She began to be sceptical of modern civilisation and this led her to preaching a kind of Tolstoyism which would have endeavoured to lead the world back to primitive agriculture. I waged war with her about this point in a correspondence that the curious might hunt down in the files. I signed myself therein Rachel East. I got no chance to convince her, for already she had retreated to further remoteness and was developing an egoistic philosophy on the lines foreshadowed by Max Stirner.' pp. 66-7.

destabilise context thus throwing it wide open to infinite reinterpretation. Nevertheless, in both senses the feminine paradigm is used in a negative or subverted way. Writing much later in 1937, using his 'BLAST on' the English sense of humour as an example, Lewis explained:

Against the tyranny of the 'sense of humour', I, in true anglo-saxon fashion, humorously rebelled. That is all that 'BLAST Humour' means. I still regard 'humour' as an exceedingly dangerous drug. I still regard it as, more often than not, an ignoble specific. In a word, I still 'BLAST' humour. (But then we come to the 'Blesses', and since there are two sides to every argument, you find me *blessing* what I had a moment before *BLASTed*. An example of British 'fairness'!)<sup>44</sup>

In part III of the manifesto, point one states, 'We have made it quite clear that there is nothing Chauvinistic or picturesquely patriotic about our contentions', (p. 34) but the constant slippage between text and meaning suggests this contention should be viewed with suspicion. Lewis, in the above quotation suggests there was no 'side' taken, but the reiterated juxtaposition of the feminine with the negative refutes the claim that there was 'nothing Chauvinistic' in *BLAST*.<sup>45</sup>

There are many instances throughout *BLAST* where the feminine is used in a negative or pejorative way. Blast no. 1 (p. 11-12) sets about 'ENGLAND' (p. 11), the 'effeminate lout within' (p. 11), and the 'GAIETY CHORUS GIRL/ TONKS' (p.11), a personal swipe aimed at Slade School of Art Professor, Henry Tonks, (fig. 5) with whom Lewis had a difficult relationship.<sup>46</sup> 'CURSE 3' (p. 15), which precedes blast no. 4, lists 'DANDY' and 'SNOBBERY as the 'diseases of femininity' (p.15). Blast no. 6 (p.18-19) attacks 'years 1837 to 1900' (p. 18), and the 'rhetoric of the eunuch' (p. 18),

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<sup>44</sup> Lewis (1967), p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> N.B. all quotations, capitalisations and spacing is reproduced as near as possible to how it appears within the pages of the magazine. In-line page numbers refer to the 1997 Thames and Hudson reprint.

<sup>46</sup> Wees (1972), pp. 28, 30-31. Wees observes that by putting Tonks' name at the end of a 'patronising list of amusing and passéiste products of English culture' Lewis was finalising the Vorticist dissent with their former Slade teachers.

a period when Bohemianism and aestheticism dominated in art, alongside 'Laughing Jenny's', 'Ladies with Pains' and 'good-for-nothing Guineveres' (p. 19.) There are numerous examples where the feminine is used to denote the undesirable or the diseased aspects of society and art, against which Vorticism is to be the antidote or cure. In effect, *BLAST* is a rebuttal of the Pankhursts' use of male contagion as an argument for the vote. It reverses the locus of disease from the male back onto the female; a position the female body occupied in the latter part of the 1800s and which prompted Josephine Butler's protest against The Contagious Diseases Act.

Wees' reasoning suggests that the Rebel Art Centre deliberately set out to be the 'masculine' apotheosis of the 'feminine' Omega workshops. Numerous women were involved in the Omega workshops and Vanessa Bell was a key figure.<sup>47</sup> Henri Gaudier-Brzeska made comparisons with Omega, which he claimed contained 'too much prettiness' (an adjective that appears in blast no. 2 against France, criticised because of her '[i]mperturbable, endless prettiness') unlike the Rebel Art Centre, which he considered demonstrated 'vigorous forms of decoration [...] capable of great strength and manliness.'<sup>48</sup> Lewis, once closely involved with Omega, became alienated from the workshop due to a misunderstanding arising between himself and Fry with regards to a commission for the Ideal Home Exhibition.<sup>49</sup> This misunderstanding resulted in public recriminations from Lewis, souring the relationship considerably and as a direct result Lewis resorted to creating a rival art

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<sup>47</sup> Wees (1972), p. 56-7, 58; David Boyd Haycock, *A Crisis of Brilliance: Five Young British Artists and the Great War* (London: Old Street Pub., 2009) pp.145-8; Richard Cork, *Art Beyond the Gallery in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century England* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 117-76 & pp.190-230. These books detail the inception and creation of both Omega and Rebel arts.

<sup>48</sup> Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. 'Allied Artists' Association Ltd: Holland Park Hall', *Egoist*, 1:12 (15<sup>th</sup> June 1914), pp. 227-9, p. 228.

<sup>49</sup> Gaudier-Brzeska also draws attention to the salient observation that Lewis' involvement was to 'do the rough and masculine work.'

establishment to counter Omega. A disaffected Lewis, cultivating a public persona as 'the Enemy', went on to describe Omega as 'an arty-crafty *fin de siècle* survival', the products of which were, 'the most abject and anemic – the most amateurish' of interior design.<sup>50</sup>

Wees identifies blast no. 4 as a vindictive 'insider' swipe at 'that bloated composite of an art world scoundrel [...] the self-demeaning Roger Fry'.<sup>51</sup> The juxtaposition of sexually connoted phrasing, as figured in the term 'ART-PIMP' and 'NO ORGAN MAN', creates an image of emasculation, effeteness and commercial 'whoring' of 'art'. It may also indicate an antipathy towards alternative or homosexual relationships and, what Jeffrey Meyers called, 'the deficiencies of Bloomsbury morality'.<sup>52</sup> Lewis extended this dispute in his novel *Tarr*, which was initially serialised in *The Egoist* (April 1916 – November 1917).<sup>53</sup> In *Tarr*, Lewis modelled the character of melodramatic, Cambridge-cut villain Alan Hobson on Clive Bell, in whom 'the art-touch, the Bloomsbury technique, was very noticeable', describing him as the epitome of 'The Cambridge set that [he] represent[ed]', which '[...] as observed in an average specimen' was 'a hybrid of the Quaker, the homosexual and the Chelsea Artist.'<sup>54</sup> Lewis' clear 'blast' on homosexuality was a preliminary to what followed. In the later publication *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), Lewis insisted on characterising the homosexual as a 'child of the suffragette', suggesting that an emancipated or politically empowered female results in an effete or

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<sup>50</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980), p. 39.

<sup>51</sup> Wees (1972), p. 67.

<sup>52</sup> Meyers (1980), p. 40.

<sup>53</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Tarr' serialisation in *The Egoist*, vol. 3 no. 4 (1<sup>st</sup> April 1916) – vol. 4 no. 10 (November 1917).

<sup>54</sup> Meyers (1980), p. 50 and Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010 [c.1915-28]), p. 9 & pp. 20-21.

weakened/perverse male.<sup>55</sup> Andrew Hewitt in his essay 'Wyndham Lewis: Fascism, Modernism and the Politics of Homosexuality' argues that Lewis 'subsumes the treatment of homosexuality within a broader framework of a feminist critique of gender binarism', a comment which supports the idea that Lewis had a life-long preoccupation with male/female dynamics, as expressed much earlier, within the pages of *BLAST*. Lewis' adoption of the common term 'inversion' to represent homosexuality, rather than the more liberal Uranianism, is ideologically loaded, and suggests an 'axiomatic binarism of masculine and feminine', as demonstrated much earlier in *BLAST*.<sup>56</sup> In this context, the use of feminine tropes or paradigms takes on a more complex and nuanced significance, as they are not being used wholly in reference to women, but are used pejoratively against homosexual men.

Any magazine, when it combines different mediums of expression, including poetry, art, theory, and manifesto, inevitably becomes what the Russian Formalist Mikhail Bakhtin called dialogic, as the magazine develops into an heterogeneous discourse, which 'appropriates, contextualises and comments on other languages of class and gender.'<sup>57</sup> Bakhtin's idea of dialogism is a useful tool to enhance the understanding of the intertextuality of literature; magazines, by the nature of their make-up, are inherently intertextual, creating a discursive space that accommodates ever-evolving dialogues between editorial policy, readers, and contributors. Marsden's publications were the apotheosis of Bakhtinian dialogism as they created a constantly fluid conversation not only between the printed page and its readers but also between the individual readers themselves through the Discussion Circles. In

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<sup>55</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled* (New York: Haskell House, 1972 [1926]), p. 244.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Hewitt, 'Wyndham Lewis: Fascism, Modernism and the Politics of Homosexuality' in *English Literary History*, 60:2 (Summer 1993), pp. 527-544, p. 534.

<sup>57</sup> Cora Kaplan, *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 165.

*BLAST* these conversations or dialogues were internalised within the Bless and Blast texts but were as equally important to the development of Vorticism, which depended upon its intertextual dyadic and dialogic rhetoric of gender and sexuality.<sup>58</sup>

Sexuality in general was a primary concern of both modernism and its component parts. As Suzanne Clarke has shown in her study *Sentimental Modernism* sentimentalism, and romantic emotional love or expressive sexuality, were anathema for modernists as they represented key elements of a bourgeois ideology weighed down by attachments to the unhealthy and, to the modernist mind, un-artistic concepts of 'family, love, pathos, religion, sorrow, feeling.' Clarke describes these as the 'watch words of bourgeois ideology.'<sup>59</sup> Lyon expands on Clarke's point, claiming: '[t]he new English Avant-garde forcefully abjures the heterosexual cult of 'sentimental' carnality associated with earlier art movements such as symbolism and impressionism.'<sup>60</sup> *BLAST* elided the aesthetics and 'sentimental' doctrine of beauty as the basic principle from which all other principles, especially moral ones, are derived, turning instead to ascetics, abstaining from worldly pleasures in order to advance art, an axiomatic characteristic of the visual and written work of Lewis, Pound and their Vorticist colleagues. *BLAST*'s phallogocentrism is evidence of what Rita Felski termed the 'parsing out of culture' into the historically embedded objectively concrete masculinity of modern production and the ahistorically unchanging matrix of femininity.<sup>61</sup> Yet in the midst of this heady concoction Lewis chose to juxtapose two pieces of prose fiction, that visually contrasted starkly with the bold textual patterns

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<sup>58</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) edited by Michael Holquist; translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. This collection of essays fully explains Bakhtin's idea of 'dialogism' and 'the dialogic'.

<sup>59</sup> Clarke (1991).

<sup>60</sup> Lyon (1999), pp. 111-112.

<sup>61</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) quoted in Lyon (1999), p. 113.



created in the rest of the magazine. The first, Ford's 'The Saddest Story', was intended as the initial instalment of the serialisation of an unpublished novel; the second was a short, vibrant story by up-and-coming writer Rebecca West called 'Indissoluble Matrimony'. Initially these two pieces seem at odds with their Vorticist setting, but on closer examination both stories demonstrate what could be described as a literary vorticism, or what shall be called for the purposes of this thesis, vortextuality.

### 3:3

## A *BLAST* from the West: The Vortextuality of ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’

Everything has its  
Own Vortex, and when once a traveller thro’ Eternity  
Has pass’d that Vortex, he perceives it roll backward behind  
His path, into a globe itself unfolding like a sun,  
Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty,  
Wile he keeps onwards in his wondrous journey on the earth,  
Or like a human form, a friend with whom he liv’d benevolent.<sup>1</sup>

*Milton* by William Blake

To man, as to woman, the voice of wisdom is crying out: Take unto yourself your great power and reign, but let that dominion begin with yourself [...] wise and strong are responding [...] These have recognized that there must be a new departure.<sup>2</sup>

Charlotte Despard

Having established that *BLAST* was antipathetic to women as artists as well as feminist issues it would seem unlikely that it should contain a short story written by a woman writer who spent the early part of her career rallying against hegemonic misogyny and male oppression. However, West’s reputation prior to the publication of the Vorticist

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<sup>1</sup> William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman (London: University of California Press, 1982), *Milton: A Poem in Two Books* pp. 95-144, p. 109, ll. 21-27.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Despard, ‘Theosophy in the Women’s Movement’ (London and Madras: Theosophical Society Publishing, 1913), pp. 43 & 47.

little magazine *BLAST* in July 1914 was that of a literary pugilist, an ardent feminist, and a ruthless reviewer. Critiques of her work described her writing through metaphors of violence and the imagery of war. She was portrayed as a warrior on the battlefield of the ‘sex-war’, brandishing her pen like a sword, unflinchingly slashing through the swathes of political hyperbole and cultural opprobrium that circulated around the ‘woman’ question. She figuratively cut her back teeth on the editorial staff of one of the most forthright publications of the early twentieth century, the *Freewoman*, which dedicated itself to ‘bearing aloft ‘the lamp of hatred’, striking sparks off the flinty dogmatism of feminism and socialism.’<sup>3</sup> Given the dynamism, diversity, and rebellious nature of West’s literary career, it is not surprising that ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ was published in the equally diverse, rebellious, and dynamically avant-garde *BLAST*. Yet some critics of West’s work view the inclusion of ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ in *BLAST* as something of an anomaly. A recently published essay by Michael Hallam, however, acknowledges the extraordinary relationship that (feminist) West and (‘masculinist’) Lewis shared, despite Lewis’s contribution to, what Bonnie Kime Scott called, ‘modernist myths of masculinity.’<sup>4</sup> It raises the obvious question: why did a self-proclaimed non-Vorticist and ardent feminist publish her work in an overtly masculinist magazine?

The facts surrounding its inclusion are confused.<sup>5</sup> Rollyson fails to mention her appearance in *BLAST* at all and there are only two references to Lewis in his

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<sup>3</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hallam, ‘In The “Enemy” Camp: Wyndham Lewis, Naomi Richardson and Rebecca West’ in Andrzej Gasoriek, Alice Reeve-Turner and Nathan Waddell, (Eds) *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2011), pp. 57-76, p. 57. Also see Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism – Volume 1: The Women of 1928* (Bloomington, NI: University of Indiana Press, 1995), pp. 100- 112, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> Wees (1972); Glendinning (1987), p. 39, 52, Marcus elides the issue of how it came to be in *BLAST*, as does Pykett (2000). Lyon (1999) does not refer to West’s story in her chapter on the relationship

biography of West. Glendinning refers to West's debut as a fiction writer in two brief sentences.<sup>6</sup> Wees claims that Wyndham Lewis, the journal's creator, editor, and main contributor, approached West to provide a suitable short piece of prose, revealing in an endnote that his information was derived from personal correspondence with West dated 9<sup>th</sup> February 1963.<sup>7</sup> West herself adds to the confusion by claiming in a letter to the American literary critic William Troy, dated 19<sup>th</sup> January 1930, that the short story's inclusion was accidental rather than deliberate.<sup>8</sup> She writes:

It may interest you to know that the story was written in my teens to amuse some friends, as a pastiche of the stories Austen Harrison was then publishing in the *English Review*. It was published in *BLAST* – a publication of which I knew nothing – by Wyndham Lewis – whom I never met till years after – for no other reason than that that Wyndham Lewis found the manuscript in the chest of drawers in the spare room of Violet Hunt and Ford Madox Ford's home at Selsey, a week or so after I had left.<sup>9</sup>

It is generally accepted that she had submitted the piece to both Austin Harrison's *The English Review* and John Middleton Murry's avant-garde little magazine *The Blue Review*, only to have it rejected.<sup>10</sup> In her letter to Troy she dismisses the piece as nothing more than juvenilia, written in her youth and clearly the tone is regretful. Hallam dismisses this letter as part of a 'playful' and 'haughty' West's propensity for self-mythologising.<sup>11</sup> Marcus dates the story later than West, attributing it to a '22 year old girl', dating the story around the publication of *BLAST* rather than in 1910-11, considering it a 'considerable feat' that a '22 year old girl could body forth' the complex fears of her protagonist, Evadne; an exotically sexual, intelligent, socialist,

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between suffragettes and Vorticists: 'Militant Allies, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and Vorticists before the War' (pp. 92-123). Gilbert & Gubar do not refer to the story's Vorticist context.

<sup>6</sup> Glendinning (1987), pp. 39, 52.

<sup>7</sup> Wees (1972), p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160, 242 e/n. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Scott (2000), p. 119-20.

<sup>10</sup> Wees (1972), p. 160.

<sup>11</sup> Hallam in Gasoriek, Reeve-Turner & Waddell (2011), p. 64.

married woman.<sup>12</sup> Lewis, on the other hand, is understood to have favoured this story over all the other literary content in *BLAST*, unlike Pound's poetry, which Lewis later publicly denounced: 'It was with regret I included the poems of my friend Ezra Pound: they "let down" the radical purism of the visual contents, or the propaganda of the same',<sup>13</sup> Wees and Edwards both observe that 'Lewis liked the story and got it for *BLAST*.'<sup>14</sup>

In her letter to Troy, West disputes the notion that she met Lewis during the Vorticist era. This account is unlikely given the close friendships each enjoyed with Ford and his partner Violet Hunt. Hallam argues that the relationship was 'long-standing and public (though sometimes critical)'.<sup>15</sup> West supported his literary endeavours, despite what Frederic Jameson described as Lewis' 'derogation of the feminine'.<sup>16</sup> Both Lewis and West regularly attended the literary soirées at South Lodge on Campden Hill, at which West was introduced to many of the *English Review* crowd, one of whom was most certainly Lewis. Rollyson records Lewis' recollection of his first encounter with West at Violet Hunt's as a 'dark young maenad' who 'burst through the dining-room door [...] like a thunderbolt';<sup>17</sup> a description of dynamism and energy that one could apply to West's female protagonist, Evadne, in 'Indissoluble Matrimony.' Glendinning's biography also locates West firmly amongst this milieu.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Marcus (1982), p. 266.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis (1963), pp. 491-2.

<sup>14</sup> *BLAST* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), p. viii.

<sup>15</sup> Hallam in Gasoriek, Reeve-Turner and Waddell (2011), p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), p. 97. Also quoted in Hallam (2011) p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Rollyson (1995), p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> It is possible that the provocation for West's denunciation of her relationship with Lewis during the 1910s was related to their increasingly polarised political leanings. West was by 1930 a committed

Clearly, West's early-career appearance in *BLAST* causes some consternation because of its public context; *BLAST* traded on its blatantly masculinist rhetoric, urging violent (cultural) rebellion. However the magazine represented a site upon which those involved in the 'London Vortex' of 1914 could experiment with gender differentiation as part of artistic experimentation.<sup>19</sup> West's short story, a feminist polemic on the futile and destructive nature of an unsatisfactory marriage, might, to some, seem an odd inclusion<sup>20</sup> but, as Hallam has observed, the inclusion of 'Indissoluble Matrimony' within *BLAST* 'can be read and placed within the wider patterns of Vorticist innovation.'<sup>21</sup> West, on reading a review of *BLAST* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, early in 1915, wrote to her friend Mrs Townshend: 'I have just seen about *BLAST* in the *Time Literary Supplement*. It is described as a Manifesto of the Vorticists. Am I a Vorticist? I am sure it cannot be good for Anthony if I am'.<sup>22</sup> To further confuse matters, West for a period at least, seems to regret both the existence of the short fiction and its association with one of the most controversial avant-garde publications of the twentieth century. Scott, in her 'Afterword' for the recent *Rebecca West Today*, observes that: 'West does not seem to have set great stock by it.'<sup>23</sup> On reflection and with maturity, she may have felt 'Indissoluble Matrimony' fell short of her own exacting standards. Despite this, it is the most widely anthologised of West's fiction appearing in both *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English* and the *Longman Anthology of British Literature*, vol. 2: *The*

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Socialist, whereas Lewis was expressing a fascination for Fascism, resulting in his publication of the book *Hitler* in 1931, which presented the leader of the NSDAP as a man of peace.

<sup>19</sup> Hallam in Gasoriek, Reeve-Turner & Waddell (2011) p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert & Gubar (1988), pp. 96-100.

<sup>21</sup> Hallam in Gasoriek, Reeve-Turner & Waddell (2011) p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> Scott (2000), p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Schweizer (2006), p. 251.

*Twentieth Century*.<sup>24</sup> However, when collaborating with her publishers in 1976-77 on a project to produce an anthology entitled *The Essential Rebecca West*, ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ is conspicuously absent. Given that it was her first substantial piece of fiction to appear in print its absence from this collection is perplexing. This distancing may be explained in light of West’s ideas of women and writing, as expressed in the 1931 ‘Woman as Artist and Thinker.’<sup>25</sup> West wrote that there ‘have as yet been very few women thinkers and artists [...] who have not adopted masculine values as the basis of their work.’<sup>26</sup> Ideally, West contends, a female thinker and artist would exhibit the ability to circumnavigate the ‘limitations and distortions’ imposed upon women working in a predominantly male field. As Samuel Hynes points out, West is not suggesting that women writers should be wholly feminine, but ‘rather that they should be free to realize their gifts without considering the roles that social definitions of gender impose.’<sup>27</sup> West had enjoyed a formidable reputation in her journalism for ‘beating men at their own game.’ She had been praised for her particularly ‘masculine’ writing style during the previous two decades, a writing style that was shaped by its individualism as well as its ‘male’ rhetoric of anger and violence. Far from arguing that West adopted male ‘values,’ this thesis demonstrates that West appropriated a masculine style not merely to survive in a male dominated industry still rife with misogyny and the homosocial ‘old school tie’ networks, but to turn its discursive arsenal back upon itself.

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<sup>24</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert & Susan Gubar, (Gen. Eds) *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996) two volumes, Third Edition Vol. 2, pp. 469-86. David Damrosch, (gen. ed.) *Longman Anthology of British Literature, Vol. 2: The Twentieth Century* (New York: Longman, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> West (2005 [1931]).

<sup>26</sup> Hynes in West, (1977), on p. ix.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

Whilst evidence suggests that West's short story was included in *BLAST* without her specific consent, its presence within such a controversial publication had the potential to cause embarrassment to the prominent author and West's lover, H. G. Wells. However as Hallam observes, given the close-knit and inter-connected nature of literary London, during this period, it is improbable that Lewis could have obtained the story and published it without West's consent.<sup>28</sup> What better revenge for 'a woman scorned' than to cause the man, whose desire it was to hide her and their illegitimate child from public view, a public embarrassment. At Wells' insistence the pregnant West was exiled to Hunstanton in an attempt to avoid speculation about her condition. Their relationship was turbulent at the best of times, and West later intimated to Gordon N. Ray that Wells was capable of deliberately failing to take contraceptive precautions; plagued with bouts of insecurity that she might leave him, Wells hoped that pregnancy would bind her to him.<sup>29</sup> Glendinning however, concludes this was 'unlikely.'<sup>30</sup> Motherhood had never been the intention of the unmarried, professional writer and was clearly unwelcomed; after being goaded during an interview in 1976, West snapped: 'It was not intended.'<sup>31</sup> If Evadne Silverton and West were 'coevals,' as Rollyson suggests in *The Literary Legacy of Rebecca West*, then she can be interpreted as representing West's concomitant struggle to combine a professional career with impending motherhood, and a volatile intimate relationship.<sup>32</sup> Its inclusion would certainly help to prevent her from slipping into the obscurity of maternity that Wells seemed to have planned for her. As has been pointed out previously *BLAST* was devoted to revenge, with Lewis enthusiastic about airing personal grievances against

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<sup>28</sup> Hallam in Gasoriek, Reeve-Turner, & Waddell (2011) p. 65 f/n 33.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon N. Ray, *H. G. Wells and Rebecca West* (London: Macmillan & Company, 1974), p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Glendinning (1987), p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Rollyson (1998/2007), p. 12.



both obvious and obscure ‘enemies.’<sup>33</sup> West’s letter to Violet Hunt certainly suggests the sharing of a mutual joke; the reference to Anthony, who was born a month after the magazine’s publication, implies the comment is a jibe at Wells’ expense.

One of the most well known critical interpretations of ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ is that of Gilbert and Gubar in *No Man’s Land* (1988). This reading of West focuses largely on what the story may be anticipating, such as Eliot’s *Prufrock* poetry (1915) and Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1920). Gilbert and Gubar associate ‘George’s sexual anxiety, almost a form of male hysteria’ with the same symptoms of ‘masculine cultural enervation that Eliot too would analyze’ a year later.<sup>34</sup> It would be fair to argue that perhaps West’s story influenced *Prufrock*, but the question that needs to be asked is what influenced ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’? The answer is Henrik Ibsen: the story is a subtle subverted retelling or reworking of his 1886 play *Romersholtm*, from which Rebecca West took her pseudonym in 1911.<sup>35</sup> In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* West readily admits that her ‘appetite for ideas’ had been ‘whetted by Ibsen’.<sup>36</sup> Ibsen’s ‘Rebecca West’ is the mistress of a married man, Johannes Rosmer, who successfully convinces her to drown herself in a melodramatic double suicide pact; Ibsen’s ‘hero’ is successful in killing both himself and his mistress, unlike George in ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ whose repeated failed attempts to dispose of his irritatingly competent wife provide the comedy for the story’s

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<sup>33</sup> Lewis, much later in 1928, established a new journal entitled *The Enemy*, which attempted to distance him from his previous Vorticist alliances. He published three issues before the magazine folded. For further information on Lewis’ somewhat erratic publishing history see Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (London: Paul Mellon/Yale University Press, c.2000) and numerous entries in Brooker & Thacker (2009) specifically Gasiorek, pp. 290-313 and Paul Edwards ‘Cultural Criticism at the Margins: Wyndham Lewis, *The Tyro* (1920-1) and *The Enemy* (1927-9)’, pp. 552-569.

<sup>34</sup> Gilbert & Gubar (1988), pp. 97-100.

<sup>35</sup> Glendinning. (1987), p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> West, *BLGF* (2006[1942]), p. 1086.

*denouement*. Whilst Gilbert and Gubar do not explicitly consider any possible parallels with Ibsen's play they identify Evadne as the 'undrownable heroine' and George as 'the hero not worth drowning'; direct comparison with Ibsen would help explain why failing to drown/be drowned is a significant tenet of the story.<sup>37</sup> Taken together with its publication context and West's personal relationship history, it is arguable that the short story, as well as being a witty demonstration of modernist storytelling, enabled her to publically attack Wells' as he assumed control over West's pregnancy and life. This would be characteristic of West, who, throughout her career, had no fear of mixing the personal with the political.<sup>38</sup> Like George with Evadne, Wells appears to have been both fascinated and exasperated by West's exoticism, intellect, and charisma and just as incapable of quashing her individual ambitions. Rollyson describes Evadne as a disconcerting concoction of 'sensuality and intellectuality' and situates the story as being 'an early dramatization of what West would call in her feminist book reviews "sex- antagonism."<sup>39</sup> This embedded personal history could also account for why in later years – when she repeatedly expressed frustration that her career was overshadowed by the ten years she spent with Wells – the story seems to have become an embarrassment to her and why *The Essential Rebecca West* contains relatively little of her very early work.

Including West and expressing a liking for her story may indicate that Lewis was seeking a literary kinship between modernist writers who exhibited vorticist characteristics in their prose. The 'vortextuality' of 'Indissoluble Matrimony' and Lewis' own literary contribution to the magazine *Enemy of the Stars*, has already been

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<sup>37</sup> Gilbert & Gubar (1988), p. 100.

<sup>38</sup> Rollyson (2007 [1998]), p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

identified, as has the significance of Marsden, West and Lewis's use of (pugnacious exhortation and) metaphorical violence. Yet this violence was in both cases purely rhetorical. Despite the persistent use of militant language West and the *Freewoman* staff were vociferously opposed to physical manifestation of their political ideals, speaking against what Rebecca West called a 'programme of massive vandalism'.<sup>40</sup> This sentiment was forcefully reiterated in *BLAST*'s full two-page admonishment 'TO SUFFRAGETTES' (fig. 7&8).

This hasty addendum to the magazine's final signature (Marcus gives it a more prominent position as 'one of *BLAST*'s first blasts' when in fact it comes after many pages of blasting/cursing/blessing)<sup>41</sup> was added in the last few weeks before printing in response to the most recent in a long line of incidents involving the destruction of artworks.<sup>42</sup> Wees, in a footnote, observes that Lewis' apprehension may have arisen in part because of the young 'hatchet-wielding' suffragette who destroyed two drawings at the Doré Gallery on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1914; a gallery at which the Vorticists and other avant-garde artists often exhibited their work. This kind of violence escalated during the early months of 1914 and several galleries were temporarily closed as a result. Lewis probably added his admonishment because of the increasing scale of the violence, rather than because of any single incident. Ford felt strongly enough about the events to include a 'hatchet-wielding' suffragette in the gallery scene in *Parade's End*. These reactions in defence of art also helped distinguish Vorticism from

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<sup>40</sup> Marcus (1987), p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>42</sup> Lyon (1999), p. 97. Lyon attributes this to the high-profile mutilation of the Rokeby Venus by Velázquez, which was hanging in the National Portrait Gallery. On March 11th 1914 Mary Richardson, an artist and Suffragette, took an axe to the painting and caused some serious damage. However, given the Vorticists' strong opinion on art, it is unlikely that the destruction of the Venus painting would have caused much of a stir in their circles, but as the Blast notes, there is a risk that they might sometime destroy a 'good' painting. Marcus also notes that a portrait of Henry James had been damaged. Marcus (1982), p. 265.

Futurism, (despite the natural comparisons being made) as Marinetti had encouraged this kind of violent destruction. In his 'Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909) Marinetti can be seen to urge the volatile Italian youth to 'set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood museums!' in order to liberate them from the oppression of an omnipresent artistic heritage.<sup>43</sup>

There has been much emphasis on the inclusion of this particular 'BLAST'. Recent studies by Janet Lyon (1999), and Morrison (2001) provide analyses of the interfaces between the complex and ideologically inflected genres of the manifesto, the little magazine, mass marketing and the countercultural, often militant, discourses employed (and deployed) by the suffrage and avant-garde movements. In a chapter entitled 'Militant Allies, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and the Vorticists before the War', Lyon examines the manner in which avant-garde movements such as the Vorticists folded the 'rhetoric and tactics of militant women's suffrage discourse' into their manifestos and as such made them part of the foundation of English modernism.<sup>44</sup> When reviewing *BLAST* in terms of its relationship with suffrage, Lyon does not mention West's contribution to the Vorticist magazine despite her being the little magazine's only 'suffragist,' or indeed female, contributor. The story is clearly treated as one disengaged from the manifesto, ignoring any possibility that its transgressive nature and polarised gendering may provide additional insight. Lyon does not consider any possible sense of irony or satire in Lewis' addendum 'blast'. Most critics take this at face value, drawing on its reference to suffragettes as 'BRAVE COMRADES' to signify some kind of solidarity to the cause; a somewhat risky assumption considering the main premise of *BLAST* was to contradict itself on any

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<sup>43</sup> Black, Adams, Walsh, & Wood (2004), p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Lyon (1999), p. 94.

given occasion. Given that many of the suffragists involved in the slashing of paintings were artists themselves, it can also be interpreted as a condescending admonishment to women, to know their place. The phrases: 'IN DESTRUCTION, AS IN OTHER THINGS, stick to what you understand,' 'WE MAKE YOU A PRESENT OF OUR VOTES', 'YOU MIGHT SOME DAY DESTROY A GOOD PICTURE BY ACCIDENT', and 'MAIS SOYEZ BONNES FILLES! NOUS VOUS AIMONS!' (p.151) are not phrased in the same manner in which you would address comrades or equals.

Discussing the problems surrounding the decoding of *BLAST*'s sexual politics, Gasiorek, like Lyon, appears to be searching for some reconciliation between what he terms 'some misogynistic moves' made by the journal and an underlying, albeit patronising, affinity with the suffragettes. In order to make these assertions Gasoriek highlights the dyadic anomalies and contradictions surrounding the use of female signifiers in the magazine's blast and bless format. These apparent contradictions, whereby female/feminine signifiers are both praised and ridiculed do not lead to any concrete conclusions regarding Lewis' or the Vorticists' stance on contemporaneous 'sex-antagonisms'. Yes, it is ambiguous, and intentionally so; no, this ambiguity does not imply any deeper understanding of the 'woman question' as it existed during the early years of the 1910s. Brooker's remark in *Bohemia* that 'for all its patronising tone, [the addition of this addendum 'TO SUFFRAGETTES'] suggests an affinity between suffrage militancy and Vorticist tactics' should not be seen to suggest a broader understanding of feminism, it merely acknowledges the appreciation of 'tactics' rather than motives.<sup>45</sup> Gasiorek, drawing from the work of Beckett and Cherry, notes that Vorticist gender politics are ambiguous, and because of this

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<sup>45</sup> Brooker (2007), p. 21.

discounts the evidence that suggests that female Vorticists were subjugated, often relegated to secondary or supportive roles, and given menial tasks or activities traditionally associated with women.<sup>46</sup> Ambiguity is common currency in the rhetoric of *BLAST*, designed to obfuscate rather than clarify and as such should be treated with caution. The one thing this addendum can be argued to show, is a close association and awareness of the ideological positioning on the destruction of art as previously expressed by the writers affiliated to *The Freewoman* magazines, including West.

Far from being asymptomatic of West's work, 'Indissoluble Matrimony' is a significant part of her creative development. Lewis clearly recognised some synergy between his own writing and that of West's. Thus far this thesis has connected West and Lewis through their use of discursive violence (and their abhorrence of physical aggression) as well as their delight in dichotomy and contradiction. Whilst it remains difficult to draw any solid conclusions from West's writing, given its broad diversity, Glendinning draws upon C. G. Jung's 1927 article 'Women in Europe' to account for its dichotomous nature, which she describes as in flux between masculine and feminine.<sup>47</sup> This might also be seen as a characteristic feature of *BLAST*. The first half of West's novel *The Judge*, to take one example, explores the antagonistic nature of sexual desire, as experienced by the three main characters: the protagonist, Ellen Melville, a typist; her employer's son Mr Philip, and Mr Yaverland, an exotic 'foreigner' and client of the law firm at which both Ellen and Mr Philip work. Ellen spends much of the first part of the novel trying to reconcile her interiorised, unrecognised 'female' emotional desire for her undeclared suitor Mr Yaverland with her exteriorised, 'male' intellectual pride and desire to be 'something important' in

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<sup>46</sup> Beckett & Cherry in Edwards (2000), p. 61.

<sup>47</sup> Glendinning (1987), p. 1.

the women's suffrage movement. Mr Philip's burgeoning desire for Ellen is transgressive in that it contravenes the dictates of his class and social station; Ellen's lower social caste permits Mr Philip to unconsciously re-inscribe his emotions, attributing his 'unseemly' desire to the consequences of Ellen's 'wily' seduction. This licentious manipulation – the turning of a naïve innocent into a sinful temptress – is juxtaposed against the noble intentions of Richard Yaverland, whose 'pure' love for Ellen allows him to control his physical and emotional desire for her, and as such he represents a person who has balanced his interiority and exteriority, his male and female sides. Richard Yaverland manages to blend a paradigmatic 'female' romantic sensitivity with raw machismo, without the latter imposing upon the object of his desire, Ellen.

Like Ellen in *The Judge*, West struggled to balance her love of abstract concepts such as history, politics, art, morality, and her 'masculine' intellect with her desire for 'men to be men and women to be women.'<sup>48</sup> This internalised battle was addressed by Jung who claimed that: 'if one lives out the opposite sex in oneself one is living in one's own background [...] A man should live as a man and a woman as a woman.'<sup>49</sup> West was not content to be reduced to a Jungian '*femme inspiratrice*,' which was the female ideal according to the general literary male consensus of the 1910s.<sup>50</sup> She demanded a redrawing of what determined the feminine and masculine in such fields as art and thought. What was paramount was the ability to move beyond

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<sup>48</sup> West's eventful love life is well documented in the biographies by Glendinning and Rollyson. Despite her feminist ideals, she often floundered in the face of personal entanglements, being drawn to powerful and rather patriarchal figures such as Wells and later Lord Beaverbrook, who were both serial adulterers. She later married Henry Andrews and recorded his infidelities in notebooks containing drafts of her memoirs – see Rollyson (1995), p. 140 & p. 401.

<sup>49</sup> Glendinning (1987), p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Zambreno, (2013). Zambreno writes about the wives of F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot and others, exploring their marginalisation as artists married to literary men, and who ultimately were consumed by the literary ambition of their respective husbands.

the assigned gender roles imposed by society, 'to be a mirror to reality itself'.<sup>51</sup> Samuel Hynes draws parallels with Woolf on this point as clearly West's thinking is echoing Woolf's idea of the 'androgynous mind' as expressed in *A Room of One's Own*.<sup>52</sup> However, this idea can also be viewed as a remnant of the influence that predates Woolf, exerted on the formation of 'Rebecca West' by Marsden's ideas of individualism – a transcendental state of genderless-ness – during her years on *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman*.

West was in no way affiliated formally with the Vorticist movement or manifesto, even though her story fits comfortably within the pages of its literary organ, *BLAST*. She was not one of the two female signatories on the manifesto, these being Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders.<sup>53</sup> In fact, women's role in the magazine *BLAST* and in the Vorticist movement as a whole was precarious and largely unsolicited and unwelcomed. Despite this, a close reading of 'Indissoluble Matrimony' can locate many parallels between the feminist short story and the masculinist Vorticist aesthetics expressed in the first issue of *BLAST*. Marcus anoints West as 'the Female Vortex' in *The Young Rebecca*, identifying both the complex nature of West's short story (and in fact her career) and the rebellious aesthetic of the publication in which it appeared.<sup>54</sup> Scott claims the reason that anthologies of modernism are keen to include 'Indissoluble Matrimony' rests largely on its context.

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<sup>51</sup> Hynes in West (1977), p. ix.

<sup>52</sup> Woolf, *AROO* (2000 [1928]).

<sup>53</sup> *BLAST*, (1914), p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, McNeil also applies the label 'vortex' to Dora Marsden in her essay in Campbell (2000), pp. 141-169.



Appearing in *BLAST* the story represents ‘a convenient text for gendered juxtaposition to the Vorticist ballistics of the male makers of modernism’.<sup>55</sup>

### **‘The Saddest Story’: A Marriage of Individuals**

It was Lewis’ intention with *BLAST* to create a transgressive counter-publication that oozed revolutionary zeal, displayed a blatant disregard for social propriety and bucked artistic tradition. Up until the mid-point of the magazine, Lewis pretty much achieves the kind of ‘unifying’ aesthetic he set out to establish. The magazine was brash, blunt, and abrasive, using the visual impact of its poster-like typeface and deconstructed form to drive home its singularity; Lewis’ experimental play ‘Enemy of the Stars’, is an overt subversion of the traditional form, bringing the written word in line with the artistic movement. *Enemy of the Stars* is as much a visual event as a literary one, textually exploiting similar visual and media idioms to those used throughout *BLAST*: music hall billboards, poster art, advertisements, newspaper layouts, telegraphic brevity, parataxis, a style that Hoffman, Allen and Ulrich described as ‘typography’s closest approximation to dynamite.’<sup>56</sup> It fits with the performative ethos exuded by *BLAST*, which Edward Bishop described as ‘a kinetic experience’ that ‘does not just espouse Vorticism, it becomes a vortex’.<sup>57</sup> However, Lewis’ decision to include Ford’s ‘The Saddest Story’ and West’s ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’, neither of which appear to have been written with vorticist ‘intent’, may have been a deliberate attempt to once again disrupt any notion of aesthetic cohesion. Wees contends that the

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<sup>55</sup> Bonnie Kime Scott. ‘Afterword: ‘Unresolvable Pedagogy? Teaching Rebecca West’ in Schweizer. (2006) p. 251.

<sup>56</sup> Hoffman, Allen & Ulrich (1947), p. 244.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Bishop, ‘Re:covering Modernism – Format and Function in the Little Magazines’, in Ian Willison, Warwick Gould, and Warren Chernaik, (eds) *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 317. This phrasing works equally well when applied to West’s ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’.

inclusion of ‘The Saddest Story’ was merely a grateful gesture by Lewis, a token of respect and gratitude for all the support the Rebel Art Centre coterie had received from Ford. ‘It did nothing’ claims Wees ‘to disprove Lewis’ complaints about the failure of writers to catch up to the revolution in art’ unlike West’s piece which seemed to echo ‘the Vorticist’s praise of violence’.<sup>58</sup> Both stories seem to be anomalous to the overall feel of the magazine, as neither engage with the same kind of textual variation or visual experimentation that Lewis favoured, which is jarring and experimental in itself.

However that is not to dismiss the possibility that they each demonstrate what could be termed ‘vortextuality’ – a form of ‘literary’ vorticism.<sup>59</sup> Sandwiched together in the heart of *BLAST*, between the harsh typeface, black bars, and poster-like text, the central tenet of each is marriage, and the emotional dynamics (possibly one could apply the term ‘emotional vortices’ here) at play between husbands and wives. Despite the difference in tone, style, and narration, these two pieces of fiction effectively create a counter-textual discourse, due to their shared premise, contextual proximity and use of ‘traditional’ form (grammar, syntax, symbolism etc.) Arguably both writers are ‘experimenting’; Ford with the unreliable narrator and West with the inversion of gender stereotypes, but neither piece uses the parataxis that is something of a vorticist idiom. Unconsciously – or perhaps by Lewis’ design – they represent intertextual counterpoints to the rest of the magazine. By including these two pieces of prose, *BLAST* effectively becomes dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense, as their inclusion ‘undermine[s] the aspirations of the text towards a unifying definition.’<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Wees. (1972) p. 190.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Vortextuality’ is a term devised solely for the purposes of this thesis.

<sup>60</sup> Kaplan (1986), p. 165.

Ford's first instalment (of a proposed serialisation) opens by introducing the remnants of two marriages, one husband and one wife, both bereaved by the loss of their respective spouses.<sup>61</sup> 'The Saddest Story' as a title, is a condensed version of the opening line of *The Good Soldier*, as it eventually appeared in 1915: 'This is the saddest story I have ever heard', which evokes feelings of sentimentality, romance, regret, and elegy; all concepts that were antithetical to the Vorticist aesthetic. When comparing only this first extract of Ford's novel with West's short story they appear to contrast starkly. However, the two stories share a similar premise and method: the indissolubility of marriage and the unreliable narrator. West is known to have admired Ford's novel, reviewing it as 'a challenge, in matter and method alike' despite declaring 'there is no more passion in it than in an entomologist's enthusiasm over his drawer of pinned and varnished beetles.'<sup>62</sup> It is feasible that Lewis juxtaposed these two pieces deliberately to create an antagonism between old and new, perhaps identifying and holding up West as a possible example of 'vortextuality'. Swinnerton places Ford (despite his association with the Rebel Art Centre and the avant-garde) amongst the patriarchal 'Literary Men', whilst West is considered to be experimentally 'post-Freud' and was later to be commended for her novel *The Return of the Soldier*, which was 'inspired by the knowledge of modern psychological methods.'<sup>63</sup> There is also an ironic twist to this arrangement as Ford was stuck in an unsatisfactory marriage for years as his wife refused to grant him a divorce, a fact that was common knowledge as he lived openly with Hunt during the period of *BLAST*'s

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<sup>61</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction* (New York: The Macaulay Co., 1929) – Ford acknowledged 'The Vorticists kindly serialized my novel', p. 205.

<sup>62</sup> West, 'Review of *The Good Soldier*' in *The Morning Post* (5<sup>th</sup> April 1915) reproduced in Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier: The Norton Critical Edition* (London: W. W. Norton & Co. Ltd., 2012 [1915]), pp. 238-9, p. 239.

<sup>63</sup> Swinnerton (1935), pp. 240-261, p. 404.

production; considering his track record, Lewis would not be adverse to exploiting this ‘scandalous’ predicament.<sup>64</sup> Also, for those on the inside, a comic frisson is created by situating the married man committing adultery next to an unmarried woman, who is the pregnant mistress of an equally prominent married man.

Setting aside the piece by Ford, which despite making a good study for vortextuality, is out-with the scope of this thesis, West’s short story both conflates and conflicts with the Vorticist ethos of *BLAST*. Both Marcus and *No Man’s Land* interpret this short story as a representative piece about young socialist women in unsatisfactory relationships and its regular appearance in anthologies gives testament to this approach. Gilbert and Gubar draw parallels between George and other male characters: ‘If “Sweat’s” Syke Jones was a hollow man, “Indissoluble Matrimony’s” George Silverton is a miserably wedded and unhappily bedded J. Alfred Prufrock, singing a love-song that becomes a song of hate because he is obsessed with the “secret obscenity of women!”’<sup>65</sup> The legitimacy of these comparisons is not in question, however, ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ draws attention to the dangers of seeing the world through globalising assumptions. Like so many of her other protagonists, West’s concern is the interiority and individuality of Evadne and George Silverton. The story is told from George Silverton’s point of view as West reveals his inner consciousness, but rather than use him merely as an example of failed modern manhood, West deploys him as a mirror to reflect the reality of Evadne. George’s main failing throughout the story is his continued insistence on measuring Evadne’s character against a traditional yet distorted yardstick of femininity, the inevitable

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<sup>64</sup> Lesley McDowell, *Between the Sheets: The Literary Liaisons of Nine 20th-Century Women Writers* (New York: Overlook Press, 2010), p. 141. McDowell records that Elsie Martingale, Hueffer’s wife, instigated legal action after Violet Hunt publicly called herself ‘Mrs Hueffer’.

<sup>65</sup> Gilbert & Gubar 1 (1988), p. 97.

consequence of which is his complete lack of understanding of his wife. Similarly, Evadne's silence and outward benignity is symptomatic of an individual who is unprepared to put her faith in the gendered ideals paraded as societal 'norms.' Thirdly, George's fractured psyche demonstrates the presence of both genders as he vacillates between the murderous 'masculine' thoughts of domination and the incapacitating 'feminine' traits of physical weakness, self-doubt, and inferiority.

'Indissoluble Matrimony' is a tragi-comic tale ostensibly narrated through free indirect discourse, with George as the focaliser, whose perspective dominates the narrative whilst Evadne remains silent. At times, like Jenny's ventriloquism in *The Return of the Soldier*, this leaves the reader with the impression that they are privy to a first person discourse. Even when the pronoun shifts from s/he to they, the perspective remains George's. West's privileging of the male gaze, a technique which was, and still is, regularly used to establish empathy for the main character is deployed as a means of challenging the reader's automatic assumption of male superiority and dominance, as it allows access to the internalised flaws of his psyche. George's 'I' casts a heavy shadow across the literary landscape, a common flaw later identified by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*. 'Indissoluble Matrimony' is constructed around the 'I' of George, but far from casting Evadne into shadow, it illuminates her situation. George's 'I' loses any of its traditional literary authority, virility, and power as the story progresses. This is one example of how West effectively uses the male discursive arsenal against itself, thus establishing Evadne as the story's true protagonist. Hallam argues that through Evadne, West's creates her own version of 'a trope familiar in the visual lexicon of Vorticist art', that of 'a hard

and strong body full of coiled energy.’<sup>66</sup> George’s internal thoughts and anxieties are laid bare, exhibiting the failings of a weak, ineffectual, and inconsistent man, disappointed as a consequence of the choices he has made, and determined to attribute those disappointments to his marriage, rather than to any flaws in his own character. George’s propensity to dither and contradict himself exposes the certainty of ‘I’ as a falsehood; unlike Woolf, West’s masculine ‘I’ is inconsistent and flimsy, insubstantial rather than solid, becoming the ‘shapeless mist’ instead of creating it.

The story’s opening lines draw attention to the obvious hostility between George Silverton, a clerk for a legal firm, and his yet unnamed wife, Evadne. Returning home from work George finds the house in darkness:

When George Silverton opened the front door he found the house was not empty for all its darkness. The spitting noise of the striking of damp matches and mild, growling exclamations of annoyance told him that his wife was trying to light the dining-room gas. He went in and with some short, hostile sound of greeting lit a match and brought brightness into the little room. Then, irritated by his own folly in bringing private papers into his wife’s presence, he stuffed the letters he had brought back from the office deep into the pockets of his overcoat.<sup>67</sup>

The scene is far from domestic. The adjectives ‘spitting,’ ‘growling,’ and ‘hostile’ evoke the physical, as well as emotional, antagonism that exists between husband and wife and highlights the lack of connubial warmth and comfort traditionally associated with the home. George’s lack of trust in his spouse is established in his hurried attempt to conceal personal papers from her and Evadne’s base animalistic nature or atavism is alluded to as she struggles to light a match with ‘mild, growling

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<sup>66</sup> Hallam in Gasoriek, Reeve-Turner, & Waddell (2011) p. 65.

<sup>67</sup> West. ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ in *BLAST* (1914) pp. 98-117. All quotations will be cited parenthetically in the text.

exclamations of annoyance.’ (p.98) In quick succession George’s impression of his wife is conveyed through a series of judgements:

His eyes remained on her face, brooding a little sourly on her moving loveliness, which he had not been sure of finding: for she was one of those women who create an illusion alternately of extreme beauty and extreme ugliness. Under her curious dress, designed in some pitifully cheap and worthless stuff by a successful mood of her indiscreet taste – she had black blood in her – her long body seemed pulsing with some extreme exaltation. (p.98)

This passage shows George’s fear and mistrust of Evadne’s difference and his social desire to catalogue her as a type. She is both eroticised and objectified as ‘exotic other’ whilst being typified as ‘one of those women.’ George’s concept of women is pejorative, having been formed through his experience of one woman, Mrs Mary Ellerker, who represents what he considers to be the blueprint for womanhood. Mary Ellerker is, in George’s estimation, a ‘marvel of imbecility,’ ‘obscene,’ representing:

that loathsome spectacle of the ignorant mind. Contorted by the artificial idiocy of coquetry, lack of responsibility, and a hatred of discipline, stripped naked by old age [...] One feared to think how many women were really like Mrs Ellerker under their armour of physical perfection or social grace’ (p.100).

Turning away from the elderly Mrs Ellerker, George’s assessing gaze falls upon her young companion Milly Stafordale, a friend of Evadne’s, observing that ‘[w]hen she was old she too would be obscene.’ (p.100) His initial attraction to Evadne is prompted by her difference from these two pale female figures, who represent the extremities of George’s paradigms of femininity, the promising ripeness and optimism of youth and the decrepit obscenity of old age. George repeatedly relies upon the common currency of normative, interchangeable, qualified phrases that lump all women together as one being or type: ‘one of those women’ (p.98), ‘the secret obscenity of women’ (p.100), ‘like a woman off the streets’ (p.103), ‘women like that’ (p.103), ‘the primitive woman who is the curse of all women’ (p.111), an

‘invisible worm destroying the rose of the world’ (p.112), ‘*the sort of woman*’ (p.16). By failing to see his wife as an individual, George’s mind spirals downwards creating a vortex of misunderstanding and underestimation of Evadne’s character. Try as he might to cast her as the villain in his life, she remains unvanquished and untarnished by his accusations; ‘as he increasingly sinks so she inexorably rises.’<sup>68</sup>

George’s marriage is indefinable in conventional terms and his wife cannot be confined, much to his chagrin, by the usual female taxonomies. Each time George attempts to snare Evadne in any preconceived notion or definition of womanhood, she fails to remain contained; she refuses to be explained in his terms. One example of this occurs just prior to their tussle on the side of the reservoir. After a quarrel, Evadne hurries from the house carrying a bundle of dark clothing and heads in the direction of a manor house, newly occupied by a young gentleman. George, eager to think the worst of her, exclaims:

‘What is this? What is this?’ he cried stupidly standing up. He perceived with an insane certainty that she was going out to meet some unknown lover. ‘I’ll come and tell him what a slut you are!’ he shouted after her and stumbled to the door. (p.105)

George pursues her hoping to catch her in the adulterous act, which would give him licence to sue for divorce. When she changes direction and bypasses the anticipated destination of the Georgian manor house, he surmises that she is meeting her lover by the water, muttering to himself:

‘Eh! She’s going to meet him by the water!’... He remembered the withered ash tree, seared by lightning to its roots, that stood by the road at the bare frontier of the moor. ‘May God strike her at that,’ he prayed, ‘as she fouls the other man’s lips with her kisses. O God! Let me strangle her. Or bury a knife deep in her breast.’(p. 106)

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<sup>68</sup> Gilbert & Gubar. (1988), p. 99.



George, who is seen as the story opens furtively stuffing private papers in his pockets to avoid discovery by his wife, is clearly the one guilty of deceit, and yet he justifies his unreasonable treatment of his wife, in thought and deed, by imagining his wife is an adulteress. The declaration “‘I’ll lie about her. I can prove that she’s wrong with this man and they’ll believe me if I say she’s a bad woman and drinks. I’ll make her name a joke. And then – ’”(p. 106) demonstrates George’s belief in the power of the male word. The implication is that if he declares ‘it,’ then she will be assumed to be ‘it’. He maintains this fiction, until he finds her standing, alone, on the banks of the reservoir, in a bathing suit:

The light emerged. It was the moonlight reflected from Evadne’s body. She was clad in a black bathing dress, and her arms and legs and the broad streak of flesh laid bare by a rent down the back shone brilliantly white, so that she seemed like a grotesquely patterned animal as she ran down to the lake [...] The moonlight made her the centre of a little feathery blur of black and silver, with a comet’s tail trailing in her wake. (p.108)

Disgruntled that Evadne’s journey has ended not in a licentious affair but a swim, George calls her back to the bank to confront her. Given a plausible explanation that destroys his previous plans to discredit her reputation and public standing, he falls into a melancholy:

His heart sank. From the loose-lipped hurry in the telling of her story, from the bigness of her eyes and the lack of subtlety in her voice, he knew that this was the truth. Here was no adulteress whom he could accuse in the law courts and condemn into the street, no resourceful sinner whose merry crimes he could discover. Here was merely his good wife, the faithful attendant of his hearth, relentless wrecker of his soul. (p.109)

Faced with the reality that Evadne cannot be classified as ‘that sort of woman’ George reluctantly revisions her as ‘his good wife,’ but still she refuses to be contained. Even when she is cast in the role of ‘good wife’ and ‘faithful attendant of his hearth’ she remains the ‘relentless wrecker of his soul.’ He is just as much of a malcontent when confronted by her innocence, as when he is convinced of her guilt. Just as Evadne

manages to evade George's attempts on her life, so she evades his attempts to explain her in universalising terms. She fits into neither camp; not 'good wife' nor 'slut.'

Many of West's early heroines including Evadne, Ellen Melville, Harriet Hume, Sunflower, and to some extent Margaret and Jenny in *The Return of the Soldier* refuse to conform to social stereotypes of the female or the feminine, remaining complex and dichotomous blends of both male and female genders: individual. What is revealed of Evadne through George's distorted imaginings, is a strong, competent articulate woman of considerable intellect, who despite disappointment in marriage, has decided to make the best of her life. George's initial desire sours exponentially as it becomes clear early on in their marriage that she is by far his superior as she bests him repeatedly. At times in the narrative George's defence collapses and his underlying, albeit bitter, admiration of Evadne seeps through the vitriol. He rails against her exotic looks and mannerisms, despite the fact that these were what first attracted him to her. Throughout the narrative West inverts or subverts characteristics normally assumed as stereotypical of one gender or the other. Weakness, hysteria, melancholy, jealousy, romantic conceits, and intellectual inferiority are all traits attributed traditionally to women. Here it is George who exhibits these flaws, whilst Evadne is figured as intelligent, physically strong, purposeful, competent, emotionally controlled and pragmatic to the point where George comically expresses the idea that '[s]piritual nausea made him determined to be a better man than her.' (p.102)

### **‘You Must Speak with Two Tongues’: Vortextualities**

As a neologism Vortextuality aims to extend the aesthetics that underpin Vorticism to a broader literary sphere, in order to include works that embraced the same disorientating, swirling, defamiliarising, and uncanny nature of Vorticist art – the literary equivalent of Lewis’s ‘unconsciousness of humanity, their stupidity, animalism, and dreams [and] the inner necessity.’ In his chapter ‘You Must Speak with Two Tongues’: Wyndham Lewis’s Vorticists Aesthetics and Literature’ Paul Edwards contends that ‘for Wyndham Lewis, who along with Pound was the chief theorist of the movement, the concept of the vortex had mainly a rhetorical significance’, but at no point does he define what this rhetorical vortex consists of. The chapter breaks down the premises that underpin Lewis’ most experimental prose play *Enemy of the Stars*, identifying the key concepts that influenced Lewis’ literary aesthetic. Using Edwards’ detailed analysis of *Enemy* this section identifies some possible features of rhetorical vortices, that when combined create a literary vorticist aesthetic that could be called vortextuality. It endeavours to show that even though Vorticism was aligned with masculinity, vortextuality was easily accessible to feminist writers such as Marsden and West, who deployed it to combat sex-antagonism.

Lewis was clearly inspired by the physical phenomenon of the vortex both in his art and in his writing. The energy of the vortex is of a cyclical nature, using closed perpetual streamlines (as opposed to open, dissipating streams) that rotate around a fixed centre. The motion creates a sensation of disorientation, which textually is

achieved in text using ‘syntactic and metaphoric disruptions.’<sup>69</sup> Narratives that repress, reform and de-form, often eddying back thus disrupting any notion of linearity. In the case of Lewis’s writing in *BLAST* this disruption is brash and bluntly obvious compared to West, who uses the technique more subtly. The resulting discourse is no longer linear or chronological, often ending where it once began but with a subtle temporal shift having occurred. Vortextuality or narrative disorientation is achieved by evoking destabilising emotions such as horror, fear, and anxiety or by exploiting cultural anxieties and taboos such as assault, suicide, rape, sexual depravity or murder. Whilst Lewis used parataxis and experimental syntax to convey this disorientating effect West was far more delicate, tapping into one of the early twentieth century’s most critiqued institutions; marriage.<sup>70</sup>

Reading ‘Indissoluble Matrimony’ it is evident that West’s characterisation resists reductive singularities or universalising ideas of gender or literary aesthetics. West’s story is artfully constructed around several vortices: the emotional vortex of George and Evadne Silverton’s marriage, the physical vortex created as both parties are plunged into the reservoir, and the psychological vortex of George’s thoughts and emotions. These thoughts flow in ‘streamlines’ of consciousness (as opposed to ‘stream of consciousness’) around a central premise that is George’s loathing for his wife. George’s interiority revolves around her perceived wrong doings, his emotions swirling violently towards a central crisis, often dissipating into nothingness only to re-emerge, reconfigured, to repeat the cycle again. One passage, which situates

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<sup>69</sup> Edwards (2000), p. 114.

<sup>70</sup> In her 1929 novel *Harriet Hume: A London Fantasy*, West continued to experiment with vortextuality using phantasmagoria.

Evadne and George facing each other on the banks of the Petrick reservoir, resembles the rhetoric of a Vorticist manifesto:

A bird rose over their heads with a leaping flight that made it seem as though its black body was bouncing against a bright blue sky. The foolish noise and motion precipitated their thoughts. They were broken into a new conception of life. They perceived that God is war and his creatures are meant to fight. When dogs walk through the world the cats must climb trees. The virgin must snare the wanton, the fine lover must put the prude to the sword. The gross man of action walks, spurred on the bloodless bodies of the men of thought, who lie quiet and cunningly do not tell him where his grossness leads him. The flesh must smother the spirit, the spirit must set the flesh on fire and watch it burn. And those who were gentle by nature and shrank from the ordained brutality were betrayers of their kind, surrendering the earth to the seed of their enemies. In this war there is no discharge. If they succumb to peace now, the rest of their lives would be dishonourable, like the exile of a rebel who has begged his life as the reward of cowardice. (p.110)

This passage contains phrases that would slot easily into one of Lewis' blasts or even one of D. H. Lawrence's novels. It even contains the internal contradictions that *BLAST* is renowned for: 'The flesh must smother the spirit, the spirit must set the flesh on fire and watch it burn'. Despite the conventional layout and punctuation this paragraph uses parataxis in a less dramatic but similar manner to Lewis: 'The virgin must snare the wanton, the fine lover must put the prude to the sword'. Although there is no evidence to support the notion that West actively submitted 'Indissoluble Matrimony' to *BLAST*, it is unsurprising that she may have got a perverse pleasure in perplexing Wells' attempt to keep his mistress and son hidden from view.

There are further points of vortextuality in West's narrative that neatly parallel the basic premises of Lewis' play *Enemy of the Stars*. Richard Aldington, reviewing *BLAST* for *The Egoist*, identified the idea of a 'cult of the individual' in Lewis' innovative play claiming:

It stirs one up like a hot poker. Of course, I do not 'understand' it [...] It doesn't seem to me that one should 'understand' a work of art in the sense that one understands a geometric problem or a legal document. The important

thing is that one should realise the artist's personality, and undergo the emotions he intended you to undergo in the contemplation of his work.

I do perceive a strong, *unique personality* in Mr Lewis' 'Enemy of the Stars.'<sup>71</sup> (emphasis added)

Centred around two male characters, Arghol and Hanp, the setting is described as 'Rough Eden of One Soul, to whom another man, and not EVE, would be mated' (p.62), a statement that repudiates the feminine, both historically and contemporarily. The 'cast' is male, and there is very little reference to women, but towards the conclusion of the play Hanp contemplates his next actions:

Where should he go? Home. Good natured drunken mother, recriminating and savage at night.

Hanp had almost felt she had no right to be violent and resentful, being so weak when sober. He caught a resemblance to present experiences in the tipsy stretching to babyhood.

He saw in her face a look of Arghol.

How disgusting she was, his flesh. Ah! That was the sensation! Arghol, similarly disgusted through this family feeling, his own flesh: though he was not a relation (p.81)

It is worth taking the time to identify several parallels between West's story and Lewis's experimental prose drama.<sup>72</sup> Both Lewis and West use Expressionism (via its 'intellectual lineage' through Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Stirner), violent imagery and narratives constructed around brutal assault, murder, and suicide.<sup>73</sup> Hanp's rejection of the maternal and of 'woman' and Arghol's obsession with 'the Romantic urge' to transcend 'the imperfections of material existence' are echoed in George's 'paramnesic illusion[s]' (p.103), which revolve around his desire for a monastic, homosocial existence achieved by the removal of his 'obscene' wife, who like Lewis'

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Aldington. 'BLAST', *The Egoist*, 1:14 (15<sup>th</sup> July 1914), pp. 272-3, p. 272.

<sup>72</sup> For a convincing close reading and interpretation of the play upon which my own interpretation is based, refer to Edwards (2000), pp. 113- 120.

<sup>73</sup> Clarke (1996), p. 87 and Edwards (2000) p. 114

‘drunken mother’, he deems to be ‘savage’.<sup>74</sup> Both the play and the short story appear to suggest eradicating ‘Eve’ as a solution to male anxiety; in the case of Lewis this is supposed to be a genuine proposition, unlike West’s, where it is ironic. There is also a deep-rooted suspicion of the female power of maternity. George draws attention to the fact that he has denied Evadne a baby, deriving ‘a mean pleasure in the thought that by never giving Evadne a child he had cheated her out of one form of experience’ (p.109). George’s free indirect discourse habitually presents an ostensibly omniscient yet unstable view of Evadne’s character, casting doubt over George’s authority to accurately portray his wife’s personality, which leads the reader to ponder whether or not Evadne would have chosen motherhood for herself; West was a firm advocate of women having autonomy over their own bodies. Frustrated, George had come to see his wife as ‘a curtain of flesh between him and celibacy, and solitude and all those delicate abstentions from life which his soul desired. He saw her as the invisible worm destroying the rose of the world with her dark secret’ (p.112). Ironically, Evadne appears to be invincible as George resigns himself to the fact that ‘bodies like his do not kill bodies like hers’ (p.117).

The appearance of West’s short story in *BLAST* raises many issues relating to gender. As Marcus and others have pointed out its juxtaposition against the masculinist doctrine of the avant-garde periodical causes any modern day reader to ask several questions: is it understandable that early twentieth-century feminists such as West and Marsden proposed masculine paradigms as a liberating ideal? Is the inversion of gendered characteristics atavistic or progressive; or is it merely reversing the binary, maintaining the negative and positive poles, and thereby perpetuating an

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<sup>74</sup>Edwards (2000), p. 114.

oppressive system of patriarchy, albeit with women occupying the patriarchal roles? In 'Indissoluble Matrimony' West inverts the paradigms attributing to Evadne all the qualities that her contemporary readership would expect of George and vice versa. Evadne is strident, forceful, persistent, intelligent, and physically much stronger than her weak, evasive, fanciful, and oft hysterical spouse George.<sup>75</sup> Although West never allows Evadne to speak she is most certainly heard. She represents a possible future for womanhood, which usurps the essentialist biological maternal function with intellectual fulfilment, a premise that destabilizes the status quo; George's future has been built upon the ineffable and subsequently unfulfilled promise of 'the good wife'. Unable to contain his wife within the confines of the normal female paradigms, he perceives her as an aberration of her sex and is consequently overwhelmed by the desire to be rid of her by any means available to him. She is also an example of West's developing vortextual aesthetic which she began developing in her mid teens, developing female characters like Adela, Nana, Evadne, Harriet, Ellen, Sunflower that were not only sensually beautiful but 'shameless' and 'savage [...] seething whirlpool[s] of primitive passions' that eddied around a 'deconstructive centre of intellectual unrest'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The 'hysterical male' is one that West had developed earlier in her article for *The Clarion* (27th September 1912): 'An Orgy of Disorder and Cruelty', Marcus (1982), pp. 98-100. The full quotation reads: 'Think of a mob of screaming, shrieking men, convulsed with liberalism, throwing themselves on singlehanded women, beating them with sticks and stones, tearing out their hair in handfuls, and stripping them down to the waist! Think of them dragging the bleeding besides of their captives towards the village pump pitching them over hedges, and trying unsuccessfully to dip them in the river!'

<sup>76</sup> West, 'Adela' in *The Only Poet and Other Short Stories* (London: Virago, 1992), pp. 17-59, p. 18. Edited and Introduced by Antonia Till. This unfinished short story was found in an envelope alongside a manuscript of 'Indissoluble Matrimony' and is written in a distinctively 'young' West's handwriting (Till's introduction p. 17).



## Conclusion

The ‘cult of the individual’ to many during this period came to represent a method of resolving a gender conundrum. Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle identified the first half of the twentieth century as one in which ‘two world wars, the culmination of women’s suffrage in the vote and the widening of both literary and mass culture’ helped to ‘reshape ideas about what it meant to be masculine and feminine’.<sup>1</sup> Many feminists, including Marsden and West, were part of the vanguard in this reshaping. They regarded femininity as the biggest drawback in their fight for equality, a factor that features in Dowson and Entwistle’s argument. For *Freewoman* feminists ‘individualism, far from reflecting or prescribing for the true nature or essence of [woman would] generate the cultural difference and diversity which conventional morality, orthodox opinion, and essentialist ideology disavow[ed].’<sup>2</sup> They articulate the distinct disadvantage women writers endured because they were ‘[s]tifled by the iconographies of the “poetess”’ and argue that in order to ‘win acceptance from male literary individuals and institutions, on whom they depended for publication and esteem, frequently avoid[ed] gender identification by means of initials or pseudonyms and indeterminate pronouns’.<sup>3</sup> Marsden’s periodicals consistently demonstrated an anti-feminine bias, challenging feminine ‘iconographies’ by placing faith in the belief that women’s advancement was achievable once they could prove themselves equal on the male playing fields; this would also help to eradicate long held prejudices

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<sup>1</sup> Dowson & Entwistle. (2005), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Dollimore (1991), p. 8

<sup>3</sup> Dowson & Entwistle. (2005), p. 7.

about women's capabilities and biological disadvantage. She urged women to free themselves from the female taxonomies that bound them to the domestic and to prove themselves as 'individuals'. However, shedding the shackles of the 'bondwoman' appeared to require the adoption of masculine ideals. To be equal a woman had to redefine herself by male paradigms and above all not be dictated to by the sentimentalism of romance, sex or motherhood. Defining a 'new woman' for the twentieth century remained a concern for most of the Modernist period. Narratives that unravelled a subject's interiority privileged the individual over the 'collective soul'. This denial of the feminine was also enacted through the militaristic rhetoric and tactics of many of the suffrage movements, and this alongside the desire to discuss formerly taboo subjects such as sex was often the cause of unease in *Freewoman* objectors. Mrs Humphrey Ward writing about the *Freewoman* declared these aspects 'the dark and dangerous side of the 'Woman Movement'.<sup>4</sup> Modern feminists may consider advocacy of the masculine as a route to equality difficult to defend, but given the historical context it should not be interpreted as anti-feminist either. Much of what Marsden discussed in her periodicals relied upon exposing the manner in which language confined and restrained women, an idea which has preoccupied French Feminists for several decades.

As the century progressed into the 1920s these protean ideas of 'individualism' began to build upon and develop the nineteenth-century concept of the androgyne and that of the 'New Woman.'<sup>5</sup> At roughly the same time as Woolf was

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<sup>4</sup> 'Some Opinions' in *NFW*, 1:2 (1<sup>st</sup> July 1913), p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> A. J. L. Busst, 'The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century' in Ian Fletcher, (ed) *Romantic Mythologies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1967) pp. 1-95. Busst explores the

writing her influential feminist essay *A Room of One's Own*. West was beginning to re-evaluate her position as a writer and woman. Her short essay, 'Woman as Artist and Thinker' (1931), explored the differences between the sexes and the significance of empathy and motherhood for women's creative abilities claiming that 'the general criticism of women is discouraging to the tranquil development of the female soul'.<sup>6</sup> The refrain against common taxonomies of gender still resonates as she rails against the 'constant fate of women' to be castigated as typical of their sex:

If an ordinary man, who had earned his living all his life, properly discharged all his civic responsibilities, and been a good husband and father, were reading his newspaper and found paragraph after paragraph accusing him of unpunctuality, untruthfulness, frivolity, stupidity, dishonesty, inability to perform such simple technical actions as driving a car, and every other vice under the sun, he would become indignant and exasperated to the point of frenzy.<sup>7</sup>

It is obvious from the tone and content of her essay that by 1931 little had changed in the wider perception of women; the battles that were waged on the pages of the *Freewoman* were ongoing, but West's approach has nonetheless shifted. Rather than accounting for and accommodating male perspectives on women's writing, West advocated ignoring them. Concluding her essay she states: 'women must learn to go on their way without caring overmuch for the judgement passed on their work by men, just as assuredly men go on their way without caring overmuch for the judgements passed on their work by women.'<sup>8</sup> Rather than compete, West's suggestion is that women must learn to dismiss 'neurotic' male criticism. Although her concluding sentence is rather ambiguous as to how this should be achieved, it

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complex issues concerning the figure of the androgyne throughout the nineteenth century, including its representation in art and literature.

<sup>6</sup> West, (2005 [1931]) pp. 10-22, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., (2005), p. 22.

arguably acknowledges that women should adopt their own method and style, rather than seeking to emulate their male counterparts or to allow themselves to be judged by a male standard.

Karen Offen's theoretical understanding of relational and individualist feminism provides a practical solution to critics who consider individualism as something alternative to – rather than part of – a complex and convoluted history of feminism. When critics such as Hanscombe and Smyers state that there is a shift *from* feminism *to* individualism it suggests individualism as something out-with feminist discourses thus eliding the substantial contribution of staunch feminists such as Marsden, West, and their fellow *Freewoman* writers. These women (and men) fought to establish a new vision of womanhood (and manhood) in a post-paternalistic society. They also helped articulate challenges to the hetero-normative practice of marriage and childbirth, by opening up the possibility that sex was not solely a procreative act, but connected to desire, passion, and identity. Marsden and her Freewomen understood that emancipation was far more complex than winning the right to vote:

[Women] will learn that their freedom will consist in appraising their own worth, in setting up their own standards and living up to them, and putting behind them for ever their role of complacent self-sacrifice. For none can judge of another soul's value. The individual has to record its own. A morality begotten in a community where one-half are born servants may glibly say that it is woman's highest role to be the comforter of men and children; but it is the truth, and men and women both must learn it, that while to be a human poultice is to have great utility, it does not offer the conditions under which vivid new life- manifestations are likely to show themselves, either in the 'Comforter' or the 'Comforted.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Marsden 'Bondwomen' *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 2

## Conclusion.

It required a greater social, cultural and psychological shift that only woman herself could bring about: 'She thus finds herself in a position in which she is compelled to do one of two things – i.e., remain solely as the man's protected female, or, making what may or may not be a successful effort, endeavour to take her place as a master.'<sup>10</sup>

The greatest legacy of women writers like Marsden and West is that they dared to be different, refused to conform and through a vocal, loud, abrasive, irritating, political, and challenging little magazine called *The Freewoman*, they dared other women (and men) to do the same.

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<sup>10</sup> Marsden 'Bondwomen' *FW*, 1:1 (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1911), p. 2

# Appendix I

## **MANIFESTO.**

### I.

- 1** Beyond Action and Reaction we would establish ourselves.
- 2** We start from opposite statements of a chosen world. Set up violent structure of adolescent clearness between two extremes.
- 3** We discharge ourselves on both sides.
- 4** We fight first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours.
- 5** Mercenaries were always the best troops.
- 6** We are Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World.

30

Figure 1 Manifesto *BLAST* p. 30

- 7** Our Cause is NO-MAN'S.
- 8** We set Humour at Humour's throat.  
Stir up Civil War among peaceful apes.
- 9** We only want Humour if it has fought like Tragedy.
- 10** We only want Tragedy if it can clench its side-muscles like hands on it's belly, and bring to the surface a laugh like a bomb.

31

Figure 2 Manifesto 1 *BLAST* p. 31

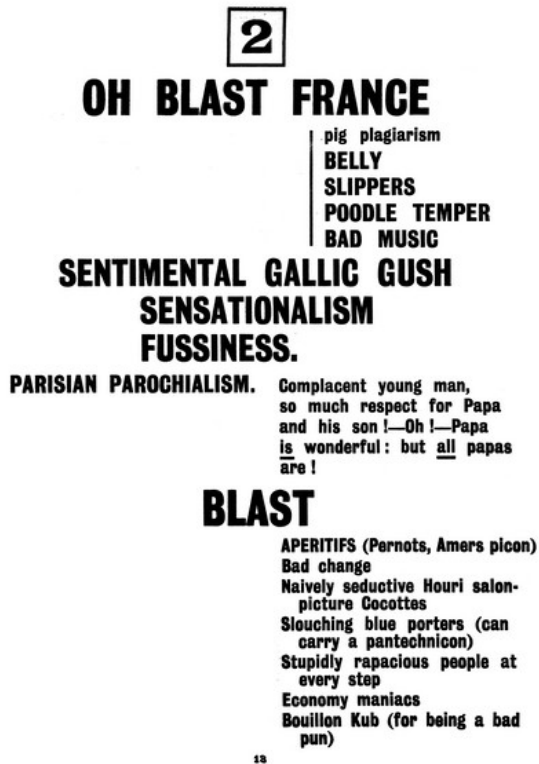


Figure 3 Blast France *BLAST* p. 13

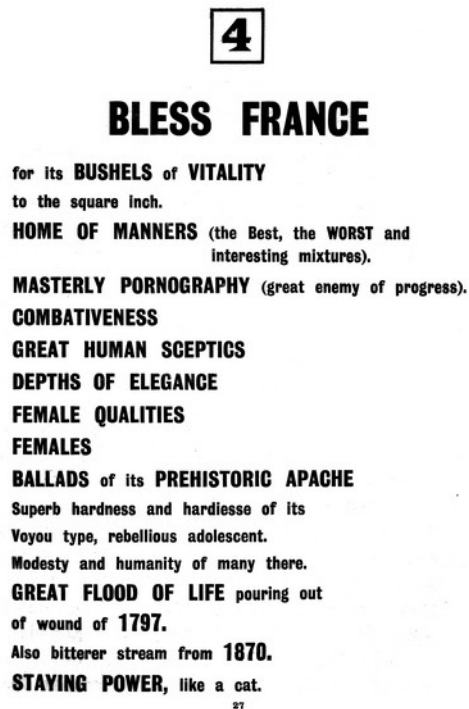


Figure 4 Bless France, *BLAST* p. 27

**1**

**BLAST First** (from politeness) **ENGLAND**

**CURSE ITS CLIMATE FOR ITS SINS AND INFECTIONS**  
**DISMAL SYMBOL**, SET round our bodies,  
of effeminate lout within.  
**VICTORIAN VAMPIRE**, the **LONDON** cloud sucks  
the **TOWN'S** heart.

**A 1000 MILE LONG, 2 KILOMETER Deep**  
**BODY OF WATER** even, is pushed against us  
from the **Floridas**, **TO MAKE US MILD.**

**OFFICIOUS MOUNTAINS** keep back **DRASTIC WINDS**  
**SO MUCH VAST MACHINERY TO PRODUCE**

| **THE CURATE** of "Eltham"  
| **BRITANNIC ÆSTHETE**  
| **WILD NATURE CRANK**  
| **DOMESTICATED**  
| **POLICEMAN**  
| **LONDON COLISEUM**  
| **SOCIALIST-PLAYWRIGHT**  
| **DALY'S MUSICAL COMEDY**  
| **GAIETY CHORUS GIRL**  
| **TONKS**

22

Figure 5 Blast 1 *BLAST* p. 11

**6**

**BLAST**  
years **1837** to **1900**

**Curse** **abysmal inexcusable** middle-class  
(also **Aristocracy** and **Proletariat**).

**BLAST**  
pasty shadow cast by gigantic **Boehm**  
(imagined at Introduction of **BOURGEOIS VICTORIAN VISTAS**).

**WRING THE NECK OF** all sick Inventions born in  
that **progressive white wake**.

**BLAST** their weeping whiskers—hirsute  
**RHETORIC** of **EUNUCH** and **STYLIST**—  
**SENTIMENTAL HYGIENICS**  
**ROUSSEAUISMS** (wild Nature cranks)  
**FRATERNIZING WITH MONKEYS**  
**DIABOLICS**—raptures and roses  
of the erotic bookshelves  
culminating in  
**PURGATORY OF PUTNEY.**

23

Figure 6 Blast 6 *BLAST* p. 18



**CHAOS OF ENOCH ARDENS**  
laughing Jennys  
Ladies with Pains  
good-for-nothing Guineveres.

**SNOBbish BORROVIAN** running after  
**GIPSY KINGS** and **ESPADAS**  
bowing the knee to  
wild Mother Nature,  
her feminine contours,  
Unimaginative insult to  
**MAN.**

**DAMN**  
all those to-day who have taken on that Rotten Menagerie,  
and still crack their whips and tumble in Piccadilly Circus,  
as though London were a provincial town.

**WE WHISPER IN YOUR EAR A GREAT  
SECRET.**

**LONDON IS NOT A PROVINCIAL  
TOWN.**

We will allow Wonder Zoos. But we do not want the  
**GLOOMY VICTORIAN CIRCUS** in  
Piccadilly Circus.

**IT IS PICCADILLY'S CIRCUS !**

19

Figure 7 Blast 6 (cont.) *BLAST* p.19

**TO SUFFRAGETTES.**

A WORD OF ADVICE.

**IN DESTRUCTION, AS IN OTHER THINGS,  
stick to what you understand.**

**WE MAKE YOU A PRESENT OF OUR VOTES.  
ONLY LEAVE WORKS OF ART ALONE.**

**YOU MIGHT SOME DAY DESTROY A  
GOOD PICTURE BY ACCIDENT.**

**THEN !—**

**MAIS SOYEZ BONNES FILLES !  
NOUS VOUS AIMONS !**

**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.**

151

Figure 8 Suffragettes *BLAST* p.151

**IF YOU DESTROY A GREAT WORK OF ART you  
are destroying a greater soul than if you  
annihilated a whole district of London.**

**LEAVE ART ALONE, BRAVE COMRADES !**



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Figure 9 Suffragettes (cont.) *BLAST* p. 152.

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#### **Book Reviews**

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