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**Passport to Paradise:
The Politics of Mobility in
Twentieth-Century Women's Writing**

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July 2019

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of
Melbourne.

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Declaration

This is to certify that

- i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy;
- ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and
- iii. the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Lucinda O'Brien

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This thesis is lovingly dedicated to John, Rose and Sylvia.

Abstract

In much twentieth-century women's writing, mobility acts as a pervasive symbol of freedom, self-discovery and creativity. Throughout this period, female writers have repeatedly employed imagery of movement and travel to represent women's growing social, economic and intellectual independence. Such writers have drawn upon a vast range of texts concerned with travel and other forms of movement, ranging from the Homeric epic to nineteenth-century narratives of *flânerie*. They have self-consciously modified these narratives, in order to illustrate the tangible obstacles to female mobility and the cultural conventions that frame mobility in masculine terms. For these writers, female mobility constitutes a struggle, not only for autonomy in a literal sense, but also for a new symbolic vocabulary that accurately represents women's diverse experiences of modernity. These women writers frequently counterpoise their travelling protagonists with others who are left behind, who move under coercion, or who serve as the static object of the traveller's quest. Through these juxtapositions, they illustrate the profound inequalities of class, race and nationality that structure and give meaning to mobility. At the same time, they persistently associate mobility with the democratising aspects of modernity, casting movement as an opportunity for independence and productive communality that transcends social divisions. These literary narratives thus register a dissonance between the affirming, liberating mobility of certain privileged women and the constrained mobility of other, more marginalised subjects. This dissonance generates a "politics of mobility", an awareness that movement and its literary uses are inevitably bound up with structures of power.

This thesis seeks to illustrate the value of critically attending to mobility in order to trace the outlines of a distinctive female literary tradition. Focussing on four major writers of the twentieth century – Virginia Woolf, Christina Stead, Mavis Gallant and Anita Desai – it shows how all four make frequent use of images of movement in order to depict the significant expansion of women's opportunities in many modern societies. At the same time, the thesis shows how all four writers use such imagery to critique inequalities of gender, class, ethnicity and the legacies of imperialism, and to suggest that affirmative, liberating forms of mobility are only available to certain subjects. In this sense, the thesis reads the work of Woolf, Stead, Gallant and Desai as deeply ambivalent,

poised between a desire to celebrate mobility and an awareness of the privilege upon which this gesture depends. While mobility offers the female writer a means of imbuing her characters with autonomy, they suggest, it also risks implicating her in the elitism that often characterises narratives of travel, quest or adventure. This thesis considers the ways in which each writer negotiates this conflict. It shows how each writer, over the course of her career, produces texts that experiment with imagery of movement in different ways, ranging from highly romanticised, even utopian optimism to a much more reticent, cynical stance. It draws attention to the similarities between these texts, in order to argue that they form part of a tradition of twentieth-century women's writing.

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1 Introduction

In much twentieth-century women's writing, mobility acts as a pervasive symbol of freedom, self-discovery and creativity. Throughout this period, female writers have repeatedly employed imagery of movement and travel to represent women's growing social, economic and intellectual independence. Such writers have drawn upon a vast range of texts concerned with travel and other forms of movement, ranging from the Homeric epic to nineteenth-century narratives of *flânerie*. They have self-consciously modified these narratives, in order to illustrate the tangible obstacles to female mobility and the cultural conventions that frame mobility in masculine terms. For these writers, female mobility constitutes a struggle, not only for autonomy in a literal sense, but also for a new symbolic vocabulary that accurately represents women's varied experiences of modernity. These women writers frequently counterpoise their travelling protagonists with others who are left behind, who move under coercion, or who serve as the static object of the traveller's quest. Through these juxtapositions, they illustrate the profound inequalities of class, race and nationality that structure and give meaning to mobility. At the same time, they persistently associate mobility with the democratising aspects of modernity, casting movement as an opportunity for independence and productive communality that transcends social divisions. These literary narratives thus register a dissonance between the affirming, liberating mobility of certain privileged women and the constrained mobility of other, more marginalised subjects. This dissonance generates a "politics of mobility", an awareness that movement and its literary uses are inevitably bound up with structures of power.

This thesis seeks to illustrate the value of critically attending to mobility in order to trace the outlines of a distinctive female literary tradition. Focussing on four major writers of the twentieth century – Virginia Woolf, Christina Stead, Mavis Gallant and Anita Desai – it shows how all four make frequent use of images of movement in order to depict the significant expansion of women's opportunities in many modern societies. At the same time, the thesis shows how all four writers use such imagery to critique inequalities of gender, class, ethnicity and the legacies of imperialism, and to suggest that affirmative, liberating forms of mobility are only available to certain subjects. In this sense, the thesis reads the work of Woolf, Stead, Gallant and Desai as deeply ambivalent,

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The politics of mobility

In treating mobility as an expression of political structures and relationships, my thesis draws on the emerging interdisciplinary field of "mobility studies". The field of mobility studies embraces a wide range of journeys and experiences that fall outside the traditional category of "travel": localised experiences such as walking, and involuntary forms of transnational movement, such as the migration of refugees. Mobility scholars explore the ways in which these forms of movement are "assigned with certain significance" and "produced as meaningful through the co-involvement of social, cultural and political contexts" (Adey 34).¹ Such scholars investigate the role of mobility in fiction, relating it to women's increasing agency, equality and artistic expression in many modern societies. Importantly, they also examine the ways in which writers use narratives of mobility to illustrate persistent forms of social inequality, especially those affecting women and other marginalised subjects.² The concept of mobility is a particularly useful tool for exploring women's writing, since women's experiences have often been excluded from the category of "travel". In fiction, the travelling protagonist is typically male, while women are associated with home, "that which must be left behind in pursuit of agency" (S. Smith x).

¹ See also Merriman; Cresswell. This politically nuanced conception of mobility informs the work of literary critics such as Charlotte Mathieson, Wendy Parkins and Andrew Thacker. See also Simpson; Cirstea; Horrocks.

² Addressing mobility in nineteenth-century women's writing, Parkins writes that "women's mobility bears an important relation to questions of women's agency" in the context of "major social change in women's roles and gender identities", brought about in part by "industrialisation, urbanisation and increasing democratisation" (2). Mathieson identifies the "gendered and classed" nature of mobility in Victorian fiction (15), showing how Victorian writers employed tropes of mobility to represent the changing social roles of women and working class people in the nineteenth century.

Indeed, Janet Wolff surmises that there may be “something *intrinsically* masculine about travel”, in the sense that it plays a vital role in “constructed masculine identity” (Wolff, *Resident* 122-23). An emphasis on mobility encompasses a range of activities that have been more accessible to women than travel, conventionally defined. These include the religious pilgrimage,³ social work in the Victorian slums,⁴ and the more recognisably modern pursuit of window shopping.⁵

In exploring the “political” aspects of literary narratives of movement and travel, my starting point is Caren Kaplan’s influential text, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (1994).⁶ In a wide-ranging analysis of twentieth-century theorists, literary critics and travel writers, Kaplan draws attention to the pervasive use of “metaphors of travel and displacement” in twentieth-century culture, arguing that they serve an “ideological function” (26). She shows how, in a wide variety of critical texts, mobility repeatedly assumes an aura of “mystified universalism” (4), becoming a metaphor for creative or intellectual achievement (101, 102). Kaplan is sceptical of such metaphors, with their implication that “we are all rootless, existentially adrift, and limitlessly mobile” (26). She observes that mobility in the real world “is not universally available or desirable for many subjects, nor is it evenly experienced” (1). She points out that “canonical” or “classic” travel writing tends to be the product of “an elite group of British, male writers”, reifying the experiences of the “gentleman traveler” (50, 53-54). Kaplan contrasts these elite travel narratives with the lived experiences of “displace[d]” refugees and economic migrants, whose travels entail “homelessness... chronic hunger” and an ever-present threat of violence (3,101). She observes that every mobile individual is inevitably embedded in “material conditions” specific to his or her “geographies, politics, and economic practices”, and suggests that universalising tropes of rootlessness

³ Female pilgrims in the medieval era were frequently accused of sexual impropriety (Waller 81-82; S. Morrison 112) and singled out as targets of “misogynist satire” (S. Morrison 112). Nevertheless, many found a measure of liberation in this rare opportunity for mobility. Some even wrote about their experiences (see, eg, Kempe). For a discussion of the trope of pilgrimage in modernist literature, see Peat.

⁴ See E. Ross.

⁵ See Bowlby, *Carried*; Lysack 171-177.

⁶ Kaplan’s text has been widely cited by literary critics, scholars of travel writing, critical geographers and proponents of “mobility studies”. See, eg, Johnson, Simpson, Huggan, Massey, Presner and Greenblatt. Some travel writing scholars have adopted Kaplan’s strategy of contrasting the privileged figure of the travelling writer with the marginal, abject figure of the refugee in order to trace “the articulation of ‘privilege through movement’” (Huggan 3). Like Kaplan, Mary-Louise Pratt calls attention to “new mobilities” such as large-scale illicit migration, carried out “in conditions of scarcity, insecurity, and restricted choice” (239), arguing that these narratives need to be reintegrated into the concept of “travel”. For a critique of Kaplan, see Pritchard.

serve to obscure these material conditions and the persistent structures of inequality that they entail (26). More recently, Carole Fabricant has made this point in relation to eighteenth-century travel narratives, which frequently invest the journey with a “quasi-metaphorical status as a journey of the heart, mind or soul” (708). Fabricant observes that this metaphor elides the “concrete historical mediations that tie any given journey, no matter how personal or paradigmatic in nature, to the social and material conditions enabling its existence, making travel a collective and (broadly speaking) political activity” (708). My own exploration of mobility, in fiction written by twentieth-century women, rests upon this dual sense of travel as a metaphoric process of personal transformation and, simultaneously, a “political” practice grounded in real social and economic conditions.

My thesis critically evaluates the ways in which narratives of liberating mobility have served as “enabling fictions” (Fraiman x) for twentieth-century women writers, allowing them to participate in what Sidonie Smith calls the “cultural logic of the individualizing journey” (xi). Through close readings of selected novels and short stories by Woolf, Stead, Gallant and Desai, I show how all four writers portray literal travel and movement as the means by which female characters pursue autonomy and maturation. Yet my analysis is not limited to actual journeys undertaken by characters in these texts. Rather, it analyses the relationship between each writer’s depiction of literal mobility and her symbolic or metaphoric evocation of mobility. The freedom and transformation that each writer associates with mobility is expressed in imagined journeys, as much as literal ones. In this sense, I consider the extent to which each writer imbues mobility with an aura of “mystified universalism” or abstraction, in the manner critiqued by Kaplan (4). Yet I also consider how each writer foregrounds the material conditions that enable or limit an individual’s mobility. Indeed, I argue that the political force of their writing often springs from the ironic disjuncture between a character’s abstract, romanticised conception of travel and the literal conditions in which she moves, or fails to move.

Travel writing scholarship serves as an important point of departure for my study. For many travel writers, the act of moving affords an insight into foreign places and cultures, but also enables a kind of creative self-fashioning. Alain de Botton articulates this idea in *The Art of Travel* (2002), when he suggests that travel and its “study” can “contribute to... what the Greek philosophers beautifully termed *eudaimonia* or human flourishing” (9). From eighteenth-century writers such as Laurence Sterne to

contemporary, postmodern figures such as Bruce Chatwin, travel writers have repeatedly reinforced the link between travel, exposure to cultural difference and the stimulation of the traveller's creativity. Such writing has traditionally been a masculine preserve (Fabricant 714), while travel writing texts by women have been "ignored by male critics" (Mills 31) or, at best, regarded as "poor carbon copies of a masculine original" (Anderson 14). Yet as demonstrated by the eighteenth-century aristocrat, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, some female writers have travelled in an effort to free themselves from traditionally feminine, domestic roles (Mills 35) and to assert their authority as writers, working from "an insider position" within hierarchies of class, nationality and empire (Anderson 27).⁷ These writers have, in turn, served as a potent imaginative resource for writers of fiction. Anita Desai, in her introduction to a volume of Montagu's letters, praises Montagu's "talent" for travel, borne out by her "ability to study an alien culture according to its own values," and "to see herself through the eyes of others" (xxix). For Desai, Montagu's travel writing illustrates the "possibilities of a freed personality and a new life unencumbered by [one's] past and... society" (xxi-xxii).

In its specific focus on tropes of travel and movement in fiction and travel writing by women, Karen Lawrence's *Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition* (1994) is another important point of reference for my thesis. Lawrence builds upon the work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, specifically their discussion of the "obsessive imagery of confinement" (64) that characterises much fiction written by women in the nineteenth century. In contrast to their largely negative account of constraint and thwarted agency, she argues that travel and mobility have furnished women with a vital "set of alternative myths or models for [their] place in society" (xi). She further observes that "women writers of travel have tended to mistrust the rhetoric of mastery, conquest, and quest that has funded a good deal of male fictional and non-fictional travel". For this reason, their fictional and non-fictional travel narratives have traditionally been marked by "a strong sense of the constraints on self-propelled movement" and a profound "mistrust of the quest and its purposeful destination" (Lawrence 20). Nevertheless, Lawrence contends that narratives of exile, quest and colonial exploration and have furnished "fictional opportunit[ies] to explore new forms of women's agency and power" (29). In a similar vein, Wendy Parkins notes that mobility

⁷ The imperial power relations that underpin this genre have been extensively discussed in travel writing scholarship. For a discussion of Victorian women's travel writing as an enactment of "imperial violence", see Franey. See also Mills. For a discussion of Montagu, see Halsband.

frequently appears as a difficult or even dangerous activity in women's fiction, emerging in narratives of flight, "retreat" and expulsion, as well as those of outward-bound, exploratory or adventurous movement (2). Parkins shows how, in novels of the nineteenth century, mobility is often "coerced or involuntary" or simply "the last resort" of the "fallen woman". She adds that, repeatedly, female mobility is cast as aberrant and even "monstrous" (47), a profound deviation from norms of acceptable feminine behaviour. Nonetheless, even if it is "not freely chosen... a woman's solitary journey takes on a heroic stature" in many female-authored texts of this period, "often involv[ing] some claim to the right to act on [one's] own behalf" (12). In this sense, like Lawrence, Parkins contends that images of constrained, impeded or even involuntary movement have enabled women writers to explore both the opportunities and the dangers that attend the modern woman's "increased capacity for action" in the modern era (12).

My analysis of texts by Woolf, Stead, Gallant and Desai seeks to cast these four writers as members of a distinctively female, twentieth-century literary tradition of writing about mobility. I do not contend that this tradition bears out any "general theory of women and literature" (Felski 4). Rather, I identify this tradition as being comprised of texts that are specifically concerned with describing female experience and the social conditions that promote or impede female liberty and successful maturation. This does not preclude an awareness of other markers of identity. On the contrary, all four writers I discuss in this thesis consider the extent to which other factors – particularly class, ethnicity and the legacies of colonialism – influence their characters' formation. In some instances, particularly in the work of Stead and Gallant, these considerations overtake gender as a central preoccupation. In this sense, I consider "women's literature" in Alison Light's terms, as a category that lends only "temporary... unity" to a collection of "dissenting voices" (*Forever* xii). Woolf frames this discussion, not only due to her status as a canonical and highly influential female writer, but also because she explicitly considers the nature of women's writing, and the need for a distinctive, self-consciously female literary tradition, in her own critical work. Her literary criticism, as much as her fiction, exerts a palpable influence on twentieth-century women's writing. Yet Woolf does not present herself as an impartial arbiter of literary taste. Instead, she carefully positions her criticism as "idiosyncra[ti]c", defined by her own "limitations" and "prejudices" (*Room* 6). In this respect, Woolf embodies the female tradition I seek to

illustrate – one that is contingent and provisional, a disparate collection of individual voices.

As Rachel Bowlby has shown, movement is a central and pervasive metaphor for female creativity throughout Woolf's oeuvre. Bowlby reads Woolf's fiction as building upon a male literary tradition that equates pedestrian movement with original thought and creativity, one that leads from Plato's *Symposium* to nineteenth-century narratives of *flânerie*.⁸ For Bowlby, Woolf's career represents a pivotal moment in the development of a distinctly female literary tradition, "the culmination of a certain tradition of writing about walking and women in the eventual arrival of the woman writer herself" (*Crazy* 30). She identifies Woolf as a paradigmatic and foundational figure in a female literary tradition that is intensely focussed on mobility and the psychological and aesthetic implications of movement. She illustrates this with reference to Woolf's essay, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), showing how the narrator's wandering movement illustrates her discursive position "outside the precincts of representational power". In contrast to the traditional masculine narrative style that adheres fixedly to "preconceived lines" (*Destinations* 35), Bowlby argues that Woolf's self-consciously "wandering, cartwheeling" (*Destinations* 33) narrative style in *A Room of One's Own* constitutes a deliberate attempt to inaugurate a distinctively female mode of writing. Bowlby's work serves as a crucial reference point for my discussion of Woolf and her use of imagery of mobility to evoke autonomous female subjectivity.

To the extent that it focusses on urban movement, my thesis also owes much to Deborah Parsons' *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (2000). Parsons observes that the figure of the urban walker functions as a twentieth-century counterpart to the nineteenth-century adventurer. She notes that in modern literature, the hero's journey of "self-discovery" shifts from its "traditional form of exotic travel or the Grand Tour to travel within the city itself, the journey becoming orientated inwards" (70). Parsons points out that this transition is especially useful to many modern women writers, who find city walking peculiarly conducive to literary "exploration of the female consciousness" (70). While Parsons' work informs my reading of Woolf, Stead, Gallant and Desai, I emphasise the ways in which these writers render female walking in highly specific, politicised terms, rather than in purely symbolic terms as a metaphor for female

⁸ For discussions of the literary figure of the *flâneur* and his female counterpart, the *flâneuse*, see Parsons; Wolff; D'Souza and McDonough; Buck-Morss; Nord.

“consciousness”. Parsons acknowledges that it is “important... not to romanticize the position of the wanderer” (14) or to take her as a universal figure of female “liberation” (6). Yet to a degree, Parsons’ study does just that: at one point, she describes homeless ragpickers as “marginalised *flâneurs*” whose vagrancy evokes the modern writer’s self-conscious disavowal of narrative authority (177).⁹ As I will show, my four writers depict such figures more critically and ambivalently. Juxtaposing bourgeois urban wanderers with vagrants and refugees, they draw attention to the material prosperity and social authority that underpins their own affirmative narratives of mobility. In so doing, they obliquely acknowledge and criticise the elitism of their own literary practices.

In addressing itself to “twentieth-century” women’s writing, this study deliberately eschews the term “modernism”. Woolf can be regarded as a paradigmatic example of high modernism, in so far as her work departs from mimetic realism in favour of formal experimentation. Her work epitomises the modernist preoccupation with the distinctive characteristics of modern environments, particularly the city, inner life, and the individual’s subjective, fleeting perceptions of these environments. Stead, Gallant and Desai are more difficult to align with the modernist tradition. This is partly a question of periodisation. All wrote and published most of their work after 1940, the end point of high modernism, as it is usually defined (Sheridan, “Modernism,” 215).¹⁰ It is also due to the geographic location of all three writers outside (or only temporarily resident in) the European capitals in which high modernism found its fullest expression (Berman 28). Most importantly, the difficulty of categorising Stead, Gallant or Desai as modernists is due to the narrative techniques each writer employs, combining elements of formal experimentation with features more commonly associated with realism, such as detailed descriptions of the natural and social world.¹¹ While none are social realist writers, all three produce texts that are characterised by their detailed descriptions of particular locations and historical moments. At the same time, their texts have an ironic or satiric inflection that is implicitly political, in contrast to the conventional understanding of

⁹ Discussing Anaïs Nin’s short story, “Ragtime” (1938), she writes that the rag-pickers’ “degraded” living conditions are, to some extent, redeemed by their capacity to transform old objects into new ones, a process that evokes the writer’s practice of retrieving repressed memories (177). This account is troubling in its attempt to gloss over the profound differences between the bohemian writer, Nin, and the destitute figures she depicts in “Ragtime”. While not exactly romanticising these figures, Parsons implies that their primary value is in representing aspects of the narrator’s creative process, rather than in offering an insight into the suffering of the urban poor.

¹⁰ See also Friedman.

¹¹ Stead, for example, incorporates highly detailed descriptions of the natural environment into novels such as *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) and *For Love Alone* (1944).

modernism as “a formalist art... above politics” (Sheridan, “Modernism,” 211). All three writers engage in formal experimentation, presenting disjointed, inverted or truncated travel narratives that self-consciously cite and revise earlier texts. Yet they do so in the context of finely observed and highly detailed portrayals of characters who move through vividly realised landscapes and encounter concrete, tangible obstacles to their progress. In this sense, the work of Stead, Gallant and Desai might fall within a more nuanced and expansive category of “transnational”, politically “commit[ted]” modernism, as recently articulated by critics such as Jed Esty and Jessica Berman.¹² This form of modernism is at once embedded in the “the pressing realities of historical modernities” and distanced from them, by means of experimental, “nontransparen[t]” narrative practices (Berman 26, 25). Rather than withdrawing from the real world into a rarefied realm of abstraction, it “disrup[ts]... mimetic realism” in order to “redescr[ibe]” reality, and in so doing, to “open [it] up” to “critique” (Berman 26).¹³

¹² Rejecting the “mythology” of modernism’s “inward turn” or “dissociation from politics” (29), Jessica Berman defines transnational modernism as “a constellation of rhetorical actions, attitudes, or aesthetic occasions, motivated by the particular and varied situations of economic, social, and cultural modernity worldwide and shaped by the ethical and political demands of those situations” (7). See also Esty, *Shrinking*.

¹³ Susan Sheridan gestures towards this definition of modernism when she writes that Stead’s “loose or fragmented narrative structure, as well as [her] fascination with the speaking subject, are features of modernist fiction. But Stead’s could be called a politicised form of modernism, in that the speech of her characters is not stream of consciousness but is always rhetorically purposeful, and is formed out of historically available discourses on class, gender, nation and sexuality” (“Modernism” 208).

***A Room of One's Own* (1929)**

In *A Room of One's Own*, a text that overtly addresses the subject of “women and fiction” (5), Virginia Woolf positions her narrator as the avatar of a newly independent, intellectually confident and irrepressibly mobile modern womanhood. Yet the opening sequence is characterised by impeded and arrested movement, the experience of being “locked out” (24), diverted from one’s course. In the first chapter of *Room*, the narrator visits the fictional university of “Oxbridge”. Woolf draws an implicit parallel between motion and esoteric thought from the earliest pages of her essay, when her narrator admires the university’s “high domes and pinnacles”, “like a sailing ship always voyaging never arriving” (10). However this narrator finds her movement, and her train of thought, continually interrupted by obstacles. She encounters a succession of male officials who insist that ladies may not walk on the grass and can only be admitted to the library if “accompanied by a Fellow... or furnished with a letter of introduction” (9). As Bowlby writes, these encounters serve as “an allegory of the banning of women from the citadels of masculine authority” and “the male monopoly on every aspect of cultural authority” (*Destinations* 19). They set the narrator on a rambling, seemingly directionless itinerary that gradually emerges as a metaphor for new and “subversive” ways of thinking (*Destinations* 33). Though she initially “curse[s]” in “anger” at her failure to gain admittance to the library, the narrator quickly observes that “the outside” of the university’s “magnificent buildings is often as beautiful as the inside” (*Room* 9, 10). From her outsider’s vantage point, the “venerable” scholars appear strikingly awkward and ungainly in their movement, resembling “giant crabs and crayfish who heave with difficulty across the sand of an aquarium” (10). By contrast, the narrator moves easily through the streets, “ponder[ing] this and that” and concluding that while it is “unpleasant... to be locked out... it is worse perhaps to be locked in” (24).¹⁴ With this imagery, Woolf draws an implicit parallel between digressive, rambling movement and a subversive mode of thought.

Woolf contrasts her narrator’s relative freedom of movement with the static and confined lives endured by previous generations of women, particularly writers. She begins with the Elizabethan poet, Lady Winchilsea, “shut... up in a room in the country” to avoid the censure of her peers, who deride her writing as a “useless folly” (58). She proceeds to recount the lives of Jane Austen, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë. Jane

¹⁴ See also Seeley.

Austen, she notes, “never travelled; she never drove through London in an omnibus” (65). George Eliot, like Lady Winchilsea, retired to “a secluded villa in St John’s Wood” to escape “the world’s disapproval” (67) of her extramarital relationship with George Lewes; while Charlotte Brontë was “made to stagnate in a parsonage mending socks when she wanted to wander freely over the world” (70). Woolf contends that this historical experience of confinement has radically impeded women writers’ capacity to write with “integrity” (69), to give their “genius” expression in a way that is “whole and entire” (67). By way of illustration, she quotes at length from a passage in Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), in which Jane looks from the roof of Thornfield Hall towards the distant horizon, protesting, “Anybody may blame me who likes... Women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts... they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation...” (Brontë 140-41; *Room* 66). Woolf points out an “awkward break” (66) between this passage and the next, in which Jane is stirred from her reverie by the laughter of the servant, Grace Poole. This “jerk” in the narrative is evidence, Woolf argues, that Brontë’s writing suffers aesthetically due to her urge to protest against “cramped and thwarted” (67) life experience. “Her imagination swerve[s] from indignation and we feel it swerve” (70), she writes. Yet she also concedes that this “swerve” is an authentic expression of a “fear”, a “rancour” and a “buried suffering” that in some way corresponds to “real life” (70). In this sense, Woolf hints that the “anger” that “deflect[s]” Brontë from her “path” (70) resembles that of her own narrator, turned away from the libraries and colleges of “Oxbridge”. While appearing to constitute an aesthetic flaw, a deviation from the expected order, she hints that her own “swerv[ing]” narrative constitutes a deliberate attempt to devise a specifically female way of writing.

Woolf enacts similarly “awkward break[s]” at several points in her narrative, most notably when she abruptly shifts the setting from “Oxbridge” to London, at the beginning of the second chapter. Playfully announcing that “the scene, if I may ask you to follow me, [has] changed” (26), Woolf’s narrator effects a sudden and disorienting transition from the silent, moonlit spires of “Oxbridge” to a bustling, modern city street. This change serves to emphasise her modernity, in contrast to the “old deans and old dons” of academia, “rare types which would soon be obsolete if left to fight for existence on the pavement of the Strand” (10). Unlike these figures, with their archaic caps and gowns, the narrator seems perfectly attuned to the modern city. This city is characterised by

crowds, by technology and above all, by incessant and ubiquitous motion. The narrator makes her way through streets full of “four-wheeled cabs”, barrows, vans and “motor-cars” (26-27), feeling that she and all the other inhabitants of London are being perpetually “shot backwards and forwards... to make some pattern” by the great “machine” of the city (27). In contrast to the clearly demarcated and bounded spaces of “Oxbridge”, this urban environment facilitates a freedom of movement that appears liberating and inherently democratic: working class barrow-men shout, sing and “parad[e]” through the streets with as much ease and confidence as the narrator herself (27). As she traverses this urban landscape, the narrator observes a house painter, a nursemaid, a coal-heaver and “a woman who keeps the green-grocer’s shop” (39). Though she claims to be too “engrossed” in thought to notice these “usual sights” (39), these fleeting encounters offer evidence of the new economic and social opportunities available to women in the modern city. At the same time, the narrator’s nonchalant tone underscores her difference from Brontë’s Jane Eyre. While Jane longs in vain for access to “the busy world, towns, regions full of life” and the “variety of character” (66) they contain, Woolf’s cosmopolitan modern narrator takes these spectacles for granted. In this respect, *Room* illustrates the unparalleled creative opportunities opening up to mobile urban women in the twentieth century.

Through her account of the imaginary novelist, Mary Carmichael, Woolf reinforces her association between erratic, unpredictable movement and female creativity. In the penultimate chapter of *Room*, Woolf’s narrator takes up *Life’s Adventure*, a novel by the fictional author, Mary Carmichael, published “this very month” (76). Almost immediately, the narrator notes with faint disapproval that Mary’s prose does not conform to conventional aesthetic standards: “[t]he smooth gliding of sentence after sentence [i]s interrupted” (77). Reading on, she is further discomfited by the difference between Jane Austen’s prose style and that of Mary Carmichael. She observes disapprovingly that while Austen “breaks from melody to melody as Mozart from song to song, to read this writing was like being out at sea in an open boat. Up one went. Down one sank.” (77) This imagery of lurching, almost nauseating movement continues as Woolf compares Mary’s narrative to the motion of a “switch-back railway... car” which, “instead of sinking... swerves up again” (78). Yet as she reads, the narrator begins to suspect that Mary is “playing a trick”, deliberately subverting the “expected sequence... for the sake of creating” something new (78). She wonders whether *Life’s Adventure* is merely a badly

written novel, or whether her own “conventional” reading habits might be to blame for her sense of disorientation and confusion. She confesses that “whenever [she] [i]s about to feel the usual things in the usual places... the annoying creature” – Mary Carmichael – “twitch[e]s [her] away, as if the important point were just a little further on” (87). Here, the narrator relinquishes her self-important tone as the literary critic possessed of “impeccable taste” and a “fastidious ear” (87). She becomes, instead, a docile horse, responding passively to Mary’s commands. In the following, climactic passage, she likens Mary to a jockey in a steeplechase and describes with relief how Mary goes over her fence “like a bird” (89). Here, as in the opening scene of locked gates and closed doors at “Oxbridge”, Woolf transfigures an image of obstructed movement, turning it into a symbol of triumphant creativity and female narrative authority.

Woolf suggests that by self-consciously revising the masculine literary tradition, in which freedom of movement has always been a male prerogative, women writers may alter the lived relationships between men and women in profound ways. With impish humour, she dramatises this subversiveness in her account of Mary Carmichael’s metaphoric jumps race. As Mary “lengthen[s] out for the test”, she imagines the “pedagogues and the patriarchs all at her... like the crowd at a fence on the racecourse,” shouting prohibitions: “You can’t do this and you shan’t do that! Fellows and scholars allowed on the grass! ...Aspiring and graceful female novelists this way!” (89). Woolf hints at the potentially radical consequences of women writing “truthful[ly]” about men (87), rather than in deference to masculine “vanity” (35). She observes that for “centuries”, women have served as “looking glasses” with the “magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (34). She upends this tradition by depicting a form of “feminine *flânerie*” (Bowlby, *Crazy* 16) that asserts women’s right to observe and write about “the other sex” (86). “The place of the walker as writer is marked out from the start as a masculine identity which locates women as part of the representation,” writes Bowlby (*Crazy* 8). Yet far from being merely “part of the spectacle” of the urban street (*Crazy* 6), the object of a masculine gaze, Woolf’s narrator appraises the men she encounters in terms that are distinctly irreverent. Her account of the “Oxbridge” dons – like “crabs” in an “aquarium” (10) – betrays a satirical edge that recurs whenever she describes male authority figures, ranging from the Duke of Cambridge, resplendent in his feathered “cocked hat” (39), to “old Professor Z”, author of “the hundred and fiftieth life of Napoleon” (86). Woolf implies that this mode of

writing poses a threat to men's monopoly on power in the real world, for how, she asks rhetorically, is the masculine "figure in the looking-glass... to go on giving judgment, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, getting up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and dinner at least twice the size he really is?" (36). With her mobile female narrator in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf makes a fervent statement of faith in women's capacity to write their own literature, one that gives authentic expression to women's experiences and, in so doing, challenges the symbolic order of patriarchy.

Outline of the thesis

In Chapter Two, I consider how the imagery of movement in Woolf's work is political in another sense. By contrasting its female narrator's ease of movement with the difficult or thwarted movement of others, this imagery draws attention to the privilege and even elitism that facilitates her emancipation. This is only faintly adumbrated in *Room*, in the narrator's account of how she came into her fortune of five hundred pounds a year. After recounting her work in a series of tedious and poorly-paid jobs, the narrator recalls how her aunt died and left her a legacy, thus providing her with "chicken and coffee, bed and lodging" for the rest of her life (37). There is a hint of self-deprecating irony in the narrator's tone, as she describes with apparent complacency how her purse "breed[s] ten shilling notes automatically" (37). Yet this revelation serves to prefigure her ultimate conclusion that a woman must have "five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door" (100) in order to write good fiction. In reaching this conclusion, the emancipatory vision of *A Room of One's Own* seems unapologetically restricted to women who have access to an unearned income. To this extent, it reflects Woolf's own position, as a member of a prominent upper middle class family and the recipient of a small legacy.¹⁵

In the same chapter, I seek to counterbalance the apparent elitism of *A Room of One's Own*, by showing how Woolf's narratives of female mobility reveal a persistent

¹⁵ In a short piece written for her Bloomsbury coterie, Woolf identifies herself as a snob in a tone at once mocking and defiant ("Snob"). As Molly Hite notes, Woolf's "less friendly contemporaries and many subsequent critics agreed with her" (190). Christina Stead, for example, dismissed Woolf as having been "cottonwooled all her life" (Rowley, *Biography* 434) while F. R. Leavis was scathing of her circle's "conceit" masquerading as "high sophistication" (Latham 62). Though neither rich like her fictional character Clarissa Dalloway, nor aristocratic like her friend Vita Sackville-West, Woolf enjoyed considerable class privilege, including servants, regular holidays both within the United Kingdom and abroad, and entry into some of London's most elite social circles (Latham 64; Light, *Servants*).

awareness of social inequality, and a willingness to interrogate her own class privilege with “brutal candor” (Latham 67). I also consider the extent to which Woolf employs such imagery to acknowledge her privilege as a citizen of Britain, a globally dominant imperial power.¹⁶ Throughout her fiction, I argue, Woolf uses imagery of mobility to draw attention to these forms of inequality and so, in various ways, to qualify the “optimist[ic]” (Solomon 333) tone she adopts in *Room*. I illustrate this claim through a discussion of an early short story, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906),¹⁷ Woolf’s first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), and her mature work, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). In these texts, Woolf juxtaposes her mobile female protagonists with other figures whose mobility is constrained, such as the impoverished peasants in medieval Norfolk, the “native” inhabitants of a British colony and the vagrants on the streets of modern London. In so doing, she draws attention to the various forms of social, economic, racial and imperial privilege that facilitate the liberating mobility of her female characters. In this sense, I argue, Woolf’s fiction deploys imagery of movement in a way that is inherently political.

In subsequent chapters, I consider how three twentieth-century women writers have drawn upon Woolf’s imagery of mobility, while also adapting it to their own circumstances and preoccupations. By juxtaposing Woolf’s work with that of Stead, Gallant and Desai, I have chosen a deliberately disparate group, both in order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of imagery of mobility in twentieth-century women’s writing, and to illustrate the ways in which this imagery varies according to each writer’s

¹⁶ Kathy Phillips has given the most comprehensive account of Woolf as a critic of imperialism. Phillips offers detailed and often persuasive readings of Woolf’s novels and criticism, arguing that Woolf demonstrates a sense of “guilt for the blindnesses of the past” and a “responsibility to make the future different” (xi). Other critics such as Jane Marcus (“Britannia”) and June Cummins have provided equally compelling and influential readings of Woolf as a critic of British imperialism. For Helen Carr, there seems “little doubt” that Woolf “was a committed anti-imperialist” (199). See also Lewis; A. Smith; Kuehn. Yet an increasing number of critics consider that Woolf in fact participates in imperialist ideologies. Jane Garrity argues that many “British women modernists,” including Woolf, “remain uneasily tied to such dominant discourses of national belonging and imperial redemption, plagued by fierce emotions and irrational desires that inform their sacred loyalties to place and betray their varied unconscious attachments to England” (2). She argues that Woolf and other modernist writers “[r]einscrib[e] the rhetoric of empire even as they resist it... deploy[ing] spatial and territorial metaphors to carve a place for themselves within the national imaginary” (3). See also Esty; Seshagiri; Carr (208-209). Jane Marcus navigates a path between these two views, showing how Woolf is “profoundly English-identified and very conflicted about it”, simultaneously critiquing imperialism and yearning nostalgically for an empire imagined as benign and benevolent (*Darkness* 8, 6). Similarly, Stasi views Woolf as an anti-imperialist who is also, paradoxically, a “daughter of empire,” and as such finds it “nearly impossible to distinguish engagement with other cultures from domination” (110).

¹⁷ The story was written in 1906 but not published until 1979, when it was identified as “a significant addition to the Woolf canon” (Squier and DeSalvo 238).

distinctive geographic, socio-economic and cultural context. In comparison with Woolf, these three writers are self-consciously peripheral. Stead was born in Australia, Gallant in Canada and Desai in India. The three writers occupy distinct positions, each with its own relationship to the imperial metropole and the legacies of British colonialism. Within their native societies, Stead, Gallant and Desai also occupy different class positions. Desai most closely approximates Woolf's upper middle class status, being the university-educated, English-speaking wife of an oil executive. Gallant and Stead occupy more precarious class positions. Though both were the daughters of professional men, both were required to support themselves at an early age and experienced acute financial hardship at various points in their lives.¹⁸ Still, it is important not to overstate the differences between Stead, Gallant, Desai and Woolf. All four were lifelong professional writers who rarely engaged in other forms of paid employment after their earliest work was published. All wrote predominantly in elite metropolitan locales, with the exception of Desai who lived and worked in India until the 1990s. All participate in an English literary tradition that affiliates them, in various ways, with a colonially-transmitted culture – even Desai, who despite being raised in India “grew up reading more English literature than... the literature of [her] own country” (Jussawalla and Dasenbrook 171).¹⁹ In different ways, all occupy ambiguous positions as both insiders and outsiders – participants in forms of privileged mobility who also found themselves, in various ways, marginalised.

Accordingly, Chapter Three discusses the work of Christina Stead, focussing on four novels: *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934), *For Love Alone* (1944), *Letty Fox: Her Luck* (1946) and *The Little Hotel* (1973). The pervasive presence of mobility in Stead's fiction aptly reflects her peripatetic life and transnational career. Stead left Australia at 26 and travelled widely, working in England, continental Europe and America and only returning to her native country in 1969 at the age of 67. Stead's biographer, Hazel Rowley, has described her as an inveterate “wanderer” and argued that “wandering” appears as “an ideal condition, the embodiment of freedom”, throughout her fiction (Rowley, “Wanderer,” 15). She points out that Stead's novels repeatedly cast life itself as

¹⁸ See Rowley, *Biography*; Hancock (29).

¹⁹ Desai concedes that for her, “English is the language of thought and logic” (Bliss 533) and the language of her literary education: she “grew up reading Henry James and D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and George Eliot” (Desai, “Being,” 27). Similarly, the bilingual Gallant rejected the suggestion that she might write in French, stating emphatically that she “prefer[red] writing in English” (Hancock 26).

a journey, in which “[a]n unusual character, highly intelligent and of a creative bent, takes flight... from [his or her] suffocating community” into a freer life elsewhere (Rowley, “Wanderer,” 17). This “wandering” motif finds its clearest expression in the quest narrative of *For Love Alone*, Stead’s semi-autobiographical account of a young woman leaving Australia in pursuit of romance, culture and personal independence. It also informs her adoption of the trope of the *flâneur* to evoke the uniquely stimulating, liberating and cosmopolitan aspects of modern urban life, particularly for women. In this respect, Stead shares Woolf’s tendency to associate mobility with self-discovery and autonomy. Yet more emphatically and persistently than Woolf, Stead emphasises the material impediments to female mobility, particularly the financial difficulties that entrap them in positions of dependency upon men. Unlike Woolf’s genteel narrator, the women of Stead’s fiction must earn their mobility, either through paid employment or by “cadging” (*FLA* 237) from fathers, lovers or other less reliable sources. In contrast to the theme of romanticised wandering identified by Rowley and others, this chapter considers how Stead provides a gendered account of women’s mobility as difficult, dangerous and frequently thwarted. It argues that, while Stead draws on Woolf’s use of mobile imagery to depict modern female consciousness, she does so in a far more pessimistic manner, stressing the limitations imposed on female mobility by patriarchal social norms. Yet cutting across this narrative, the Marxist Stead emphasises class relations as forces that shape and delimit her characters’ travel experiences. In these respects, Stead self-consciously distances herself from Woolf and her perceived metropolitan, bourgeois elitism.²⁰

Chapter Four discusses the Canadian expatriate writer, Mavis Gallant. Successive critics have identified the theme of “exile” as preeminent in Gallant’s work, linking this to her ambivalent attitude towards her country of origin (Hancock 46). Yet in this chapter I argue that Gallant continually critiques romanticised narratives of figurative exile, showing how they serve to gloss over real, material inequalities between those who travel

²⁰ Several feminist critics have compared Stead’s work with Woolf’s, often drawing upon Stead’s own comments relating to Woolf and her work. Diana Brydon writes that Stead studied Woolf’s writing but disliked “the narrowing of Woolf’s sympathies by class privilege” (19). For Brydon, Stead’s “thinking about women’s oppression [was] much more thoroughly grounded in a materialist analysis... For her the enemy was not individual men but the networks of power that structured all human relations” (19). Susan Sheridan characterises the relationship as a more fractious one. Observing that Stead denounced feminism as “pure freakery” (1), Sheridan states that Stead criticised *A Room of One’s Own* and *Three Guineas* (1938) and regarded Woolf’s writing as middle class (Sheridan, *Stead* 2-3). Yet Sheridan also concedes the limits of the “autobiographical” approach to the interpretation of Stead’s work, noting that her statements in interviews reveal “manifest inconsistencies and self-contradictions” (18).

for pleasure and those who travel involuntarily, particularly those displaced by war. Like Stead, Gallant spent most of her adult life as an expatriate. Her work is set in Europe, particularly Paris, and presents a highly variegated cast of travellers, tourists and drifters from all over the world. In contrast to Stead's positive identification of the "wanderer" as "an embodiment of freedom", Gallant casts her mobile figures as profoundly melancholic, isolated and cut off from any meaningful sense of identity or community. Beginning with an early story, "The Other Paris" (1953),²¹ and the novel *Green Water, Green Sky* (1959), this chapter shows how Gallant experiments with the trope of travel as a transformative, educative experience, in a manner that draws upon Woolf's *The Voyage Out*. Yet it goes on to argue that, more overtly than Stead, Gallant sharply satirises the wealthy tourists and travellers who populate cities such as Paris, contrasting their figurative exile with the real vulnerability and deprivation of genuine refugees. Gallant situates these characters within the specific historical and political context of the Second World War, an event that continues to cause acute suffering for many of the refugees and displaced persons who populate her stories. Through my discussion of "The Other Paris", *Green Water, Green Sky* and two further short stories, "An Alien Flower" (1974) and "Baum, Gabriel, 1935 – ()" (1979), I show how Gallant presents ideals of cosmopolitan mobility as ethically suspect, equating them with attempts to suppress or deny the events of the war and the enduring suffering of the war's victims. Even more than Stead, Gallant frequently casts her female characters as complicit with these forms of evasion or exploitation.

Chapter Five marks a shift in emphasis, exploring the depiction of mobility by a writer who, to some extent, occupies the discursive position of the "postcolonial" (Jussawalla and Dasenbrook; Jackson, "Gender") or "Third World" (George) woman.²² It examines the work of Anita Desai, a writer born in India to a Bengali father and a German mother. Like Stead and Gallant, Desai occupies an ambiguous position in relation to her nation of origin. While she regards herself as "totally Indian", she also views her native country with the eye of an "outsider" (Bliss 527; Ho 1). This is partly due to her European heritage, but also to her education in English literature (Jussawalla and Dasenbrook 171) and her preference for writing in the English language. As Hena Ahmad writes, Desai occupies an "in-between location as an Anglophone third world woman

²¹ "The Other Paris" was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1953. It was republished in a short story collection of the same name in 1956.

²² Anita Desai's fiction has also been discussed as an example "black women's writing" (Nasta).

writer, situated at the colonial/national/diasporic nexus” (89) and thus detached from her country of origin in a way that mirrors the expatriate position of Stead and Gallant. Yet if Desai resembles Stead and Gallant in her ambivalent relationship to her country of origin, she is distinguished from them by her membership of an elite social class. Like Woolf, Desai enjoyed a degree of affluence that freed her from the need to earn an income. In the context of postcolonial India, Desai’s strong affinity with English culture reflects her membership of an affluent, educated bourgeois elite. Desai has stated that as a young woman, she regarded England as “almost... an extension” of India (Desai, “Bicultural,” 23). In this respect, she illustrates the way in which Indians schooled in English literature have, as Rajeswari Mohan writes, served as “intermediaries” between the colonising culture and their own (55).

More than Stead or Gallant, Desai illustrates the enduring significance of Woolf in the development of a twentieth-century female literary tradition.²³ Desai’s strong identification with Woolf is apparent in an early article published in *Quest*, an Indian literary journal, entitled, simply, “Women Writers” (1970).²⁴ Desai overtly models her own essay on Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, combining an arch, playful tone with a serious philosophical reflection on the necessary conditions for female creativity. She suggests somewhat flippantly that “in an age when five hundred unearned pounds [a]re simply not to be had”, Indian women writers have resorted to the “simple, if drastic, solution” of marriage to acquire the “necessary lucre” (40). She assures her readers, with some irony, that the “resultant series of infants is fairly tractable” since they “allow their mothers to write while they sleep and, when they no longer sleep, can legitimately be sent to school” (40). Yet the essay quickly adopts a far more earnest tone, bearing out Desai’s strong commitment to the development of a female literary tradition in the terms outlined by Woolf. Desai concurs with Woolf’s assertion that “great” women writers “like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki” are all “inheritor[s] as well as... originator[s]” (*Room* 104). She laments the lack of similar figures in her own country’s history, complaining that for

²³ Early in her career, Desai sought to distance herself from Woolf; a revised version of the *Quest* essay, published in England, makes far less reference to Woolf (Desai, “Indian Women Writers”), and in the mid-1990s she told an interviewer that she “hardly read [Woolf] any more” (Sanzgiri). More recently, however, Desai has admitted that she reads Woolf’s novels “again and again even now with great pleasure,” and that she “had to struggle very consciously to break free” of Woolf’s influence, to “find [her] own voice and not write in emulation” (Gee 10).

²⁴ Several critics have compared Desai to Woolf, as well as Margaret Drabble and Margaret Atwood, casting Desai as an avatar of “Western” feminism. See especially Kanwar; Ramulu; Uniyal; Singh. See also Parekh.

Indian women “there [i]s no literary tradition at all”, no equivalent to a “Mrs Carlyle” or “Lady Murasaki” (40). For Desai, this lack of a female tradition represents a significant “handicap” to women writers, “perhaps [a] fatal one for literature must have it as a tree must have long, deep roots.”²⁵ In her view, writing in the absence of such a tradition produces an effect of “wandering aimlessly through wild, uncharted tracts, unsure of where one began, unsure of where one may end” (41).

As this imagery of desultory wandering indicates, Desai does not attempt a wholesale adoption of Woolf’s imagery of mobility. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, Woolf’s imagery exerts a palpable influence on Desai, particularly that of *The Voyage Out*, which Desai connotes in several of her own novels. Like Woolf, Desai portrays female characters frustrated by their physically constrained existences within the home. Yet her novels rarely present mobility in positive terms, as a symbol of female emancipation. Rather, Desai’s work reveals a persistent and profound anxiety concerning the effects of mobility on personal identity; a suggestion that the mobile, questing protagonist represents an ethically suspect and personally destructive form of extreme individualism. Desai casts her female characters as poised between two equally unpromising alternatives: continuing entrapment within a static, domestic life, or a painful separation from home, family and community. In this schema, mobility is frequently associated with the abandonment of Indian cultural traditions in favour of a Westernised lifestyle that threatens to be just as lonely and disorienting as the path of the “wandering”, “aimles[s]” female writer who writes without enabling precedents. This chapter discusses Desai’s imagery of mobility in four novels, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *Baumgartner’s Bombay* (1988) and *Fasting, Feasting* (1999). It shows how, repeatedly, Desai depicts the static and oppressive domestic life experienced by many Indian women, contrasting it with the mobility that is almost exclusively reserved for male characters, particularly Western men or Westernised, transnational Indians. Yet rather than associating this mobility with freedom or self-expression, Desai casts her mobile, male characters as deeply alienated and melancholic. The chapter considers how Desai counterbalances this largely negative account of mobility with a complex and multifaceted portrayal of the home. In each of these texts, Desai evokes the home as a place that is potentially imprisoning for women,

²⁵ Here, Desai closely echoes Woolf’s observation in *A Room of One’s Own*, that English “early nineteenth-century novelists... had no tradition behind them” (72) and that “such a lack of tradition... must have told enormously” upon them (73).

but also as the site in which essential familial and cultural bonds are nurtured and sustained. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the late short story, “The Rooftop Dwellers” (2000), which offers a more sanguine account of female mobility within the specific environs of the modern Indian city. It reads this story as evidence of Desai’s desire to recuperate the home as a site of enabling security and freedom for modern, educated, middle class Indian women.

This thesis argues that attending to imagery of mobility allows us to identify the outlines of a female literary tradition that is deeply concerned to represent the unique aspects of female experience and to explore the conditions in which women can achieve autonomy and creative fulfilment. It argues that Woolf’s fiction serves as a repository of images and narrative techniques that serve as precedents for subsequent twentieth-century women writers. While Desai is the only writer of the three to make explicit acknowledgement of Woolf, as a source of inspiration, the fictions of Stead and Gallant also bear distinct traces of her influence. This reflects Woolf’s preeminent status within a British literary culture that enjoyed global dominance in the first half of the twentieth century, transmitted from the metropole to the colonies of Australia, Canada and India with unprecedented speed, due to rapid improvements in technologies of communication.²⁶ Still, it is important to stress that this thesis does not attempt to outline a tradition of strict emulation of Woolf. While certain tropes and metaphors employed by Woolf recur throughout the work of Stead, Gallant and Desai, the tradition I seek to identify is marked by a ceaseless desire for reinvention and critique, often taking the form of irony or satire. As I will argue, the work of Stead, Gallant and Desai often sets itself at a distance from Woolf, in a way that reflects each writer’s time, place and personal experiences of mobility.

²⁶ For a discussion of the Australian reception of English literary modernism, and Woolf’s writing in particular, see Carter.

2 Virginia Woolf and the journey to alterity

Throughout her fiction, Virginia Woolf persistently associates mobility with autonomy, creativity and personal transformation. For Woolf, mobility furnishes a range of tropes with which to represent women's increasing social and intellectual freedom in modern, twentieth-century societies. At the same time, this repertoire of images serves to illustrate persistent forms of inequality, based not only upon gender but upon class, race and the legacies of imperialism. Like the narrator of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's female travellers and urban walkers are all socially elite, engaging in mobility by choice and for leisure, rather than out of necessity. While offering them release from the domestic stasis and confinement that characterised preceding generations of women, their journeys bring them into discomfiting proximity to people outside their own social milieu. Woolf's fictional heroines experience these encounters as transformative in several senses: offering the opportunity for personal agency and creative stimulation, these journeys also create the potential for feelings of empathy that transcend divisions of gender, class, race and nationality.

This chapter begins with an analysis of an early short story, "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn". Written shortly before Woolf commenced work on *The Voyage Out*, this story strikingly articulates Woolf's association between mobility, modernity and female creative potential. Woolf contrasts the mobility and independence of a modern scholar, Rosamond Merridew, with the confined and static life of the medieval diarist, Joan. Joan's diary vividly illustrates the constraining impact of literal stasis upon female creativity. Yet, through her account of a religious pilgrimage, Joan bears testament to the transformative potential of movement. The chapter turns next to *The Voyage Out*, Woolf's most sustained experiment with a conventional "travel" narrative. Set in the fictional South American colony of Santa Marina, this novel draws a parallel between exploratory, outward-bound movement and the fraught, uncertain process of female maturation. To some extent, Woolf casts the exotic setting of South America as an environment in which her heroine, Rachel Vinrace, can free herself from the restrictions of Victorian femininity and develop authentically intimate relationships with those around her. Yet Rachel's encounter with the colonised inhabitants of Santa Marina forces her to confront her own implication within structures of imperial violence. Rachel responds to this by dying suddenly of an unidentified illness. The chapter concludes with *Mrs Dalloway*, a novel in

which Woolf turns to the trope of urban walking as a metaphor for female autonomy. *Mrs Dalloway* emphasises the unique qualities of the female urban walker, suggesting that walking in the city can afford new forms of literal and imaginative freedom to women. It also affords new opportunities for empathy with, and ethical awareness of, others, even if this awareness is inevitably fragile and fleeting.

“The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn” (1906)

In “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”, Woolf draws an explicit parallel between mobility, freedom and creativity. The story consists of two narratives, the diary of a fifteenth-century gentlewoman, Joan Martyn, and a preface by a twentieth-century amateur historian, Rosamond Merridew. The story begins with Rosamond’s account of her journey through the English countryside in search of medieval manuscripts. By chance, Rosamond discovers an old country house, Martyn Hall. She obtains entry on the pretext of desiring a tour, in the course of which the proprietor reveals the existence of his “grandmother Joan’s diary”, written in 1480 (*JM* 41-42). At this point, Rosamond’s narrative abruptly gives way to the diary itself.²⁷ Like most women of the fifteenth century, Joan is almost totally confined to the domestic sphere, represented by her family’s house. In her diary she frequently expresses frustration at her inability to move outside this sphere. While Joan expresses pride at her literary achievement in keeping a diary, she becomes increasingly preoccupied with her domestic and familial obligations, until, finally, she determines to cease writing, in anticipation of her marriage to a local landowner, an event that is yet to take place at the story’s conclusion. Through an implicit contrast between the domestic, homebound Joan and the independent, mobile Rosamond, Woolf suggests that mobility offers modern women new opportunities for personal agency, and new modes of entry into traditionally masculine realms of scholarship and literary creativity.

Through her characterisation of Rosamond, Woolf inaugurates a symbolic parallel between mobility, modernity and creativity that will persist throughout her fiction.²⁸

²⁷ The diary is loosely modelled on the letters of a real medieval figure, Margaret Paston. Rosamond explicitly alludes to *The Paston Letters* (1430-1504) in her narrative. Woolf later makes these letters the subject of an essay in *The Common Reader* (1925): see Lojo-Rodriguez (82).

²⁸ For critical commentary on “Joan Martyn”, see DeSalvo, “Other”; Skrbic; Lojo-Rodriguez; Engler; Schröder; VanStavern. Nina Skrbic’s account makes the most explicit reference to mobility, noting that the journal sustains a “poignan[t]” tension between the “stasis” of Joan’s life at Martyn Hall and the “dynamic movement” of the world around it (112). For the most part, however, these discussions focus on the story’s treatment of history and women’s creativity.

Rosamond begins the story in the breezily authoritative tone of a seasoned traveller. She locates the story's setting, with great precision, on "the Thetford road from Norwich to East Harling" (35). While demonstrating her familiarity with the English countryside, Rosamond also emphasises her stature as an international, cosmopolitan figure. "Berlin has heard my name; Frankfurt would give a soirée in my honour" (33), she announces airily. She adopts overtly masculine language to describe both her mobility and her intellectual pursuits, comparing herself to a hunter, and recounting the "many shrewd blows" she has sustained in scholarly skirmishes (33). With her bombastic tone, Rosamond is in one sense a satirical figure, inviting comparison with the "Oxbridge" academics in *A Room of One's Own*. Yet she also resembles the "digressive", iconoclastic narrator of *Room*, evincing a "transgressiveness that is also the chance of her going somewhere different" (Bowlby, *Crazy* viii). Underscoring this transgressive quality, Rosamond acknowledges the ambiguity of her status as an independent scholar, in contrast to the denizens of "secluded rooms in Oxford and in Cambridge" (33). She explains that her scholarship is unorthodox in that it concerns the everyday lives of "men and women and children" (34), unlike the more conventional historian's focus on impersonal subjects such as systems of land tenure. Like the narrator of *Room*, Rosamond literally deviates from "preconceived lines" (Bowlby, *Destinations* 35) by venturing off the main road in a spontaneous detour to Martyn Hall, in the course of which she discovers Joan's diary. Through her rambling journey across Norfolk, and the serendipitous discovery of the diary, Rosamond embodies the connection Woolf articulates in *Room*, between dilatory female mobility and the emergence of a distinctive female literary tradition.

In counterpoint to Rosamond's modern, mobile sensibility, Woolf portrays the medieval life of Martyn Hall as overwhelmingly static, creating a symbolic association between premodern culture and stillness or impeded motion. In her diary, Joan describes an era in which travel is rare and difficult. Writing amidst the political upheaval of the War of the Roses, she reveals that her family must "keep much within [its] own lands" (45). Every night, she recounts, her mother "clamps" the Hall gates with "great keys," to ward off marauding "men who prowls the lanes" (45). Joan recounts "fearful" tales she has heard of murderers, robbers and other "fierce creatures" lying in wait by the side of the road (49), and notes that many who "set forth... in the dawn" on the long road to London "never ride home again" (48). In contrast to this oppressive and "claustrophobic"

(Skrbic 113) state of domestic confinement, Joan outlines a utopian vision of the future, a more peaceful and more prosperous England, in which there will be “cottages of stone for the poor” and “cheer for guest or serving man at the same table as the Lord” (60). This future is envisaged by her mother, the matriarch Lady Martyn, in the form of “a broad road... long strings of horsemen, riding at their ease, pilgrims stepping cheerily unarmed... wagons that pass each other going... to the coast and returning...” and houses “open freely to any passer by” (60). Observing the traffic that passes the Hall, Joan describes the varied crowds of “pilgrims and pedlars, or gentlemen travelling in parties to London”, her tone conveying both admiration and envy. Anticipating the vivid urban street scenes of Woolf’s later fiction, these city-bound travellers seem to embody a dynamic, cosmopolitan and latently modern sensibility, in contrast to the static, enclosed and tradition-bound world of Martyn Hall.

Woolf stresses the particular impediments to female mobility in the context of Joan’s medieval society. Joan accepts that her destiny is to be confined to the domestic sphere, anticipating that the “proper work [of] a woman” will “cal[l] her within the house” (59) after her marriage to a local nobleman, Sir Amyas. Even so, Joan’s diary reveals a degree of frustration at the confined life she leads at Martyn Hall. She ruminates on the adventures of her father and brothers on their journeys to London, and confesses that she “should like to go that way once, and pass over the land, like a ship at sea” (49). She describes how, at night, she presses her face against the windowpane and feels “bold and impatient” contemplating the “free and beautiful” world outside (*JM* 48, 45; Skrbic 112). Watching the “strange wayfarers” who pass by the gates of her home, her “mind becomes eager and hopeful even though [her] body must stay motionless” (*JM* 53). While Joan’s vivid mental “pictures” of “imagined journeys” illustrate her intelligence and creativity (Lojo-Rodriguez 79), her frustrated desire for movement contrasts starkly with the freedom of the modern scholar, Rosamond. In this respect, “Joan Martyn” traces a persistent tension between Joan’s creative abilities and her domestic confinement, a tension that at times threatens to rupture the calm and contented narrative of the diary.

Woolf underscores the parallel between mobility and creativity through the figure of a travelling minstrel who visits Martyn Hall.²⁹ Woolf evokes the minstrel with striking imagery of movement, presenting a radical contrast to the static environs of Martyn Hall.

²⁹ As Tim Cresswell points out, the minstrel was a uniquely mobile figure in medieval societies (11).

On the morning of his arrival, Joan remarks that “the current of life” seems to pulsate around the Hall and “chaf[e]” against its stillness (53), a highly erotic image that aptly prefigures the arrival of the charismatic “Master Richard”. He appears, “striding along the road, walking fast and waving his arms,” his “patched” boots (54) bearing testament to his extensive travels. Richard embodies both untrammelled movement and an imaginative departure from the literal world into a realm of fantasy. As he recites a romantic tale, he accompanies his words with dramatic physical gestures, “clench[ing]” his fists, “rais[ing] his foot and “stretch[ing] forth his arms” (56). He shows Joan an illustrated manuscript, assuring her that it has “has lifted [him] over many miles of weary road” (55). Joan’s diary sounds a note of distinct melancholy after Richard’s departure. Reflecting on his visit, Joan feels “as though some strange bird had rested on our roof for a moment, and flown on” (57). Even as Richard seems to offer the tantalising prospect of escape from the prosaic world of Martyn Hall, he underscores Joan’s continuing entrapment within it.

Through Joan’s pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Madonna at Walsingham, Woolf offers further evidence of the transformative potential of mobility. Joan embarks on her annual pilgrimage to the shrine shortly after her engagement, ostensibly to “give thanks” for her imminent marriage.³⁰ Yet she makes no mention of her future husband in the course of the pilgrimage. Instead, she relishes her journey as a unique opportunity for solitude and free, uninterrupted thought. As she sets off, Joan describes herself “striding along the road,” “with a springing step”, in language that echoes her description of the minstrel’s arrival at Martyn Hall (58). She observes the way in which her walking seems to unleash her intellectual and creative energies, surmising that she “may have thought enough for a whole week lived indoors during those three hours... spent striding along the road to Walsingham” (58). She compares the transformative effects of walking to those of literature, reflecting that she “might enter within [her] feelings and study them” as she moves along the road, just as she “walked in a wide space within the covers of Master Richard’s manuscript” (58). She hints that the journey allows her to escape, temporarily,

³⁰ In medieval England, Marian shrines were a favourite destination for pilgrims, particularly female pilgrims who visited them in order to pray for “fertility... safe deliveries... lactation” and other matters related to childbirth (Waller 94). In the 1480s, Walsingham still boasted the most famous Marian shrine in England. As Gary Waller writes, the Shrine at Walsingham was “England’s premier Marian site” (88), “a place of immanent female power, centred on... a woman’s body... revered as the vehicle of salvation” (94). It was destroyed, as were most other Marian shrines, abbeys and convents, during Henry VIII’s campaign to eradicate Catholicism from England. Waller speculates that the Walsingham Madonna might have been taken to London and burned in the summer of 1538 (1).

from her role as a dutiful daughter and future wife. Imagining her “spirit” as a rebellious horse, which will “rear and race, and bucket you hither and thither” (57), Joan associates her mobility with a rebellious, subversive impulse.

Joan’s pilgrimage is also politically transformative, offering her an unprecedented insight into the lives of those outside her own social class. Early in the diary, Joan expresses unalloyed contempt for the poor. Visiting her father’s tenants in their squalid cottage, she reflects that “[t]hese are the people we must rule; and tread under foot, and scourge... to do the only work they are fitted to do...” (53). With the strikingly violent image of “tread[ing]” under foot, this passage equates mobility with brutal and tyrannical power. Yet on her journey to Walsingham, Joan discovers a new empathy for the poor. As she approaches the shrine, she sees “men and women, and lame people and blind people; and some... in rags, and some... on horseback” and “confess[es]” that her “eyes s[ee]k out their faces curiously...” (59). She experiences a kind of epiphany, feeling suddenly that it is “terrible” to be “divide[d]” from her fellow human beings, when all “would have strange, merry stories to tell” (59). As she reaches the end of her journey, she “join[s] with a stream of other pilgrims” and the group clasps hands “to show that we came humbly as human beings and trod the last steps of the road together” (58). Stirring a new sense of fellowship with the peasants she has previously despised, Joan’s travel to Walsingham briefly realises her mother’s utopian fantasy of a “broad road” in which social divisions evaporate. In this respect, “Joan Martyn” casts mobility as a powerful democratising force.

Joan’s journey is only a temporary reprieve from the domestic stasis that ultimately extinguishes her narrative. The closing pages of the diary draw an implicit parallel between Joan’s confinement within the family home and the vitiation of her creative energies. In a visit to the family vault, Joan observes the stone effigies of her ancestors, “stark white figures” that “b[ear] [her] name” (62). She feels an overwhelming sense of pity as she reflects that they can “never move from their backs” (62), as though she sees in them an image of her own enforced immobility. In the same scene, Joan announces that she will no longer keep a diary, declaring that “the record grows wearisome” (61). The conclusion’s faintly melancholic tone, and its macabre setting, qualify Louise DeSalvo’s account of Joan as a “mythic mother” to future generations of female writers. DeSalvo sees Joan as a counterpart to “Judith Shakespeare”, the fictional figure in *A Room of One’s Own*. Unlike Judith, she points out, Joan does not “become

crazed” or “shoot herself,” but survives to become “the historian of her own times” (“Other,” 79). Yet in staging the story’s final scene in a vault, Woolf does not cast Joan as a forbear to future generations of writers. Rather, the pervasive symbolism of death in this concluding scene suggests the extinguishment, rather than the fulfilment, of her literary potential. This impression is reinforced by the presence in the vault of Joan’s father and her future husband, Sir John Amyas, who “withdr[a]w in talk” (62) leaving Joan alone with the stone effigies. With this final image, Woolf seems to underscore Joan’s exclusion from power, and indeed, from language, as a woman whose life will be governed and narrated by men.

In this sense, the conclusion of the journal seems to identify Joan, not as a “mythic mother” to future generations, but rather as a paradigmatic example of the frustrated female writer who can only “die young, cramped and thwarted” (*Room* 67). “Joan Martyn” contains several subtle allusions to Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Joan’s confession that she is “forever dreaming” of London, the “great city... [she] may never see” (48), closely echoes the scene in which Jane Eyre stands on the roof of Thornfield Hall and confesses a “long[ing] for a power of vision which might... reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life [she] ha[s] heard of but never seen” (Brontë 140; Woolf *Room* 66). Similarly, Joan’s description of her “stagnant spirit” growing “nimble... with its exercise” (58) recalls Jane’s insistence that women, like men, “suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation” (Brontë 141; Woolf *Room* 66). In this respect, Woolf identifies Joan as a forbear to Brontë, the unjustly constrained and thwarted female writer, whose literary potential is stymied and whose gift will never be expressed “whole and entire” (*Room* 67).

Even so, the concluding passage of the diary contains a muted note of optimism in its identification of the home as an enabling site of female creativity. As Joan concludes her diary, she resolves that “if [she] ever write[s] again”, she will not write of her own experiences, but of “Knights and Ladies and... adventures in strange lands” (62). For DeSalvo, this illustrates the way in which Joan has been “taught by the literature written by men that [her] own ordinary and humble experiences [a]re not worth recording” (“Other,” 76). Yet it also indicates an evolution, suggesting that Joan is now prepared to move beyond the mere recording of daily life to the more challenging genre of fiction. In her determination to write about “Knights and Ladies”, Joan indicates a new confidence in her own literary tastes, as distinct from those of her mother, who has “little time for

Princes and Princesses” (59). As an author of fiction, Joan has a precedent on which to draw. She cites the example of Dame Elizabeth Aske, whose tales drew “men and women, old and young” across “long distances to hear her” (62). Joan describes admiringly how Dame Elizabeth “sat with clasped hands by the fire all day long, and you had only to pull her sleeve and her eyes grew bright, and she would tell you stories of fights and kings, and great nobles, and stories of the poor people too, till the air seemed to move and murmur” (62). Importantly, the precedent set by Dame Elizabeth suggests that the home might ultimately serve as a hospitable environment for Joan’s creativity. This is posthumously confirmed by the preservation of Joan’s diary by her ancestors at Martyn Hall. By identifying Martyn Hall as the repository of Joan’s literary archive, Woolf qualifies her own association between mobility and female creativity, suggesting that a stable home is also fundamental to the creation of a female literary tradition.

***The Voyage Out* (1915)**

The symbolic and political importance of female mobility emerges more explicitly in *The Voyage Out*.³¹ Combining a travel narrative with elements of the *Bildungsroman*, the novel deploys mobility as an overarching metaphor for individual maturation. Woolf's protagonist, Rachel Vinrace, undertakes a journey from England to South America and a second, shorter river voyage into the interior of the continent. In the course of these journeys, she becomes more self-confident and assertive, but also much more acutely aware of the persistent, gendered constraints upon her agency. Freedom of movement assumes a central figurative role in the novel, illustrating Rachel's struggle against her feminine conditioning and towards independent self-hood. In this respect, the novel appears to reinforce the positive significance Woolf ascribes to female mobility in "Joan Martyn". Yet over the course of the novel, Rachel becomes increasingly aware that her colonial travel renders her complicit with the oppression, violence and exploitation of British imperialism. The encounter between Rachel and the female inhabitants of a native village is a turning point in the novel, seeming to precipitate an ethical crisis, in which Rachel realises that her own transformative, liberating journey is facilitated by the subordination of others. Rachel's death, shortly after this encounter, confirms its symbolic importance, yet the novel remains curiously reticent as to its meaning. Still, by staging Rachel's death as a retreat into inarticulacy and obscurity, Woolf makes an important qualification to her symbolic parallel between mobility and female development.

Like "Joan Martyn", *The Voyage Out* persistently reflects upon the social and psychological effects of mobility, identifying it as genuinely instructive, transformative and socially productive. Travel enables several characters in the novel to adopt a critical perspective on the society they have left (DeKoven 108). In the course of their journey from England to South America, Rachel and her fellow passengers experience a radical

³¹ *The Voyage Out* has been described as a minor work in the Woolf canon – "obscure, little read" (DeKoven 90); "sometimes clumsy, immature, and loosely fabricated" (Frye 421); and a "rather traditional" work that only fitfully suggests the distinctive ideas and techniques that will mark Woolf's later creations (Bishop 343). Nevertheless, *The Voyage Out* has been widely discussed as an example of the *Bildungsroman* genre (DuPlessis 47-53) and, in particular, modernist experimentation in that genre (Castle; Esty, "Colony"). Feminist critics have produced detailed analyses of the novel's depiction of female psychological development (Froula), its evocation of motherhood and "matriarchal mythologies" (Moore) and its engagement with "the legacy of a female literary tradition" (De Gay 25). In the last two decades, attention has turned to the novel's colonial setting and its interrogation of British imperialism (DeKoven; Phillips; Cummins; Esty, "Colony"; Stasi). Over the same period, scholars of travel writing have shown the novel's indebtedness to Elizabethan travel narratives (Fox; Lawrence) and nineteenth-century "colonial romances of the Anglo-Indian passage" (Mukherji).

shift in their perception of the world. Seen from their moving ship, the “great city” of London suddenly strikes them as “a crouched and cowardly figure”, “a circumscribed mound” (10), while England itself appears as little more than “a shrinking island in which people [a]re imprisoned” (25). Travel also facilitates transformative social encounters. The sense of dislocation and “loneliness” of being out at sea prompts “queer confidences and sudden appeals for sympathy” (87) among the English tourists, causing them to forge relationships across hitherto insurmountable barriers of gender and class. The transformative powers of movement are not limited to travel, conventionally defined, but extend to other forms of movement within the South American colony of Santa Marina. The act of walking, in particular, offers release from anxiety and “superficial irritations” (255) and a “refuge” from painful emotions (274). In contrast to the oppressive sensation of being “shut up all by oneself in a room” (321), Woolf’s tourists are often “overcome” by the “intoxication of movement” (10) as they walk, first around the ship and then, later, through Santa Marina. In this way, as in “Joan Martyn”, *The Voyage Out* credits mobility with the power to transform individual consciousness and social relations.

To some extent, the colonial setting of *The Voyage Out* facilitates this idealised narrative of transformative travel. As Karen Lawrence writes, Rachel’s journey re-enacts “an Enlightenment dream of discovery and freedom” (160), in which literal travel serves as a “paradig[m] for the expansion of consciousness and imagination” (164). Drawing on early modern accounts of the “antipodes”, Woolf casts her South American colony as a “topsy turvy” world, in which ordinary social relations are inverted.³² The liberating possibilities of this antipodean setting become apparent when the English tourists begin to explore the colony on foot. Having formed the “habit of strolling through the town after dark”, Rachel and her aunt, Helen, elicit only mild and “friendly curiosity” from the local population, merging into the variegated crowd, a mixture of merchants, beggars and “young men rang[ing] up and down” (99). As they walk, they come to regard the social stratification of their own country as increasingly absurd. “Out here”, they reflect, “it seemed as though the people of England must be shaped in the body like the kings and queens, knights and pawns of the chessboard, so strange were their differences, so marked and so implicitly believed in” (99). Obliquely alluding to Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), this image reinforces Woolf’s evocation of South America as a

³² See, eg, Richard Brome’s *The Antipodes* (c. 1640).

fantastical, other-worldly place, in which conventional hierarchies lose their power to oppress and constrain.

Woolf draws together elements of colonial adventure, the quest narrative and the *Bildungsroman* in an attempt to invest her travelling heroine with a new form of autonomous female subjectivity. In some respects, Rachel appears at first to be a conventional “mid-nineteenth-century girl heroine” (DuPlessis 49), negotiating “the awkward age” between adolescence and sexual maturity (Bilston). Yet in embarking on a journey to a remote colonial outpost, Rachel self-consciously departs from these Victorian textual precedents. Through this travel narrative, Woolf portrays “a specifically feminine quest”, one that seeks “new models of desire” (Lawrence 160) and identity for women. This feminine quest motif first emerges in Woolf’s sustained description of the *Euphrosyne*, which, as Marianne DeKoven writes, fleetingly represents “a utopian fantasy of female freedom, power, and autonomy” (102). Woolf evokes the ship in reverent, almost mystical tones, casting it as a “bride going forth to her husband, a virgin unknown of men” (26). While clearly identifying the ship with Rachel’s callowness and naivety, Woolf also invests it with dignity and self-possession. The *Euphrosyne* is “more lonely than the caravan crossing the desert”, yet is independent, “moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources” (26). The sea “might bring her death or some unexampled joy”, Woolf writes, “and none would know of it, for as a ship she had a life of her own” (26). This sense of novelty and possibility endures when the *Euphrosyne* drops anchor in Santa Marina. The ship is immediately surrounded by a number of smaller vessels, “swarming” around her, “as if she were a recumbent giant requiring examination.” Connoting Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), this description of the *Euphrosyne* introduces a discordant note by gendering the “giant” as feminine, suggesting that in this anarchic antipodean world, women might find a point of entry into masculine narratives of adventure and exploration.

The colony of Santa Marina functions as a liminal space in which Rachel and her fellow female tourists enjoy heightened mobility and new forms of social freedom. Convinced that “nothing is private in this country”, Rachel and Helen decide to trespass on the grounds of an English hotel (100, 103). The hotel’s windows are brightly lit, and uncurtained, so that, as they circumnavigate the building, Rachel and Helen are able to observe the inhabitants without being seen. Affording views of the servants eating dinner, a group of old married couples, and finally, the younger guests, in an informal lounge,

their circuit around the hotel allows them to view their fellow tourists with detachment, just as they previously viewed England from the vantage point of their departing ship. Rachel's unauthorised foray into the grounds of the hotel leads directly to her first meeting with Terence Hewet, to whom she will ultimately become engaged. In this respect, it facilitates her integration into society. Yet her wandering around the exotic landscape of Santa Marina also gives Rachel a new sense of her own individuality: in contrast to the dull, "interminable walks round sheltered gardens" she previously engaged in, at home in England, movement through the colonial landscape affords Rachel a new perspective on herself as "an heroic statue in the middle of the foreground, dominating the view" (126). In this sense, *The Voyage Out* links mobility with female maturation, in a manner that recalls the subversive ramblings of the narrator of *A Room of One's Own*.

Yet from the earliest scenes, Woolf infuses her imagery of movement with distinctly ominous undertones. In the opening chapters of the novel, Woolf evokes London in gothic terms, describing its mass of dank, smelly and congested lanes, "the monstrous outline of the Tower Bridge" and the River Thames, which has only "a certain amount of troubled yellow light in it" (4). Describing the Thames as the tide runs out, this opening scene palpably evokes Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), drawing an implicit parallel between Rachel's voyage and Marlow's ill-fated journey into the "dark" heart of Africa.³³ In the following chapters, Woolf persistently associates Rachel with drowning, shipwreck and objects "at the bottom of the sea" (15, 174). Lacking "colour" and "definite" features, due to her long confinement "indoors" (12), Rachel faintly resembles the "white, hairless, blind monsters" she imagines "lying curled on the ridges of sand" beneath the waves (15). As the *Euphrosyne* first enters the English Channel, she looks "[d]own... into the depths" to the sandy floor and makes out "the black ribs of wrecked ships... spiral towers made by the burrowings of great eels" and "smooth green-sided monsters... flickering this way and that" (21). This imagery hints at the futility of Rachel's quest: when a fellow passenger surmises that the underwater creatures "would explode if you brought them to the surface" (15), he seems to be alluding to the risks that await Rachel, if she departs from her habitually passive, feminine role in order to become an independent agent (Froula 69). The novel's macabre underwater imagery continues as the ship's steward shows Rachel a collection of sea creatures preserved in jars. While fascinating, these preserved creatures also represent a kind of uncanny death in life,

³³ For an extended comparison of *Heart of Darkness* and *The Voyage Out*, see DeKoven.

symbolising Rachel's own state of incomplete development. Having "swum amongst bones" on the sea floor (50), they also reinforce Woolf's persistent parallel between voyaging and mortality. At one fascinating and grotesque, the bottled sea creatures embody the ambivalence of travel, as a source of both adventure and horror. Like the earlier allusion to Conrad, this scene implies that Rachel's journey might indeed "bring her death" (26), rather than successful maturation.

Woolf further undermines the novel's optimistic quest narrative by equating the trope of the voyage with violent and oppressive forms of military, mercantile and imperial power. Rachel's fellow passenger, the conservative politician Richard Dalloway, epitomises English nationalism, capitalism and imperial ideology. He proudly declares his commitment to "dispers[ing] the best ideas over the greatest area" and confidently asserts that English colonists' records are "whiter" than those of other nations (61). Yet Woolf implicitly critiques Richard's rather bombastic assertion, by juxtaposing it with the sight of two British warships, which sail past the *Euphrosyne* just as he is speaking. The war ships literally arrest the *Euphrosyne*'s progress, forcing "her" to pause and dip "her" flag deferentially. Metallic, "bald", identical and seemingly insentient, these "sinister grey vessels" illustrate the coercive force that underpins England's colonial power. In stark contrast to the singularity of the feminine *Euphrosyne*, they sail in formation, one "closely following the other," "casting a curious effect of discipline and sadness upon the waters" (66). In their synchronised, mechanistic movement, and their identical appearance, they resemble Richard's "[w]onderful masculine stories" at the dinner table, which make his listeners feel "featureless and small" (74). In this respect, they differ markedly from Woolf's evocation of the *Euphrosyne* as a symbol of authentic and idiosyncratic development. Cutting across the *Euphrosyne*'s path, and halting her progress, they symbolically point to the limitations of the voyage as a metaphor for individual maturation.

By offering Rachel her first experience of sexual desire, Richard plays an important role in her personal development, while at the same time drawing attention to the gendered limitations on her access to knowledge and agency. The ships come into view just as Richard asks Rachel if she understands the meaning of "love", not in its "conventional sense" but in the way "young men use it" (65). Rachel confesses in an almost inaudible whisper that she "do[es]n't know" the meaning of "love", in the sense to which Richard refers (65). Yet if she does not know the literal meaning of his question,

she intuitively recognises it as a verbal seduction. In response, Rachel feels a sudden, unprecedented pang of sexual desire that “seem[s] to unveil the skies” to her (65). While this scene constitutes a crucial stage in Rachel’s maturation, its symbolism is deeply ambiguous. In his aggressive sexuality, Richard resembles the warships prowling the sea, “seeking their prey”, a resemblance that becomes more striking when, in the ensuing scene, he unexpectedly kisses Rachel. In contrast to her rapturous response to their earlier flirtation, this scene produces conflicting emotions in Rachel: afterwards she is at once “exulta[nt]” (74) and “terrified” (78). She is subsequently plagued by nightmares, imagining Richard as a “beast” that “moan[s]” for her, “harrass[ing] the ship... scuffling down the passages” and “snuffl[ing] at her door” (75). This experience fundamentally alters Rachel’s view of herself, making her aware of her vulnerability to sexual violence. She suddenly perceives herself as “a creeping hedged-in thing, driven cautiously between high walls, here turned aside, there plunged in darkness, made dull and crippled for ever...” (80).³⁴ In this respect, Rachel’s encounter with Richard suggests that her quest is profoundly, even fatally compromised by her femaleness and the patriarchal society in which she lives.

This suggestion becomes more explicit upon Rachel’s arrival in Santa Marina. Karen Lawrence has highlighted Rachel’s ambiguous “doubl[e] position[ing]”, as both an “explorer” and “virginal territory” open to conquest by male aggressors (162). Glimpsed for the first time from the deck of the *Euphrosyne*, the colony of Santa Marina is cast as the passive victim of colonial violence. The scholar William Pepper recalls that the Elizabethans appropriated the colony from the Spanish. In the process of this acquisition, he recounts to the passengers of the *Euphrosyne*, the Spanish “fell in heaps”, while “the hardy Englishmen... with... fangs greedy for flesh, and fingers greedy for gold, despatched the wounded, drove the dying into the sea, and soon reduced the natives to a state of superstitious wonderment” (89). This passage, with its bestial imagery of the English colonisers as fanged animals pursuing their prey, echoes Rachel’s nightmare and her vision of Richard as a predatory beast. In this way, it also establishes a subtle parallel between the colonised land and Rachel’s inarticulate thoughts and desires. The English travellers meet Pepper’s observations with stony silence, ensuring that he makes no

³⁴ As Froula notes, Rachel’s nightmare “ironically recalls” and subverts Woolf’s earlier vision of the ship as a virginal bride (74). No longer a symbol of freedom, the *Euphrosyne* becomes instead a site of “domestic enclosure” and “sequestr[ation]” (Froula 74), an emblem of women’s constrained mobility and sexual vulnerability.

further reference to the colony's history and his knowledge "die[s] with him" (88). Pepper's unsuccessful attempt to discuss the colony's history further echoes the encounter between Rachel and Richard, and the latter's unsuccessful attempt to engage her in a discussion of sexual love. Like the novel's recurrent imagery of deep sea creatures and submerged wrecks, this imagery suggests that Rachel's subjective experience, like her sexuality, cannot be expressed in words, remaining taboo, like the subject of England's imperial violence. This further attenuates Rachel's symbolic quest, suggesting that Rachel cannot attain agency but is destined to remain in a state of subjection comparable to that of Santa Marina.

This inconsistency becomes more evident in the course of Rachel's courtship with Terence. Epitomising a romantic, autonomous but also deeply sociable form of mobility, Terence seems to offer Rachel a means of combining married life with genuine independence. Like the minstrel in "Joan Martyn", Terence is an inveterate wanderer. Having "money enough to do no work," he has "travelled and drifted, ma[king] his life strange at many points where his friends' lives were much of a piece" (109). He is also a faintly androgynous figure. There is "something of a woman in him" (262), and he combines a masculine prerogative of unchecked movement with a profound curiosity about women's lives. Terence pursues a number of idiosyncratic, rambling itineraries over the course of the novel. He confesses to Rachel that he has "often walked along the streets, where... one house is exactly like another house, and wondered what on earth the women were doing inside" (225). He dreams of walking with Rachel through the streets of London, as an alternative to the "walled up" domestic intimacy he associates with conventional marriage (256). It is upon Terence's initiative that the English tourists decide to climb the summit of Monte Rosa, overlooking Santa Marina. Importantly, Terence does not frame this journey as an adventure or journey of discovery, but rather, looks forward to it as an opportunity to discuss poetry with the "elderly ladies" who are staying at the hotel, surmising that they are "the only one[s]... who can really understand" it (112). Terence is also the instigator of a river voyage into the interior that serves as a crucial moment in Rachel's development.

By facilitating an encounter between Rachel and the female inhabitants of a South American village, this river voyage illustrates the agency and authority she derives from her status as a white, imperial traveller (Wollaeger 69). Rachel initially views the women in the native village as a kind of tableau, a spectacle for her consumption. In contrast to

the “saunter[ing]” motion of the tourists, the women are strikingly, almost unnaturally static. “If they mov[e], it [i]s to fetch something from the hut, or to catch a straying child, or to cross the space with a jar balanced on their heads” (303). The women do not attempt to communicate with the English visitors, but only stare with a “motionless inexpressive gaze of those... far, far beyond the plunge of speech” (303). In this encounter between an articulate, mobile woman and a silent, static woman, this scene closely parallels the encounter between Joan and her father’s tenants in “Joan Martyn”. Like the peasant woman in “Joan Martyn”, the native women seem to submit passively to Rachel’s gaze. Like Joan, Rachel watches, transfixed, as one woman “uncover[s] her breast to the lips of her baby” (303). Rachel’s reaction to this sight, which combines fascination with squeamish embarrassment, subtly emphasises her virginity, youth and inexperience. At the same time, her capacity to observe and intrude upon this intimate domestic scene offers Rachel confirmation of her own authority as a questing, imperial subject.

Yet even as it seems to draw a distinction between Rachel’s civilised, cerebral femininity and the more carnal, embodied femininity of the native women, *The Voyage Out* undermines this distinction, associating Rachel and her fellow English tourists with a bestial, savage form of violence. The scene of Rachel’s encounter with the village women contains unmistakable echoes of William Pepper’s earlier account of English imperial aggression, in which “hardy Englishmen... with... fangs greedy for flesh, and fingers greedy for gold, despatched the wounded, drove the dying into the sea, and... reduced the natives to a state of superstitious wonderment” (89). This earlier episode of horror and brutality haunts the encounter between the English visitors and the natives: the English walk “cumbrously like tight-coated soldiers” among the “soft, instinctive” villagers, while their “peer[ing]” eyes distinguish the glint of guns “leaning in... corner[s]” of the villagers’ huts (303). As they reach to take the villagers’ “sweetmeats”, the tourists’ “great red hands” resemble the bloodied “fangs” and “greedy” fingers of their predecessors (303); while in relation to the “majestic” profile of a native chief, the “advancing”, grasping figure of the Englishman appears both “ugly and unnatural” (303). Through this series of images, with their unsettling connotations of blood, war and death, Woolf denaturalises the figure of the colonial traveller and deliberately disrupts her own symbolic association between mobility, transfiguration and freedom. To the extent that this village scene subsumes Rachel into a collective Englishness, it casts her mobility as being fundamentally predicated on violence, conquest and imperial domination.

Significantly, this exotic encounter marks the end of Rachel's journey as a self-contained, autonomous, questing protagonist. In the scene immediately preceding her encounter with the villagers, Rachel has become engaged to Terence. Woolf evokes this moment indirectly, as if suggesting a kind of paradisaal, perfect intimacy that the narrative itself cannot penetrate. Following their mutual declarations of love, Rachel and Terence wander through the jungle, which assumes an almost Edenic quality. They share their delighted observations of the native flora, which "grew there so red, like garden flowers at home..." (301). As Wollaeger notes, this engagement "in effect turns the South American journey into a trip back into England" (44), prompting a fundamental reorientation of Rachel's consciousness away from her colonial setting and towards her anticipated future as Terence's wife. Following the engagement, Rachel becomes increasingly "anxious to go back to England" (318), intrigued and excited by Terence's assurances that they will "go for walks together" in "the streets of London" (299). By staging the visit to the village and the engagement simultaneously, Woolf seems to confirm the connection between Rachel's outward-bound journey of colonial exploration and her attainment of maturity, through her assumption of adult status as an engaged woman. Yet in the ensuing scenes, Woolf contradicts this, suggesting that marriage to Terence is in fact, fundamentally incompatible with Rachel's attainment of a mature, independent subjectivity. Indeed, as DeKoven argues persuasively, the novel seems to identify Rachel's initiation into "bourgeois marriage" as the very thing that negates, and renders impossible, her process of development (129). From the moment of her engagement, Rachel seems to renounce agency and to accede to a submissive, passive role as Terence's future wife. As she and Terence wander through the jungle, she "follow[s] him, stopping where he stopped, turning where he turned, ignorant of the way, ignorant why he stopped or why he turned" (290; Wollaeger 65). On their return to the hotel at Santa Marina, Rachel suddenly adopts the conventional behaviours of a Victorian bride-to-be, writing formulaic notes of thanks in response to the letters of congratulations she and Terence have received. As part of this shift to a more conventionally feminine role, Rachel ceases to be Terence's interlocutor, becoming instead a passive audience whose "lot" it is "to listen and ask questions" (318).

As Rachel's relationship with Terence develops, Woolf's use of static imagery serves to reinforce her increasing entrapment within a passive and conventionally feminine role. This association between marriage and entrapment has already been

intimated early in their courtship, when Terence observes Rachel withdrawing indoors, to the sound of “bolts grating”. Terence feels “an exquisite pleasure” at this spectacle and runs back to his hotel, “plunging” and “swinging from side to side down the hill” as if to underscore his freedom of movement, in contrast to Rachel’s entrapment (194). As their courtship progresses, Woolf increasingly associates Rachel with static objects and Terence with mobility. Moments after she and Terence have become engaged, Rachel finds herself strangely paralysed, falling into long grass which “fill[s] her mouth and ears”, rendering her “speechless” and “still” (302). From this point onwards, Woolf persistently associates Rachel with “slowness of movement” (341), an association that becomes even more explicit when Rachel becomes ill. Commanded by her nurse to “lie still,” Rachel becomes obsessed with a shadow on the ceiling, concentrating “all her energy... upon the desire that it should move.” The “terrible stationary sight” of the shadow horrifies Rachel, serving as an uncanny symbol of her own arrested development and imminent death (352-53).³⁵ Rachel’s delirium increasingly draws upon imagery of drowning, culminating in a final image of herself falling into “a deep pool of sticky water... clos[ing] over her head” (363). This imagery integrates Rachel’s death into the novel’s overarching metaphor of failed voyaging (DeSalvo, *First* 127; Froula 84). At the same time, it suggests an ambiguous equivalence between Rachel, in her dying moments, and the motionless women she observed on her voyage up the river. Confirming Rachel’s failure to attain the role of questing imperial subject, this imagery of stasis seems, in negative fashion, to affirm mobility as a masculine prerogative.

The cause of Rachel’s death is never revealed, and the novel seems to end on a note of deliberate obscurity, foregrounding its status as a literary text and Rachel’s status as a fictional heroine. Woolf foregrounds the artificiality of her own narrative throughout *The Voyage Out*: the landscape of Santa Marina is variously described as resembling “a watercolour” (144), “a cardboard background on the stage”, and “a wooden screen against a sheet painted blue” (255). Throughout the novel, Rachel demonstrates a desire to interrogate the boundaries between art and life: she “act[s] out” various fictional characters (126) and reads “with [a] curious literalness... handling words as though they were made of wood” (127). Terence seems to share this tendency: as he reads aloud from Milton’s *Comus* (1634), he remarks approvingly that “the words... ha[ve] substance and

³⁵ Imagining herself “curled up at the bottom of the sea” (363), Rachel in her dying moments seems to renounce the role of questing subject. In this sense, as Froula writes, her death is not merely corporeal but “symbolic” (85), confirming her exclusion from the masculine realm of voyaging, action and adventure.

shape” such that “one could almost handle them” (347). The scene of Rachel’s death can be read as a dramatisation of the process by which words produce human experience and render it intelligible (Bishop 349). In it, Rachel moves between the “real” world of the novel and one that is overtly symbolic: she perceives “the glassy, cool, translucent wave” of Milton’s poem as being “almost visible before her, curling up at the end of the bed” (351). As she sinks beneath the figurative waves of Milton’s poem, Rachel is still engaged in an act of increasingly frantic and explicitly literary interpretation: she perceives the people around her as being engaged in “some plot, some adventure”, and feels that “there [i]s a reason behind it, which she must endeavour to grasp” (363). In rendering Rachel’s death in overtly literary terms, Woolf seems to suggest that her voyage fails, not for any literal reason (such as a tropical disease), but because, as a woman, she lacks literary precedents that would enable her to narrate her life as a successful quest.

Through Rachel’s death, Woolf also appears to renounce the trope of colonial adventure as a means of representing transformative personal relationships. As already noted, the early chapters of the novel associate colonial travel with a desire to transcend loneliness and alienation through meaningful encounters with others. This is illustrated in Rachel’s brief acquaintance with Richard Dalloway. While numerous critics have identified Richard as an avatar of imperialism (Phillips) and the target of Woolf’s “anticolonial satire” (Heady), this brief relationship serves as a poignant example of the isolation that will ultimately subsume Rachel. Despite his aggressive sexuality, which Rachel experiences as frightening, Richard also figures as a potential confidant: he enthusiastically questions Rachel about her “interests and occupations”, while decrying the “reticence” and “isolation” of “modern life” (73). Shortly after he kisses Rachel, Richard hastily and with much embarrassment disembarks from the *Euphrosyne*, without looking at her. Afterwards, Rachel reflects that there was “something loveable about [him], good in their attempted friendship, and strangely piteous in the way they had parted” (80). This episode seems to illustrate the futility of the attempt to communicate with others, in a social world that insists on “reticence” and withdrawal from intimacy (73). *The Voyage Out* continually restages Rachel’s attempt to communicate with others and to form genuine friendships, sometimes through explicit images of voyaging: “What is it to be in love?”, she soliloquises at one point, “the question “seem[ing] to shove itself out into an unknown sea” (182). Rachel’s brief romance with Terence can be seen as a further attempt by Rachel to “voyage out” of her loneliness into a state of genuine

fellowship with another. Yet like “ship[s] passing in the night” (87), Rachel and Terence remain inscrutable to each other. Ironically, it is only in the moments after Rachel’s death that Terence feels they achieve “complete union and happiness” (376). As DeKoven points out, this sentiment is “overtly touching”, yet is, “at another level shocking and almost diabolical” (137). The union Terence imagines is entirely a figment of his imagination: he lives on, while Rachel is dead, no more than an apparition in his private fantasy. In the next moment, Woolf underscores this separation, as Terence is once again drawn into the literal world of tables and cups and plates, “a world in which he would never see Rachel again” (376; Bishop 356).

In *The Voyage Out*, Woolf transfigures her own central metaphor of voyaging, transforming it from a symbol of rational discovery to one that represents the fraught, potentially futile process of trying to understand other human beings. *The Voyage Out* casts the consciousness of others as ineluctably foreign, “beyond the usual reach of language” (Bishop 355). It is arguably the “cold and melancholy” (304) knowledge of her own fundamental and enduring solitariness that Rachel intuits in her crucial encounter with the village women: their “motionless inexpressive gaze ... far, far beyond the plunge of speech” (303) not only makes her aware of their subordination by an imperial hierarchy in which she is complicit, but also, of her own isolation as an individual “different from everything else” (83). As the women turn away from her, Rachel realises that they will “go on for ever and ever”, a prospect that seems to underscore the transient and subjective nature of her own experience (304). This reading contradicts Stasi’s claim that Woolf’s novel “highlights a transformative possibility that is... inseparable from colonial relations” of mastery and domination (126). In the final scenes of the novel, Woolf ironically invokes the scientific, rational discourse of colonial exploration by repeatedly describing Rachel’s journey into death as an “expedition” (355, 358), requiring “elaborate scheme[s]” charted on “large sheet[s] of paper” (355). Yet it ultimately transpires that hers is a journey into inarticulacy, unreason and oblivion. Rather than furnishing Rachel with a coherent, autonomous sense of self, colonial travel confirms her vulnerability and marginality, as an individual whose experiences are unique and unintelligible, even to her most intimate friends.

With its deliberately cryptic, baffling narrative of failed development and untimely death, *The Voyage Out* resembles *Life’s Adventure*, the novel by the fictive Mary Carmichael that so unsettles the narrator of *A Room of One’s Own*. Like *Life’s Adventure*,

The Voyage Out breaks with generic conventions, and in so doing, provokes feelings of profound unease and uncertainty in the reader. Through the many scenes of reading contained in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf asserts the ethical and political importance of this kind of reading. After their engagement, Terence gives Rachel a book that causes her “an hour’s discomfort”, prompting her to ask him whether or not it is “true... that women die with bugs crawling across their faces” (321). Just as Rachel recoils from the sight of the women in the native village, so she recoils from the “horrors” depicted in the book. She does not finish it, but keeps it unopened on her table like a “medieval monk” keeps a skull or crucifix as a reminder of mortality. Terence insists on the importance of this kind of literary “discomfort”, teasingly suggesting that “we so seldom think of anything but ourselves that an occasional twinge is really rather pleasant” (321). Despite his flippant tone, Terence here asserts the value of literature as a means of mitigating the self-absorption and complacency of the bourgeois reader. In so doing, he describes the way in which Woolf herself attempts, in *The Voyage Out*, to subvert the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* in order to challenge the notion of a coherent, knowable self, the kind of self she associates with the questing protagonist of the masculine colonial travel narrative.³⁶ Through Rachel’s death, Woolf stresses the limitations of this model, as a means of narrating female subjectivity. In its failure, or refusal, to present Rachel as a successful colonial adventurer, *The Voyage Out* marks the commencement of Woolf’s search for new forms of imagery and new narratives of mobility.

Mrs Dalloway (1925)

Like *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs Dalloway* employs tropes of mobility to illustrate female identity and subjectivity, but unlike the earlier novel, it focusses on urban movement in the restricted geographic environment of London. In this novel, Woolf identifies movement through the city of London as an alternative to colonial travel, both as a social practice that provides women with increasing agency, and as a narrative device that facilitates the representation of a uniquely modern form of female subjectivity. Set in the post-war period, the novel depicts a decisively modern England in which women’s free movement through the streets reflects a social transformation underway in gender

³⁶ In this respect, *The Voyage Out* bears out Berman’s account of the modernist *Bildungsroman* as one that “revise[s] the tradition... using narrative experimentation to challenge the political model of the exemplary, representative man” (34).

relations. Whereas Rachel's Victorian upbringing only permitted her to walk "under the escort of father, maid, or aunts" (61), both Clarissa Dalloway and her daughter Elizabeth move confidently through the city on their own. This form of urban mobility seems to substitute entirely for other forms of travel. Despite her brief appearance on board the *Euphrosyne*, as one of Rachel's fellow passengers, the Clarissa Dalloway of this later novel seems to have no knowledge of the world beyond England: she "muddled Armenians and Turks ... and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know" (134). Yet unlike Rachel Vinrace and Joan Martyn, Clarissa betrays no desire to travel beyond the immediate environs of her opulent Westminster home. For this reason, critics such as Paul Stasi view the London setting of *Mrs Dalloway* as a "retreat" from the earlier, more expansive colonial travel of *The Voyage Out*, indicating Woolf's philosophical reorientation away from anticolonial critique towards a "chastened version of Englishness" (Stasi, 112, 123). In important ways, however, the imagery of *Mrs Dalloway* represents a continuation and elaboration of the earlier novel's political concerns. As in *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs Dalloway* uses imagery of mobility to present a model of female subjectivity that aspires to personal autonomy, but at the same time, attempts to form and maintain ethical, egalitarian relationships with others. In so doing, it betrays an acute awareness of the ways in which its characters' lives are shaped by racial and imperial power relations, as well as those of class and gender.

Mrs Dalloway perpetuates the theme of female awakening that Woolf explored in *The Voyage Out*. Though Clarissa is a mature woman of fifty-two, her frequent recollections of her youth create a fragmentary, "clandestine" narrative of development (Abel 161) that links the novel, in both generic and thematic terms, to *The Voyage Out*. Like Rachel, Clarissa is frequently seized by a feeling of profound alienation from those around her, feeling that she is "out, out, far out to sea and alone" (MD 9). Yet whereas Rachel appears chronically incapable of forming satisfactory relationships with those around her, Clarissa feels fleeting but profound moments of empathy with those she observes in the city streets. Rachel's encounter with the native South Americans underscores this difference: noticing that the women have forgotten her and gone back to their own activities, she is seized by the "cold and melancholy" realisation that their lives will "go on for ever and ever" in the same way, unaffected by her presence or absence (VO 304). This sense of her separateness from the village women strikes Rachel as an ominous portent of her own mortality, making her "acutely conscious of ... the delicate

flesh of men and women, which breaks so easily and lets the life escape..." (304) By contrast, Clarissa finds "consol[ation]" in the frenzied movement of the city, believing that the life of London will "go on without her" but that "somehow... on the ebb and flow of things", she will "surviv[e]" (MD 9). Whereas Rachel envisages her ideal self as "an heroic statue, in the middle of the foreground, dominating the view" (VO 126), Clarissa's sense of self is based upon a sense of interpenetration: she will never "say of herself, I am this, I am that" (9) and feels "part of people she ha[s] never met" (10). With this understanding of the self as "permeable" (Stasi 115), or fluid, Woolf makes a radical departure from her first novel. Here, unlike in *The Voyage Out*, her heroine's sense of self is nourished, not threatened, by her encounters with people who are very unlike herself.

In her depiction of urban mobility, Woolf draws heavily on the literary tradition of the *flâneur*. The novel's most sustained and vivid description of *flânerie* does not centre on Clarissa, but rather, her old friend Peter Walsh. Having spent his adult life as a colonial administrator in India, Peter views London with keen powers of observation, noting its transformation in the years he has been away. By depicting Peter in the guise of a *flâneur*, Woolf suggests that there are important continuities between the modernity and prosperity of London and the workings of the British Empire. Viewing himself "reflected in the plate-glass window of a motor-car manufacturer", Peter sees "[a]ll India l[ying] behind him" (52), thinking of the "coolies" who won't use the plough he designed for them (52) in the underdeveloped, pre-modern environment of colonial India. As in *The Voyage Out*, Woolf associates the role of colonial traveller with an aggressive, domineering form of male sexuality. As Peter strolls through the city, he suddenly decides to follow an unknown young woman, in a manner that is playful yet at the same time faintly predatory. As he pursues the woman at a distance, Peter imagines himself as "an adventurer, reckless... swift, daring, indeed (landed as he was last night from India) a romantic buccaneer," all the while "stealthily fingering his pocket knife" (57-58). For Thacker, this "escapade" represents "an attempt to shrug off the imperial masculinity represented in the streets of Whitehall, but... only draws upon a different aspect of that same... masculinity..." (163).³⁷

Peter's walk also illustrates the class privilege that underpins the trope of *flânerie*. Woolf emphasises the way in which Peter's awareness of his class status influences his

³⁷ See also Marcus 75-79; Parsons 73-74.

manner of walking, rendering it pleasurable and reassuring. As he wanders the affluent streets of London's West End, he observes and "approve[s] of" the expensive cars, butlers, chow dogs and white curtains blowing in the breeze, while also reflecting complacently on his own "respectable Anglo-Indian family which for at least three generations had administered the affairs of a continent" (60). As a member of the upper classes, Peter feels entirely at ease and faintly proprietorial in this elite enclave, which seems to him as "dear as a personal possession" (60). This class consciousness also inflects Peter's pursuit of the unknown young woman. Peter adopts a rather condescending attitude towards the girl, deducing from her clothes that she is neither "rich" nor "worldly" (58) and noting that her house conveys an air of "vague impropriety" (59). Surmising that she might not be entirely "respectable" (58), Peter's thoughts betray a certain salaciousness, reflecting the long cultural tradition of illicit sexual relations between "gentlem[en]" (173) and women of lower social status. Like Rachel's brief encounter with Richard in *The Voyage Out*, this passage conflates colonial conquest, class privilege and eroticism in order to cast urban walking as a distinctly male, upper class form of conquest and pursuit.

Even so, Peter's adoption of the role of "buccaneer" is distinctly self-conscious and even self-mocking. As he watches the girl fit her key in her lock and disappear into her house, Peter reflects somewhat bashfully that it is "over". "I've had my fun", he reflects, "for it was half made up... as one makes up the better part of life... making oneself up; making her up..." (59). In conceding that his pursuit of the girl is nothing more than an ephemeral "amusement" (59), Peter also implicitly admits that he is not a romantic "buccaneer" but is merely performing a part. This playful, performative sensibility is insufficiently acknowledged by those critics who view Peter as domineering and chauvinistic, "more interested in power than in love" (Phillips 16). Woolf reinforces the sense that Peter is self-consciously adopting an heroic persona in the scene of his encounter with Clarissa in her drawing room. Here, as in his pursuit of the girl, Peter brandishes his knife, "tilting" it towards Clarissa's dress in a "critical" fashion (44). Yet far from evincing a form of aggressive, chauvinistic masculinity, Peter suddenly bursts into tears, overcome by emotion as he remembers Clarissa's refusal of his marriage proposal thirty years before. As he stands by the window, weeping, Clarissa reflects that he looks "[m]asterly and dry and desolate... as if he were starting directly upon some great voyage"; yet he is also faintly absurd, his "thin shoulder-blades lifting his coat

slightly; blowing his nose violently” (51). Coming immediately after this undignified scene in Clarissa’s drawing room, Peter’s pursuit of the unknown girl assumes a similarly bathetic quality. Rather than identifying Peter as a sexual predator, it illustrates the impulsiveness and emotionality that make him an attractive, vaguely feminine figure, reminiscent of Terence in *The Voyage Out*.

Through her portrayal of Clarissa, Woolf reinforces this view of urban mobility as a pleasurable means of escape from the mundane into a world of play and fantasy. The novel’s opening scene vividly articulates the euphoria Clarissa feels as she immerses herself in the frenetic movement of the city street around her. “[I]n the swing, tramp, and trudge”, she reflects, “in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging... in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life, London; this moment of June” (4). Just as Peter feels a deep sense of “companion[ship]” with the people he encounters in the streets, Clarissa’s walk provides her with a profound sense of concord with the rest of humanity. She feels sure that even “the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps” share her sense of exhilaration at the energy and motion of the city (4). In her account of Clarissa’s *flânerie*, Woolf presents a vision of the self that is distinctly modern, characterised by “freedom, flux, and possibility” (Stasi 114). In this respect, it differs fundamentally from the coherent, self-contained subjectivity to which Rachel aspires in *The Voyage Out*, a sense of identity “different from everything else, unmergeable, like the sea” (83).

In stark contrast to *The Voyage Out*, *Mrs Dalloway* presents a vision of the self as fluid and fluctuating, interpenetrating with others rather than remaining separate from them. Here, the purely figurative sea of the city enables the past to mingle with the present, affording a sense of self that is enduring over time, but dynamic, rather than fixed or self-contained. In *Mrs Dalloway*, water imagery is associated with a positive form of sociality. Woolf evokes the city streets as waterways upon which people move like boats “tossing on the waters, as if the whole place were floating off in a carnival” (180). For Clarissa, the city’s fluid motion enables her to make a narrative out of her own life, one that incorporates traces of her childhood, adolescence and adulthood into her perception of the present “moment in June” (4). She compares the early morning air of Westminster to “the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave,” “fresh as if issued to children on a beach” (3). Passing Hyde Park, she remembers herself as a young girl, “throwing a shilling into the

Serpentine” (9). Here, unlike in *The Voyage Out*, the lake and its submerged contents do not figure as symbols of arrested development, but rather, of youthful exuberance remembered in maturity. At the novel’s conclusion, Peter likens the middle-aged Clarissa to a mermaid, “lolloping on the waves and braiding her tresses... with the most perfect ease... of a creature floating in its element” (190-91). Recapitulating the water symbolism of the novel’s opening scene, this image seems to confirm Clarissa’s success in attaining maturity. Visibly “brushed” by age, she nonetheless possesses “inexpressible dignity,” Peter reflects (191). The water imagery of *Mrs Dalloway* thus crucially departs from that of the earlier novel: rather than symbolising the ideal of a distinct, “unmergeable” self, it confirms the state of social flux afforded by the city as the perfect condition for individual development.

The novel’s water imagery serves to link Clarissa to her symbolic double, Septimus Warren Smith, a shell-shocked war veteran whose breakdown and eventual suicide form a bleak counterpoint to her narrative of maturation. Septimus’s disintegrating sense of self is expressed in water imagery reminiscent of *The Voyage Out*. He imagines himself as being marooned “like a drowned sailor on a rock,” or submerged “under the sea” (75). More generally, Woolf uses imagery of halting or arrested motion to symbolise Septimus’s psychological decline (Cohen 103). Like Clarissa, Septimus experiences a sense of wonder as he walks through the streets of London. Yet whereas Clarissa feels a deep and reassuring sense of familiarity in this environment, Septimus finds it deeply alienating: as he walks, he looks about with an air of amazement and trepidation, as if he has entered an empty ballroom with “chandeliers... hung in holland bags” and “deserted, queer-looking armchairs” (91). This wonder occasionally gives way to sudden spasms of terror. Watching the traffic jostle in the streets, he feels “[t]he world wave[r] and quive[r]” as if it were “about to burst into flames” (16). For Septimus, movement through the city constitutes an attempt to assimilate and transcend his traumatic experiences in the war, by reintegrating into English society.³⁸ Yet this proves impossible: rather than merging with the crowd, Septimus feels that he is “[r]ooted to the pavement”, “blocking the way... being looked at and pointed at” (16). In negative fashion, Septimus’s failure to move through the streets confirms the novel’s association

³⁸ For Scott Cohen, Septimus’s movement through the streets also represents an attempt to communicate and to “feel”, something Septimus declares he can no longer do. Cohen writes that, “[i]n the figure of Septimus, Woolf merges the dual crises of representational systems of language with spatial experience – feeling and desire are united with movement and mobility” (103).

between urban mobility, social integration and the attainment of a coherent, if fluid and permeable, sense of self. His inability to navigate the city illustrates his profound isolation, serving as a vivid contrast to Clarissa's exhilarating sense of affinity with others.

Woolf associates Clarissa's distinctively urban, mobile subjectivity with new possibilities for intimacy and companionship between men and women. This possibility emerges most vividly in the relationship between Clarissa and Peter. Like Terence in *The Voyage Out*, Peter is marked by his difference from a conventional masculinity. He enjoys "women's society" (174) and is "attractive to women, who lik[e] the sense that he [i]s not altogether manly" (171). Peter's mode of walking displays his predilection for transgressing gendered social roles, and suggests that the city facilitates and even encourages such transgression. As he strolls through the city, Peter feels a pleasant sense of release from "damned proprieties... respectability and evening parties and spruce old men wearing... waistcoats" (58). Just as Clarissa admires the luxurious goods on display in the windows of Bond Street, he window-shops, savouring "the fringes and the laces and the feather boas" as part of the generalised "spirit of finery and whimsy" that characterises the city (58-59). Offering men and women a shared experience, in the form of consumption, the city also offers social spaces in which they can socialise freely, without the presence of chaperones, as in *The Voyage Out*, or in Clarissa's rural girlhood home. Peter remembers riding through London "on top of an omnibus" with the young Clarissa, listening to her proclaim her "transcendental theory" that she is "not 'here, here, here'... but everywhere" (167). For both Peter and Clarissa, the city is inscribed with the memories of this early friendship, prompting each to think of the other. In this respect, it seems to fulfil the promise intimated by Terence and Rachel, in *The Voyage Out*, in their determination to walk the streets of London together, "look[ing] at things" (VO 321).

At the same time, Woolf retains a strong emphasis on the socially situated and specifically gendered nature of this mobile urban experience. She illustrates this by contrasting Clarissa's walking with that of her husband, Richard. Here, as in *The Voyage Out*, Richard is a Conservative politician and an earnest social reformer. As he walks, he shares his wife's "pleasure" at the sight of the bustling city; yet in contrast to Clarissa's serene sense of fellowship with the London poor, he quickly begins to feel his "blood boil" as he sees "little creatures of five or six crossing Piccadilly alone" (127). He notices the "costermongers" and "prostitutes" plying their trade, inwardly condemning their

plight as the result of a “detestable social system” (127). A moment later, he observes a “poor creature, stretched on her elbow” on the pavement, and wonders “what could be done for female vagrants” (127). Whereas Clarissa’s walk is impressionistic and aesthetic, Richard’s is action-oriented, a systematic process of “collecting evidence” to inform his political activities. This difference reflects Richard’s social position, as an influential man, with the capacity to effect real political change. Whereas Richard has “dogged[ly]” and “pertinacious[ly]... championed the down-trodden” in Parliament (126), Clarissa has been excluded from any position of authority in her patriarchal society. Moreover, like Rachel Vinrace, she has been denied the education that might have trained her in more systematic, disciplined modes of thought: she wonders how she has managed to get through life with the meagre scraps of knowledge she obtained from her governess.³⁹ The impressionistic nature of Clarissa’s subjectivity is therefore not a sign of decadence, but an illustration of her gendered socialisation.

Woolf also emphasises the way in which women form “part of the spectacle” of the city street (Bowly, *Crazy* 6) for male urban walkers. Clarissa is constantly observed and appraised by men as she moves through the city. In the opening scene, she is judged “charming” by her neighbour, Scrope Purvis, who observes her without being seen as she waits to cross the street (4). Shortly afterwards, she meets Hugh Whitbread who assures her that “she might be a girl of eighteen,” but who makes her “oddly conscious of her hat” (6). This continual process of objectification and appraisal is part of the gendered social system that excludes women from power: the next man to observe Clarissa is “Sir John”, the retired judge who “had laid down the law for years and liked a well-dressed woman” (18). Clarissa’s daughter, Elizabeth, is also aware of herself as the object of a sexualised gaze. She imagines people constantly “compar[ing] her to poplar trees, early dawn, hyacinths, fawns, running water, and garden lilies; and it ma[kes] her life a burden to her” (147). As Elizabeth rides through the city on a bus, Woolf describes how, “to each movement of the omnibus the beautiful body... respond[s] freely like a rider, like the figure-head of a ship” (149). This passage stages a jarring shift from Elizabeth’s perspective to that of an observer. By focussing on Elizabeth’s “beautiful body”, the narrative reduces her to a sexualised object, and so deftly illustrates the dual status of the woman walker, as both a “strolling spectator” and a part of the display.

³⁹ The benefits of a formal education are demonstrated by Hugh Whitbread in his skilful composition of a letter to *The Times* on behalf of his friend, Lady Bruton.

Yet here, as in the earlier portrayal of Peter in the role of “buccaneer”, Woolf stresses the performative and self-conscious nature of this feminine display, suggesting that, for a woman, to be observed and admired is part of the pleasure to be gained from moving through the city. Though Elizabeth claims to dislike the attention she receives, her awareness of her beauty seems to embolden her and to propel her movement. She boards a bus “most competently... in front of everyone” (148). Woolf implies a degree of vanity on Elizabeth’s part. While Peter describes her as “queer-looking... not exactly pretty; handsome rather...” (61), Elizabeth is convinced that “[e]very man” she meets “f[alls] in love with her” (148). Elizabeth’s knowing enjoyment of her sexual power marks a generational difference between mother and daughter, identifying Elizabeth as distinctively and uniquely modern. In the performative aspect of her urban mobility, Elizabeth also resembles Peter, providing a further illustration of the city as a space in which male and female subjective experiences can merge. Woolf describes the bus on which Elizabeth rides through Westminster in language that strongly evokes Peter’s pursuit of the girl in the guise of “buccaneer”: Elizabeth assumes multiple symbolic guises, first that of a “rider,” then “the figure-head of a ship” and finally a “sculpture”. The bus itself also undergoes a series of figurative transformations: it is at once a “garish caravan,” a “pirate,” an “eel-like” creature and a ship, “rushing insolently, all sails spread up Whitehall” (148-49). This extravagant series of metaphors implicitly compares the bus, and Elizabeth herself, to the *Euphrosyne* in *The Voyage Out*. As in the earlier novel, the rapid succession of metaphors emphasises Elizabeth’s ambiguous and unprecedented quality, locating her outside the boundaries of conventional literary representation. In its excessive, overtly literary quality, Woolf’s representation of Elizabeth does not merely document a social practice – the increasing autonomy of young women in the modern city. It also draws attention, in a self-reflexive fashion, to the importance of mobility as a means by which to represent modern female subjectivity.

By rendering Elizabeth as an amorphous and overtly symbolic figure, Woolf also attempts to neutralise the association between colonial travel and aggressive masculinity, recuperating it as a symbol of cosmopolitan cultural hybridity.⁴⁰ Woolf draws explicitly on the trope of colonial exploration in order to describe Elizabeth as a “pioneer”, boldly venturing where “no Dalloways [went] daily” (151). Yet she also casts Elizabeth,

⁴⁰ In this respect, it lends credence to Seshagiri’s contention that “Woolf’s novels often reproduce a wide range of assumptions about non-white otherness...” (61).

ambiguously, in the role of the native or colonised subject. In contrast to the other members of her family, Elizabeth is dark-haired and has “Chinese eyes”, as if “some Mongol” had “mixed with Dalloway ladies” generations ago (134, 148). Elizabeth’s “Chinese” appearance underscores her similarity to the faintly racialised “black, but enchanting” woman Peter follows through the streets (57). Viewed as an object of the male adventurer’s gaze, Elizabeth’s “oriental” allure bears out her subordinate status in a patriarchal culture, in which she is perennially vulnerable to conquest or attack. Yet it also assumes a radical quality, anticipating Woolf’s description of the artist, Lily Briscoe, in *To the Lighthouse* (1927). For Patricia Laurence, Woolf’s description of Lily as “Chinese” represents a “brilliant cultural, political, and aesthetic stroke,” signifying not “the Empire’s foraging glance toward... distant lands... for trade and gain” but rather an image of the artist “enriched by the ‘foreign,’” embodying a newly cosmopolitan, modernist sensibility (Laurence 10).⁴¹ Similarly, Elizabeth’s faint identification with the racial other seems to gesture towards the communitarian, cosmopolitan atmosphere of the modern city. At the same time, her “fine eyes” strongly identify her with her namesake, Elizabeth Bennett, the heroine of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), casting her as the successor to a venerable tradition of English literary heroines. With this symbolic gesture, Woolf represents Elizabeth as an amorphous figure, simultaneously evoking masculinity and femininity, colonial exoticism and a quintessential Englishness.

Woolf acknowledges that Elizabeth’s euphoric experience of urban mobility is an elite one. She contrasts Elizabeth’s graceful, untrammelled movement through the city with that of her governess, Doris Kilman. Doris experiences none of Elizabeth’s excitement at travelling through the city. Being “stout” and “plain”, she is unable to excite the admiration of observers, but instead, attracts disapproving glances with her “disorder[ly]” appearance (147). As she and Elizabeth visit a department store, she moves like an “unwieldy battleship” (142), “hemmed in” (146) on every side by goods for sale. Doris’s inability to obtain pleasure from this excursion is partly due to her acute awareness of her own “unlovable body which people could not bear to see” (141). In this respect, she reinforces the profoundly ambivalent nature of female *flânerie*, which necessarily entails submission to the scrutiny of others. Yet Doris’s exclusion from the pleasures of *flânerie* is not merely due to her gender or her physical attributes, but also to

⁴¹ But see Seshagiri, who argues that the use of “Chinese eyes” to denote Lily’s artistry constitutes a form of “racial appropriation, which by turn exploit[s], essentialize[s], or redeem[s] the resources of non-Western cultures” (78).

her “degradin[g]” poverty. Doris’s “cheap” (135) mackintosh coat exacerbates her unattractiveness, just as Elizabeth’s “very well cut clothes” (147) accentuate her beauty. Being unable “to buy pretty clothes” (141), Doris can derive no pleasure from the “decorous, striped, frivolous, solid, flimsy” goods on display (142), any more than she can enjoy the sensation of being admired by fellow shoppers. In this respect, Doris illustrates the elitist and class-bound nature of the *flânerie* variously experienced by Peter, Clarissa and Elizabeth. Describing herself as “a wheel without a tyre... jolted by every pebble” (143), Doris bears out the potentially hostile and alienating quality of the city, for those who do not enjoy upper class status.

While Elizabeth’s “odd friendship” (148) with Doris signifies her capacity for empathy with people outside her own milieu, her travel through London also illustrates the limitations of her empathetic powers. Woolf depicts Elizabeth’s journey through the city as an act of withdrawal or even flight (Bowlby, *Destinations* 74) from Doris’s possessive desire to “grasp her... clasp her... make her hers absolutely and for ever” (144). Faced with Doris’s claustrophobic, possessive love, Elizabeth instinctively recoils, like a “dumb creature... gallop[ing] away in terror” (145). As she leaves Doris alone in a tea shop, Doris experiences an acute pain, as if “the very entrails in her body” are being “draw[n] out” (145). By contrast, Elizabeth does not give “one thought to poor Miss Kilman” as she rushes out into the “delicious” fresh air of the street (149). Indeed, her ensuing journey seems to illustrate the profound gulf between the two women. As she sits in the bus, her “fine eyes... gaz[ing] ahead, blank, bright”, like those of a “sculpture” (149), Elizabeth is blithely unaware of the pain her departure has caused Doris. In her sudden withdrawal from Doris, Elizabeth resembles the young Clarissa, who revolts against Peter’s desire that “everything [should] be shared; everything gone into” (8). Just as Clarissa’s glance touches Peter and then “flutter[s] away, as a bird touches a branch and rises and flutters away” (47), Elizabeth’s affection for Doris is fleeting and uncontainable.

In this respect, despite their difference from Rachel Vinrace, both Clarissa and Elizabeth bear testament to the existence of a self that remains intractably individual and solitary, “different”, or “unmergeable”, as Rachel puts it in *The Voyage Out*. Woolf stops short of suggesting that the experience of urban mobility offers unlimited potential for empathy, ethical engagement with others, or transcendence of social divisions. Like her father, Elizabeth perceives the crowds in the street as a spur to action, “crowds of

people... having more power than... any... books... to stimulate what lay slumbrous, clumsy, and shy on the mind's sandy floor, to break surface, as a child suddenly stretches its arms..." (149). Seeing "people busy about their activities" in centres of professional life such as Chancery Lane, she experiences a sense of expanded possibilities and ambition. She contemplates her future and feels momentarily "determined... to become either a farmer or a doctor" (149). Yet Woolf hints at the superficial, transitory nature of Elizabeth's ambitions by breaking into an elaborate description of the sky above the city, with clouds like "broad golden slopes, celestial pleasure gardens." These clouds are in "perpetual movement", "chang[ing]" constantly "in spite" of their appearance of "grave fixity" (152). Epitomising transient beauty, the clouds reflect the anonymity of the crowd, in which "faces fad[e]" and busses "suddenly los[e]" their glow as the light changes (152). In so doing, they illustrate the limits of Elizabeth's capacity to empathise with individual members of this crowd, or to perceive them in their radical difference from herself. To this extent, Elizabeth's *flânerie* is, like that of Clarissa and Peter, passive and impressionistic. To Elizabeth, a brass band of unemployed men is merely part of the city's benign "uproar," a "consolatory, indifferent" sound (151), rather than a reminder of poverty. The "geniality, sisterhood, motherhood, brotherhood" (151) Elizabeth feels as she moves through the streets is "exquisite[ly] amus[ing]" (59) but not in any clear sense politically transformative.

The novel's conclusion reaffirms this sense that the empathy produced by urban mobility is, to some extent, an illusion. The novel's climactic scene takes place, not in the flux of a crowded city street, but in a private party held in the rarefied environs of the Dalloways' home. In this scene, Clarissa is utterly static. As she welcomes her guests, she feels as though she is "a stake driven in at the top of her stairs" (187). This party poses a stark contrast to the democratic, variegated social atmosphere of the streets. Clarissa has carefully curated the guest list to exclude "dull" and poor women like her cousin, Ellie Henderson, who only obtains a grudging, last-minute invitation at the insistence of another guest. With the exception of Ellie, the guests appear to be entirely drawn from the upper classes and include the Prime Minister, reflecting the Dalloways' proximity to the highest echelons of political power. Peter reflects that Clarissa is "at her worst" in this context, "effusive, insincere" (183). Elizabeth is ill at ease, wishing she were in the country with her dogs. Even so, her presence at the party seems to counter the "faintly transgressive" nature of her earlier journey through London (Thacker 170), leaving her

poised uncertainly between her professional aspirations and the more conventional role of a “lovely girl” (213), an “idealised object” decorating her parents’ drawing room (Bowlby, *Destinations* 75, 83). By staging this final scene in the domestic setting, Woolf suggests that the liberating atmosphere of the city street offers only a temporary release for girls like Elizabeth, who remain, for the most part, tightly constrained by their domesticated, gendered social roles.

Clarissa is a curiously ambiguous figure in this final scene. Learning of the suicide of Septimus Warren Smith, she reacts with a mixture of horror and euphoria. Withdrawing to a small private room, she responds to the news with an initial burst of indignation. “What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party?” she demands angrily (201). In the next moment, she is seized with a profound sense of empathy for the dead man. “[H]er dress flame[s], her body burn[s]”, as she imagines him impaled upon “rusty spikes... with a thud, thud, thud in his brain” (202). Yet almost instantly, this vividly imagined scene of pain and death gives way to elation, as Clarissa imagines the nameless “young man who had killed himself” as a romantic hero, “plung[ing]” to his death while “holding his treasure” (202). Casting the suicide in poetic terms that recall her own youthful “plunge” into the fresh air at Bourton (3), Clarissa refuses to “pity” Septimus (204). She reflects that she has “schemed... pilfered” and “wanted success”; in short, that she has never been “wholly admirable” (203). By contrast, she imagines that Septimus has retained his integrity in death and is “glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living” (204). She feels that she is “somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself” (204) in a way that recalls her sense of fellow-feeling with the “dejected... miseries sitting on doorsteps” in the streets of Westminster (4). This conviction appears, for some critics, to confirm Clarissa’s acute sensitivity and capacity for empathy with others. For Alex Zwerdling, it illustrates that she and Septimus are, in fact, “kin”, in so far as they share a desire for “inner freedom” – the freedom Septimus has preserved in death (141-42).

Yet Zwerdling’s reading does not adequately account for the ambivalent tone of this scene, in which Clarissa appears to take a perverse delight in the death that she initially perceived as an unwelcome interruption to her party. In her elation, Clarissa bears little resemblance to Septimus, whose acute mental anguish Woolf has vividly evoked throughout the novel. Dressed in her evening gown, surrounded by her aristocratic guests, her claim that she is “very like” Septimus appears even more implausible than her affinity

with the destitute, homeless women of the street. There is a distinctly jarring note in her reflection, upon hearing of Septimus's death, that she has "never been so happy" (203).⁴² Clarissa's response here is "shocking" (DeKoven 137) and baffling, like Terence's sudden feeling of happiness in the moments after Rachel's death. Just as Terence's response illustrates the failure of his attempt to achieve "complete union" with Rachel (VO 376), so Clarissa's feeling here seems to confirm the impossibility of her own attempts to empathise with Septimus.⁴³ In the concluding moments of this scene, Woolf reinforces this sense that Clarissa's powers of empathy are grievously deficient. As she gazes out of the window, Clarissa finds, to her great surprise, that the evening sky is not "solemn... turning its cheek away in beauty", as she had expected, but "ashen pale, raced over quickly by tapering vast clouds" (204). Still more surprisingly, the neighbour Clarissa has observed through her window many times before is staring back at her. "Could she see her?" Clarissa wonders, breathlessly (204). As in Elizabeth's journey on top of the bus, the cloud imagery symbolises the transient, impressionistic quality of Clarissa's consciousness. Simultaneously, the gaze of the old woman serves to reduce Clarissa's narrative authority, reaffirming the limited and subjective nature of her perspective (Berman 61).⁴⁴

⁴² Moreover, Clarissa's reaction to the news of Septimus's death appears purely subjective and private. In this respect it contrasts starkly with Richard's reaction. Richard responds to the news by engaging in discussion with Sir William Bradshaw, the doctor who diagnosed Septimus's condition, regarding the need to make "provision" for cases of "deferred shell shock" in a bill before Parliament (201). This response, which recalls Richard's "dogged" efforts on behalf of the "downtrodden" in his capacity as an MP (126), emphasises the fact that Clarissa's purported fellowship with Septimus is entirely abstract, limited to the realm of emotion and fantasy. This distinction between private feeling and action in the world is further underscored by Sally Seton's description of her husband and his fellow Manchester industrialists as "men... who did things" (205). Woolf draws an implicit distinction between the achievements of this upwardly mobile industrialist and the entirely unremarkable career of Peter, who has inherited his wealth. Sally explains to Peter, "every penny they had he had earned. As a little boy (her voice trembled) he had carried great sacks" (208).

⁴³ This passage bears out J. Hillis Miller's observation that *Mrs Dalloway* is "based on an irreconcilable opposition between individuality and universality. By reason of his or her existence as a conscious human being, each man or woman is alienated for the whole of which he or she is actually, though unwittingly or at best half-consciously, as part. That half-consciousness gives each person a sense of incompleteness" (Miller 183; Cohen 107).

⁴⁴ Though Berman devotes a chapter to Woolf, she only briefly discusses *Mrs Dalloway*. She does not refer specifically to the novel's imagery of mobility. She does, however, focus on Clarissa's glimpse of her neighbour through her window. For Berman, the sight of this woman staring back at her prompts Clarissa to invest the woman with "an agency of her own and a demand to be recognized as a subject." The possibility that her neighbour might see her suggests, "for the first time", the possibility of their engaging in "a relationship of mutuality... underscor[ing] it as a moment of ethical recognition" (61). Berman's interpretation of the scene, and the novel overall, resembles Zwerdling's account more than my own, in the sense that she invests Clarissa with superior insight and ethical qualities.

Throughout her fiction, Woolf adopts imagery of movement to represent a distinctively female subjectivity, defined by its desire to form empathetic, egalitarian relations with others. Woolf draws an implicit contrast between this form of relational subjectivity and that of the archetypal questing protagonist, whose relationships with others are characterised by an impulse to dominate and exploit. This distinction is subtly foreshadowed in “Joan Martyn”, where Joan discovers on her pilgrimage that she is capable of fellowship with the blind, lame and ragged peasants she meets on the road. This sentiment contrasts starkly with her previous desire to “tread” the peasants “under foot, and scourge” them “to do the only work they are fitted to do...” (JM 53). For the most part, however, “Joan Martyn”, casts mobility as a masculine prerogative. This association is reinforced in *The Voyage Out*. Rachel is initially exhilarated by the sense of mastery she derives from her status as a traveller, the sense of being “an heroic statue, in the middle of the foreground, dominating the view” (VO 126). Yet she gradually comes to appreciate that this form of autonomy is inaccessible to her, as a woman in a patriarchal society. In her brief encounter with the inhabitants of a South American village, Rachel also intuits that the identity of the questing, autonomous traveller is inextricably bound up with imperial power relations. In so far as it frankly “acknowledge[es] the imperial grounding” of Rachel’s subjectivity (Wollaeger 45), this scene represents a unique moment in *The Voyage Out*. But this does not mean that Woolf otherwise embraces a form of “imperial subjectivity”, as Stasi maintains (113). Rather, the very ambiguity of *The Voyage Out*, and Rachel’s sudden, inexplicable death, suggest that Woolf finds it impossible to reconcile her critique of colonial travel with her enduring, profound affinity with English culture and history (Maxwell 33). Instead of reconciling this tension, she simply breaks off Rachel’s narrative, consigning her to inarticulacy and oblivion.

Mrs Dalloway attempts to resolve this conflict in a more productive and affirmative manner, by presenting a female protagonist whose literal movement through the city symbolises her attempts to transcend the boundedness of her own experience, and to empathise with people who are different from herself, but who are also linked by a common culture and a shared experience of modern, urban life. Through Clarissa’s purely private, domestic and emotional response to Septimus’s death, the conclusion of *Mrs Dalloway* seems to confirm the limited capacity for such imagined affinities to translate into concrete social or political change. In this respect, it could be argued that *Mrs Dalloway* epitomises the “inward turn” of high modernism (Berman 29), withdrawing

from the “real world” (Zwerdling) in favour of a rarefied inner life. Yet to read the conclusion in this way would not account for the way in which Woolf critiques Clarissa’s perspective. While Clarissa herself may have an exaggerated faith in her capacity to understand Septimus’s feelings, the reader of *Mrs Dalloway* remains acutely aware of her limited capacity to voyage beyond the subjective and bounded nature of her own experience. Far from endorsing Clarissa’s claim that she is “part of people she ha[s] never met” (10), Woolf ironises this claim and the totalising, “imperial subjectivity” it represents (Stasi 113). At the same time, she endorses Clarissa’s *desire* to empathise with others, as something that must be attempted, even if it is doomed to fail. In charting a course from the city street to the Dalloways’ exclusive London home, Woolf acknowledges the way in which social inequality impedes individuals’ capacity to “know other lives,” in all their “distance” and “alterity” (Berman 39). In so doing, she implicitly concedes her own “limitations” and “prejudices” (*Room 6*) as a white, bourgeois “daughter of empire” (Stasi 110).

3 Christina Stead and the myth of the wanderer

Christina Stead's fiction is characterised by a sustained, albeit deeply ambivalent, engagement with the concept of mobility. Stead was "cosmopolitan... in outlook" (Geering, *Stead* 25), in contrast to many other prominent Australian writers of her time, for whom the development of an Australian national literature was an urgent priority.⁴⁵ The young Stead was also an inveterate "wanderer," for whom mobility appeared to be "an ideal condition, the embodiment of freedom" (Rowley, "Wanderer," 15). Stead's idealisation of mobility emerges most vividly in her semi-autobiographical novel, *For Love Alone*. This novel describes a young Australian woman who travels to Europe in pursuit of romantic, intellectual and creative fulfilment. It offers a powerful and compelling vision of mobility as a source and expression of personal freedom and triumph over obstacles, including those encountered by women in a patriarchal culture. Yet in its ambiguous conclusion, *For Love Alone* betrays a certain disenchantment with its questing protagonist, casting her as an egotist whose cosmopolitan aspirations are inherently bourgeois and elitist. Despite her persistent attraction to the romanticised figure of the "wanderer", Stead evinces an enduring suspicion of elite transnational culture and its reification of mobility. Her fiction is replete with satiric portraits of bourgeois artist-intellectuals, whose mobility she associates with narcissism and an evasion of social responsibility. Increasingly, as her career progresses, Stead satirises her mobile protagonists, associating them with hypocrisy or, at best, naive complicity with the structures of class privilege. While she portrays mobility as potentially liberating for a select group of middle and upper class women, she reveals a growing suspicion of transnational mobility and its utopian promise.

This chapter begins with *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, and its representation of female urban mobility in the visionary, eccentric figure of Catherine Baguenault. Through her depiction of Catherine, Stead identifies the city as a potentially liberating environment for women, but also provides a graphic account of the impediments to their mobility, in the form of deeply entrenched sexism and the persistent threat of sexual violence. This novel presents Stead's first satiric portrait of cosmopolitan, left-leaning bourgeois intellectuals. Through her acerbic caricature of Fulke and Marion Folliot, Stead identifies

⁴⁵ These "ardent patriots" include Miles Franklin and Katherine Susannah Pritchard (Geering, *Stead* 25).

transnational travel with elitism and dilettantism, an association that will persist throughout her work. The chapter proceeds to *For Love Alone*, a novel often read as a triumphant female-centred *Bildungsroman*. In one sense, Stead equates Teresa Hawkins' literal journey, from Sydney to London, with a process of maturation and fulfilment. Yet she undermines and ironises this narrative, casting Teresa in an ambiguous relation of equivalence with the novel's apparent villain, Jonathan Crow. Culminating in "backstreet" marriage to a rich banker, Teresa's quest can be interpreted as an expression of bourgeois social ascension that fails to offer any solution to the structural problems of gender or class inequality. Proceeding to Stead's New York novel, *Letty Fox: Her Luck*, the chapter detects an equally stinging critique of the modern bourgeoisie, this time predominantly through imagery of urban mobility. An overtly satiric novel, *Letty Fox* dramatises the picaresque exploits of a heroine who signally fails to extricate herself from the venality and materialism of her culture. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Stead's late novel, *The Little Hotel*, a darkly comic portrait of a group of wealthy tourists in a Swiss resort in the early years of the Cold War. It argues that, in this short novel, Stead mounts her most acerbic critique of an amoral transnational elite, whose privileged mobility depends upon the ruthless exploitation of the working class.

Seven Poor Men of Sydney (1934)

Stead's first novel, *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, appears at first to have little to say about women's mobility. Its action takes place almost exclusively in Sydney, the city of Stead's birth, and its *dramatis personae* lists only the "seven poor men" of its title. The novel's first few chapters focus almost exclusively on the early life of a young man, Michael Baguenault. Tracing the development and premature decline of the sensitive, tempestuous Michael, the novel can be read as a modernist *Künstlerroman* in the style of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Yet Stead also introduces several other vividly drawn characters who gradually assume an increasingly significant role, displacing Michael altogether after his suicide mid-way through the novel. Among these, the most striking is Michael's half-sister, Catherine Baguenault. Catherine's restless energy pervades *Seven Poor Men* while her idealism tempers its generally bleak account of poverty, alienation and despair. Passionate and visionary, Catherine is an instinctive radical who abandons her comfortable middle class home to engage in philanthropic and

political “work” (35) in the slums of the city. Feminist critics have identified Catherine as a crucial figure in the novel, a position most emphatically presented by Dorothy Green, who argues that “Catherine, not Michael, is the real centre of the book” (Green 153). This view finds support in the conviction of Heinrich Winterbaum, a minor but credible character, who proclaims that Michael is “nothing but a shadow of Catherine” (132). It is further reinforced by the novel’s concluding chapters, in which Catherine embarks on a lengthy monologue summing up her troubled relationship with her brother. In this section, entitled “Catherine’s Narrative” (264), Catherine reveals Michael’s incestuous love for her, quoting his confession: “I have come to love my sister as myself, for you are myself... I am in love with you; not you, that which is like you in me...” (274). Catherine concludes her narrative by describing her emotional detachment from her brother: “I changed”, she says. “I met a lot of people: my own world emerged” (275). In contrast to the sterility and solipsism of Michael’s psychological decline, Catherine’s narrative identifies her as the novel’s true protagonist, the only character who seems capable of transformation and growth.

As the title of the novel suggests, Catherine struggles to find a fulfilling role in the masculine milieu of 1920s Sydney. A fellow socialist, Baruch Mendelssohn, describes her as “dark, furious, thin... a woman of revolution without a barricade... a marcher in strike processions... always passionately involved in something, always half-sick” (144). She occupies a marginal position in this world, “loiter[ing] about the corridor and peep[ing] into” doorways (128), sitting “at the back of the hall” (137) and “in the side-benches” while others take the stage (172). She lives like a “vagrant”, inhabiting a succession of temporary dwellings that include a “miserable lodging where she ha[s] nothing but a blanket on a wire mattress” (35) and “a room in an old building... left her for the moment by a tubercular friend” (137). In depicting Catherine’s nomadic life amongst the Sydney slum-dwellers, Stead casts female mobility as vulnerable and, indeed, almost abject. Catherine often appears dirty and ragged, with “holes in the back of her stockings” and “stains on her skirt” (196). This vulnerability is specifically sexual in nature: in one of his frequent rages, Michael threatens to “lead [her] a nice chase and drop [her].” “You’re a girl after all,” he taunts her; “there are some places where you can’t go...” The threat of sexual violence continually underpins Catherine’s movement through the city. On several occasions, men follow Catherine through darkened streets and parks, “taking her to be a beggarly girl” (144) and therefore easy prey. Confessing that she “can’t

bear to have anyone behind [her],” Catherine hints that she has in fact experienced sexual assault (264). As Diana Brydon notes, Catherine has rebelled against the constricting role of the Victorian “angel in the house” only to find herself cast in the role of the “gypsy”, and thus just as “easily assimilated into patterns of exploitation” by her patriarchal culture (40).

Even so, Catherine’s purposeful mobility poses a stark contrast to the wandering, dilatory, self-absorbed figure of the *flâneur*. Stead presents a parodic narrative of *flânerie* in her description of a window-shopping expedition by Joseph Baguenault and Baruch Mendelssohn, in a passage containing many striking echoes of Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*.⁴⁶ As Joseph and Baruch take a stroll down Pitt Street, they encounter a dizzying array of consumer goods: “suits... ‘For the Evening Wedding’, ‘For the Afternoon Wedding’, ‘For the Evening Reception’...” (117) as well as “snapshot kodaks” (118), “lotion for the hands, guaranteed to whiten them” (119) and innumerable other, more luxurious items crafted in silver, diamond, opal, satin and pearl. The opulence, variety and sheer quantity of these items serves to emphasise the gulf between Sydney’s prosperous upper classes and the vagrants who seem to occupy every available cave, hollow tree or park described in the novel. More subtly, the passage also mounts an implicit critique of bourgeois consumer culture. While Baruch attempts to sustain a political discussion, Joseph is hopelessly distracted by the goods on display: “Supply and demand,” he murmurs vaguely, “what was Baruch saying about supply and demand?” (120). Surveying the shops, Joseph becomes utterly absorbed by the products on display. As Peter Kirkpatrick observes, the “political discourse” in which Baruch attempts to engage him is “overridden” (66) by the pleasure of moving through the city’s commercial heart. Describing Joseph losing himself in the “ebb and flow in the markets, the jostling in the streets” (120), Stead echoes *Mrs Dalloway* and Woolf’s description of Clarissa euphorically merging with “the ebb and flow” of the London street (MD 9). With this sly reference to Bloomsbury modernism, Stead associates the act of window-shopping with a decadent and inherently apolitical sensibility. In so doing, she draws an implicit contrast between the self-absorption of the bourgeois consumer and the radical activism embodied by Catherine.

⁴⁶ Stead began to write *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* in 1928, three years after the publication of *Mrs Dalloway* (Geering, Stead 15).

Yet even as she draws this implicit distinction between Catherine and Clarissa Dalloway, Stead refuses to equate Catherine's urban mobility with a desirable form of female freedom. Instead, she casts Catherine as being ambivalently drawn to the domestic sphere, which figures as a sanctuary from the emotional anguish and physical dangers of the streets. As Green observes, "Catherine oscillates between the security and comfort of home and the lodgings of outcasts" (157). She reacts angrily when Baruch declares her unsuited to conventional family life, "bound to one spot of earth by the delightful chains of ceramics, carpets, cobwebby laces, a marriage ring." She insists that she would be happy in such a situation, "although [she] would fret against it" (152). Green observes that Catherine "confronts" this "temptation squarely" when she spends a night in a vagrant women's shelter (Green 157), suggesting that the squalor of the shelter reminds Catherine of the "comforts" of the affluent suburban home she has forsaken. Yet in one sense, the shelter offers a spectacle of domesticity and care that contrasts favourably with the emotional sterility of the Baguenault home. Catherine watches, transfixed, as the "young woman" near her "g[ives] her breast" to her "crying infant" (214), at which the child ceases to cry. In spite of the "debauched and degraded" state of the women in the shelter, there is a note of tenderness and even tranquillity in this scene, in stark contrast to the frenetic movement that generally characterises Catherine's appearances in the novel. With this scene, Stead poignantly illustrates the paucity of choices available to women such as Catherine in 1930s Sydney: an oppressive, imprisoning form of bourgeois domesticity, or an independent, mobile life that is "insupportably lonely" (137), excluded from the love and intimacy offered by the home.

By invoking Catherine's lingering desire for domesticity, "ceramics, carpets [and] a marriage ring", Stead also draws attention to her ambiguous position as a bourgeois socialist, a figure that recurs repeatedly throughout Stead's oeuvre. Despite its title, *Seven Poor Men* primarily depicts the lives of middle class people. Indeed, among the "seven poor men" listed in the *dramatis personae*, Stead includes the artist Michael, the intellectual and aspiring politician, Baruch Mendelssohn, and even Gregory Chamberlain, the proprietor of the press where Joseph works. Catherine's greatest friends are Fulke and Marion Folliot, "pioneers of the middle class defection" who are "well provided for" by their wealthy families. The Folliots live in a "pleasant home" and intersperse their Communist activities with bicycling in France and winters in Spain (57-58). Marion Folliot personifies the rarefied nature of this middle class radicalism. Stead describes

Marion as having “deep eye-hollows set skew-whiff... the present of Genghiz Khan to some charming female ancestor” (56), recalling Elizabeth’s “Chinese eyes” and possible “Mongol” ancestry in *Mrs Dalloway* (MD 134). Exuding cosmopolitan glamour, Marion embodies the genteel radicalism Stead associated with Bloomsbury modernism.⁴⁷ While Catherine and Fulke work at a newspaper article, she goes to the gym, then retires to her club for a rest before an evening meeting. Although Catherine embraces a “vagrant life and raffish experience”, her penchant for psychoanalysis (130, 262) also links her subtly to the elitism of this rarefied, cosmopolitan milieu. Stead repeatedly draws attention to the signs of Catherine’s middle class status: her “silk dress” (135), her polished and artfully “almond-shaped” nails (196) and her “white good teeth... a surprise in her worn face” (129). Catherine, she reminds us, is not truly poor but is rather “poor by choice” (144) and “has only to go home to have all the comforts possible... to be petted and rest in the garden” (196).

Through her depiction of these bourgeois radicals, Stead associates mobility with diletantism, privilege and, in many instances, outright hypocrisy. A well-travelled left-wing reporter, Lancyman, scathingly describes the Australians he has met abroad, “in Rio de Janeiro, in New York, Paris, Shanghai, London... a mare’s-nest of dissolute Australians who lived by journalism, stock promotion, defrauding of dowagers, confidence tricks, marrying of landladies, cadging of drinks and general cheap exploitation on the basis of their easy-going and taking manners” (237). Fulke and Marion Folliot align themselves with this disreputable “Australian international” (237) at the novel’s conclusion, quitting Sydney in order to enjoy more respectable and materially comfortable lives abroad. In the novel’s final chapters, Stead reveals that Fulke and Marion have “c[o]me into their money” and intend to go “to England to live quietly as good middle-class people” (305). As Michael Wilding notes, the Folliots’ departure constitutes an “evasion” and an abandonment of their purported commitment to socialism: they are, in a sense, “deserters” (181). While Baruch is portrayed more sympathetically than the Folliots, his departure is also criticised by several characters as a form of bourgeois self-advancement and proof of his hypocrisy. In leaving to take up a position as “political secretary to an aspiring industrialist” (179) in America, Baruch fulfils the prediction of a fellow socialist, Tom Winter, who anticipates that he will

⁴⁷ Ironically, Miles Franklin criticised the novel for its use of the modernist techniques she associated with Bloomsbury (Geering, *Stead* 32; Harris 15).

“leave” his comrades “behind” and become a “traitor to the workin’-class” (124). This view is shared by the more cynical and jaded Tom Withers. “It’s a fine show, your revolution”, he sneers. “You only stick up for it because you know you’d be somebody in a revolution, you have the capacity for demagoguery” (194). For Withers, Baruch’s international mobility is confirmation of his dilettantism. “A wanderer, a rolling stone gathers no moss, and doesn’t want to gather any”, he observes phlegmatically, “but no house is built on top of it” (178).

As Baruch, Marion and Fulke prepare to leave Sydney at the novel’s conclusion, Catherine commits herself to a mental asylum. There she intends to teach woodcarving and design, while also undergoing psychoanalytic treatment. Brydon expresses a widely held view when she describes this conclusion as “hardly promising”, noting that in her last appearance in the novel, Catherine slits her wrist (Brydon 37).⁴⁸ She observes fatalistically that Catherine’s “sense of self contradicts all the available definitions; there are no terms in which she can express what she is or what she wants.” Yet Brydon concedes that Catherine also offers one of the few images of potential “escape” in the novel, pointing to her depiction in a painting by Baruch, entitled “La Femme s’échappe de la Forêt” (Brydon 43; *SPM* 154). If Catherine’s removal to the mental asylum can be seen as a form of retreat from the demands of her more active life among the slum-dwellers in the city, it can also be regarded as a temporary, strategic withdrawal, a means of survival, rather than a wholesale abandonment of radical ideals. Catherine herself adopts this view, assuring Baruch that she will not remain in the asylum indefinitely, but insists that she needs a “home” to go to when she is “crazy and cracked” (276). Critics such as Michael Ackland have endorsed this more optimistic reading, affirming that Catherine is “wise to place herself beyond immediate harm” by retreating to the asylum (“Imagination,” 203). Similarly, Green regards the decision as a reasonable attempt to avoid the “self-destruction” that would otherwise surely await Catherine, given her dogged refusal to “be conformed to the world” (157).

In her commitment to radical activism, Catherine bears out the liberating potential of urban mobility for women in the modern city, while also attesting to its dangers, both tangible and psychological. Her retreat to the asylum would seem to confirm that, in a

⁴⁸ According to Rowley, this ending implies that Catherine “is doomed never to escape...” (Rowley, “Cythera,” 39). More devastatingly, Wilding views Catherine’s “retreat to the mental asylum” as evidence that she has “failed in [her] political beliefs and abandoned the collective struggle” (181).

society in which sexual violence goes largely unchecked, the streets are not a suitable or conducive space for women to engage in either political activism or self-fashioning of a more abstract, imaginative nature. Yet her decision to remain in Sydney poses a telling contrast to the mass emigration of her fellow activists. It aligns her symbolically with Tom Winter, the passionate socialist who ends the novel critically ill after being imprisoned for his activism. It is Winter who declares, in an argument with Baruch, “Yew only got to read Marx, and study what’s under yer nose” (125). Catherine adopts a similar position. When Baruch urges her to “[l]eave the country” and “get a real cause to fight for” (152), she refuses, insisting that her work in Sydney is meaningful and purposeful. “Everything and everyone I meet is the further instrument”, she declares (149). With this conclusion, *Seven Poor Men* posits a distinction between Catherine’s mobility and that of Baruch, Fulke and Marion; a tension between purposeful, socially committed movement and another, more decadent form of mobility that is, ultimately, an evasion of social responsibility.

***For Love Alone* (1944)**

In *For Love Alone*, Stead combines this sharp satire of the internationally mobile bourgeois intelligentsia with a female-centred quest narrative. The novel follows Teresa Hawkins’ journey from Sydney to London in pursuit of social, sexual and intellectual freedom. Like Catherine in *Seven Poor Men*, Teresa demonstrates her independence of spirit through incessant, purposeful walking through the streets of Sydney. In stark contrast to Catherine, however, Teresa finds herself inexorably drawn towards Europe. At the beginning of the novel, Teresa lives with her father and siblings in a ramshackle house in a poor beachside suburb of Sydney. Working as a teacher in a shabby school, Teresa dreams of studying at Sydney University among the privileged children of the professional classes. Her aspirations shift to international travel when she meets Jonathan Crow, a university student who has won a travelling scholarship and is poised to depart for further study in London. Infatuated with Jonathan and inspired by his example, Teresa determines to follow him. After Jonathan’s departure, she adopts a lifestyle of extreme asceticism in order to save for her fare to England. As she saves, starving herself and walking miles each day to avoid the cost of a tram ticket, Teresa becomes increasingly convinced that her journey to London will culminate in a romantic union with Jonathan.

When she finally succeeds in reaching London, Jonathan rejects her and she sinks briefly into despair. By the novel's conclusion, however, she has written her first novel and formed a fulfilling romantic relationship with her employer, James Quick, signifying her intellectual, creative and sexual maturity.

The trope of the quest is fundamental to *For Love Alone*. From her early youth, Teresa feels a vague but irresistible desire to embark on a "grand perilous journey" (137). For Teresa, travel, creativity and intellectual development are inextricably linked. She resolves to "sail the seas, leave her invisible track on countries, learn in great universities... tramp, perhaps shoeless, along side roads... [and] know life" (265). Stead portrays Teresa's wandering impulse as a characteristic feature of Australian identity. She describes Australia as a "fruitful island of the sea-world", where "people look toward the water, and... to the fixed stars and constellations which first guided men there" (2, 1), while Teresa herself proclaims that "every Australian is a Ulysses" (222). Teresa frames her "irrevocable journey" (274) in classical terms, but is also inspired by "England's sea history" (224). This history remains insistently present in the international ships that move perpetually in and out of Sydney Harbour, to the sound of old sea shanties: "...So now good-bye to land/ And the dull unchanging shore..." (90). Teresa fervently believes that she too can "escape by sea" from the "dull shore", like "the sailors who, from de Quiros to Cook, had sailed all the seas and discovered Australia..." (224). She strongly identifies herself with these seafaring heroes, "lov[ing] the sea with a first and last love" and possessing "the heart of a sailor" (224). Despite being a woman, Teresa regards herself as a full participant in the English tradition of imperial travel.

In travelling from Sydney to London, at a time when such a journey was extremely rare and highly prestigious,⁴⁹ Teresa can be regarded as a heroine who accomplishes an extraordinary feat. Many critics have characterised Teresa's journey from Sydney to London as a dazzling success, a triumph of personal will over unpropitious circumstances. Rowley is the most notable proponent of this view, identifying Teresa as the first (and arguably the only) female character in Stead's fiction to "overcome... obstacles and escape successfully from her claustrophobic home environment" (Rowley, "Cythera,"

⁴⁹ As Angela Woollacott observes, the voyage to London was rite of passage for early twentieth-century Australians, not just as "a matter of individual liberation" but as a socially significant and "culturally privileged" activity (19, 24). Large numbers of professionals, students and artists undertook the journey, linking it to "the pursuit of higher education, the professions, and the arts," and imbuing it with cultural prestige (26). While many of the travellers did not possess much capital, the journey was also a mark of "bourgeois status" (24) and "class distinctions were keenly observed" on board (26).

41).⁵⁰ Similarly, Brydon reads the novel as an “affirm[ation] that change is possible”, and that “open rebellion” against social norms can offer a “way out” of misery and oppression (88). For both Rowley and Brydon, Teresa’s quest is fundamentally a search for erotic and romantic fulfilment. Rowley draws a parallel between Teresa’s literal journey to London and her adolescent fantasies of journeying to the mythic island of “Cythera”, a place Teresa associates with her most “secret desires” (192-93) for sexual experience. Similarly, Brydon identifies the trope of the journey to Cythera as an important symbol of Teresa’s idiosyncratic “idea of love as a free and mutual releasing of creative energies” (80). For Brydon, this idea finds fulfilment in Teresa’s relationship with James and her brief liaison with his friend, Harry Girton, both experiences that affirm her “utopian vision of the potential of humanity” to “striv[e] toward the good” (87). These readings rightly identify the pursuit of love as a central facet of Teresa’s quest, an interpretation that would seem consistent with the novel’s title. Yet despite its apparently uncompromising insistence on “love” as the *only* purpose of Teresa’s journey, the title is faintly ironic. Evoking the saccharine language of a conventional romantic novel, it jars uncomfortably with Teresa’s eccentric and often ribald fantasies, which draw upon “the disorderly loves of Ovid... the experiments of Sade, the unimaginable horrors of the Inquisition, the bestiality of the Bible, the bitter jokes of Aristophanes and what the sex-psychologists had written” (*FLA* 76). In contrast to Teresa’s vivid sexual fantasies, the title seems euphemistic and trite, suggesting that her quest is in fact much more ambiguous and multifaceted than a mere search for “love”.

Unlike its cloyingly romantic title, the novel itself frames Teresa’s quest in distinctly economic terms, casting it as a desperate attempt to escape the squalor and poverty of life in Depression-era Sydney. As in *Seven Poor Men*, Stead depicts Sydney as deeply impoverished, filled with destitute vagrants, tramps and transitory “roomers” (*FLA* 266). The city streets of *For Love Alone* are sites of palpable deprivation. The vagrants who inhabit them are not picturesque “frumps”, as in *Mrs Dalloway* (*MD* 4), but are instead deeply pitiable. Walking through the slums, Teresa watches tenants “be[ing] thrown out in the street... first their goods...clinking and clattering in a delightful smash, then bits of tawdry, or a spare pair of pants... and last the personage itself... swearing and crying, almost sexless, merely degraded...” (266). In her work as a teacher, Teresa encounters several homeless children, including “the Mad Boy”, George Wadling.

⁵⁰ See also Rowley, “Island”; “Outward”; “Other”.

“[S]tained” and “weeping,” in his “old Norfolk suit of no colour at all, so queered was it by rain and dirt” (115), George has been “ruined” by poverty and the brutality of life on the streets; he exhibits a desperate “restlessness” (117) that mirrors Teresa’s own. While Teresa’s home is comfortable, compared with the “verminous, dangerous, soot-blackened nests” in which her students live (118), she regards herself as “homeless” (230). She is acutely conscious of her precarious position as a young, unmarried woman, and feels that she “do[es]n’t... belong... any more” (230) in her father’s home. In stark contrast to her sister, Kitty, who performs unpaid domestic work for her father and brothers, before accepting the role of paid housekeeper to a widower, Teresa “kn[ows] that she c[an] not go and wash dishes hopelessly for some man, waiting for the day when he asked her to marry him” (275). Her decision to go abroad signifies her determination to escape such a life of “hungry obscurity” (137), by seeking out more lucrative employment abroad. Surveying a map of the world, with the British colonies coloured pink, she reflects with satisfaction that “[i]n every one of those pink patches... she could get a job, she was a citizen...” (83).⁵¹

For all her romantic daydreaming, Teresa is clear-eyed about the role that money will play in facilitating her adventure and the practical steps she must take in order to procure it. On the day Jonathan departs for England, she “calculate[s] how many weeks, at how much a week, she must work to pay the forty-four pounds” for a third-class ticket to London and demands an increase in her wages (244). She counts her money fastidiously as she walks to work, thinking with satisfaction that three years of walking “represent[s] seventeen pounds, three shillings, and fourpence... saved to take abroad” (278). She reflects pragmatically that “with beauty and health she could not get one wave nearer England; but even though her bones poked through and she was carried aboard, she was welcome, if she paid her fare” (278). Even en route to London, Teresa remains steadfastly focussed on saving money. She sees “nothing” (298) on the journey, accepting a position as night nurse to a suicidal alcoholic heiress. Later, she regales Jonathan with a detailed description of the first class breakfast she enjoyed as compensation for her efforts, far superior to the third class breakfast “for which [she] had paid” (298). She tells him enthusiastically of her charge’s luxurious “chiffon nightdresses” (300) and elegant scents purchased in the Champs Elysées. In her obsessive focus on these material goods,

⁵¹ Woollacott notes that, for many white Australian women in this era, the journey to London constituted a “claim to the status of colonize[r],” a claim rendered all the more urgent by Australians’ ambiguous status as settler colonial subjects (24). See also O’Brien.

Teresa's account of her voyage attests to the economic factors that at least in part motivate her journey to London.

In this context, Teresa's rather grandiose view of herself as an Australian "Ulysses" can be seen as a form of denial, a refusal to confront the real, material circumstances in which she finds herself. This contrast is foreshadowed in the novel's epigraph, taken from Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605), in which the horse Mefisto grows "metaphysical" out of sheer hunger. Stead repeatedly stresses the disjuncture between Teresa's actual circumstances and her romantic ideals, often to great comic effect. As a young girl, Teresa imagines "spend[ing] glorious days, full-blown hours teasing out the ideal and the real" (123) as a student at Sydney University; yet she "never care[s] to sit down and work out how many years she would have to study to get to the hill in Camperdown," or to calculate "the wages of young teachers or typists," relative to "the cost of a university education" (123). Similarly, as she sets off on foot on a journey to Harper's Ferry, Teresa reflects euphorically that "chains evaporate as soon as you try to throw them off... they are illusions" (137). Yet she quickly finds that the physical needs of the body cannot be so easily disregarded. Having set out with no hat, no map, and nothing to eat but chocolate and a "cold meat sandwich," she quickly grows "dizzy with fatigue, hunger" and her mind becomes "tattered" (164). Later in the novel, as Teresa pushes herself to the brink of exhaustion by walking to work and back every day, she reflects that "[t]he tram ride only cost twopence, so that it might seem folly to wear oneself out in this way." Yet even in her moments of greatest physical weakness, Teresa refuses to perceive her struggle in literal, economic terms. "[I]n some way", she reflects, "the endless walking, walking meant England. She was walking her way to England." (278) She insists that "[s]he [i]s not now walking to save money" but rather to "outstri[p] illness and failure" (277).

In this wilful denial of her real, material circumstances, Teresa emerges as a comic and indeed a satiric figure. Though several critics identify satiric elements in *For Love Alone*, they tend to view these as marginal to the novel's central narrative of struggle and awakening. Many see Teresa as "a female Quixote" (F. Morrison, "Cruel Book," 229), alluding to Stead's epigraph. Yet on this analysis, Stead's reference to Cervantes merely underscores Teresa's status as a feminist heroine. Just as Don Quixote attracts ridicule for his devotion to chivalry, Brydon writes, Teresa's "strenuous idealism often makes her ridiculous" in a sexist society that refuses to recognise female achievement (82). Sheridan takes a similar view of Teresa's elaborate sexual fantasies and her idiosyncratic

“philosophy of passion” (Stead 80). For Sheridan, this miscellaneous “wardrobe of hand-me-downs” reflects Teresa’s tenuous and marginal position, as a woman seeking to make use of an essentially “patriarchal cultural inheritance” (82). Stead’s Homeric references are also cited as evidence of Teresa’s heroic status. Teresa herself decries her journey to England as a “rigmarole of [a] buffoon Odyssey” (FLA 348), yet Brigid Rooney suggests that this reference to buffoonery is merely a “gentl[e] iron[y],” and that Stead’s “framing of Teresa as foolish or deluded in no way detracts from her heroism... because [Teresa] herself voices this perspective” (57).

Yet *For Love Alone* repeatedly illustrates the ways in which real, material problems complicate Teresa’s quest (Yelin 44) and undermine her attempts to view herself as a questing hero. Through repeated episodes of threatened or actual sexual violence, Stead ironises Teresa’s naive belief that she can simply appropriate the masculine persona of a Homeric hero or colonial adventurer. Very early in the novel, Stead hints at the specifically sexual dangers that confront female wanderers through her portrayal of Gladys, a fifteen-year-old vagabond who “kn[ows] all the boys, the fishermen and the deck hands” and sleeps “in the boat sheds”. The teenage Teresa envies Gladys her “freedom”, but is troubled by the sight of local boys “rolling, riding each other, giggling and shouting: ‘Gladys, Gladys’” (21). The sexual exploitation of Gladys causes Teresa to reflect, “Girls wanted to take to the road, but how could they, how could they?” (21). Teresa becomes more aware of her own sexual vulnerability on her brief, abortive journey to Harper’s Ferry. She is followed by an old man, who pursues her with a “queer white flag” appearing underneath his belt. Teresa cannot fully comprehend the man’s sexual gestures but is nonetheless deeply humiliated and frightened. This experience has a lasting, traumatic effect on her. Later in the novel, while she is obsessively saving for her passage to London, she determines to sleep overnight in a vacant lot next to her workplace, in order to avoid the exhausting journey home on foot. Yet when she sees a man approach the lot, she imagines he is “like the man on the road” and becomes “very much afraid” (287), returning unwillingly to her home. With these episodes, as in *Seven Poor Men*, Stead illustrates the ways in which women occupy a tenuous and vulnerable position on the streets of the city. The faint but ever-present threat of sexual violence undermines Teresa’s triumphant quest narrative, calling into question her “capacity to wander” and to engage in transfiguring travel (Yelin 44).

Through Teresa's unsuccessful attempt to court Jonathan, Stead provides further evidence that women cannot simply disavow their gender in order to adopt a masculine questing role. In her amorous pursuit of Jonathan, Teresa imagines herself in the role of a knight-errant, striving to "win" his love (250). Yet the incongruity of her position has already been signalled in the novel's opening scene. Responding to her father's cruel mockery of her appearance, Teresa declares, "You offend my honour! I would kill anyone who offends my honour". Her outburst only prompts derisive laughter from her father, who informs her, condescendingly, "A woman's honour means something else from what you imagine" (13). Teresa's early relationship with Jonathan bears this out. Jonathan is flattered by her attentions, but at the same time, acutely conscious that her aggressive pursuit of him puts her beyond the pale of acceptable feminine behaviour. Ironically, Jonathan's ambivalent response to her affection only encourages Teresa to continue in her imagined courtship: she sees herself as a "gallant and a brace man... pass[ing] through the ordeals of hope deferred... and painful longing, to win a wife" (250). What follows is, as Brydon puts it, a "comedy of misunderstanding" (83) in which Teresa idealises Jonathan as a "cruel mistress", while he increasingly views her pursuit of him as proof of her desperation, her kinship with the "miserable mass" of unmarriageable women, "writhing with desire and shame, grovelling before men" (18; Yelin 44). The role of the knight-errant serves as a sustaining fantasy for Teresa, in so far as it provides a symbolic schema for her struggle to save money for her fare to London. Yet it fails in its more immediate objective, serving to alienate Jonathan rather than to "win" him. In this respect, as Louise Yelin notes, Teresa's fantasies do not "resolve the question of what kind of power women might have" in a society permeated by misogyny (44).

While Jonathan vividly personifies this misogyny, he also acts as a symbolic double to Teresa, sharing her idealism and her desire for escape. With his thin face, inadequate clothing and "rain-bitten hat" (125-26) Jonathan physically resembles Teresa, who becomes increasingly thin and unkempt in the course of her quest. Like Teresa, Jonathan walks everywhere and "carrie[s] his lunch, never having... money for lunch out" (124). He and Teresa compare their sturdy walking shoes and are both proud that they are "hardy enough to do without an overcoat... that they need not use trams... that they [eat] little..." (188). In one of their earliest exchanges, Jonathan underlines their similarity, referring to "people like us... homeless" (230). He seems to share Teresa's restless spirit, urgently wishing he could sail "right away" and escape the squalid, miserable life he knows in

Sydney (230). As Geering notes, by emerging from working class origins to acquire a university education and a travelling scholarship, Jonathan has achieved a feat no less impressive than Teresa's. For Geering, Jonathan has "some reason to be proud of his achievement and if only for this has some claims on the reader's sympathy" (*Stead* 115). But Stead invites sympathy for Jonathan for others reasons, too. Unlike most of the "dulled" and demoralised tutors at the night college in Sydney, Jonathan encourages Teresa to study, "believ[ing] that she would accomplish some little thing, just as he himself had done" (123). He defends Teresa when other women mock her, observing pungently that "what they laugh[h] at in her... [i]s poverty and the lack of property or status" (229). This sensitive, idealistic side of Jonathan's character continues to reveal itself, fitfully, in the "rather naive and loquacious letters" he writes to Teresa from London. In his letters, Teresa reads of "the secret life of man... which is the greater part of man's life; his true sorrows, sufferings, his hidden loves and his loves' crimes... that complete ideal life which everyone dreams of alike in his vices and virtues... love, learning, fervour, and the flush of success" (314). In these fleeting revelations of his "ideal life", Jonathan emerges as Teresa's alter-ego, a person of great intellectual energy and an idealistic, romantic temperament.

Yet unlike Teresa, Jonathan does not appear to develop positively over the course of the novel, instead degenerating into increasing bitterness and cynicism. Stead links his seemingly inexorable decline to the acute poverty of his childhood, which has "ruined" his character, just as slum life ruined the "Mad Boy" George Wadling in Teresa's school. Jonathan's visceral "fear of not eating" has imbued him with such a profound "suspicion of everything" (200) that he allows himself "no daydreams" (198). Without money to spend, he gazes "dully at the customary sights; fruiterers' and pastrycooks' windows that he had pasted his nose against, stationers' windows full of exercise books... the bootshop of thrown-out specials... the class mark of the very poor child and man" (198). Unlike the bourgeois *flâneur*, Jonathan can only perceive these spectacles as reminders of his own physical hunger, and the stigma he bears as a man without money. Similarly, he is unable to perceive his journey to London in terms of a transfiguring quest: having "given his whole life to the prospect of success and safety," he can only view his journey to England in starkly economic terms, as a chance to attain a "a little more money" by means of a higher degree and "[a] pedagogue's career" (122). Stead hints that Jonathan's cynicism is well founded, through her brief sketch of the self-styled cosmopolitan,

Stephen Rasche. Belonging to “one of the reigning families of Sydney society,” Rasche has studied law and “begun to make a name for himself as a barrister,” but has recently “married a wealthy woman and given up the bar for the quill.” Now a journalist, he “hold[s] court” in “a place he ke[eps] downtown,” a kind of salon for discussions of “Chiang Kai-shek and Soviet Russia” (170). Facilitated by his wealth and family connections, Rasche’s dilatory travels offer a stark contrast to the pragmatic “grind” that takes Jonathan to London (128). He taunts Jonathan for his reliance on scholarships, declaring that “a man gets out of Europe what he takes to it... Mr Nix-nought-nothing, will you take our money?” (172). In his snobbish hostility to the scholarship student, Rasche reinforces Jonathan’s view of himself: permanently stunted by his impoverished childhood, and now no more than “a poor man who had made up his packet and... trudg[es] off to sell himself” (198).

Through Jonathan, Stead offers a kind of anti-*Bildungsroman* that bears out the essentially economic nature of the quest upon which both he and Teresa are embarked. In a sense, Rasche’s words are prescient: Jonathan does not appear to prosper in England but instead becomes more “[i]ntellectually and emotionally perverted” (Geering, *Stead* 116). When Teresa first meets Jonathan in London, she perceives him as “handsome, sardonic, and well-dressed” (314). He speaks more “firm[ly]” and “smile[s] more, and as if to himself, wisely, like a man quite at home in the world.” Yet this worldly self-assurance is a veneer. Jonathan recalls how, when he first arrived, he was “depressed to find everyone so far behind the times, girls drab, dowdy and frightened, shops dingy and Dickensian, opinions backward and smug” (293). He tells Teresa she has “no idea... of the degradation of morals... in London” (313). Privately, he reflects with horror on “the dull, vicious life a lost man like himself led in London” (322) and considers returning to Australia to “[b]ecome sun-burned, easy-going,” escaping this “visit to limbo” (322). In a cruel irony, the class distinctions that Jonathan left behind him in Sydney are even more insurmountable in England, where he finds himself even more firmly excluded from the elite cosmopolitan milieu of Rasche and his kind. He tells Teresa that, as a poor man, he is shunned by the fashionable young women of the city, who want “someone with a yacht from Princeton or Harvard” (318). Moreover, as “a blanky colonial” (433), he stands little chance of obtaining a good academic job.

By staging an encounter between Jonathan and Teresa’s lover, James Quick, Stead lends some support to Jonathan’s pessimistic view of his prospects in London. Jonathan

secures an appointment with James, “hop[ing] to charm and interest this influential man” (441) and thus secure a lucrative job. Yet the wealthy, sophisticated James takes an immediate dislike to Jonathan’s “swarthy, oak-complexioned face” (429) and his speech “like a hungry animal at its food” (433). The most obvious explanation for this is jealousy, since James is, by this time, in love with Teresa and aware of her previous infatuation with Jonathan. Yet Stead suggests that James’ antipathy for Jonathan is also a reflection of his class privilege. Inwardly comparing Jonathan to a “private dick” or “cheap lawyer” (429, 433), James reflects spitefully that Jonathan is “an ambitious small-town man” (431), the type who “climbs slowly but successfully... behind the backs of other men to be head of his department” (430). After questioning Jonathan at length about Teresa, he pronounces sententiously: “You’re a poor man, and women frighten you because they’re an expense. If you were a rich man, you’d have a different set of clichés about women” (440). James feels nothing but contempt for Jonathan’s sexual liaisons with working class women, privately deriding him for “lifting the unwashed skirts of miserable servants who cannot refuse” (451). Yet in adopting this moralistic tone, James reveals more than a little hypocrisy: just as the “gentleman[ly]” Peter Walsh never questions his entitlement to pursue young women through the streets of London, James does not hesitate to embark on a sexual relationship with his own employee, Teresa.

In a further contrast between Jonathan and James, Stead emphasises Jonathan’s irregular, halting manner of walking, while casting James in the role of an urbane and sophisticated *flâneur*. James notes that Jonathan has a “syncopated rolling walk... the business stroll of the second-rate spottable spy” (429). Here, and elsewhere, Stead obliquely hints that Jonathan walks with a limp, a possible legacy of his neglected childhood in the slums. By contrast, as his surname suggests, James epitomises graceful mobility. Like Terence Hewet in *The Voyage Out*, and Peter Walsh in *Mrs Dalloway*, he enjoys walking through London, admiring the spectacle of city life without concern for his destination. In contrast to Teresa, who walks purposefully and always takes the shortest route, he wanders aimlessly, “circling... floating down streets” and “sometimes... taking a taxi” when he tires of the game (387). Unlike both Teresa and Jonathan, whose walks are characterised by a perpetual state of hunger, James breaks his itinerary with frequent stops in tea rooms and restaurants, where he dispenses large tips to his preferred waiters and waitresses. He wanders through the “distressed district of Caledonian Road” and the Islington slums, surveying the “soot-blackened” houses, “out of which... human

beings issue in haste to take up their miserable day – why, and with what hope, why to return... we know but do not repeat for fear our hearts would break” (387-88). Despite his sympathy for the slum-dwellers, Quick takes a detached, almost anthropological interest in their misery. His reflections recall Terence’s airy claim to have “often walked along the streets where people live all in a row... and wondered what on earth the women were doing inside” (VO 225). James reenacts Peter’s pursuit of the unknown girl when he follows Teresa through the streets at night. Not recognising James, Teresa walks ahead of him “with the demeanour of a person deeply agitated,” before turning “fiercely” to confront him (FLA 396). Yet James does not regard his pursuit as predatory or express any regret for the fear he inspires in Teresa. Instead, he regards his interest in Teresa in highly abstract, intellectualised terms, as nothing more than “ordinary restlessness and the feeling which can be called pity or sorrow for the world, which is the feeling of any kind man with a formed philosophical viewpoint” (396).

Teresa’s romantic involvement with James constitutes a feat of social ascension, fulfilling her ambition to escape from “hungry obscurity”, even as it paradoxically relegates her to the role of a traditional, economically dependent woman. While Stead emphasises the genuine tenderness between Teresa and James, she also points out that the relationship casts Teresa in the ambiguous role of a “backstreet wife”. After Teresa begins to cohabit with James, she appears to relinquish her job in his office, remaining at home to entertain friends while he is at work. In a strikingly acquisitive image, Stead describes Teresa in the early days of her “marriage” to Quick as being “like an unexpected heir of estates in distant lands”, eager to “find out what she ha[s] come into” (460). Teresa also marks her rise in social status through her changing patterns of mobility. Unlike her previous, exhausting pedestrian journeys through Sydney streets, Teresa now travels by train, equipped with a hamper, numerous parcels and a surfeit of coins and notes, all furnished by James (480). Though Teresa professes disdain for James’ money, protesting that he gives her “too much... always” (486), it is his money that enables her to take a short train trip to Oxford, the locus of her adolescent fantasies, in the comfort and ease of a first class carriage.

Through James, Teresa gains access to a new milieu, one that seems to epitomise the leisurely, genteel intellectual radicalism of Stephen Rasche in the first half of the novel, or the Folliots in *Seven Poor Men*. In James’s flat in Fleet Street, she reads Proust, “the fad of all up-to-date metropolitans of whatever profession” (459), and participates in

literary discussions with the “[m]any... libertine, picaresque, amiable, floating men” (465) who come to visit. Expatriates of many countries, and often employed in journalism, these men recall the “down-at-heel Australian international” (*SPM* 237) described by Lancyman in *Seven Poor Men*. Their circle includes a young “fleshy” German, “mysteriously wealthy and mysteriously travelled,” who exhibits a “false bonhomie” and has vague links to the fascist Franco (*FLA* 465). An equally ambiguous figure is Harry Girton, the blond haired, blue eyed Marxist pamphleteer with whom Teresa falls in love. Despite the group’s apparent cosmopolitanism, Stead is quick to ironise its “jealous... pack instinct” (472) and “taking egotisms... common to all adventurous men” (465). Like Rasche’s “salons”, Stead implicitly casts these Fleet Street gatherings as decadent theatres for posturing and self-indulgence, rather than genuine intellectual exchange.

Teresa’s affair with Harry Girton confirms her initiation into this bohemian clique, while also introducing a curious note of staleness into the narrative. Teresa imagines Harry as the embodiment of her youthful fantasies. “[I]t was sweet Harry,” she reflects, “who would sleep in the olive plantation, have the salt foam, the winds of the far Cyclades, on his lips, see the tents of Arab and Kurd, be in China perhaps when the next floods came, Harry who like the foot of her wandering soul would print his foot on the world” (492). Critics such as Brydon and Sheridan read the affair between Harry and Teresa positively, as a sign of Teresa’s sexual and psychological liberation.⁵² Yet others note the “contrived or false” tone of their love scene (Rooney 62), which is totally devoid of eroticism and takes place in the distinctly “tawdry” surroundings of a cheap hotel (Rowley, *Biography* 205). In contrast to the vivid erotic fantasies of Teresa’s youth, this encounter is strangely bowdlerised. While each “str[i]ve[s] to please” the other, the scene quickly shifts to the morning, with Teresa packing her bag for the return to London. The liaison is not merely dull, but faintly distasteful. Described as having “pale yellowish flesh” (471), Harry is not obviously attractive. Indeed, he is uncannily like Teresa, causing them to be mistaken for brother and sister. The spectacle of the “two fair people looking at each other” (482) has a solipsistic quality, reminiscent of Michael’s obsession with Catherine in *Seven Poor Men*. It is as if, in Harry, Teresa has found an equivalent to Michael’s narcissistic and ultimately maddening “hall of mirrors”, casting “a thousand

⁵² Diana Brydon, for example, writes that from the affair Teresa “brings back a greater love to Quick and a new utopian vision of the potential of all humanity to continue striving toward the good” (87). Susan Sheridan reads the encounter as the novel’s “visionary climax” (*Stead* 68).

reflections of himself on every side, each one a shell of himself, and insubstantial” (*SPM* 17).

Through her portrayal of the vain and selfish Harry, Stead offers an oblique criticism of Teresa’s own increasingly ruthless egotism. He intends to abandon his wife, Manette, in order to fight in Spain, but one acquaintance bitterly predicts that when he gets to Spain he will do nothing but “sit in an hotel in Madrid” with all the other “arm-chair Marxists” (465, 475). Manette is also deeply cynical regarding Harry’s heroic ideals and ambitions: “it’s to fly away from me that he’s going first to fight for Spain and then to Tanganyika, if he can, and after that to the ends of the earth,” she tells James. “The Kipling ideal, and all to avoid a woman of fifty” (484). Harry embarks on the journey to Oxford with Teresa despite the pleas and protests of Manette, who loves him “hopelessly” (482). Stead stresses the pain that the affair between Teresa and Harry causes, both to Manette and to James. As the train departs, Manette is in “despair” (482) and although James feigns indifference, he runs after the train, returning to Manette with “tears on his face” and “tremulousness” in his voice (483). Leaving the station, he realises that he cannot face “the dark flat” and “the silent week-end” without Teresa (485), and when Teresa returns to London she finds him weeping, with his “face convulsed” (494). In this respect, both Manette and James stand as representatives of the many others Teresa has left behind in the course of her quest, notably her sister, Kitty, and her cousins, Anne and Ellen, all young women similarly constrained and tormented by the misogynistic culture in which they live. Through the affair with Harry, Stead emphasises the selfishness and egotism that underpins Teresa’s apparently triumphant quest, suggesting that her journey has, like Jonathan’s, resulted in a kind of degeneration rather than maturation or growth.

Through faint but undeniable allusions to Woolf, Stead identifies Harry as a representative of decadent, elitist Bloomsbury modernism and its dilettantish form of left wing politics. By naming Harry after Girton College, Stead invokes the venue for the series of lectures that ultimately became Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. Stead reinforces this intertextual reference by locating Teresa’s tryst with Harry in Oxford, the basis for the fictional “Oxbridge” of Woolf’s essay. For Sheridan, Harry’s name illustrates the positive, educative function of this affair, which figures ironically as Teresa’s belated “college education” (Sheridan, *Stead* 79; Yelin 50). In a more pessimistic vein, Yelin reads these veiled references to Woolf as offering an implicit rebuke to Harry’s left wing utopianism, “suggest[ing] the exigent, if unacknowledged, pressure of gender... on the

class politics that the novel ostensibly espouses” (50). Yet read in the context of *Seven Poor Men*, with its more explicit satire of left-wing intellectuals, these references to Woolf assume an entirely different meaning. By staging the affair in Oxford, Stead casts Harry as a representative of the elite, bohemian Bloomsbury modernism epitomised by Woolf. In bedding Harry, Teresa confirms her status as a member of this ostensibly progressive, cosmopolitan milieu, while also identifying herself with a feminist text that Stead “intensely disliked” (Yelin 50) for its perceived bourgeois elitism. This parallel between Teresa and Bloomsbury recurs in the following scene, which portrays Teresa after her return to London. Here, a fashionably dressed Teresa sips wine as she looks down from the window of her flat into the London street, where she sees an “old beggar-man to whom the printers threw scraps” (498). Though Teresa usually gives him change, on this evening she has forgotten. As Yelin notes, the affair with Harry constitutes an “ironic inversion of the quest plot,” making it impossible to read *For Love Alone* as a simple account of Teresa’s “self-realization” (50). Yet if Stead’s allusions to Woolf might, in some respects, affirm Teresa’s continuing entrapment in “patriarchal constructions of heterosexual love,” as Yelin suggests (50), they also emphasise her bourgeois aspirations, casting her quest as little more than the pursuit of higher class status.

For Love Alone thus adopts the trope of the voyage as a symbol of maturation in a profoundly ambivalent and ironic fashion. While Teresa views her journey in the most rarefied aesthetic, erotic and spiritual terms, Stead continually stresses its economic dimension, casting it as a process of self-advancement in a strictly material sense. Through the mirroring of Teresa and Jonathan, Stead emphasises the role of money in facilitating transformative travel. In the most obvious sense, Jonathan’s scholarship throws into sharp relief the poverty and tribulations Teresa must endure in order to save for her fare. In a more oblique sense, however, Jonathan’s cynicism and gradual decline into “vicious[ness]” illustrates the role that money places in fashioning the consciousness of the idealistic, questing traveller. For Stead, both Jonathan’s misogyny and his cynical attitude to his academic career are products of his poverty, and are made worse as he gradually realises the path to success is closed to him. This cynicism is to some extent borne out by Teresa’s trajectory. Her transfiguration is arguably the result of her coming into unearned wealth through her liaison with James, and in this sense, constitutes a purely “private solution” that poses no challenge to the “communal problem[s]” of gender or

class inequality (Brydon 84). Thus while many critics read *For Love Alone* as a celebratory feminist *Bildungsroman*, the novel also invites interpretation as a critique of transnational bourgeois mobility, in a way that builds on the depiction of Baruch and the Folliots in *Seven Poor Men*. Through her portrayal of Teresa, Stead suggests that the mobile bourgeois woman attains agency through her complicity with an exploitative and unjust class system, and that for this reason, her mobility has no transformative potential, other than in purely individual, crassly material terms.

***Letty Fox: Her Luck* (1946)**

Stead dramatically repudiates the questing metaphor in her satiric novel, *Letty Fox: Her Luck*. A young, precocious New York girl of the 1940s, Letty is a privileged child of the bourgeoisie. Like Catherine Baguenault, Letty rebels against the strictures of bourgeois domesticity, plunging into the city streets in order to escape the confinement of the family home and to exorcise her pique, frustration and misery. Like Catherine, she is in a state of continual movement, but rather than frequenting political meetings and homeless shelters, she inhabits a fashionable, decadent milieu in the bars, hotels and restaurants of Manhattan. Letty regards herself as a representative of her class and culture, “an ordinary girl” (537). Her frenetic mobility goes unremarked in a city in which girls are “[i]n taxis with men – all the time” (288). Revelling in the permissive atmosphere of wartime New York, she engages in a series of romantic relationships and frankly proclaims her capacity to be “a good mistress” (3). Yet Letty’s sexual activity places her in a profoundly ambiguous and vulnerable social position, in a society that continues to uphold an implicit sexual double standard. For women of Letty’s generation, marriage still represents the surest path to social and economic security, while single women remain vulnerable to financial hardship, social isolation and varying degrees of sexual violence. In this sense, invoking the gendered term “streetwalker”, Letty’s urban mobility serves to illustrate the persistent sexism that both hinders her movement and impedes her social and psychological maturation. At the same time, the novel ironically reverses the quest narrative Stead previously adopted in *For Love Alone*, suggesting that domesticity, marriage and motherhood remain the most rational goals for the savvy modern *flâneuse*.⁵³

⁵³ For a discussion of the continuities between *For Love Alone* and *Letty Fox*, and the autobiographical aspects of the latter novel, see Segerberg.

Like Teresa Hawkins' quest, Letty's constant movement through the city symbolises her pursuit of love. In her more bombastic moments, Letty frames her romantic career as a formative "Grand Tour" (8). She is aggressive in pursuing her love interests and her movement through the streets often assumes the character of a sexual conquest. Once, thinking she recognises her latest paramour, she "r[uns] after him... shout[ing]" his name (476). Yet in contrast to the patrician connotations of the "Grand Tour", her father Solander unkindly describes her as a "tourist to men" (12). He suggests that, for a woman, a rapid succession of lovers is not an accomplishment, but rather, a sign of marginality and failure.⁵⁴ In this sense, like Teresa's father in *For Love Alone*, Solander seeks to school Letty in a passive, feminine form of sexuality. Letty's compulsive movement reflects the precariousness of her situation, as a sexually adventurous woman in a society that still places a premium on female chastity. She frequently walks the streets when she is "feeling bad" over her latest failed love affair (1) or her unfulfilled sexual desires. Feeling an "attack of adult passion" in her "tortured body", she bursts out of her mother's apartment and into the street, afraid to look at any passing man, lest she "throw [her]self upon his welcoming breast" (438). Rather than displaying the *flâneur*'s detached interest in the spectacles of city life, Letty's impulsive wandering through the streets often bespeaks loneliness and a desperate desire to escape from the "empty room" in which she sits wondering if "anyone in this world care[s] for" her (485).

In her dual obsession with sex and money, Letty's movement through New York can be read as a satire of Woolf's genteel narratives of female *flânerie*. Like Elizabeth Dalloway, Letty seems utterly oblivious to signs of deprivation or poverty in the city streets. She never describes homeless or destitute people, or slums, only declaring that she "never could stand anything poor, wretched and ugly. If I am a socialist, it is just because of that" (267). In this respect, Letty closely resembles Elizabeth, in her rash determination to "go into Parliament... all because of the Strand" (*MD* 150). Yet in other respects, Letty and Elizabeth are starkly contrasting figures. Elizabeth is blithely indifferent to the cost of her journey through London. "Another penny was it to the Strand?" she reflects nonchalantly. "Here was another penny, then" (*MD* 149). By contrast, Letty counts her rapidly diminishing funds anxiously. In the course of a visit to

⁵⁴ As Anne Pender points out, Letty is "really no fox"; lacking "cunning, she cannot 'snare' a man for 'keeps'" (70).

her father, she takes a taxi “downtown” and then another “back uptown”, thus “ma[king] a small hole in the thirty dollars” she has managed to extract from him (*LF* 10). At one point, Letty seems to echo the narrator of *A Room of One’s Own*, declaring airily that “there is nothing of which a ten dollar bill cannot cure you” (*LF* 324). Yet whereas, in *Room*, the narrator’s ten shilling notes “breed... automatically” (*Room* 37), Letty’s bills must be painfully acquired, either by her own labours or by “gold-dig[ging]” (*LF* 323). Stead makes her most explicit allusion to *Room* in the opening pages of the novel, in which Letty proclaims that “a room of [her] own [i]s what [she] principally lack[s]” (*LF* 2; Brydon 92). Yet the allusion is palpably ironic. The room for which Letty hankers so ardently would not afford her the conditions in which to write, but more importantly, the chance to entertain male friends in privacy.

Like Catherine in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, Letty is a radical, an attribute frequently represented through imagery of mobility. She declares passionately that “active people in youth should be ashamed if they do not try to change the world” (219) and adopts Marx’s concept of “struggle” as the guiding principle for her life (369). Yet Letty’s identification with “good old K. M” (390) is much more tenuous and ambivalent than Catherine’s. Her father denounces her as “a lousy pseudo-intellectual red... riding perpetually after the hounds of culture” (390). She herself frankly admits, “I don’t want to be a real worker. Why do we have to struggle? Things ought to be made easy for us...” (*LF* 548; Sheridan, *Stead* 87). To some extent, Stead satirises Letty as a “[m]iddle-class radical[l]” (26), like Marion Folliot in *Seven Poor Men* and Harry Girton in *For Love Alone*. Yet unlike these self-styled radicals, Letty is acutely aware of her limitations as a socialist and is capable of viewing her political position ironically. She acknowledges that her struggle is more “Darwinian” than Marxist: her affinity lies not with the working class but rather with “the plant in her window-box”, battling to survive in an insalubrious and inhospitable environment (*LF* 369; Sheridan, *Stead* 87). Whereas Catherine’s activism is uncompromising and absolute, Letty’s is continually checked by her overwhelming need to impress the male “political faction-chiefs”, who dislike being “beat[en]... on their own ground.” When she perceives that she has alienated these “faction-chiefs” with her sharp wits, Letty feels “desperately” that she has “lost them” and in their next encounter says “amen all they ha[ve] to say” (384).

Like *Seven Poor Men* and *For Love Alone*, *Letty Fox* illustrates the gendered social norms that impede Letty’s agency. Stead fills her narrative with subtle references to

sexual assault, showing how the city remains a predominantly masculine sphere in which women are physically vulnerable. Letty's widowed cousin, Lily Spontini, finds herself living alone and fending off frequent unwelcome attentions from men. "...[T]he men follow you," she tells Letty. "They want to know, 'Where do you live? Do you live alone? Haven't you got any family? Can I come and pay you a visit?'" (252). Letty's sister, Jacky, also frequently complains of being followed and wolf-whistled, and consequently "hate[s] to walk alone along the streets" (394). Letty seems indifferent to these potential threats. As she wanders, "lost", through the "dark street[s]" of Chelsea, and then through the "coal-damp and gashouse districts near the East River", men attempt to accost her but she continues on, unperturbed (504). But even Letty begins to feel apprehensive as the war draws to its end, and the city begins to fill up with returned soldiers, "small-town boys or country lads who thought we owed them everything..." (610). "I had always gone around town freely", she observes, "but now, a lot of town became impossible." When she and a female friend meet for a drink they are forced to rebuff the attentions of two "flying dinosaurs in soldier-suits." When Letty tells them they are "making a mistake", one demands, "Then what are you here for?" He proceeds to insult both women loudly and profusely, going on to announce that he "had a perfectly good wife at home that he could get at when he pleased; she never said no; and she didn't sit in bars, but waited for him..." (*LF* 610; Brydon 96-97; Pender 71-72).

In marked contrast to Teresa's sublimation of sexual desire into romantic idealism, Letty frames her romantic and sexual frustrations in overwhelmingly economic terms. She frankly yearns for money "for clothes... parties and presents...corsages and taxi rides" (301) and believes that if she "had the money [she] would attract a husband in a short time", since "[y]oung men count up", and most prefer "a woman with cash" (9). She appears envious of women in a lower social class than her own, who are able to earn their own living: she notes that "wages [a]re so high" that "working girls [go] on world tours or to the Bahamas or Paris" (262) and "stenographers... really everyone" goes abroad (150). Though her "ugly, clever" friend Isabel forges a successful career as a doctor (610), Letty is convinced that "only pretty women ha[ve] any careers" (212). Her own work experience quickly convinces her that her best assets on the job market are her "physical charm", her "social manners" and her capacity to "make a good mistress" (3). In this unpromising context, Letty prefers to rely upon her family for financial support, but here, too, she is constantly frustrated by a sexual double standard. She is convinced

that her father Solander intends to withhold her inheritance until her “vagaries in love” are resolved and determines that she “must marry in order to get [her] own property...” (9). When her father denounces her as a “gold-digger”, Letty replies tartly that since he won’t give her any “pocket money”, she “ha[s] to gold-dig” (323).

Despite Letty’s continual motion through the city, *Letty Fox* casts mobility as the prerogative of men. Both as fathers and as lovers, the men of the novel repeatedly outrun and outmanoeuvre the various women who depend upon them. This is most apparent in the relationship between Solander, his abandoned wife Mathilde and his mistress, the exotically named Persia. Persia’s name intimates that it is Solander rather than Letty who is the real sexual “tourist”, moving freely between women by virtue of his superior economic and social power. It is this affair that prompts Letty’s own international travel. At the instigation of the family matriarch, Cissie Morgan, Mathilde takes the children to Paris in pursuit of Solander. Urging Mathilde to exert her conjugal rights, Cissie demands, “Why do you think laws were made? Otherwise our fine feathered friends would be running out on us all the time” (139). Yet when the family arrives in Paris, Solander refuses to leave Persia, merely “install[ing]” his wife and children in a separate apartment. “[I]t is easy to send money to transport people back and forth”, Mathilde reproaches him, “but the fact is you are just following your whims” (178). As an adult, Letty finds herself equally outwitted and eluded by highly mobile men. Her first fiancé, Clays, abandons her to work in Spain as a “special correspondent” (352). On departing, he tells her, “I had visions of you... following me... all round Spain, while I, obedient to the whims of Mars...left you far behind” (358). Another suitor, Cornelis, is a fledgling diplomat who has to “go and come on various missions, and sometimes [goes] as far away as the West Indies” (625). Letty is perpetually awaiting the return of these or other lovers, “gibbering with misery over men who were not there” (545), underscoring her similarity to the hapless Mathilde. Her sister, Jacky, is also abandoned by her lover, Simon Gondych, who travels to England and “ma[kes] frequent trips out of town, or to the Continent, and [can]not reveal his address” (605).

In her “Darwinian” struggle for survival, marriage offers Letty the most straightforward means of attaining her own home, a measure of financial security and a place in “organized society” (3). Letty describes her mother, Mathilde, as having “walk[ed] barefoot... in a bustling world” until marriage rendered her “motionless” (37). Even Solander’s mistress, Persia, appears immured within the walls of her apartment in

a deeply conventional feminine role. Her refrigerator is stocked with home-cooked food and her only excursions are to go “marketing” like any other housewife (439). In contrast to her increasing sense of loneliness and fatigue, Letty comes to view the married state as a form of stasis that is at once confining and protective. After her parents’ separation, she drifts between the homes of her father and mother and a series of rented rooms, confiding to one of her lovers, “We’re guests, girls of my age, we have no homes.” (445) Approaching her eighteenth birthday, Letty begins “to feel weary of the wandering life” (448). In this way, the novel casts a static, domestic life as the inevitable destiny of even the most spirited and exceptional heroine. In setting her sights resolutely on marriage, Letty explicitly rejects the solution posited by her sister, Jacky, who hopes to travel to Europe in pursuit of a man, much like Teresa in *For Love Alone*. Letty surmises that her sister has been “led by her library years to imagine that in Europe things would be different – chastity, beauty, romance, idealism, self-sacrifice, might have some spiritual value there” (624). But to Letty’s jaded eyes, such a prospect seems remote: to her, the whole world appears “rough and self-centred” (624).

In this respect, *Letty Fox* can be read as a satire of the idealistic quest narrative, typified by Rachel Vinrace’s journey to South America in *The Voyage Out*. Stead appears to invite this comparison through her repeated employment of voyaging or questing imagery. In her more confident moods, Letty imagines herself as a steamer departing on her “grand trip”, leaving her old love affairs like “lost paper streamers” trailing behind her (*LF* 561). Letty imagines herself, without apparent irony, as a “good freighter made to carry bread and bibles around the world” (*LF* 513; Sheridan, *Stead* 96). Yet as love and marriage continue to elude her, this imagery becomes more ambivalent and melancholic. Letty feels that she is drifting, “rudderless” (610), buffeted by currents and threatened by marauding “pirates” (497). In a moment of despondency, she muses that “the woman looking for love is like a little boat meeting waterspout after waterspout... tired of steering, rowing, looking for land, hanging up old shirts for sails and the rest of it” (497). Like Woolf’s description of the *Euphrosyne*, Stead’s figurative ship appears strikingly mutable and amorphous, as if calling attention to Letty’s anomalous, inscrutable status as a female questing subject. For Sheridan, the variable nature of this nautical imagery highlights the “contradictions” of Letty’s position as a woman who wishes to be “free”, but who can only do so by offering “free love as invented by men” (Sheridan 96). Yet it also has a comic, even bathetic quality. In particular, the image of

Letty “hanging up old shirts for sails” (497) evokes Teresa’s vision of her own journey as a “rigmarole of [a] buffoon Odyssey” in *For Love Alone*. Like the ironic allusion to Homer’s *Odyssey* in *For Love Alone*, this exaggerated nautical imagery highlights Letty’s status as a satiric figure, rather than a questing, visionary heroine.

Letty’s eventual marriage reinforces the fundamentally pragmatic and economic nature of her quest. As she contemplates her situation, she makes a detailed inventory of her future husband’s attributes, noting his “excellent good looks”, his “delightful build... fine muscles...long, arching hands and feet [and] pleasant blue eyes, perhaps at times a little empty” (657). Letty appraises herself in similarly material terms in the final passage of the novel, by which time she is married and pregnant. In triumphant tones, she declares, “I have a freight, I cast off, my journey has begun” (662). Like the earlier allusion to “bread and bibles”, Letty’s description of her unborn child as “freight” casts her marriage and impending motherhood as commercial transactions. Indeed Letty accepts her own status as a commodity, proclaiming that there is no “scandal” in it. “In other times”, she observes, “society regarded us as cattle or handsome house-slaves; the ability to sell ourselves in any way we like is a step toward freedom” (4; Sheridan, *Stead* 97). In this respect, the novel’s imagery of voyaging links Letty’s marriage, in symbolic terms, to the circulation of goods in an increasingly globalised network of trade and commerce. In so doing, it suggests that Letty’s figurative quest is not only circumscribed by gendered expectations of women’s domestic, static role. Instead, her apparent failure to achieve genuine autonomy reflects her conditioning by a crassly materialistic culture in which even the most intimate human relationships are commoditised.⁵⁵

In this context, marriage appears to constitute no point of culmination, as it does for Teresa in *For Love Alone*, but rather, a retreat from the freedom and possibilities briefly hinted at in the novel’s more confident imagery of mobility. In adolescence, Letty expresses her supreme self-confidence through metaphors of untrammelled mobility: she believes she can “knock the world down... just by strutting in upon it” (27). Yet by the novel’s conclusion, she is retreating gratefully to the “safe harbor” of matrimony (406), just as her mother, Mathilde, sought sanctuary in the “dark tent” of Solander’s love (37). When an acquaintance warns her that she will “end badly, just a slut, a rolling stone” (578), Letty confesses that she’s “tired with knocking round the world”, having “pounded

⁵⁵ In this sense, it recalls Willoughby Vinrace’s observation in *The Voyage Out* that Rachel’s bourgeois leisure is facilitated by trade: “Without goats, there would be no music” (VO).

the sidewalks for jobs and hurt [her] shins against every obstacle” (587). In this sense, the novel’s conclusion contains a solemn, even melancholy note, despite Letty’s buoyant tone. Letty looks forward to the birth of her baby, reflecting that she was always “looking for something – union with something; an ideal, a lover ... and this, I believe, is it” (658). Yet this imagery jars with her earlier evocation of pregnancy as a burden, a deadening weight, and a harbinger of death: “that cooling cold stone of a child, which stands in the hot belly and makes a woman heavy and tired, forgetting all her cruel fervours, that thing that drags her to the doors of the death house...” (438).⁵⁶ In this respect, Letty’s marriage constitutes a striking repudiation of the quest narrative as a viable model for female development. More emphatically than *For Love Alone*, the conclusion of *Letty Fox* attests to the enduring obstacles that impede the transfiguring journeys of the even the most precocious modern *flâneuse*.⁵⁷

***The Little Hotel* (1973)**

This bleak, macabre tone re-emerges in Stead’s late novel, *The Little Hotel*, a portrait of the leisured inhabitants of a Swiss hotel in the early 1950s. The hotel’s torpid and sepulchral atmosphere encapsulates the deep pessimism and paranoia of Europe in the early years of the Cold War (Brydon 138). Stead sharply satirises the idle, selfish guests of the hotel, contrasting their privilege with the difficult lives of the hotel staff, an assortment of migrants forced to work abroad in order to survive. Judith Kegan Gardiner relates the novel to Stead’s “long, humiliating years” as a “hotel-dwelling exile” in Europe (Gardiner, “Stead,” 22), when she and her husband, Bill Blake, were forced to leave America in order to evade the McCarthyist “terror” that threatened to engulf them (Rowley, *Biography* 294). Similarly, Rowley reads the novel as marking a distinct shift in Stead’s oeuvre, a decisive abandonment of “the unattached, free and easy wanderer” as an idealised, heroic figure (Rowley, *Biography* 337). Sheridan also detects in *The Little Hotel* a “harsher, more satirical” tone than is apparent in Stead’s earlier work

⁵⁶ In this respect, as Sheridan notes, the novel’s conclusion refuses any straightforward interpretation: it is left to the individual reader to judge whether Letty is a fool, a hypocrite, or merely a “shrewd player” of the game into which she has been born (Sheridan, *Stead* 98).

⁵⁷ Discussing the writing of *Letty Fox*, Anne Pender writes that “Stead was intensely interested in the lives of the next generation of women and whether or not their enhanced sexual freedom had made any difference. What she found was disappointing, for most of the young women were still ‘just as hell bent’ on securing a husband, and pleasing men in general” (Pender 67).

("Modernism," 213). This new harshness is apparent in Stead's treatment of women, who are accorded far less sympathy than in *Seven Poor Men*, *For Love Alone* or *Letty Fox*. Whereas each of the earlier novels draws sharp distinctions between the mobility of its female characters and those of men, this novel presents the wealthy female denizens of the Hotel Swiss-Touring as entirely complicit in the brutal exploitation of the workers who facilitate their leisured lives. Yet despite its more acerbic and pessimistic tone, *The Little Hotel* embraces a theme that is present in *Seven Poor Men* and becomes more prominent over the course of Stead's writing life, that of the narcissistic, selfish and excessively individualistic mobile figure. In its depiction of the hotel guests, most of whom personify an amoral state of extreme selfishness, *The Little Hotel* represents the culmination of a critical discourse that runs through Stead's fiction.

The Little Hotel is narrated for the most part by the owner of the Hotel Swiss-Touring, Selda Bonnard, who views the self-indulgent, hysterical and often violent behaviour of the people around her with bemused detachment. While she is an astute observer of her guests and employees (Brydon 142), she is remarkably indifferent to their follies and vices. When her eccentric guest, the Mayor of B., barricades himself in the bathroom stark naked, she only observes that "he was... a good-looking man in all ways" (LH 47-48). She notes that the French porter, Charlie, has been seen "going into a shabby little hotel with a schoolgirl" and has already been jailed for similar behaviour, but points out that he has nothing else "to look forward to". He is "a decent man", she insists, and "[t]here is something very soothing about the intelligence of a broken good-natured old scamp" (29). In her moral apathy, Madame Bonnard is a representative of her time and place. Later in the novel, a guest remarks that "nine-tenths of the babies in South America are diseased and should be gassed"; when challenged, she responds nonchalantly, "[S]cience is cruel; and this is a cruel age." (131) Madame Bonnard and her guests personify the political climate of the 1950s, in which war has left the population morally desensitised and pragmatically focussed on economic matters (Gardiner, "Stead", 18). The hotel's clientele includes Germans, French, Swiss, English and people of many other nationalities; a motley collection of skiers, tourists, wealthy tax-dodgers, "poor travellers, people without a home... refugees... [and] collaborators who escaped in time" (31). Rather than demonstrating cosmopolitanism in its ideal sense, this mixed gathering is based solely upon economic pragmatism: as Geering puts it, "tolerance pays" ("Normal," 465), both for Madame Bonnard and her penny-pinching guests. In her acerbic depictions

of Bonnard and her guests, Stead inaugurates a sharp critique of idealised narratives of cosmopolitanism.

The precarious status of the female expatriate finds its most vivid illustration in Lilia Trollope, a hapless divorcee who resides at the hotel with her lover, Robert Wilkins, on the pretext that they are cousins. Having left her husband for Robert, Lilia has lived with him in Malaya and other outposts of the British Empire for twenty-five years in the expectation of marriage. During this time, she has gradually withdrawn the bulk of her fortune from England and transferred it to Robert, placing him “at the wheel of her fortune” (126). Lilia dislikes the life of an expatriate, reflecting ruefully on the “old days” when “she had had many real friends” (150) and longing to return to England, where her children live. Her residence in Switzerland is due to Robert’s desire to live as cheaply as possible by manipulating the currency exchanges, a desire she does not share. “Suppose”, she protests, “we go to Nice or Davos or Zermatt or Casablanca or the Argentine, all places I don’t like and where I don’t feel at home, just because it is good for our money? ...[T]hat means the money has us” (95). Despite her wealth and social class, Lilia seems utterly beholden to Robert’s manipulations, even agreeing to buy him a car despite his mocking threat to “tip [her] over the edge of some Alp” while she is a passenger in it (*LH* 125; Brydon 139). Her gradually building resistance to his schemes forms an important element of the plot, culminating in her realisation that she must “choose between Robert and some sort of freedom, between a wandering old age and that homeland in which she was a stranger” (157). She eventually succeeds in leaving Robert, telling the hotel manager that she is “going to strike out for [her]self” and return to England (188). But she does not escape entirely unscathed. Robert keeps her money, ostensibly “for her sake”, hoping that she will be forced to return to Switzerland in order to reclaim it (189).

Stead presents a more sinister counterpart to Robert in the form of Dr Blaise, who keeps his wife at the Hotel Swiss-Touring while he carries on an affair with their housekeeper at their lavish home in Basel. Madame Bonnard draws an explicit parallel between Lilia and Madame Blaise, both “living in a foreign town, unhappy with their men, away from their children” (44). For both women, the expatriate state is not one of freedom but subjection and exploitation by their abusive, manipulative partners. In her feminist reading of the novel, Judith Kegan Gardiner stresses “the pathetic dependence of these women”, and the ways in which they undertake a perverse form of “female bonding” through their shared marginality (Gardiner, “Stead,” 18; *Empathy* 69). Yet they

are very different characters, and while Lilia eventually makes an ambiguous, partial escape from her entrapment, Madame Blaise does not. Madame Blaise insists that she will never go home, for fear that her husband will murder her: “Who knows what a doctor can do to you? A doctor can do anything, even in your sleep,” she cries (44). She eventually agrees to return to Basel with Dr Blaise, who controls her by means of her addiction to prescription drugs. As she departs, she begs Lilia to visit her, saying that she is “in danger” (179). Her anxieties prove well founded. At the end of the novel, Stead reveals that Madame Blaise has died suddenly and left her fortune to the housekeeper, on the condition that she marries Dr Blaise. Stead initially entitled her novel *Mrs Trollope and Madame Blaise* (Stead, “The Hotel-Keeper’s Story,” 74; Geering, “Normal,” 74), underscoring the importance of these two characters and their dyadic relationship. An excerpt, published in 1952, presents a further parallel to their distressed situation: a former guest whose daughter-in-law has recently died in ambiguous circumstances, possibly at the hands of her son who has since disappeared (Stead, “The Hotel-Keeper’s Story,” 74-75; Gardiner, “Stead,” 18). Even Madame Bonnard herself emerges as a lonely and isolated figure, “looking for a friend” (7) and feeling her marriage as a “shadow over everything” (7). This early fragment, which appears almost unaltered as the opening chapter of *The Little Hotel*, suggests that Stead initially intended to focus far more closely on the female experiences of expatriation, isolation and abandonment, in a manner reminiscent of *Letty Fox*.

Yet in its final, published form, *The Little Hotel* emphasises the complicity of women in a capitalist system that is inherently exploitative and unjust.⁵⁸ Robert Wilkins is only one of many guests who travel not to undergo personal transformation, or to experience freedom, but to maximise their wealth and the social power that it confers upon them. The epitome of this is Miss Chillard, an English invalid who travels from place to place in order to seek the advice of expensive doctors. Claiming to be a descendant of William the Fourth (78), she exploits her aristocratic demeanour to extract money and favours from the hotel’s guests and to evade her creditors, which include Madame Bonnard. Mrs Powell, an American widow, moves “from place to place” in order to avoid paying income tax (37). The exotic Princess Bili plans to move her fortune to South America, “where they have dictators” to “kee[p] the greedy people down” (127).

⁵⁸ Gardiner observes that the novel casts the exploitative relationships between men and women as simply part of the “whole system of inhumane individualism fostered by capitalism” (Gardiner, “Stead,” 22-23).

Even Lilia, Robert and the other English guests remain abroad rather than render themselves subject to the Attlee Labour Government and, presumably, its high taxes. As Gardiner writes, these characters are not just figures of fun, but “oddly representative cogs in the complex machinery of global capital”. Despite their “apparent stasis”, their presence at the Hotel Swiss-Touring symbolises a “mobile concatenation of forces” by which an elite transnational class maintains its grip on “power, privilege, and leisure” (Gardiner, “Stead,” 23).

Stead contrasts the laziness, venality and self-indulgence of the hotel guests with the lives of its impoverished and overworked employees. The servants live in a state of perpetual dependence and uncertainty. When the hotel is “peaceful”, they “beg[in] to think of their homes and whether they w[ill] lose their jobs if the season continue[s] quiet” (62-63). One of the hotel’s employees, Luisa, is tubercular, but Madame Bonnard points out that “[t]here are a lot of walking cases and convalescents about; people must work...” (49). For the most part, however, the servants are not “walking” but notably immobile, seemingly entrapped within the hotel.⁵⁹ Luisa’s married sister “can only see her husband two weeks a year”, on her annual holiday (107); another servant, Gennaro, only speaks to his mother when she walks past the hotel on her way to work, while he cleans the “the lowest part of the building” facing the street (59). Madame Bonnard reflects mildly that most of her servants send their wages home to their families, and do not receive meals on weekends, with the result that they spend their days off “in bed” or else sitting lethargically on the promenade (23). The aged, paedophilic porter, Charlie, “nearly broke his back” carrying the new elevator up a flight of stairs and was subsequently in bed for ten days (107). With this grotesque image, Stead contrasts the leisurely, pampered mobility of the hotel’s guests with the enforced stasis of the workers, who are reduced to beasts of burden and literally immobilised by the physical strain of their labour.

By juxtaposing the stasis of the hotel’s workers with the lazy, pampered lives of its tourist guests, *The Little Hotel* draws an explicit link between transnational mobility and exploitative class relations. Stead shows how law and custom conspire to protect the free movement of an elite, transnational class, while exerting an almost autocratic control over

⁵⁹ Another servant at the hotel recounts: “I had two weeks’ holiday in the beginning of the year and I assure you I only just got my bones undone when I had to put them together again; and when I came back it took me a week to recover... The same thing when you sleep. Lots of nights you don’t sleep... Other nights you sleep and you try to wake up at six; but it is perfect misery; you wish you were dead... So what is the use of sleeping, what is the use of a day off, what is the use of holidays? Work until you drop... I say...” (106-7).

the movement of working class people. Emma, “the most intelligent of all [the] servants” at the Hotel Swiss-Touring, is an “Italian mountain peasant” who arrived at the hotel with nothing but the cotton dress she wore. “Someone on the train... lent her a pair of bedroom slippers... to pass the frontier,” presumably because as a barefooted vagrant she would not have been permitted to enter Switzerland (60). Her difficult and dangerous journey contrasts markedly with that of the hotel’s guests, who travel unimpeded even when penniless. The wealthy Mayor of B. is eventually declared insane and put on train a to Belgium, where he is to be interned in an asylum. Knowing that the train travels through France, and that under French law he cannot be kept in custody without a court order, he “step[s] off the train at the very first stop” after crossing the border and disappears from the narrative (76). The Mayor’s successful escape parallels that of Miss Chillard, who departs for Zermatt with a train ticket paid for by Lilia, without having paid her medical bills. For both the Mayor and Ms Chillard, travel constitutes a form of evasion. Madame Bonnard is conscious of the power she wields over her internationally displaced and illegal workforce. Having “stood by” one of her employees “when the police came about [his] work permit” (66), she nonetheless threatens to “send [him] to the frontier” if he disobeys her orders (28). While wealthy collaborators and fascist sympathisers travel freely and escape any form of retribution, Stead suggests, the poor ones, like Gennaro, live in a state of perpetual uncertainty and dependence on the protection of their employers.

More clearly than any of her previous novels, *The Little Hotel* links the movement of individuals to the transnational flows of capital (Brydon 140). Like Charlie the porter, a fugitive from French justice, many other residents of the hotel are fleeing left wing governments and seeking to disguise their associations with discredited fallen regimes. Lilia and Robert are “afraid to go home” for fear that the Labour Government will “enrol them at the labour exchanges”, since they have “no occupation” (27). Clinging to the spoils of their “damned ruined robber empire”, they are hiding in Switzerland in order “to be safe from doomsday”, in the form of anti-colonial independence movements (134). The enigmatic Belgian guest, “the Mayor of B.”, is also a kind of fugitive. “They were still shooting collaborators in Belgium”, Madame Bonnard notes, and “[i]t was very strange the amount of money he had...” (26). Madame Blaise is similarly suspected of having colluded with, or at least profited from, the Nazi occupation. She boasts of the property she holds in New York, explaining, “You see, it was war conditions; it could not

be put in people's own names" (17). Later, alone with her husband, she declares defiantly, "I got it from Nazis" (134). Through these characters, *The Little Hotel* associates mobility with an amoral capitalist class that willingly colludes with oppressive, even murderous political regimes, only to flee with the "spoils" when these regimes begin to falter. In their different ways, Lilia and Robert, Madame Blaise and the Mayor of B. all bear out Baruch Mendelssohn's observation in *Seven Poor Men*: "[t]hat's the great secret: how does a small minority oppress a large majority? – we count on making a getaway" (SPM 193; McGregor 397).

In its focus on members of the aristocracy and haute-bourgeoisie, *The Little Hotel* represents a shift in focus from novels such as *Seven Poor Men*, *Letty Fox* and *For Love Alone*. While these earlier works critique the hypocrisy of bourgeois radicals, *The Little Hotel* depicts a far more elite social class. Through this unusually stark contrast between the lives of a transnational capitalist class and its proletarian servants, Stead asserts, with particular clarity, that narratives of liberating, transformative mobility are fundamentally bound up with class privilege and an impulse to evade collective social responsibility. *The Little Hotel* casts wealthy women as complicit in this process, in a manner that distinguishes it from the more sympathetic portraits of mobile women in *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, *For Love Alone* and *Letty Fox*. Yet in drawing a parallel between untrammelled mobility and class privilege, Stead articulates a theme that runs throughout these earlier novels. If this late novel's satire of the elite, transnationally mobile classes is harsher than that found in Stead's earlier works, this can be attributed to Stead's own, increasingly bitter experience of expatriatism from the late 1940s onwards, when the rise of McCarthyism forced her to exchange her life in the United States for the "isolation, obliquity, and grinding hardship" of Europe (Ackland, *Socialist* 6). As Rowley writes, Stead's Cold War life, with its endless dislocations in search of work, "cheaper... accommodation" or "better food", transformed her attitude to "wandering". No longer an idealised, romanticised condition, it became something she "detested" (296), a sign of her extreme precariousness in a world entirely dominated by capital. In the context of her own increasingly marginal, unwilling mobility, Stead's fiction becomes more insistent in its claim that the liberating quest is a fantasy, reserved for the members of a privileged, amoral capitalist elite.

4 Mavis Gallant and the varieties of exile

Mavis Gallant's writing is replete with mobile figures. Throughout her fiction, Gallant obsessively depicts the plight of the "displaced person", the refugee forced into exile by conflict, post-war ethnic cleansing or poverty. Her fiction constitutes a sustained meditation on the personal and political consequences of mobility in the modern world, written in the specific historic and geographic context of post-war Europe, and its painful, often violent mass migrations. In interviews, Gallant has spoken of the "the immense shock of the photographs of the concentration camps" in Germany, which she first encountered as a very young woman working for the *Montreal Standard* in 1945 ("Interview").⁶⁰ For Gallant, the apparent prosperity of post-war Europe belies the enduring personal and collective trauma caused by the War, particularly in Europe, where much of her fiction is set. The mobility of Gallant's European refugee does not result in a utopian, glamorous cosmopolitanism, but rather, a sense of rootlessness and acute vulnerability. Gallant stresses the precarious position of these refugees by juxtaposing them with wealthy tourists and expatriates who travel in pursuit of romance, enlightenment, culture or personal redemption of a more ambiguous nature. She stresses the privileged and voluntary nature of such travel, in contrast to the coerced or involuntary displacement of the refugee.

By drawing a contrast between the tourists and refugees in Gallant's fiction, this chapter deviates from the predominant critical approach, which views her characters as offering subtle variations on the recurring "theme" of "exile" (Hancock 45-46; Dahlie; Côté; Hatch, "Expatriate"; Malcolm). Typically, when reading Gallant's work, critics have used the term "exile" very broadly, applying it both to wealthy expatriates and to displaced persons who have fled their homes due to war, poverty or other traumatic events. For many of these critics, the term "exile" does not refer primarily to the literal experience of displacement, but rather to a more ambiguous spiritual condition. Hallvard Dahlie exemplifies this approach when he argues that Gallant's "concer[n]... with ... dislocation and dispossession" articulates a "universally-sensed malaise about the

⁶⁰ Gallant's task was to write the captions for these photographs, a process she acerbically satirises in the story, "With a Capital 'T'", published in her collection, *Home Truths: Selected Canadian Stories* (1981). Gallant also describes this experience in detail in her interview with Hancock (39).

impermanence and rootlessness” that marks post-war culture (Dahlie 115, 118).⁶¹ This approach can be attributed, in part, to Gallant’s own trajectory as a writer who spent almost her entire adult life abroad, and a consequent critical tendency to view Gallant herself as an “exilic” figure.⁶² Yet it overlooks an important aspect of Gallant’s approach to mobility and mobile figures. While it is true that Gallant offers many sensitive and sympathetic portraits of expatriates who are in some sense unhappy, alienated or nostalgic for homes or former lives they have left behind, she also ironises their unhappiness, casting it as an attribute of privilege. Gallant draws attention to the elite and cosseted lives of these self-styled “exiles” by ironising their self-absorption, showing how they are unable to perceive, much less sympathise with, the suffering of genuine refugees. While Gallant’s travellers and tourists often go out in search of transformative experiences, they continually retreat into comforting and self-serving fantasies. These characters do not appear capable of transformation, but rather, cling to “steadfast images of themselves as protection from the strangeness of the new worlds” (Hatch, “Expatriate”, 133). In this respect, as Janice Kulyk Keefer writes, Gallant is not a “white-gloved” stylist, a “recluse” from political concerns (Keefer, *Reading* 162). Rather, she is deeply concerned with the material circumstances that perpetuate social inequality, and the cultural narratives that allow wealthy, voluntary travellers to legitimate and normalise their privileged status.

This chapter discusses four texts that illustrate Gallant’s persistent, subtly evolving fascination with the dyadic figures of the tourist and the refugee.⁶³ The chapter

⁶¹ Others have used the term “exile” to describe the sense of “disconnection and instability” (Schaub, “Irony,” 25) manifested by “characters in exile from, if not happiness, then fulfilment” (Côté 1). O’Rourke writes that Gallant’s characters are exiles in time”, rather than “space”, “locked into a present situation, condition, stage of personal history, from which escape is difficult, and sometimes impossible” (98); whereas for Hatch, Gallant’s fiction illustrates “the extent to which every individual, simply by existing, necessarily becomes an expatriate from his own self” (Hatch, “Expatriate”, 142).

⁶² As David O’Rourke writes, the critics’ “unfortunate tendency to look for romantic exile” in Gallant’s writing is partly due to this autobiographical approach, which has led many critics to treat Gallant as a North American literary exile akin to Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald or Gertrude Stein, “a kind of hangover from the twenties” (O’Rourke 98; Murray). Numerous critics have taken an autobiographical approach to interpreting Gallant’s work, drawing heavily on her childhood as the sole English speaker in her French-Canadian school as well as on her adult life as a Canadian in Paris (see, eg, Woolford). Some have stressed the theme of “exile” in her work in order to cast her as emblematic of a distinctively *Canadian* literary sensibility. Dahlie identifies “the phenomenon of exile” as “a frequently recurring element in Canadian literature” and evidence of Gallant’s “unconscious Canadianism” (9, 115). E. D. Blodgett similarly identifies an exilic sensibility as an inherent feature of Canadian identity: “A Canadian is, it would seem, by nature of but not in, and thus endowed with attributes similar to those of a woman in a patriarchal world... Life and history... happen to Canadians elsewhere.”

⁶³ Janice Kulyk Keefer observes that there is nothing in Gallant’s writing that suggests her thinking underwent a radical “transformation” over time; instead, the nature of her “vision”, like her literary skill, was “set almost from the moment she began publishing” (*Reading* 12). Similarly, Douglas Malcolm notes the “strong thematic continuity” in her work.

begins with one of Gallant's earliest stories, "The Other Paris", from her book of the same name, then proceeds to discuss her first novel, *Green Water, Green Sky*. Both comic and lightly satirical in tone, these texts are "paradigmatic" examples of Gallant's preoccupation with the spoiled and naive North American tourist in Europe (Keefer, *Reading* 12). The latter text represents an important development in her oeuvre, lampooning American tourists while also offering a far more melancholic account of genuine exile in the form of a Polish Jew who reinvents himself as a successful American businessman. In this way, the novel lays the foundation for Gallant's later work, which deals far more explicitly with the traumatic experiences of refugees. The second half of the chapter addresses this aspect of Gallant's work, discussing "An Alien Flower", first collected in *The Pegnitz Junction* (1974) and "Baum, Gabriel, 1935 – ()", first published in *From the Fifteenth District* (1979). Centring on European protagonists, these stories much more explicitly examine the suffering of those who have been displaced by the Second World War. Here, leisure travel assumes a secondary but nonetheless important role. In "An Alien Flower" and more particularly "Baum, Gabriel", Gallant shows how the cultural narratives generated by tourism play a crucial role in obscuring and suppressing the experiences of refugees and the uncomfortable history of the Second World War.

Gallant's imagery of mobility poses a radical contrast to that of Virginia Woolf, refusing to offer an affirmative account of a distinctively female identity. As Keefer observes, Gallant's work is "woman-centred" in so far as it "deals... overwhelmingly with [the] female experience... of society, of politics and history, of oppressive family structures and exploitative family ties" (Keefer, *Reading* 120, 135). This is apparent in Gallant's approach to mobility. Like Stead, she persistently illustrates the gendered limitations placed upon women's mobility, and, by extension, their social, economic and psychological agency. Throughout her work, Gallant shows how women are often denied the autonomy, the economic resources and the self-confidence to engage in independent journeys of self-discovery. Whether as daughters, wives, divorcées, mistresses, or "amoureuuses" of a more indeterminate nature, almost all of Gallant's female characters are "bound by [their] personal relationships" with men (Keefer, *Reading*, 137), trapped in an inertia that is both literal and spiritual. Yet Gallant is not a feminist (Keefer, *Reading* 18) in the sense that this implies an exclusive or predominant focus on gender inequality. On the contrary, Gallant stresses her female characters' complicity with the various class,

racial, ethnic and geo-political hierarchies that give them a precarious sense of security and power. More overtly than Stead, Gallant consistently asserts a “moral parity” between men and women (Keefer, *Reading* 120). For her, as Keefer observes, women are “victimizers as well as victims” (120), frequently guilty of as much “hypocrisy” as their fathers, husbands and lovers (128). Indeed, Gallant’s wealthy tourists are predominantly female, while her refugees are often male. Representing an inversion of the trope of the questing male hero and his passive, static female counterpart, this dyadic pairing dramatically repudiates the trope of mobility as a means of representing female identity or maturation in any positive sense. Instead, it suggests that travel facilitates a kind of solipsistic, myopic self-delusion that can be inimical to personal growth.

“The Other Paris” (1953)

Gallant’s early short story, “The Other Paris”, demonstrates her profound reservations regarding the myth of transformative travel and the figure of the questing, mobile protagonist. The story centres around a twenty-two year old American woman, Carol Frazier, who has recently arrived in Paris in order to work for an unnamed “American government agency”. Although she is well-educated and speaks “earnest college French” (5), Carol’s expectations of Paris are deeply sentimental and clichéd. She had hoped to find a city of “elegant and expensive-looking women” and “men with... gay good looks and snatches of merry song, the delight of English lady novelists” (*The Other Paris*, Deutsch, 6; Keefer, *Reading* 149). She believes fervently that if only “she sp[ea]ks] to the right person, or open[s] the right door”, Paris will “reveal itself” to her and she will “fall in love” (9). Yet she is disheartened to find the city decayed and impoverished, its inhabitants grudgingly dependent on American largesse. “Where was the Paris she had read about?” she wonders resentfully, surveying its “shabby” people (6), “dull” food and cafes “full of Coca Cola signs” (6). Carol clings tenaciously to her own idea of Paris, a “confused, misty” pastiche of “moonlight, barrows of violets, acacias in flower and... little crooked streets”. While Carol regards herself as having a “romantic” disposition (30), her obsession with this stale fantasy constitutes a kind of denial, a refusal to acknowledge the real conditions of life in post-war France.

At the commencement of the story, Carol has recently become engaged to an American economist who is also her supervisor at work (3). The fact that she is not in

love with Howard “d[oes] not dismay her in the least” (3). Carol believes that such feelings will develop automatically, given the right “conditions”. She notes with satisfaction that she and Howard share “[s]imilar economic backgrounds, financial security” and are members of “the same church... the pillars of the married union” (4). Carol’s narrow conception of romantic love finds its counterpart in her patterns of movement through the city. Carol’s efforts to discover the “secret” (9) Paris are almost comically misguided. Watching “the sun come up from the steps of the Sacré-Coeur” (11) and attending a performance of Christmas carols in the Place Vendôme, Carol reveals a persistent desire to perceive Paris in ways that are highly idealised and contrived. Her daily movements are equally rigid and unimaginative. She follows a fixed itinerary “to and from work” on the Métro, where, she notes, “people pus[h] and [a]re just as rude as in New York” (6). Carol never joins them, afraid “of the dark and the Arabs” (26) she might encounter if she strays from her familiar course. Yet like Clarissa Dalloway, she is tantalised by the spectacle of the city in motion, watching people “hurr[ying]” past her on mysterious errands in which she has “no part” (8). Every night, as she leaves her office, she pauses on the stairs to watch the crowds “strea[m] out” of a building opposite, wondering where they are going (8).

Despite Carol’s conventionality and lack of imagination, she experiences a modest transformation during her time in Paris. As she becomes more curious about the inhabitants of Paris, Carol becomes more aware of the narrowness of her original vision. Howard notes with discomfort, not long after their engagement, that Carol is “changing”. She increasingly “hunt[s] up odd, cheap restaurants” and “complain[s] about their friends, saying that she want[s] to meet new people and see more of Paris” (11). A carols service at the Place Vendôme marks a turning point in Carol’s perception of the city. Arriving before the commencement of the service, Carol and Howard find themselves among “[n]ewspaper photographers” and the smoke from a “newsreel camera”. The choristers sing “over and over the opening bars of ‘Il est né, le Divin Enfant,’ testing voice levels for a broadcast” (12). Looking up at the street lamps, Carol observes that “cheap tinsel icicles” have been attached to them, an effect that looks “poor” in comparison with the “giant tree in Rockefeller Centre” in New York. She suddenly feels “sorry for Paris”, perceiving that its inhabitants are trying, vainly, to conceal their poverty from the visiting tourists. Later, when Howard makes “an amusing story” out of the incident, she realises that “[s]omething could be perfectly accurate but untruthful” (13). With this fleeting

insight, Carol suggests that she might be capable of transcending her initial, clichéd expectations of Paris and appreciating the limitations of her own perspective as a foreigner.

Carol's friendship with a Frenchwoman, Odile, and her paramour, Felix, plays an important role in this developmental narrative. Odile is Howard's secretary, a member of an aristocratic but now impoverished Parisian family. Carol describes her unkindly as "past thirty", "sallow and pathetic... all of a piece" with the city's grey, treeless streets and "chilly air" (2). By contrast, Felix is a misfit, an illegal immigrant of uncertain origin. An orphan whose parents were killed in "the final bombings" at the end of the war",⁶⁴ Felix inhabits an ambiguous, shadowy world, supporting himself by trading in black market goods obtained from American servicemen. Carol is powerfully attracted to Felix, who waits outside the office for Odile each day looking "pale... ill" and underfed (9). When she passes him in the corridor, she is "acutely conscious of every bit of her clothing: the press of the belt at her waist, the pinch of her earrings, the weight of her dress... which felt as scratchy as sacking" (11). She agrees to accompany Odile on a visit to his lodgings, and her visit to his dark and "dirty" room (25) makes Carol aware of the true extent of Felix's poverty and social isolation. At the same time, ironically, it offers Carol a rare vision of the romance she has so far failed to find in Paris. When Odile observes that "[p]oor Felix doesn't belong in this world", he responds by taking her hand and spontaneously kissing its palm, leaving Carol "breathless with embarrassment". While disapproving of the "immoral" relations between Felix and Odile (29), she is also aware that they "might be in love" (24-25), a possibility that transcends the squalor of their circumstances, imbuing it with poignancy and mystery.

With this encounter, Gallant establishes a symbolic nexus between the figures of the wealthy expatriate and the refugee that will persist throughout her work. Throughout the story, Gallant draws a subtle parallel between Carol and Felix, while at the same time ironically disavowing it. When Carol attends a concert with Odile, she is obliged to wait while Odile goes backstage with her family. When Felix observes wryly that there is "[n]o admission for us foreigners", she angrily rejects his suggestion that she falls into a "a single category of foreigners" (19). "Surely Odile could see the difference between Carol

⁶⁴ While Howard suggests that he is Austrian or Czech, Janice Kulyk Keefer contends that Felix is German, "a prototype of the rootless and historically dispossessed young Germans who will figure in Gallant's later fiction" (Keefer, *Reading* 140).

and this pale young man who ‘did other things’”, she reflects indignantly. Carol herself feels a powerful affinity with Felix, though she consciously resists it. She discovers that Felix is only twenty-one and therefore “closer in age” to her “than he was to Odile or she herself was to Howard” (10). This knowledge gives Carol a comforting feeling that “some tie” exists between them. “When I was in school, he was in school, she thought. When the war stopped, we were fourteen and fifteen.... But here she lost track, for where Carol had had a holiday, Felix’s parents had been killed.” Carol’s apparent confusion is telling and deeply ironic. Like her fantasies of Parisian “moonlight... violets... and little crooked streets”, this “los[ing] track” is a form of denial. Carol intuitively, but refuses to acknowledge, that the Second World War enhanced America’s prosperity and global power, even as it devastated Europe and created the mass displacement of people like Felix. Serving as a metonym for the increasing presence of Americans in Europe, her teenage “holiday” (10) offers a poignant contrast to his traumatic displacement.

In her transition from naivety to a fleeting, qualified form of insight, Carol has been regarded by numerous critics as a questing and even heroic figure. Some have adopted a highly sympathetic approach to Carol, viewing her as “an exile” both by virtue of her nationality and her unsatisfying relationship with Howard. Dahlie considers that Gallant displays “more sympathy for Carol than for Odile”, stressing Carol’s “feelings of compassion, and perhaps even love, towards the dispossessed Felix” (119). Danielle Schaub also views Carol in more or less approving terms, describing her as an “outsider” and “twice an exile” by virtue of her “geographical displacement” and her “invented... feelings for Howard” (Schaub, “Irony,” 16, 25). Similarly, Ronald Hatch argues that Carol demonstrates “courage and strength of a certain kind”, in the sense that she “thinks she wants adventure” and takes positive steps to seek it out, first by coming to Paris and then by venturing into the seedy part of town in which Felix resides (Hatch, “Expatriate,” 134). Yet these critical responses do not adequately acknowledge the sharpness with which Gallant satirises Carol and her condescending attitude towards Felix and Odile. Far from pitying Felix for his poverty, or his vulnerable status as an illegal immigrant, she betrays only incomprehension and contempt for his squalid circumstances. She scornfully assumes that Felix “liv[es] off” Odile and wonders why he does not get a job. For her, “the idea that one might not be permitted to work was preposterous” (24). She complains to Howard, in a long, indignant outburst, that Felix “doesn’t work or anything, he just hangs around... Any man can work if he wants to... Odile must be crazy... Why, he’ll

never marry her! ... What does he want with an old maid from an old, broken-down family?" (19-20).

In contrast to the precarious and uncertain future of Felix and Odile, Carol looks forward to her marriage to Howard and their future life together, in which "[n]o-one [w]ould point to them, or criticize them, or humiliate them by offering to help" as she herself has offered to help Felix (29). She smugly contemplates the apartment she will share with Howard in Chicago, with its freshly papered walls and venetian blinds. Critics such as Hatch describe this mental reversal in generous terms, as a "return to the safe habits of decency" (Hatch, "Expatriate," 134), or as evidence of Carol's devotion to "the old goal of the pioneers... self-sufficien[cy]" (Hatch, "Stages", 96). In Hatch's view, Carol's contemptuous reaction to Felix reflects her desire for the "social dignity that comes from independence", as distinct from "the love that comes from dependence" (Hatch, "Stages," 96). Yet in her repeated description of Felix as a "parasite" (*OP* 19, 24), and Odile as an "old maid" (20), Carol betrays a vindictiveness, even cruelty, that renders her a thoroughly unattractive figure. Gallant suggests that Carol's contemptuous words are, at least in part, a sign of her own attraction to Felix and her jealousy and wounded pride at his continued, puzzling preference for Odile. Her putative "love" for Howard (4) and her anticipation of their married life thus offers her a means of evading the spontaneous sexual desire she finds confusing and threatening. In this respect, as Hatch concedes, Gallant forces the reader to recognise the profound limitations of Carol's perspective and thus "to voyage outside... the bourgeois norms" that she herself embraces at the story's conclusion (135).

As Hatch points out, these "norms" are not merely bourgeois but are also culturally specific, reflecting Carol's identity as a wealthy American, insulated from the trauma and extreme material deprivation experienced by much of Europe in the Second World War and its aftermath. Carol is acutely aware that her presence in Paris reflects America's growing influence on the Continent. She sees herself as a conduit for American interests and is "careful not to complain" to Odile about the city's shortcomings, having been "warned that the foreign policy of her country hinge[s] on chance remarks" (7). In similar fashion, Odile equates the declining prestige and power of France with her own reduced capacity to assume the role of tourist. She tells Carol, "Before the war, we traveled, we went everywhere... Now, with our poor little franc, everything is finished" (8). Felix, too, views his own precarious status as a *sans-papiers* as the product of a new

global geo-political system. Remarking that the US army has opened a new “PX”, a distributor of consumer goods to American soldiers, he informs Carol and Odile that he could only buy two cartons of cigarettes from a soldier. “Everything is organized on such a big scale now that there is no room for people like me”, he remarks ruefully (24). While Carol never describes the physical appearance of her fiancé, Howard, she describes Felix in vivid detail: his pale face, his thin frame, his ill-fitting clothes and expression like that of “a clever child, at once bold and withdrawn” (9). When she visits his room, she makes a mental inventory of his possessions, “an alcohol stove, some gaudy plastic bowls... a plate and a spoon... and a battered toothbrush” and notes that Felix’s shirt is “unbuttoned” (23). Evoking Rachel’s encounter with the bare-chested “native” women on her river voyage, this detail casts Felix in the role of the subaltern, a racialised and faintly feminised other, at once a figure of horrifying strangeness and the object of the traveller’s prurient gaze.

Through Carol, Gallant casts the bourgeois tourist as an embodiment of privilege and wilful self-deception, rather than heightened insight or a process of maturation. Like Rachel in *The Voyage Out*, when confronted with the sight of the native women in their village, Carol ultimately recoils from the “distasteful strangeness” of this spectacle (30). Whereas Carol perceives herself and her social relationships in monetary terms, she perceives that Odile and Felix are radically different. In their poverty, their “ability to love” is “their only hospitality, their only way of paying debts” (29). In this respect, they represent the thing she has been seeking in Paris, suggesting “that she had at last opened the right door, turned down the right street, glimpsed the vision toward which she had struggled on winter evenings...” (29). Yet she retreats into her “comforting vision... the Paris of films... street lamps [and] tinsel icicles” and her fabricated story of her own “romantic and interesting” courtship, determining that her encounter with Felix and Odile will fade from her memory “as if it had never been” (30). Carol’s travel to Paris facilitates her development in a purely negative sense (Hatch, “Expatriate,” 135), by prompting her to relinquish her fantasies of adventure and romance, in favour of a return to her home, to middle class marriage and to the capitalistic culture in which she has been raised.

***Green Water, Green Sky* (1959)**

Gallant's *Green Water, Green Sky* offers a similarly critical portrait of the self-deceiving vanities of the wealthy North American tourist, juxtaposing their experience with the traumatic displacement of Europe's refugees. The novel depicts a group of wealthy Americans, predominantly women, living in Europe in the 1950s.⁶⁵ It coalesces loosely around the figure of Florence McCarthy, or Flor. Flor lives with her skittish mother, Bonnie, who has fled America to escape the stigma of her "humiliat[ing]" divorce (*Green Water* 9). Having spent most of her adolescence in fashionable tourist haunts such as Venice and Cannes, Flor marries a young Jewish-American businessman, Bob Harris, and settles in Paris. Under the influence of her manipulative, egotistical mother, Flor becomes increasingly unstable and eventually succumbs to a nervous breakdown. In the course of her mental disintegration, she meets Doris Fischer, another young American woman who has been abandoned by her husband. The novel also introduces Wishart, a strangely asexual gigolo who presents himself as a "sardonic Englishman in America" and an "awfully decent American in England" (116) in order to appeal to lonely, wealthy single women such as Bonnie. While the novel is heavily ironic in its treatment of these characters, Gallant reserves some sympathy for Flor and still more for Bob, who is haunted by his parents' and grandparents' experiences as refugees from German fascism. Through all these figures, Gallant explores the deleterious effects of displacement on personal development. She also draws an analogy between the wilful self-deception of her wealthy tourists and the culture of denial that characterises the immediate post-war era, one that refuses to acknowledge the enduring trauma of Europe's refugees.

Green Water employs the imagery of displacement to symbolise a state of estrangement in a way that invites comparison with the "exilic" tradition of high modernism.⁶⁶ Most critical responses have viewed the novel as a psychological study of alienation. A typical 1995 review of Bloomsbury Classics edition confines itself almost entirely to a description of the novel's characters, "lost in their own illusions" and "sunk in private pools of narcissism and necessary artifice" (Ashworth).⁶⁷ More recent critical work has similarly stressed the psychological themes of the novel and the claustrophobic

⁶⁵ *Green Water* was originally published in *The New Yorker* as a trio of short stories: "Green Water, Green Sky" (1959); "Travellers Must Be Content" (1959) and "August" (1959). See Besner (49).

⁶⁶ For Robertson Davies, the novel is "an exploration of the fashionable theme of unrelatedness" (71).

⁶⁷ An earlier, less sympathetic reviewer wrote disparagingly of the characters' "central mediocrity and... lack of vitality" as the most striking feature of the novel (Ayre 33).

relationships between Flor, Bonnie and Bob. These readings have variously cast the novel as a study in grief and bereavement (Smythe, *Elegy*); the “deadening” influence of family relationships (Hatch, “Consciousness,” 47); and the role of memory in the construction of personal identity (Siemerling; Schaub, *Gallant*).⁶⁸ Even Janice Kulyk Keefer, who has tended to lay greater emphasis on the political dimension of Gallant’s work than other critics, reads *Green Water* primarily as a psychological study, viewing it as “an exploration of the inseparableness of love and resentment”, and, to a lesser extent, “an examination of the... unreliability of memory” (*Reading* 79). In focussing on Flor’s mental breakdown, as the central event of the novel,⁶⁹ these accounts do not do justice to the way in which Gallant situates her rootless, drifting characters in the specific political, economic and historical context of post-war Europe. In particular, they do not give adequate attention to the way in which Gallant satirises her characters as wealthy, North American travellers in a post-war Europe still profoundly affected by the events of the Second World War.

As in “The Other Paris”, Gallant maintains an ironic detachment from her characters’ emotional problems, satirising their self-deception and inability to see beyond their own narcissistic preoccupations to the social circumstances around them. This satiric perspective is hinted at in the novel’s epigraph, taken from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (c. 1599):

Ay, now am I in Arden; the more
fool I; when I was at home, I
was in a better place: but
travellers must be content.

Bonnie regards herself as an exile, “condemned to live abroad and bring Flor up in some harmful way” (9) as a result of her husband’s rejection, after her “surpassingly silly” affair

⁶⁸ Winfried Siemerling stresses the role of memory in *Green Water*, comparing Gallant to Marcel Proust and Gustave Flaubert. Similarly, Schaub observes how “[a]ll the characters reconstruct the past” in an “idiosyncratic” and self-serving manner (*Gallant* 57).

⁶⁹ Smythe argues that Flor’s breakdown is a consequence of her traumatic separation from her father, who never appears in the novel except in Flor’s dreams and hallucinations (*Elegy* 50). D. B. Jewison also identifies this as a significant theme in the novel, writing that “Flor’s vision of reconciliation with her father is the dream she has been searching for, although the reader might not at first be aware of this...”. For Neil Besner, Gallant presents family relationships as “a necessary prison... which both confers and confines identity” (50). Lorna Irvine reads the novel as “a fictional account of why daughters fail to develop independent speech” (248). Lesley Clement also focuses on Flor and her futile attempts to establish “an authentic image of self,” in opposition to the “images projected upon her” by her mother and her husband (65).

with another man (27).⁷⁰ Yet Gallant ironises this self-conception. She observes that Bonnie's self-image is "fragmented, unreconciled" (27). Bonnie imagines herself in mutually contradictory ways, at once virginal, and "authentically innocent" on the one hand, and vampishly alluring, "a kind of American Mrs Hauksbee" on the other (27).⁷¹ Beneath these images, Gallant observes, is "something nearer the truth, a lost, sallow, frightened Bonnie wandering from city to city in Europe, clutching her daughter by the hand" (28). Bonnie's longing for New York is also a longing for an imagined, former self, "pretty and pert, outrageously admired", a "lost Bonnie" who continues to exist in the New York of her imagination (26).⁷² In this sense, like Carol in "The Other Paris", Bonnie uses her European surroundings as the backdrop for her own self-serving fantasies.

Gallant reinforces this negative view of expatriatism through her portrayal of Doris, a young American woman who lives in the apartment below that of Bonnie, Flor and Bob. Though Doris claims that she is merely holidaying in Paris while her husband works in Rome, she has in fact been abandoned by him for "a woman studying Egyptian at the Ecole du Louvre" (87). Despite her own status as a cast-off wife, Bonnie views Doris with unalloyed disdain. Quintessentially Midwestern and middle-class in "dress, voice, speech and manner" (47), Doris evokes "an unknown cindery city full of used-car lots" (67) and "d[oes] not belong in their lives or in the Paris summer" (67). Doris herself feels acutely disoriented and out of place in Paris. She speaks little French, had never "wanted... to come abroad" (67), and is bewildered to find herself "alone ... nearly thirty and in a foreign place" (87). She is also perplexed by the pretensions and evasions she observes in Flor, Bonnie and Bob. She detects instinctively that Bonnie's ostentatious displays of affection mask a palpable "hostility" (69) towards her daughter and son-in-law. She also rightly perceives that they are "not in touch with life in France" (68), despite Bonnie's attempts to present herself and Flor as "true Parisians" (55). Doris eventually decides to return to America without her husband, declaring that "he can follow, or he can stay... but I have made a decision and I have cabled my father and he is cabling the money and I am going home" (99). In a purely literal sense, Doris's departure appears to

⁷⁰ For Dahlie, Bonnie is one of Gallant's many "middle-aged individuals... who inhabit decaying *pensions* or rented villas on the Italian and French Riviéras", unable to accept the ageing process and therefore "exiles out of time as well as out of place". She embodies a distinctively female Gallant type, the woman who experiences marriage as a "painful state of exile, the solution to which is frequently fantasy, promiscuity, or... rootlessness..." (Dahlie 127, 123).

⁷¹ Mrs Hauksbee is an Anglo-Indian widow and *femme fatale* in Rudyard Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888).

⁷² Dahlie 127; O'Rourke 98.

confirm the way in which travel offers genuine agency to some women. As Kulyk Keefer notes, Doris's reliance on her father's money ironically illustrates "the labyrinthine quality of female entrapment" (*Reading* 143). Yet her refusal to remain in Paris, waiting for her husband to return, signifies her rejection of a purely passive form of femininity: in leaving Paris, Doris sheds the humiliating role of the abandoned wife and claims a modicum of independence. Simultaneously, her decision to leave constitutes a rejection of the fantasy of travel as transformative or liberating. In so doing, she refuses to be drawn into the claustrophobic and unhealthy expatriate milieu inhabited by Bonnie, Flor and Bob.

Gallant's depiction of Flor most clearly illustrates the deleterious effects of expatriatism.⁷³ While both Doris and Bonnie have a clear sense of where they belong, Flor is a perpetual outsider who seems equally out of place in Venice, Cannes, Paris and in a borrowed New York apartment. For her, the life of the expatriate is one of profound isolation, disorientation and fragmentation, militating against any coherent or stable sense of self. Having spent her entire adolescence abroad, Flor has no friends her own age. Until her marriage, her only friendship is with her cousin, George, who is seven years younger, and whom she encounters only in sporadic summer holiday meetings "two or three years apart, so that it was like meeting a different person" (16). She also has little opportunity to form romantic attachments, as Bonnie's friend Wishart astutely observes. When Bonnie laments Flor's lack of marriage proposals, and protests that she herself had had "literally hundreds" of suitors at the same age, Wishart "want[s] to say, Yes, but you were among your own kind. The girl is a floater..." (115). Flor herself clearly attributes her sense of alienation to her status as a "foreigner". As she wanders the streets of Paris, she reflects that had she not been "uprooted" she would not "have feared the movement of the pavement under her feet and watched herself in shop windows to make sure she was still there. She would not have imagined life as a brightly lit stage with herself looking on" (34). Flor's disorienting loneliness sets her apart from George, who has always inhabited the "structure" of parental love and dense "tangled" networks of familial relations (23). While the adult George regards his social milieu from "an imagined distance" (24), the vantage point of a secure sense of self, Flor suffers from a peculiar

⁷³ Many critics have described Flor as a symbol of "rootlessness" (see, eg, Jewison). For some critics, Flor is representative of a generalised cultural disorientation and alienation (Keefer, *Reading* 80). For others, she illustrates the traumatic consequences of parental "abandon[ment]" (Smythe, *Elegy* 51-52).

form of psychic “vertigo” (35) reflecting her inability to form stable, meaningful attachments to the world around her.

Through Flor, Gallant portrays the life of the expatriate as a form of stagnation and paralysis rather than enabling mobility. Throughout the novel, she persistently associates Flor with impeded or arrested movement. In a deliberate subversion of the trope of *flânerie*, she stresses Flor’s inability to navigate the streets of Paris. Walking through the city, Flor takes “cautious steps” (32) and feels “the sidewalk c[o]me up before her” as if she were “drunk” (32). As her mental state deteriorates, she becomes increasingly immobile, remaining in her room with the shutters closed. She protests when she is “dragged out of bed” to visit an artist’s studio (76) and insists on remaining in Paris in the holiday month of August, when Bob departs on a business trip and Bonnie goes to Deauville to stay with a friend. Bob attempts to persuade her to leave, rattling off an increasingly improbable series of potential destinations: “Spain, Portugal, Portofino, Lausanne, Scotland, gaudy as posters, and as unsubstantial” (59). Yet Flor insists doggedly, “‘I have to stay here’... nothing more” (59). Flor’s decision to remain in Paris is a poignant testament to her desire for something that is *not* “unsubstantial” (59): a stable home that might serve as the basis for a coherent sense of self. Yet, ironically, Flor’s presence in the city in August, a time at which almost all Parisians traditionally depart for the coast, only emphasises her status as a foreigner and a social misfit. It is during this period of total isolation and inertia that Flor descends into a state of psychosis from which she does not recover.

Subverting the narrative of transformative travel, Gallant employs the trope of the journey to represent a staged “retreat from life” (85) into solipsism and breakdown. Flor’s increasingly desperate “desire for sleep and dreams [takes] the shape of a boat”, which “[e]very day pull[s] away from shore but [is] forced to return” (88). Flor herself regards her drug-induced sleep as “a longer and longer journey away from shore” (98).⁷⁴ This imagery strongly evokes Woolf’s *The Voyage Out* (Smythe, *Elegy* 50), casting Flor as a *Bildungsheld* in the style of Rachel Vinrace. Gallant self-consciously reprises the water imagery of Woolf’s novel, equating movement through the ocean with a difficult process of development. Flor’s sense of herself as being on the edge of “a narrowing shore, an

⁷⁴ Her husband Bob intuits this, feeling that her compulsion to sleep is “a longer journey each time over a greater distance” (43). Ironically, this intuition represents almost the only instance of genuine empathy in the novel.

encroaching sea” (33) recalls Rachel’s sense of her words as pushing out into “an unknown sea” (VO 182). Yet whereas in *The Voyage Out*, the trope of the voyage stands for personal growth, communication and attempts at intimacy, Flor’s symbolic forays “away from shore” (*Green Water* 89) constitute a pathological withdrawal from life and human relationships. When Bob tries to understand the source of Flor’s distress, she makes a “vertiginous effort to turn back on her journey out” (79), yet when he leaves her alone in Paris she imagines herself “floating, sailing, dreaming” away again (89). Flor’s final descent into psychosis uses imagery of movement to illustrate a fatal splitting of the consciousness. Flor imagines herself astride her horse, “[a]t last... going in the right direction”, while her alter-ego disappears into the ocean, with “fan-shaped ripples diminishing against the shore” (100).

Like Rachel’s “voyage out”, Flor’s “voyage” is overtly textual, yet whereas Woolf invests literature with the power to promote self-knowledge and agency, Flor’s reading only seems to exacerbate her mental disturbance. Just as Rachel symbolically immerses herself in the works of Ibsen, Stendhal and Gibbon, the teenage Flor reads compulsively, as if “drugged, drowned” (33). As a young girl, she reads “in hotel rooms... on buses and on trains...” (33), “depend[ing] on words” to supply her with a sense of “belong[ing]” (34). Like Rachel, imagining herself in the role of Ibsen’s Nora Helmer, Flor assumes a variety of literary poses: she proclaims to Doris’s bafflement that she is a “Victorian heroine” (86).⁷⁵ Yet whereas Nora Helmer offers Rachel an example of distinctly modern, independent womanhood, Flor’s reading only emphasises her entrapment in a contrived and deeply anachronistic feminine role. As Flor wanders through the streets of Paris, she repeatedly intones Shakespearian lines, imagining herself “on the beached verge of the salt flood” (33), in a manner reminiscent of Clarissa and Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*. Yet here, too, the effect of literature is deeply ambiguous. Whereas both Clarissa and Septimus find reassurance in Shakespeare’s injunction to “fear no more the heat o’ the sun” (*MD* 32, 43, 153), Flor’s invocation of the “beached verge” only reinforces her sense of disorientation and helplessness (33). Rather than providing her with an enabling self-image, the clarity of Shakespeare’s “vision, clear as a mirror”, threatens to overwhelm her fragile sense of self: she hears the words “ringing” in her ears like a “faultless echo, as if... in her own voice” (33).

⁷⁵ A scene in which Flor sews a dress and then unpicks it strongly evokes Penelope in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Smythe also detects references to Woolf’s *The Waves* (1931) (Smythe, “Dislocation”).

Among its many intertexts,⁷⁶ *Green Water, Green Sky* frequently alludes to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912), a text Gallant admired (Hancock 67). In so doing, it frames Flor's predicament as part of a wider cultural malaise. The strong influence of *Death in Venice* is apparent in the title and opening passage of *Green Water, Green Sky*. Gallant evokes the Grand Canal in terms redolent of stagnation and decay. Its "hardly moving layer of morning muck... black underwater, green above" (2) recalls Mann's description of the city. Similarly, Gallant's descriptions of Flor repeatedly compare her with the beautiful Polish boy, Tadzio. The adolescent Flor excites an intense and highly sexualised response from those around her as she enters the lobby of a Venice hotel, strongly evoking the scene in which Mann's hero, Aschenbach, first encounters Tadzio. George's mother pauses to "stare, admiring[ly]" at Flor's bare arms and "coppery" hair (15), and even the seven-year-old George is transfixed by "her hair flying and her dress blowing so that anybody could see the starched petticoat underneath, and the sunburned thighs" (6). Later, in Cannes, Bonnie and Wishart watch Flor on the beach, noting her "extraordinary colouring" (117), just as Aschenbach obsessively observes Tadzio. Yet while Aschenbach earnestly worships Tadzio's "god-like beauty" (Mann, *Death* 223) as a physical embodiment of classical ideals (Ritter 6), Gallant's vision is far more cynical. Flor's earliest appearance in the novel takes place in Piazza San Marco, the city's most famous tourist site. As if performing an "awful rite", she and George throw corn to the pigeons "[t]o please Aunt Bonnie", who "would want to see them enjoying themselves" (10). This sense of inauthenticity recurs in the later scene in which Bonnie and Wishart watch Flor on the beach. Though he pretends to admire Flor, so as to ingratiate himself to Bonnie, Wishart mentally appraises "Venus-Flor" in jaded, sarcastic tones (114). When Bonnie compares Flor to "a Tanagra", he mentally retorts, "Of which there are so many fakes" (112).⁷⁷ Where Mann's novella expresses a fragile but profound idealism, Gallant presents a jaded account of a city entirely given over to contrived touristic experiences. Unlike the other-worldly, godlike figure of Tadzio, Flor the

⁷⁶ Drifting through Paris, Flor also invites comparison with Jean Rhys's anti-heroine Sasha Jensen in *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). In her novel, Rhys depicts Sasha's humiliation by the taunts of English tourists in a Parisian café. In a scene similar to that in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Flor seeks refuge in the Café de la Paix. When she sits down distractedly at an already-occupied table, she finds herself the subject of lewd jokes from a group of American tourists. "Maybe she's after you, Ed Broadfoot, ha ha," they snigger, prompting Flor to "g[e]t up and fle[e]" (37).

⁷⁷ See Zink and Porto; Jeammet and Louvre.

“Tanagra” is a cheap and vulgar replica, the artefact of a debased and commercialised culture.⁷⁸

Through her eroticised depiction of Flor, Gallant draws a parallel between tourist culture and sexual commoditisation, linking Flor’s mental decline to her status as a sexualised object of others’ gaze. Throughout her life, Flor is primarily valued for her physical appearance. In the novel’s first chapter, her aunt implores the teenage Flor to “do something tremendous... You’re too pretty to waste.” Later, after Flor’s marriage, Bonnie reflects that her daughter “had always been... moody” but “she had been pretty” and “a pretty girl can get away with a lot” (59). As Flor’s illness progresses and her “looks” deteriorate (72), Bob recalls Flor’s youthful beauty, which he had “prized” and which had once “made her an object as cherished as anything he might buy” (44). To Bob, the young Flor resembled “the luminous women” of Impressionist paintings he has seen in “museums”, “and this had increased his sense of possession and love” (44). He perceives her “wilfu[l]” destruction of her beauty as a strategy “to force him to value her on other terms”, but concludes that such efforts are “futile... He could never understand and was not sure he ought to try” (45). In stark contrast to Doris, whom Bob secretly labels “The American” (47), Flor seems to embody the mystique of Europe and its cultural treasures. Yet this aura only serves to isolate Flor and to reinforce her alienation from those around her.

Gallant suggests that, as a sexualised object of male desire, Flor is fundamentally precluded from undertaking a metaphoric journey of development. Just as Woolf describes Rachel Vinrace as both an explorer and a passive, colonised territory, Gallant compares Flor to a static landscape through which others move, a setting for others’ touristic fantasies. This emerges in Bonnie’s passing reference to a Parisian nightclub, which offers its visitors “lovely girls” representing various European towns and regions: “Miss Oslo, Miss Vichy Water, Miss Baden-Baden... toutes les Miss de l’Europe” (177). Evoking a kind of sexual Grand Tour, this description of the nightclub draws a parallel between sexual conquest and the tourist’s traversal of Europe. When Bonnie notes with a laugh that Flor thought “une Miss was a governess” (177), Gallant stresses the disjuncture between this seamy, exploitative form of tourism and the ideal of educative, edifying travel. This sense of incongruity recurs in the novel’s final scene, after Flor has been taken

⁷⁸ For an account of Venice as the epicentre of global tourist culture, see Davis and Marvin.

away to an asylum. Bonnie leads Bob and George on a walk through the streets of Paris and observes eulogistically that “Florence loved the Paris night”. She insists that they walk through the city streets “the way Florence used to walk” (163). Yet shortly afterwards Bonnie concedes that Flor “hated... the way they light up all the monuments... for the tourists. She said it made Paris seem like an old prostitute. She never would look. As a matter of fact, she hardly ever went out at night.” (171) The passage draws a parallel between Flor’s innocent idealism and the beauty of Paris, suggesting that both have been somehow “depleted” and despoiled by the intrusion of “strangers” (163). The “prying searchlights on the monuments, the pressure of hands, feet, cameras, eyes” (163) on the city’s tourist sites symbolically evoke the voyeuristic scrutiny to which Flor has been subject all her life (163). At the same time, Bonnie’s foolish remark seems to confirm the extinguishment of Flor’s subjectivity. Just as Rachel’s thoughts become intermingled with Terence’s narrative in *The Voyage Out*, so Flor’s opinions seem irretrievably lost in her mother’s mawkish, sentimental narrative.

Rather than embodying development and growth, *Green Water* thus associates the expatriate existence with stagnation and decline. Flor’s very name encapsulates this process, the substitution of “Florence” with “Flor” suggesting a kind of curtailment or diminution. With its botanical connotations, Flor’s name also forms part of the novel’s wider organic symbolism, which sustains a tension between beauty and horror, growth and decay. This symbolic schema is established in the novel’s opening passage, in which the adult George remembers the stagnant water of the Venetian lagoon, coated with “muck” and rotting lettuce, “black under water, green above” (1; Clement 69). George compares the foetid water to his grandmother’s pond, in which he nearly drowned as a young child. The pond was “kept dirty for the sake of some dirt-loving... Argentine fish” (7), he remembers. In language that recalls Rachel Vinrace lying “speechless” and “still”, with grass “fill[ing] her mouth and ears” (*Voyage* 302), he recalls how “he had lain there, passive, with the mossy water over his mouth” (8), while the “darting minnow fish came around him... tap[ping] against his cheeks” (7). It is the memory of his own “unmoving” (7) “passiv[ity]” that George finds most “oppressive” about this vision. Like Rachel’s vision of the underwater creatures and wrecked ships like submerged bones, lying at the bottom of the sea, George’s memory of his grandmother’s pond is a source of terror, a macabre prefiguration of death. Here, as in *The Voyage Out*, motionlessness becomes a symbol of death and the obliteration of the self.

It is significant that Gallant links this sense of stagnation to a crisis of European culture. In particular, her narrative would seem to associate the rise of the mass tourism that she observes in Paris with a collective failure to reckon with the history of the Second World War. However, the novel refers only once, indirectly, to the Second World War. When Flor refuses to leave her bed, Bob asks her if she is “afraid of the next war... the bombs and all that?” but she insists that she “doesn’t think about the war” (78) itself a sign of repressing this devastating event. Bob is equally circumspect, reflecting that “[w]hen you live in a foreign country you learn to mind your own business” (79). Yet the tourists of *Green Water, Green Sky* are uncomfortably aware that the elegant European cities they encounter have a horrific war-torn past. Flor is the only character to acknowledge this directly. Surveying Notre Dame Cathedral, she realises that the city’s architectural beauty is “dangerous[ly]” deceptive. “Human cunning was keeping the ruin of Paris concealed”, she reflects. “The ivy below Notre Dame had swelled through the city’s painted crust: it was the tender covering of a ruin.” (62) Surveying the cathedral, “something she had suspected bec[o]me[s] clear.” “[T]here was no present here,” she reflects, “and the strangers were perfectly correct to record, to stare, to giggle, to display the unease a healthy visitor feels in a hospital – the vague fear that a buried illness might emerge, obliging one to remain.” (62) In this passage, which strongly evokes Mann’s *Death in Venice* and *The Magic Mountain* (1924), Flor intuits that she and her fellow tourists are complicit with a false and nostalgic view of French history, one that fails to acknowledge the more recent history of the collaborationist Vichy regime. Like the pond that is “kept dirty” for the sake of an exotic species of fish, the post-war Europe of *Green Water, Green Sky* seems to languish in a state of picturesque decay for the benefit of tourists who do not wish to dwell on its more recent history.

The figure of the refugee serves as the novel’s most potent symbol of this suppressed history, albeit in an oblique, peripheral form. Unlike “The Other Paris”, *Green Water* does not offer an explicit account of the refugee experience, but hints at it in the form of the repressed memories and unacknowledged family history of Bob. Initially, the “distinctly American” (157) Bob appears to be an avatar of cosmopolitan modernity. Bob “love[s] Paris, but then he loved anywhere. He “ha[s] never been homesick in his life” and “carrie[s] his birthright with him” (40). Bob is the only American in the novel who seems capable of perceiving Paris as a modern city. His office is “a cake-shaped building

of the thirties”, resembling “the lounge of a dazzling Italian airport” (41).⁷⁹ Personifying the spirit of modernity, Bob appears to have no “feeling for the importance of time”: he “could have been persuaded that the world began the day he was born” (54).⁸⁰ However, late in the novella, Gallant reveals that Bob is in fact a descendant of European refugees. His grandfather “had come out of a Polish ghetto,” he “d[oesn’t] know his mother’s maiden name” and he has “no family records more than a generation old” (132-33). Bob resists when Flor questions him about his antecedents; “[e]vasion” on the subject of “Jewishness” is “seared into his personality” (74). Yet privately, Bob is haunted by his family’s painful history. He hears “creaking or mournful or ghostly sounds” emanating from the stairs of their apartment building, “the lingering vapours of adolescent nostalgia – that fruitless, formless yearning for God knows what” (41).

Gallant shows how the recent history of the Second World War exerts a palpable, though unacknowledged, influence on the post-war society of *Green Water, Green Sky*. She emphasises the casual anti-Semitism of Flor’s family and the way in which this is focussed upon Bob. Early in the novel, Bonnie remarks to a friend that she “do[es]n’t know what’s going to happen now... Florence has gone and married this Jew” (18). This hostility becomes more palpable after Flor’s disappearance from the narrative. The loss of Flor has a profound effect on Bob, robbing him of his poise and exuberance. Yet George’s sympathy is qualified by a sense that Bob “had no business marrying her... Keep him in his place” (181-82). He registers Bob’s ethnicity with faint but palpable hostility. Taking “the sum of his face, his manner, his rings, and his clothes”, he dismisses Bob as being “not the kind of American [he] had been brought up to know well” (157). As Bonnie needles Bob “cruel[l]y”, George averts his eyes, taking “refuge in contemplating the walls of the bar, which were papered with maps of Paris” (162). With this image, Gallant subtly associates Bonnie and George with the tourists Flor has earlier observed at Notre Dame. Like the “buried illness” Flor detects beneath the ivied façade of the cathedral, the Fairlies’ superficial cordiality merely papers over their deeply-held ethnic and class prejudices.

⁷⁹ This image subtly prefigures the revelation of Bob’s ethnic origins and his family’s historic displacement by the Holocaust. Modernist architecture played an important symbolic role in Mussolini’s Italy. See Nicoloso (3).

⁸⁰ It is therefore ironic, but also fitting, that his business is to buy and sell wine, a commodity valued primarily for its age. In his business life, Bob meets people who are “apt to assume a monkish air of dedication because they [a]re dealing in wine instead of, say, paper bags” (41).

These interrelated images of the ivy-covered cathedral and the papered-over walls of the café serve an important purpose, drawing a parallel between the Fairlies' contemptuous treatment of Bob and their touristic, sanitised encounter with post-war Europe. Flor is, to some extent, distinguished from her mother's anti-Semitism, expressing nothing more than mild curiosity about Bob's "Jewishness" (74). Yet in another important sense, Flor's relationship with Bob renders her complicit with the process of denial she perceives in the tourists at Notre Dame. Bob appeals to her precisely because he seems to have "no attachments to the past" (132) and she seems to have no awareness of the trauma his family has experienced in their forced dislocation from Europe to America. Gallant contests the apparent similarity between Flor and Bob, suggesting that their shared sense of psychic rootlessness masks fundamental differences. Despite her sympathetic rendering of Flor's breakdown, Gallant ultimately casts her as privileged leisure traveller whose experience of "exile" is purely figurative, a symptom of her membership of an elite social caste. By contrast, Bob's literal, involuntary exile is identified as a profound injustice requiring "atonement" (182). In their final encounter, George observes that Bob looks "like a man who had come into a known station only to find all the trains going to the wrong places or leaving at impossible times" (162). Despite his seeming cosmopolitanism, Bob is the novel's true "exile", forced to adopt a "distinctly American" (157) persona in order to disguise his painful and stigmatised identity as the child of Jewish refugees. As in "The Other Paris", Gallant draws the figures of the tourist and the refugee into an ambiguous and distinctly asymmetrical relation, in order to critique romanticised conceptions of mobility as a means of transformation.

"An Alien Flower" (1974)

In her 1974 collection, *The Pegnitz Junction*, Gallant continues to juxtapose tourists with dispossessed and disoriented victims of the Second World War. Here, however, unlike in "The Other Paris" and *Green Water*, the refugee assumes the role of chief protagonist, while the tourist appears a peripheral or marginal figure. Though the stories in *The Pegnitz Junction* are set in many European locations, the collection deals specifically with post-war Germany and its fitful, inadequate attempts to reckon with its wartime past (Hancock 37-41). Much more explicitly than in her earlier stories, Gallant deals directly with the violence and horror of the war, particularly the mass murder of Jews in German

concentration camps. Yet she is equally concerned to depict the process of evasion and deliberate misremembering by which this history is rapidly being effaced. In another story in the collection, Gallant's narrator observes wryly that "[t]he vast complex of camps in Silesia is on land that has become Polish now, so it is as if those camps had never been German at all" (*Pegnitz* 96; Woodcock 84). The stories in *The Pegnitz Junction* repeatedly associate trauma and repression with geographic dislocation and disorientation. This emerges particularly in "An Alien Flower", the final story in the collection. This story presents a deeply poignant account of a young female refugee, Beate Brüning. Beate, or "Bibi", is marked as "alien" not only on account of her uncertain ethnic origin, but also by virtue of her refusal to deny her past. Emerging from the war "with no friends, no family and no money" (168), she finds employment with a bourgeois family, the Lauers, who represent the internationally networked, capitalistic West Germany. Through Bibi's relationship with the exploitative, manipulative Lauers, Gallant illustrates the direct, albeit ambiguous relationship between the bourgeois prosperity of West Germany and the suffering of post-war refugees.⁸¹

"An Alien Flower" is set in a post-war Germany haunted by its recent past, a past personified by Bibi. Like Bob Harris in *Green Water, Green Sky*, Bibi is strangely devoid of personal history. She is, as Helga Lauer notes, "as pure as the rest of us... swept clean... of childhood memory and of childhood itself" (174), a passage that combines a fantasy of purification with a postlapsarian sense of profound shame. With her "honest and plain" Germanic name, blond hair, blue eyes and "round face" (173-74) Bibi seems to personify a quintessential Germanness. Her disingenuous nature "sp[eaks] of nothing but peasant sanity"; even her nickname bears a homophonic similarity to "baby". Yet Bibi also appears to her employer as a threatening and untrustworthy figure. As Helga notes, "people like Bibi could say anything they liked about themselves", since "so many papers and documents had been burned" (168). Helga regards Bibi as "different... 'other'", and surmises that she might be "slightly foreign" (173). She recalls how her high school text books "explained about the pure and the impure, beginning with plant life", showing the image of "an upright, splendid, native plant" next to "a spindly thing that never bloomed and that was in some way an alien flower" (173). With this anecdote, Helga unwittingly reveals the persistent influence of Nazi ideology in post-war Germany, with its emphasis

⁸¹ For brief discussions of "An Alien Flower", see Woodcock; Besner; Keefer, *Reading*; Smythe, *Elegy*. For a detailed and insightful analysis of the story, as an exploration of German women's experiences of Nazism and its aftermath, see Wolf.

on hardline eugenics and racial purity. In this context, Bibi's "alien" status assumes a dual meaning. Ambiguously representing both a quintessential German identity and its racial other, Bibi also symbolises Germany's repressed but still-pervasive racism and xenophobia.⁸²

Like Felix in "The Other Paris", Bibi is designated simply as a "refugee", a term that serves to obscure her identity and the precise reason for her dislocated, dispossessed state. Helga describes her as "a refugee, from Silesia" (168), remarking that in the town Bibi "name[s] as her birthplace everyone had died or run away" (168). Helga apparently believes that Bibi has spent time in a "refugee camp" (178), like many ethnic Germans in Silesia in the years following the war.⁸³ Yet she hints at other, darker possibilities, surmising that Bibi's family might have been "Socialists, radicals, troublemakers, black-marketeers, prostitutes, wife-beaters, informers, [or] Witnesses of Jehovah" (174). Evoking the many categories of ethnic Germans who were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps alongside Jews, Helga implies that Bibi might in fact be a victim of Nazism. At the same time, she rejects this possibility, professing that she "never learned why" Bibi hoards cakes of soap and toothpaste and obsessively "ration[s]" her use of water (180). Helga's ignorance is deeply disingenuous, since the Lauers repeatedly thwart Bibi's efforts to talk about her past. Julius forcibly removes Bibi from her shared lodgings with "a family of refugees", asserting that she must not "waste her mental energies talking about the tides of history" (172). One night at a dinner party, having had a glass of wine, Bibi remarks that "some adolescents, under difficult circumstances, were instructed in algebra and physics by distinguished professors", while in "a concentration camp" a "gypsy girl" was "taught to read and write by a woman doctor of philosophy". The Lauers' only response is to determine that Bibi "be given nothing to drink except when... alone" (180). "I could not expect Julius's guests to abandon their own homes and their own television to hear nothing but disjointed anecdotes", Helga declares indignantly (180). In their determination to obscure Bibi's origins, the Lauers embody their country's collective national trauma and its determination to forget its recent past. Bibi's "alien"

⁸² As Ronald Hatch observes, the story emphasises the "continuities between post-war Germany and its disavowed recent history" ("Stages" 104).

⁸³ Silesia, a region straddling the borders of Germany, Poland and the former Czechoslovakia, witnessed widespread looting, rape, forced labour and other forms of violence against ethnic Germans after the cessation of formal hostilities (Lowe 45, 52, 233, 245). After Silesia was formally incorporated into Poland, there was a mass expulsion of ethnic Germans and a concerted attempt 'to erase all traces of their existence' from the region. Many ethnic Germans "were rounded up and put into camps, either for use as slave labour or to be held until they could be officially deported" (Lowe 233).

quality is thus not only attributable to Bibi's "foreign" origins, but also to her representation of historical events that Julius and Helga would rather "erase" from "existence" (Lowe 245).

Bibi's "alien" status is compounded by her status as a woman in a deeply patriarchal society. Though her role in the Lauer house is ostensibly that of a domestic servant, Bibi also serves as mistress or second "wi[f]e" (186) to Julius. Julius's relationship with Bibi is both despotic and sexually exploitative. When she enrolls in a high school chemistry class and shows herself to be a "brilliant" student, Julius finds her employment at Possner, the chemical manufacturing company for which he works. Helga declares this "an incredible stroke of fortune for someone in Bibi's situation", observing that since Bibi met Julius "she had nothing but luck" (169). But Bibi's employment at Possner only compounds her vulnerability to Julius's tyrannical control. Upon her commencement at Possner, Julius "personally move[s]" Bibi from her shared lodgings to her own apartment, on the pretext that "Possner employees [must] live decently" (172). This forced dislocation is repeated when Bibi eventually becomes "tiresome" to Julius and he determines to be "honorably rid of her" (184), deciding that Bibi must go abroad for further study. Bibi accepts the plan "without thanks and without joy", though she is frightened of planes and reluctant to leave her "work that interested her" (184). When Julius "abandon[s]" her "at a university in the west of Canada", her "wounded, homesick letters follo[w], one a day", until she is permitted to return home (185). Having "failed as an emigrant" in North America (188), Bibi is readmitted to the Lauer household and resumes "her old duties of ironing and washing the supper dishes" (186). Yet at the end of the story, Helga reveals abruptly that Bibi has "gone out to an American branch" of Julius's company and subsequently committed suicide (190). Through this sustained imagery of coerced mobility, Gallant draws a parallel between Bibi's status as a refugee and her vulnerability as the mistress of a wealthy and powerful man. Her "alien" status as a Silesian parallels her precarious status as Julius's unacknowledged second "wife", without legal status and therefore continually liable to expulsion from the family home.

Gallant reinforces this parallel between Bibi's gender and her "refugee" (178) status, by using overtly military metaphors to describe the family patriarch, Julius. Whereas Bibi stands for the dispossessed and unacknowledged victims of Nazism, Julius symbolically represents the perpetrators of it. Over the course of the story, Helga traces Julius's rise through the ranks of his company, Possner, from "lieutenant" (170) to

“captain” (171), then “colonel” (186) and finally “general” (191). For Helga, Possner represents “a new force in the nation, an élite army... enlist[ing] the best of recruits” (170), “bright young people with a promising future and no past” (169). Julius reveres the company with an almost messianic zeal. “[H]is life [i]s his work”, Helga notes (172), while he himself declares that “without an ideal, life is nothing” (182). Yet Julius also reveals the deeply illiberal and sinister aspects of this “industry-army” (170). He detests “[t]he conversational aspect” of the evening news (170, 187) and never “need[s] to shout to be frightening” (188). Julius expresses no surprise when his carefully selected “future son-in-law”, Michael, suggests that Possner should train political candidates and “launc[h]” them in every political party, so that “no matter who was elected... everything would run efficiently” (188). Indeed, he has already put this strategy into practice (188), by selecting and “train[ing]” (183) Michael as his daughter’s lover. Recalling the Nazis’ programme of racial engineering for the purposes of national efficiency, this gesture also illustrates the extent of Julius’s patriarchal power.

Gallant reinforces her parallel between women and the dislocated and dispossessed victims of Nazism, by drawing a sustained comparison between Bibi and Helga Lauer. Helga describes herself and Bibi as “two grown-up war orphans” (176). “Anyone who had ever known me or loved me had been killed in one period of seven weeks”, she recounts (171). This traumatic experience profoundly influences Helga’s relationship with Julius, rendering her perpetually “nervous” and vulnerable to intimidation. In her wedding photo, she observes, “I look as though someone had just scolded me” (171). Throughout her married life, Helga is haunted by a sense that she is “[l]ike Bibi,” with “no friends... no family” (171), “absolutely no-one but Julius, and nowhere to go” (176). Paradoxically, her discovery of the sexual relationship between Julius and Bibi only heightens the sense of affinity between the two women. Rummaging in a cupboard, Helga finds a diary written by yet another woman, detailing her liaisons with Julius. When she shows it to Bibi, Bibi’s shock and “her stricken face” betray her, yet Helga feels powerless to confront either Bibi or Julius over their illicit relationship. Being pregnant, she is subject to frequent “violent spasms” of illness (176), and she depends upon Bibi, “the only person [whose] smell did not turn [her] stomach” (176). As Helga vomits, she clings to Bibi, who confides that she “know[s] that mixture of hunger and nausea, when all you long for is good white bread” (176). With this striking image, Gallant draws an explicit parallel between Bibi’s suffering in her “refugee camp” (178)

and the specifically female forms of pain and vulnerability Helga experiences in the course of her pregnancy, further underscoring her symbolic association between the precarious status of the refugee and that of women in a patriarchal society.

At the same time, Gallant emphasises Helga's complicity with Julius and the brutal ideology he represents. She reflects derisively that most of Julius's mistresses are "poor things, sometimes barely literate" (175-76) and regards herself as socially superior to Bibi, with her "farm girl's accent" and unrefined manners. In a sense, Helga's loyalty to Julius is based on her desire for social status and material comfort. Confronted with his infidelities, she consoles herself by reasoning, "I am his wife... and he has promised me a house" (176). Yet Helga's attachment to her series of new and increasingly luxurious homes is not merely a sign of bourgeois acquisitiveness, but also of her desperate desire to repress her memories of the war. By the time Julius has attained the status of "colonel", and they have moved to "the newest and best of [their] homes", she notes that the house is in her name. "Every windowpane belongs to me," she reflects with satisfaction (186). This reference to windowpanes eerily evokes images of bombed buildings, including Helga's own former home, from which she saw her mother running "with her hair on fire" (182). In this context, the Lauers' frequent, almost compulsive movement from one new house to the next seems to illustrate a desire to break with the past, to disavow it and to live without memory in a kind of perpetual present. A similarly compulsive, pathological desire to be rid of the material traces of the past is evident in Helga's habit of emptying out Bibi's handbag, discarding her "broken comb... thumbled mirror... [and] pencil stubs" and replacing them with "something clean and new" (180). Through this ritualistic "dumping" of Bibi's possessions, Helga not only demonstrates her power over Bibi, but also seeks to enlist her in the Lauers' collective effort to maintain a domestic environment that has no visible history. Gallant thus makes it clear that Helga is not merely a passive witness to Julius's exploitation of Bibi, but rather, an active participant in it.⁸⁴

Helga's complicity with Julius's gendered, racial and economic exploitation of Bibi become apparent in her own patterns of mobility. When Julius "order[s]" Helga to

⁸⁴ Similarly, when a documentary on the concentration camps appears on television, Helga imagines her house as a "fortress", with "bodies pil[ing] up outside" (188). "Don't look at them", she commands herself. Just as Clarissa Dalloway recoils from knowledge of "the Albanians, or was it the Armenians" (*MD* 106), Helga wilfully retreats from the horrors of her country's recent past into an idealised and inward-looking domesticity. The corpses she imagines "pil[ing] up outside" (188) symbolise not only those who died in the concentration camps, but also those of Bibi and the other women who are more marginal, and more exploited, than she is herself.

accompany him on “a long business journey to Hong Kong, Japan, California, and Vancouver” (183), she persuades him to take Bibi instead. In stark contrast to Bibi’s series of forced and ultimately fatal dislocations, Helga travels for pleasure and in order to engage in conspicuous consumption. On her first international holiday, to Rome, Helga is “dazzled” by the Italian shops and wants “to buy presents for dozens of people” (172). Since she has “only Bibi”, she buys “a marble darning egg” and a pair of oversized sandals, believing, erroneously, that Bibi’s feet are “enormous” (172). Reinforcing Bibi’s inferior role in the Lauer household, as well as her status as a less feminine, less desirable wife, these purchases also bolster Helga’s self-image as an affluent and glamorous tourist. Her destination, Italy, also underscores her superiority over her other domestic servant, “the Italian” (186), who is never even named in the narrative although she works in the house every day. The profound symbolic importance of this journey becomes apparent when Helga names her only daughter Roma. While Helga gives the prosaic reason that Rome was where her daughter was conceived, the choice is powerfully symbolic. Connoting affluence, leisure and luxury, the name Roma signifies the profound importance of touristic travel in the “refined and comfortable future” Helga imagines for herself (173).

As in “The Other Paris” and *Green Water, Green Sky*, Gallant links tourist travel to the growth of transnational capitalism. With their connotations of an ancient empire, the names Roma and Julius illustrate the economic expansionist ambitions of post-war Germany. Julius is the personification of the new global capitalist regime of which Germany is part. He has “personal and professional acquaintances in South Africa, Argentina, Sweden, Milan and many other places” (184) and his travel is almost exclusively in the service of his business. Julius’s tastes reflect his seemingly sophisticated global outlook. He takes a “particular” interest in wine and holds a “bouquet of long-stemmed glasses” as he watches a beer-drinking contest on the Lauers’ television. It is Julius who “promise[s]” Helga a “beautiful house” with a “clock from Holland... wallpaper from France [and] swimming-pool tiles from Italy” (175). In the last and “best” of the Lauers’ homes, he grows “imported white camellias in pots” and lilies in a pool, “their roots feed[ing] on a chemical mixture encased in a sphere” (189). Yet as Gallant makes clear, this is a contrived and impoverished form of cosmopolitanism, one based purely on consumption. “Even with flowers the pool looks sterile”, Helga bleakly concedes (189).

Gallant associates this debased, materialistic expression of cosmopolitanism with the Lauers' desire to disavow or deny their recent past. Julius's "particular" interest in wine and his multinational network of associates identify him a fictional counterpart to Bob in *Green Water, Green Sky*. Yet just as Bob's bland Anglo-Saxon name and "New York boy" persona belie his Jewish origins, Julius's background is mysterious. He objects to the beer-drinking contest, protesting, "[n]o-one here is Bavarian". To this, Michael responds, "Right.... We are not Bavarian! Roma is not, and her mother is from Dortmund, and Aunt Bibi is from... and... and *you* are from..." (187) before falteringly naming Cologne as Julius's birthplace. Helga reacts indignantly to Michael's error, reflecting that "[h]e should have known where Julius was born" (187). Yet she also admits, early in the story, that "Julius lied sometimes... Divinities invent[t] convenient fables... and appea[r] in strange disguises..." (173) With Michael's awkward pause, Gallant hints that Julius, like Bibi, is an "alien flower", one of the many who emerged from the war with a "dreadful secret" or an "unspoken grudge" (168). Perhaps a refugee from Silesia, a former Nazi, or even an "assimilated" Jew like Bob Harris (Bodemann 59),⁸⁵ Julius adopts a cosmopolitan persona in order to efface his history and recreate himself as an archetypal citizen of the modern, globally networked and emphatically capitalist West Germany. Like Bob, and unlike Bibi, he is a successful global entrepreneur precisely because he is willing to disavow and deny his true identity and personal history, which remain obscure at the story's conclusion.

Through the subtle interrelationship between Julius, Helga and Bibi, Gallant reprises the theme of "The Other Paris" and *Green Water, Green Sky*, insisting on the mutual interdependency of the categories of tourist and refugee. More explicitly than in her earlier texts, she stresses the ways in which gender, class and ethnicity determine the nature of an individual's travel. In particular, through her dyadic pairing of Bibi and Helga, Gallant presents contrasting examples of female mobility, showing how middle class tourism is meaningful precisely because it expresses social and economic power, in contrast to the forced mobility of refugees and other migrants. For Helga, travel denotes membership of a socio-economic elite. By contrast, for Bibi and the unnamed Italian domestic in Helga's house, travel is traumatic, a forced dislocation that renders the traveller vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Gallant underscores this interrelationship

⁸⁵ Cologne was where the earliest Jewish communities re-established themselves in April 1945, before the war had even come to its official end (Bodemann 52).

with the story's concluding image, in which Helga imagines Bibi lying "face down" in the pool "among the... lilies, with dragonflies darting at her wet hair" (190). This ghoulish fantasy, which echoes the scene of George's near-drowning in *Green Water, Green Sky*, recalls Helga's earlier distinction between the "upright, splendid, native plant" of her high school textbook and the "alien flower" that "never bloomed" (173). It reinforces the obscure racial or ethnic difference that the Lauers perceive in Bibi, a difference that relegates her to second class status, even in a post-war Germany "swept clean" of Nazism (174). At the same time, it reinforces Gallant's symbolic connection between the Lauers' cosmopolitan aspirations and their exploitation of Bibi: Helga notes with bitter irony that it was "thanks to an idea of Bibi's that Julius [was] able to grow the lilies" (189). In this way, "An Alien Flower" bears vivid testament to the suffering of refugees, while also revealing the ways in which bourgeois travellers and tourists are complicit in their marginalisation.

"Baum, Gabriel, 1935 – ()" (1979)

In "Baum, Gabriel, 1935 – ()", the refugee becomes Gallant's chief protagonist, the archetype for an entire generation of displaced and disoriented post-war Europeans.⁸⁶ Spanning a longer historical period than "An Alien Flower", this story takes the traumatic events of the Second World War as its backdrop, but also focusses far more closely on the disorienting forces of globalisation and transnational capitalism as they develop over the 1950s, 60s and 70s. In contrast to the Paris of *Green Water, Green Sky*, the Paris of "Baum, Gabriel" is palpably multicultural and postcolonial, populated by "Yugoslavs, Turks, North Africans [and] Portuguese" emigrants (156-57) as well as Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. The story's eponymous narrator is a Jewish man whose family fled from Germany to France during the war. Gabriel's parents are turned over to the Nazis by French collaborators, leaving Gabriel as "the last of the Baums" (143). As a young man he finds himself adrift in Paris, without any tangible connection to his German or Jewish heritage. Utterly "immersed in the present moment" (150), Gabriel feels he is "suspended...stopped" (140) in a state of arrested development reflected in the story's aporetic title. Like the characters in *Green Water, Green Sky*, he experiences his rootless

⁸⁶ To date, this story has received little scholarly attention. See Gabriel for an illuminating discussion of the story as an exploration of post-War French cinema, as a medium that "provoked French anamnesis about its wartime collaboration" with Nazism (190).

state as one of paralysing inertia, rather than liberating mobility. Despite his seemingly cosmopolitan surroundings, his experience of transnational mobility is a profoundly melancholic one, a state of displacement from an idealised and unattainable home.

“Baum, Gabriel” begins with a nostalgic evocation of the cosmopolitan culture that existed in Europe before the two World Wars. This culture is personified in Gabriel’s Uncle August, whose very name connotes a benign and peaceable sensibility. Gabriel’s only surviving relative, August Baum was born in 1899 and speaks “German and Spanish and the pale scrupulous French and English that used to be heard at spas and in the public rooms of large, airy hotels” (140). His clothes are “old-fashioned British”, his watch Swiss and his manners “German, prewar”. To Gabriel, in the 1960s, his uncle appears “to conceal an obsolete social mystery”, though Gallant notes that “a few Central Europeans, still living, would have placed him easily as a tight, unyielding remainder of the European shipwreck” (140). August’s cosmopolitanism is not characterised by inertia but rather by purposeful mobility. “Unlike Gabriel’s father and mother, Uncle August had got out of Europe in plenty of time” (139). He disapproves of Gabriel’s residence in Paris, maintaining that the city’s “moral climate invite[s] apathy and rot” (142). He urges Gabriel to “take a strong, positive line with his life and above all to get out of Paris, which had never amounted to more than an émigré way station” (142). Yet Gabriel feels profoundly alienated from his uncle and the pre-war culture he represents. He does not respond to August’s letters or even open the envelope he receives upon his uncle’s death, “being fairly certain it d[oes] not contain a check” (143). Though Gallant insists that Gabriel “truly mourn[s]” his uncle, the failure of their relationship confirms August’s status as an anachronism. The avatar of an enabling cosmopolitan mobility, he is deeply anomalous in post-war Europe, a place in which national boundaries and ethnic differences appear increasingly insurmountable.

In some respects, “Baum, Gabriel” imbues travel with a transformative significance, suggesting that it offers the traveller the chance to transcend such ethnic and national divisions. As a young man, Gabriel forms a romantic relationship with a young German woman, Liselotte, who has travelled to Paris “pursuing spiritual cleanness through culture” (144). Liselotte belongs to “a generation of extremely pretty German girls” in Paris at this time, travelling “because their fathers were dead or exiled under unremarkable names” (144). Gallant faintly ironises Liselotte’s idealism, describing how she earnestly studies French poetry, “following the words with her finger” (144). Yet, at

least initially, Liselotte's journey appears genuinely transformative. Through their romance, Liselotte seems to be freeing herself from the taint of her Nazi forbears, while Gabriel also seems poised to abandon the traumatic memories of his parents' deaths. When Gabriel first meets Liselotte in the Parc Monceau, he is struck by the beauty of its "six, seven, eight shades of green", evoking renewal and regeneration (145). Though he "had promised the child-Gabriel he would never marry a German", he hurries to meet Liselotte, barely noticing the "old men" around him, "wearing slivers of ribbon to mark this or that war" (145). In this period, Gabriel acquires an uncharacteristic mobility. "For the sake of Liselotte he crosse[s] the Seine", even "tak[ing] the No. 84 bus to see her – he who never went out of Montparnasse unless he had to, who had never bothered to learn about bus routes or the names of streets" (145). With this imagery, Gallant appears to embrace the trope of transformative travel, suggesting that in the cosmopolitan environs of Paris, Gabriel and Liselotte can transcend their ethnic differences and the burden of Europe's recent history to form a genuinely empathetic relationship.

Still, if the idealism of Liselotte and Gabriel recalls the early courtship between Rachel Vinrace and Terence Hewett, the premature conclusion of their romance also recalls the bleak conclusion of *The Voyage Out*. Like the other German girls in Paris, "whistled back by solemn young men with solemn jobs" (144), Liselotte finds her spiritual "voyage out" cut short. She confides to Gabriel, resignedly, that her stepfather "had tried to rape her; still, she had his name" (145). Yet Gallant implies that it is Gabriel, rather than this menacing stepfather, who prompts Liselotte to "g[i]ve up on love and culture" and return to Germany. Waiting in vain for a clear declaration of love, Liselotte "trie[s] to ask Gabriel if he wanted to marry her, but the words caught" (145). Gabriel hesitates, feeling that "in an odd way" Liselotte is "not... German *enough*" (145); that she does not "look German" (145). With her high ideals and literary tastes, as much as her brown eyes, Liselotte fails to conform to his prevailing cultural stereotype of a German fascist (Hatch, "Fascism"). She is therefore, like Uncle August, culturally illegible.⁸⁷ As Gabriel watches Liselotte being "borne away" to Germany, his vision of the train is "blurred, as if he were looking at it through Liselotte's tears" (145). Liselotte

⁸⁷ In his inability to separate Liselotte from French cultural stereotypes about Germans, Gabriel resembles the title character in an earlier story, "Willi", first published in the *New Yorker* in 1963. Willi is also a German (though not Jewish) who acts in French films about the Occupation. As Hatch writes, Willi sees people through the prism of the films in which he performs, trying to reduce them to "celluloid abstractions". "When people resist such a use, as inevitably they must... he walks away from real life, all the while desperately wanting the ideal film to continue playing" (Hatch, "Fascism").

writes letters “like the trail of a child going ever deeper into the woods”, but while Gabriel is “still deciding, and not deciding, the trail stop[s] and the path bec[omes] overgrown behind her” (145-46). Evoking the story of Hansel and Gretel, this macabre image appears to constitute a stark repudiation of Liselotte’s idealised conception of transformative travel.

Gabriel’s friendship with another German, Dieter Pohl, more clearly illustrates the utopian potential of the émigré’s existence. Gabriel and Dieter are both professional actors, meeting regularly in a bar-tabac called La Méduse where “refugees... and foreign students” wait to be recruited for television roles (147). In their television careers, Dieter and Gabriel ritually re-enact the occupation and liberation of Paris, with Dieter playing German officers and Gabriel playing a “victim” whose “rapid disappearance [i]s supposed to establish the tone of the period for audiences too young to recall it” (147). Through Dieter’s performance in these “Occupation dramas”, Gallant traces the economic resurgence of post-war Germany, ironically echoing Julius’s rise through Possner in “An Alien Flower”. Dieter “had begun as a private, had been promoted to lieutenant, and expected to become a captain soon” (147). By contrast, Gabriel’s career illustrates the enduring marginality of the war’s victims. He has “no equivalent staircase to climb; who has ever heard of a victim’s being promoted?” (150). Yet despite their different roles, Gabriel and Dieter achieve an enduring rapport. Gallant symbolically links this friendship to Gabriel’s earlier romance with Liselotte and their tryst in the Parc Monceau. When Dieter announces that he is returning to Bavaria, the Luxembourg Gardens become, temporarily, “all one dull colour”, but “[t]he greens emerg[e] again” when Dieter invites Gabriel to come to Germany to stay with him (159). Through this “loyal friendship” (151), Gallant casts Paris as a transformative site in which displaced, rootless individuals can transcend ethnic differences and achieve a kind of symbolic reconciliation. In this sense, “Baum, Gabriel” seems to recuperate the humanistic value of cosmopolitanism and the transformative potential of mobility.

By stressing the masculine exclusivity of the cosmopolitan milieu inhabited by Gabriel and Dieter, Gallant implies that this form of cosmopolitan mobility is exclusively available to men. The name of their favourite bar, La Méduse, casts its patrons as Homeric wanderers, engaged on an epic adventure. With their black leather jackets, and haircuts that “sp[ea]k of military service and colonial wars”, they resemble “a camp full of armed militia” (148) as they stand at the bar or sit hunched around their tables. This environment

produces a distinctively male form of sociality. Extolling their “[y]ears and years without a disagreement”, Dieter declares that “[i]t is a male situation. Women would never be capable of such a thing” (151). Gabriel’s friends “prefe[r] films in which women presen[t] no obstacles and creat[e] no problems”, appearing “either naked or in evening dress” (150). The real women in their lives are kept at a literal and emotional distance. When Dieter’s cousin Helga telephones him from Germany, he silently passes the receiver to Gabriel, who “place[s] [it] softly on a shelf” while she declares, plaintively, “I still love you.” (156). This distinction is reinforced when Dieter reveals his intention to return to Bavaria, where he has purchased a bakery. With its “linen press, sheets strewn with lavender”, clothes neatly folded and breakfast of warm bread, eggs, milk and coffee, served on a “white tablecloth, under a lime tree” (159), Gabriel imagines Dieter’s Bavarian home as a paradisaal space of nurturance and comfort. This space is entirely dependent upon the labour of women (Gabriel 194): Gabriel imagines “Dieter’s wife putting her hand on the white coffee pot to see if it was still hot enough” for him (159). Like Homer’s Penelope, these women serve as emblems of a passive and subservient, domesticated femininity, utterly peripheral to the male world of action and adventure.

Gallant heavily ironises her male protagonists, suggesting that their cosmopolitan disdain for domesticity masks a profound sense of loneliness and insecurity. Gabriel secretly thinks of his émigré actor friends as “bachelor orphans”. “They had been everywhere”, he reflects, “to Brazil, where they could not understand the language, and to New York, where they complained about the climate, and to Israel, where they were disappointed with the food” (147). Now, in Paris, they live in a state of curious inertia, with neither parents nor children and “no way of measuring time” (150). Like Bonnie and Bob in *Green Water, Green Sky*, the “bachelor orphans” of La Méduse seem incapable of recognising their own loneliness or isolation. Only Gabriel has fleeting intimations that their masculine bonhomie is forced or contrived. He notes uncomfortably that the female patrons of La Méduse do not “cluster together like anxious pigeons on the pretext of friendship” (151). Sitting by themselves, they read “whatever fascinating stuff” they carry in their “mysterious shopping bags”, but also show an “an ever-fresh interest” in the “strangers” who come and go without addressing them (151). In contrast to the self-sufficient solitude of these female patrons, the male patrons of La Méduse appear “rudder[less]” and “aimless”, “the flotsam of Europe” (148-49). Like the clichéd

Occupation dramas in which Gabriel and Dieter perform, their form of cosmopolitan mobility is merely a performance, one that is ultimately inauthentic and enervating.

As in “The Other Paris”, *Green Water, Green Sky* and “An Alien Flower”, Gallant links this sense of inauthenticity to the insidious influence of capitalism. Over the course of the story, Gallant traces the increasing pervasiveness of the capitalist logic by which culture is reduced to a commodity or spectacle. In their acting careers, Dieter and Gabriel trade on their respective identities as “real Germa[n]” and “authentic Je[w]”, “doing something their parents had done before them” (157). Again and again, they ritually reenact the Holocaust for television audiences comprising “millions of people, some eating their dinner” (151). Dieter is clear-eyed about the commercial nature of this transaction, estimating that by the time the French are “bored with entertainment based on the Occupation” he will have saved up “enough money to buy a business... in his native town” (151). Yet he also derives “moral satisfaction” from his work, believing that it “provide[s] the general public with notions of history” (148). Gallant gently satirises Dieter’s “fuss[iness]... about a badge misplaced or a button undone” (150). He frets when his uniform becomes soiled, curtly dismissing Gabriel’s suggestion that “after the siege of the Palais de Luxembourg the original uniforms must have shown wear” (156). Yet she also draws a distinction between Dieter’s earnestness and the more mercenary generation of actors that succeeds him. In middle age, Dieter is appalled when his fellow actors “tr[y] to make [tourists] pay for taking their pictures” in their Nazi uniforms (158). Ironically, Dieter fails to appreciate that this is merely a logical extension of the voyeuristic and commoditising capitalist culture that has shaped his own career.

More explicitly than in her earlier texts, Gallant associates this capitalistic culture with increasing transnational mobility, particularly the mobility of tourists. Over the course of the story, *La Méduse* undergoes a transformation that registers the increasing influence of tourism on Paris and of American culture on French daily life. From its early incarnation as a shabby bar-tabac, *La Méduse* undergoes refurbishment and reinvents itself as a café for English and American expatriates, complete with “rows of booths... orange glass lampshades, and British First World War recruiting posters plastered on the walls” (152). Recalling the “Coca Cola signs” Carol finds so disheartening in “The Other Paris”, this change denotes the increasing influence of American modernity on French life. Yet whereas the Coca Cola signs in the earlier story seems merely to underscore France’s economic reliance on the US, the France of “Baum, Gabriel” appears more self-

conscious and more cynical in its pandering to touristic tastes. Like the café in *Green Water, Green Sky*, with its walls papered with maps of Paris, the café is highly contrived, intended to appeal to a tourist's idea of historic authenticity. At the same time, its most striking features are fetishised emblems of mobility: "automobile seats made of imitation leather" and "postcards advertising the café, which customers could send to their friends" (152). With these interrelated images of imitation car seats and imitation postcards (in the sense that they are actually advertisements), the refurbished La Méduse illustrates the interconnection of mobility, modernity and a debased French culture reduced to a touristic spectacle.⁸⁸

If La Méduse seems to represent the locus of a cosmopolitan identity, Gallant suggests that this identity is deeply precarious and artificial. Gabriel views the bar as a kind of haven, perceiving its neon signs as "the lights of home" (142). Yet Gallant demonstrates that this tenuous sense of security and belonging is misplaced. Ironically, Gabriel himself has been unwittingly conscripted into the bar's tourist economy, becoming part of the spectacle. The bar's postcards announce it as "THE OLDEST AND MOST CELEBRATED MEETING-PLACE FOR TELEVISION STARS IN PARIS" (152) and the proprietor proudly announces that Dieter and Gabriel are his "oldest customers" (161). In the story's final paragraphs, the proprietor reveals that the bar has been sold again. The new owners declare that they will not "tamper with the atmosphere of the old place; not for anything in the world would they tamper with the recruiting posters or the automobile seats" (161); but Dieter has heard that they are "crooks" who intend to turn the bar into a "front for the Corsican mafia" (161). In this way, Gallant stresses that the bar and its "atmosphere" are commercial in nature, perpetually vulnerable to the whims of the market. She juxtaposes La Méduse with the seemingly more authentic home to which Dieter plans to return, to get married, open a bakery and revive an "old, forgotten trad[e]" (158-59). Gabriel is powerfully attracted by this vision of return to a bucolic, preindustrial, pre-war Germany, which he associates with "birds singing and the smell of freshly baked bread" (159). Yet he himself can enact no such homecoming. He "kn[ows] nothing" about Germany and has no mental image of it other than "empty

⁸⁸ Kristin Ross describes the significance of cars in post-war France, both as a symbol of modernisation and a practical contributor to the development of its advanced capitalist economy. "During the 1950s and 1960s in France," she writes, "mobility was the categorical imperative of the economic order, the mark of a rupture with the past; every individual must be free to be displaced, and displaceable in function of the exigencies of the economic order. The car performed (and continues to perform) the activity most embedded in ideologies of the free market: displacement" (22).

rooms, letters left behind [and] cold railway stations washed down with disinfectant” (159). He has never been there “except to jump out of trains” in his television roles (159). Like the artificial car seats, these televised acts of return are utterly contrived, performative and ultimately purposeless.

In his profound sense of alienation from his cultural origins, Gabriel differs radically from Felix, the refugee depicted in “The Other Paris”. In the earlier story, Felix rejects Carol’s exhortations to abandon Europe for a new life in America. As an undocumented immigrant with no right to work, Felix is much more vulnerable than Gabriel. Yet Felix retains a clear sense of his own identity, his origins and the reasons for his displacement, even if these things remain obscure to the reader. In his refusal to be seduced by Carol’s promises of a more affluent life in America, Felix evinces an integrity and determination that make him a rare figure in Gallant’s fiction, an oeuvre overwhelmingly populated by poseurs, opportunists and hapless conformists. His quiet self-possession, and his indifference to money, make him baffling and ultimately frightening to Carol, who retreats from her encounter with him into the comfortable parochialism of her relationship with Howard. This power dynamic is inverted in the final scene of “Baum, Gabriel”, in which the tourists pose for photographs with Gabriel, who has at last been cast as a Nazi officer alongside Dieter. Here, Gabriel’s identity, and his history, are reduced to an assortment of simulacra and surfaces: a uniform, a plastic helmet, a booth seat in the shape of a car, and a World War One recruiting poster. Where, in the earlier story, Carol is acutely conscious of her exclusion from, and foreignness to, Parisian culture, the tourists of “Baum, Gabriel” betray no desire to discover a “real” or “authentic” Paris. Instead, they enthusiastically consume the spectacle performed for their benefit by Dieter and Gabriel. In this respect, the tourist emerges in “Baum, Gabriel” as a symbol of wilful amnesia, the process by which profound historical events are transformed into meaningless “kitsch” (Hancock 39).

Gallant’s fiction does not fail to acknowledge the ways in which women are subordinated and exploited by patriarchy: in texts such as *Green Water*, *Green Sky* and “An Alien Flower”, she poignantly illustrates the ways in which women can be exploited and objectified in their intimate relationships with men. Yet like Stead, Gallant refuses to absolve her female characters of complicity with other forms of inequality. Rather, through figures such as Carol and Helga, Gallant shows how women can be complicit in the exploitation and marginalisation of displaced figures such as Felix and Bibi. Whereas

Stead's critical portrayal of the mobile, bourgeois woman reflects her commitment to Marxist ideology, Gallant's approach is informed by her enduring preoccupation with the suffering of refugees. This in turn reflects her intense desire to record the impact of the Second World War, a history which, in her view, was being rapidly "forgotten" (Hancock 39). By refusing to subsume the experiences of refugees into a generalised category of "rootlessness" or "exile", Gallant's fiction bears vivid testament to this history.

5 Anita Desai and the politics of home

When compared with Woolf, Stead and Gallant, Anita Desai takes a very different approach to mobility, calling into question its value as a symbol and literal expression of female agency. Throughout her novels and short fiction, Desai juxtaposes mobile figures with those who remain at home, either by choice or because they have no opportunity to do otherwise. Desai portrays mobility in a distinctly ambivalent manner, emphasising its disorienting and deracinating effects upon the individual who leaves his or her home, family and native culture. To some extent, this difference can be attributed to Desai's Indian nationality and cultural context, in which "communal" values and family relationships arguably assume a higher value than they do in many "Western" societies (Jackson, *Feminism* 10). As Elizabeth Jackson has observed, Desai's fiction offers a sustained critique of "rampant individualism", which it frequently associates with the influence of colonial or Western cultures (*Feminism* 10). This critique finds expression in Desai's depiction of mobility and, in particular, of characters who experience mobility as distressing or destructive to their sense of self. It also finds expression in Desai's evocation of home, and the act of remaining at home, in more positive ways than can be found in the work of Woolf, Stead or Gallant. While Desai vividly depicts the oppressive and constraining aspects of domestic life, particularly for women, she also stresses the importance of the home as the place in which familial, social and cultural identity is nurtured and preserved.

Reading Desai's work in this way, it is important to acknowledge her elite socio-economic status within Indian society, and the ways in which this status shapes her attitudes to, and depictions of, mobility. For Rosemary Marangoly George, Desai's fiction expresses a vision of "liberty, freedom [and] feminist equality" that reflects her membership of an "educated upper class" (George 137, 159). Writing in English, and deeply influenced by the English literary canon,⁸⁹ Desai is "not representative of Indian

⁸⁹ In interviews, Desai has frankly acknowledged the profound influence of English literature upon her own writing. Speaking to Feroza Jussawalla, Desai says: "I went to the nearest school... which happened to be a mission school, and it's there I was taught English, and I think I instantly fell in love with English literature. It was a lifelong obsession of mine. I think it's what you read that most influences what you write... In those years, it was very much the tradition for Indians who went to mission schools to grow up reading more English literature than they did the literature of their own country. And I have to admit that as for older Indian literature, I've only taken an interest in it and read it very recently" (Jussawalla and Dasenbrook, 171).

women writers, nor of Indian women”, writes George (135). Instead, her writing explores the rarefied psychological struggles of the Indian woman “whose every material need has been met” (137), a highly atypical state, in a country in which large proportions of the population live in extreme poverty. This can be seen in Desai’s repeated depiction of characters, predominantly female, who suffer psychologically due to their confinement within comfortable, secure but emotionally sterile domestic spaces. In this context, the desire for mobility constitutes a “rebellion” of a largely symbolic or “aesthetic” kind (George 153), bespeaking a desire for “selfhood” that takes economic survival for granted (George 137). Similarly, the home that figures positively in Desai’s work is a highly unusual one, in the Indian context, being that of an “English speaking, upper-class/caste Hindu elite” (George 135), maintained by servants and filled with the artefacts of a bourgeois lifestyle: English literary texts, American records and fashionable nylon nightgowns bearing testament to the inhabitants’ wealth, as well as their cosmopolitan tastes. To the extent that Desai’s writing embraces both the act of remaining at home, and mobility as a path to personal “liberty” (George 137), it illustrates her distinctive subject position as a member of an Indian elite, one that in many ways renders her closer to Woolf, Stead and Gallant than to “Indian women” in a general sense.

With this in mind, the following chapter does not attempt to read Desai’s work as articulating a collective, “pan-Indian” sensibility (Chakravarty 78), even as it acknowledges the influence of Desai’s Indian context on her approach to mobility. Numerous critics have read Desai’s fiction, particularly her novel *Clear Light of Day*, through the prism of Indian history and politics, viewing its critique of domestic relationships as a metaphoric engagement with wider questions of Indian national identity.⁹⁰ Yet as George observes, to insist on reading texts like *Clear Light of Day* as nationalist allegory is to “relegat[e]... the elite woman herself, and... the projects intimate to her, to secondary or peripheral status”, a gesture that constitutes a “devaluation of female selfhood” (George 140). More recently, critics such as Hena Ahmad have construed Desai’s writing as “postnational”, in the sense that it is “invested much more in the problems women face in different capacities as single, married, widows, sisters, and mothers... than in concerns connected with national political independence from colonial rule” (Ahmad 91). The following discussion considers the influence of Desai’s Indianness in this more personal, individualised sense. Specifically, it explores the ways

⁹⁰ See, eg, Hashmi; Roy; Jani; Ray.

in which Desai portrays family relationships, particularly maternal bonds, in ways that distinguish her fundamentally from Woolf, Stead and Gallant. This difference can be attributed partly to the “central importance of motherhood” in traditional Indian formulations of female identity (Jackson, *Feminism* 84) and the “valorization” of maternal self-sacrifice that serves to constrain Indian women within an ideal of static and subservient domesticity (Chakravarty 77). It also reflects the specific life experiences of Desai herself, who unlike Woolf, Stead or Gallant spent much of her early life bearing and raising young children (Ho).

The chapter begins with Desai’s early novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, which graphically portrays the limits imposed upon female mobility by familial, and in particular, maternal responsibilities. It considers the extent to which the novel’s protagonist, Sita, successfully rebels against her confined domestic life and her maternal role by fleeing to the remote island where she spent her childhood. It suggests that in returning to her home and family, Sita acknowledges the centrality of motherhood to her own identity, even as she recognises the ongoing tension between her family life and her desire for personal fulfilment. The chapter proceeds to discuss the pervasive, contrasting imagery of stillness and mobility in *Clear Light of Day*, a novel set entirely in a crumbling house in Old Delhi. It considers how, more overtly than in her earlier novel, Desai equivocates between a critique of her female characters’ static, confined existence and a desire to recuperate the home as a site of connection, nurturance, personal and collective identity. Moving to *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, the story of a German-Jewish refugee in post-war India, the chapter shows how Desai evokes mobility as a deracinating and alienating experience, one that militates against any stable sense of identity. It finds further evidence of this critical stance in *Fasting, Feasting*, a novel that depicts a young Indian man sent into figurative exile in the United States, in order to obtain a prestigious university degree. Throughout this discussion, the chapter shows how Desai refuses to idealise mobility, or to associate it with a positive process of self-discovery or self-actualisation, even among these comparatively privileged mobile figures. Yet, as *Fasting, Feasting* most vividly illustrates, Desai also refuses to idealise the home that she posits as an alternative locus of identity. Rather, in *Fasting, Feasting*, Desai presents a stark account of the home as a site of exploitation, oppression and violence for many Indian women. Against this background, her short story, “The Rooftop Dwellers”, seeks to

reimagine the home as a liberating space for the independent, mobile, cosmopolitan Indian woman.

Where Shall We Go This Summer? (1975)

Where Shall We Go This Summer? offers a powerful depiction of the social and specifically familial bonds that inhibit female personal development. Its protagonist, Sita, is a wealthy middle class woman in her forties, living in Bombay with her husband and four children. Sita's life in Bombay is profoundly static. Though freed from the burden of domestic labour by a retinue of servants, she has no legitimate reason to leave her home, and so spends much of her time sitting on her balcony, looking at the sea, a "living monument to Waiting" (WSWG 49). Sita's intense desire for movement becomes apparent when she and her family encounter an "extraordinary looking, excessively blond" European hitchhiker as they return from a family outing (46). A mysterious and romantic figure, this hitchhiker strongly resembles the travelling minstrel in Woolf's short story, "The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn". He informs Sita and her husband that he is a flautist who has won a scholarship to study at an Indian university. Entranced by the hitchhiker's "bravery", Sita later confesses to her husband that she "would like to travel like that [her]self" (47). This passage closely echoes Joan Martyn's remark, upon seeing her brothers and father set out for London, that she "should like to go that way once..." (JM 49). Yet like Joan, Sita has no means of realising her ambition to travel. Instead she remains entrapped with the "small, enclosed area" of her home, watching its "few characters chur[n] around and then past her" (49).

In this context, Sita's sudden decision to leave her family home appears to constitute a dramatic and radical assertion of personal agency. When she discovers with dismay that there is a "fifth baby to wait for", she abandons her husband, Raman, and her two elder children, fleeing with her daughter and youngest son to her late father's home on the remote island of Manori. In a literal sense, Sita's flight is an attempt to escape from the monotony of her daily life as a bourgeois wife and mother. In a more symbolic sense, however, her journey constitutes an attempt to retreat from adulthood into a childish world of fantasy. For Sita, Manori is a "magic" place, an "island of miracles" (28), where her father, a charismatic leader of the Indian independence movement, became a kind of guru to the local people. By retreating to the island, Sita seeks to reassume her childhood

identity as an adoring, passive witness to her father's "wizardry" (82). With a child's wilful denial of unpalatable truths, she hopes that as long as she remains on the island her own fifth child will remain unborn, "safe inside" (117), protected from the "tedium and ugliness" (132) she perceives all around her. Inverting the conventional association between travel and development, Sita's journey to Manori represents a conscious attempt to "go back", to revert to an imagined state of infantile innocence and security (52).

Desai is quick to dispel any sense of romance from Sita's journey to the island, emphasising Sita's "disappointment" (19) at finding it very different from the childhood home she remembers. On arriving at Manori, Sita is "startle[d]" to discover that it is not as "picturesque" as she had expected. The fields are "pits of mud and slush", the village "an evil mass of overflowing drains, gaping thatched roofs and mud huts all battered and awry" (20-21). Arriving at her old home, Sita finds it dark and dirty, smelling of "bats and mildew", with "no air of providing shelter" (26). Far from offering a haven, the house is no more than "the cold remains of the bonfire her father had lit... to a blaze" (26), resembling "an empty theatre with its cigarette stubs and stale odours and dust" (90). During her time on the island, Sita gradually revises her idealised memories of her father and the strange, "theatrical" life she lived with him as a child (90). Remembering the home-made potions he administered to the local people, for ailments ranging from boils to infertility, she realises that his "wizardry" (82) had something of the "charlatan" about it (68). She finally acknowledges that she must "struggle to free herself" from her father's influence, and that if he had not died, "she might have spent her life [as] a slave to his undefined magic" (79). Sita understands, finally, that her journey to Manori has not been an expression of independence, but rather, a desperate and misguided attempt to escape the "dark", "cruel" sea of adult life by "swim[ming] back into the net" of her oppressive childhood (90).

As this marine imagery suggests, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* draws on Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, seeming to offer a narrative of failed or arrested female development. Images of water, drowning and underwater creatures recur throughout Desai's novel, in a manner that strongly recalls Woolf's characterisation of Rachel Vinrace. At home in Bombay, Sita desperately "search[es] for... moments that proclaim her still alive, not quite drowned and dead" (45). When she arrives at Manori, she surveys the local people in a manner that strongly evokes Rachel's encounter with the native South Americans in *The Voyage Out*. As Sita and her children proceed through the village

on their bullock cart, “[t]he villagers star[e] at her, she at them... at women squatting in the thick smoke of damp fires, and men slack with monsoon idleness” (21). This wordless encounter with the island’s inhabitants identifies Sita as a member of a privileged class, just as it underscores Rachel’s membership of a colonial ruling elite. Sita’s sense of alienation from the “squatting”, stationary village women emphasises her anomalous status, as an autonomously mobile woman. Yet rather than attributing her mobile protagonist with superior insight, Desai emphasises Sita’s wilful blindness to the women’s dire poverty. Sita “disregard[s]” the stagnant pool from which the women are filling their pots, “its water... thick, viscous... a solid green layer of germs and disease” (21). Instead, she admires the “beautiful” tableau formed by the women, dressed in their “saris of scarlet and crimson”, set against a “glittering” mango grove and “rose and orange” sky, filled with “phosphorescent” parrots (21). Ironically, while Sita is acutely sensitive to the ugliness and squalor of her neighbourhood in Bombay, she is unable to recognise it in the context of Manori, clinging tenaciously to her vision of the island as a rural idyll. Here, more explicitly than in *The Voyage Out*, Desai associates the vision of the traveller not with wisdom or superior insight, but rather, with wilful self-delusion, an elitist withdrawal into a rarefied aestheticism.

Like Woolf in *The Voyage Out*, Desai evokes the ocean as an intrinsically feminine space, in order to illustrate both the liberating and threatening aspects of female mobility. Sita imagines her mother, who left her as a young child, as having “torn a hole in the net” of her father’s “illusion”, “escap[ing] into the dark depths of the ocean” (90). Here, as in *The Voyage Out*, the ocean seems to represent a utopian space for women, one in which the oppressive domestic, feminine role can be exchanged for a form of liberating mobility. Yet as the reference to “dark depths” suggests, the medium of the ocean is also ambiguous and treacherous, representing the danger confronting any woman who attempts this kind of social and psychic transgression. In a further striking reference to *The Voyage Out*, Sita discovers a jellyfish stranded on a sandbar. Its “strange and glaucous” shape reminds her of the “brain of... some gigantic undersea creature that had lived all its life far beneath the level where light penetrated... washed and washed again to... unearthly whiteness” (114). She imagines this creature, in its “death pangs”, having “risen to the surface of the sea”, only to “surrende[r] its few moments of momentum” and be left helpless by the “discarding waves” (114-15). This passage strongly connotes Woolf’s imagery of colourless underwater creatures that “explode” when they come to

the surface (VO 15), in symbolic anticipation of Rachel's premature death. Like Woolf, Desai implicitly compares her heroine to this ill-fated sea creature, suggesting that Sita's "few moments of momentum" are no more than a precursor to her own "surrender" (114) to a static and passive feminine role.

Like Rachel's death, Sita's return to Bombay can be interpreted as a defeat, "a failure to achieve selfhood and autonomy" (Jackson, "Gender," 61). Sita herself reaches this conclusion when her husband arrives and she agrees to leave the island. In the final pages of the novel, Sita engages in a lengthy though ultimately inconclusive argument with Raman as they walk up and down the beach. The manner of their walking reinforces the symbolic status of the ocean as a site of transgressive female mobility. Sita walks in a desultory fashion on the edge of the surf, allowing the "frilled waves [to] rush up and dash over her feet", occasionally "scoop[ing] up" an object from the sand, "caress[ing] it" and finally "fling[ing] it extravagantly into the sea" (130). By contrast, Raman walks purposefully, "a little more land-wards" (130), regarding the objects on the sand as little more than "obstacles he had to remove from his path so that he could proceed" (131). As she walks, Sita confesses that she has never been happy as a wife and mother. Yet she concedes that her attempt to "run away" has been a failure, surmising that she is like a jellyfish, merely "washed up" and "stranded" on Manori (135). Frustrated and hurt by this revelation, Raman abandons Sita on the beach, where she stands "straddling the line where the water me[ets] the sand" (136). After a brief hesitation, she "trail[s] after" him, "knowing she would follow him, follow the trail of footprints he had laid out for her" (136). Sita turns her back on the beach, seeming to relinquish the ocean and the subversive female agency it represents. Placing her own feet carefully in Raman's footprints, which form a "chain" across the sand, she appears symbolically to readopt her accustomed role as a docile and submissive wife (George 153).

Yet this conclusion invites another reading, one that attaches a more positive value to Sita's decision to return to Bombay with her family. While Sita does not clearly articulate her reasons for "follow[ing]" Raman, Desai makes it clear that she is not hostile to him or fearful of challenging his authority. Instead, she suggests that in the unfamiliar environs of Manori, Sita acquires a new perspective on her situation, seeing that her act of flight has caused her husband and her children pain. Watching Raman seat himself very upright upon a stone bench, despite his "wrack[ing]" back pain, Sita realises suddenly that he "had suffered during the weeks that she had been away – had suffered

from worry and anxiety about her, the unborn child, Menaka and Karan..." (126-27). As Elizabeth Jackson notes, this epiphany is ironic: "the very thing ... Sita is trying to escape – her connectedness to other people ... turns out to be her salvation" (*Feminism* 99). For Jackson, it is "highly significant" that Sita brings her two children with her to Manori, and that it is her daughter who ultimately summons Raman to come to the island and bring them home, so that she can take her university entrance exam. As Jackson points out, the children "embody and represent [Sita's] grounding in... social responsibility, in connectedness to other people, which she is not prepared to completely relinquish" (*Feminism* 99). It is this sense of interconnection that impels Sita to follow Raman back from the beach, like a "freed sea-bird... wheel[ing] around... circl[ing] about and then dropp[ing] lower and lower towards her home" (WSWG 136). Far from representing an unqualified retreat or failure, this conclusion conveys a profound ambivalence, a simultaneous yearning for freedom and a recognition of the power of familial bonds.

This ambivalence finds its clearest expression in Sita's contemplation of her unborn child, which in the most tangible sense, illustrates the inescapability of her role as a mother. The incompatibility of pregnancy with travel is apparent from Desai's first description of Sita: arriving on the island, she climbs down "clumsily" from the boat and seems "to an irresponsible degree careless of the effects" of the journey on her "condition" (18, 20). Throughout Sita's sojourn on Manori, the movements of her unborn baby are a constant reminder of the futility of her desire that the child should remain unborn and the impossibility of separating herself from her own pregnant body. Yet these movements also demonstrate Sita's ambivalence regarding the new baby, prompting her to move her hands "instinctively" to her "frail goldfish-bowl belly" in a protective gesture (50). Tellingly, when she encounters the stranded jellyfish, Sita does not initially perceive the creature as a symbol of her own situation, but rather, compares it to her child, "float[ing] inside her, mindless and helpless" (115). As she regards the "poor washed thing thrown onto the beach, opaque and wet and sad" (115), Sita is moved by a deep sense of pity for her unborn baby, which she imagines as an innocent, "whole and pure and unimpeached" (50) in the safety of her womb. In counterpoint to her sense of anger and frustration at the oppressive life she leads with her family in Bombay, Sita feels a deeply "sensual, emotional, Freudian" (29) bond to this unborn baby, one that inspires fear and resentment, but also tenderness and joy.

Thus, while Desai presents motherhood as antithetical to liberating, autonomous mobility, she suggests that Sita finds a degree of personal redemption in returning to her home and accepting her maternal responsibilities. Throughout the novel, in counterpoint to Sita's experience of motherhood, Desai evokes the spectral figure of Sita's own mother, thought to be in Benares, a city of temples and funeral pyres, "flooded with the lost, the runaway, the dying and the dead of Hindu society" (79). Profoundly affected by the trauma of her mother's perceived abandonment, Sita feels that she is doomed to be a "wanderer", "always in search of the ghost" that she imagines as "invisible... fleshless" (77) and faintly sinister. In contrast to this shadowy mother figure, who symbolically associates mobility with the annihilation of the self, Sita embodies a tangible, prosaic form of motherhood characterised by repetitive, mundane acts of caregiving. In particular, through the recurring image of the packed suitcase, Desai associates Sita's real, literal experience of motherhood with encumbered or inhibited movement. In the novel's final scene, Sita contemplates returning to Bombay, where she will dutifully "pack a suitcase full of infant's garments", in preparation for her next, inevitable journey to the "gynae ward" (139). Anticipating her child's birth, Sita reinforces the association between maternity and stasis: she imagines herself after the birth "ly[ing]... still as though paralysed in a fearful accident, with blue lips and a grey sensation of death" (140; Chakravarty 81). Yet she quickly dismisses this macabre image, with a "faint shrug" and a "toss of the head", returning to her immediate task of packing for the return to Bombay (140). Implicitly renouncing the "escapist pursuit of illusion" that led her to Manori (Chakravarty 81), Sita in this final scene appears to assume an uncharacteristic pragmatism and stoicism. While not denying the difficulty of her maternal role, she appears to choose it, ultimately, as preferable to that of the melancholic, solitary "wanderer" (77).

***Clear Light of Day* (1980)**

Clear Light of Day more explicitly refutes the association between mobility, agency and identity, showing how the home and family offer a sense of community, identity and continuity, even as they impede or stymie individual agency. The action of *Clear Light of Day* is almost entirely confined to the home of the affluent Das family, in the Civil Lines district of Old Delhi, and is set against the chaos and violence of the Indian

Partition. Yet the characters seem peculiarly impervious to these momentous historical events taking place around them. As the city erupts into rioting and bloodshed, the adolescent protagonist, Bim, thinks she hears “the sound of shots and of cries and screams”, but concludes that it is “really rather improbable” (44). “[S]heltered behind their hedges”, the Das family and their neighbours carry on their lives with little regard for the “fires li[ghting] up the horizon beyond the city walls so that the sky was luridly tinted with festive flames of orange and pink” (44).⁹¹ Within this spatially confined setting, Desai traces the changing relationships between Bim and her siblings, Tara, Raja and Baba.⁹² Bim is a history teacher who has spent her whole life in the family’s home, teaching at a local school and caring for Baba, who is intellectually disabled. By contrast, her younger sister Tara has married a diplomat and lived a seemingly glamorous, cosmopolitan life abroad. Raja, the eldest, has spent his entire adult life in the distant city of Hyderabad, an absence Bim regards as a personal betrayal.

This confined setting unifies the four discrete sections of the novel, which move between the present and the past in a series of abrupt temporal shifts. At the commencement of the novel, set in the 1970s, the middle-aged Tara returns from the United States to Delhi, en route to Hyderabad, where she intends to visit Raja and attend his daughter’s wedding. Bim refuses to accompany her, bitterly protesting that she and Baba “never go anywhere” (4). In the second chapter, reverting to the time of the Partition in 1947, Desai narrates the increasingly competitive and fractious relationship between Bim and Raja, as Raja begins to exercise his privilege as the eldest son. Moving further back into the past, the third chapter describes the siblings’ early childhood, focussing closely on their widowed aunt Mira who provides them with love and care, in substitution for their own frequently absent and emotionally distant parents. The final chapter returns to the 1970s, culminating in Bim’s decision to forgive Raja for his perceived abandonment of the family. In an epiphanic moment, she concludes that she is satisfied with her life in Delhi and that she has no wish to leave her family’s home. This conclusion is profoundly ambiguous. In suggesting a resolution of Bim’s previous resentment of

⁹¹ As Rajeswari Mohan writes, the novel can be read not as a Partition narrative so much as an account of middle-class “withdrawal... from the torrent of historical events” into the claustrophobic, but more secure, confines of affluent domesticity (Mohan 49). Similarly, Elaine Yin Ho observes that the Partition seems “not [to have] been fully grasped or understood” by the inhabitants of the Das household (39).

⁹² In this vein, *Clear Light of Day* has been read by many critics as a “psychological” novel (Crane 10; Jani 101), addressing the “interior world” of particular characters, rather than broader “social issues” (Kumar 84).

Raja, and of her obligations as carer and guardian to Baba, this conclusion is consistent with the novel's general critique of "rootless cosmopolitanisms" that valorise mobility and individualism above all else (Jani 108). Some critics, many of them Indian, read the conclusion as marking Bim's attainment of maturity and "self-realization" (Uniyal 225).⁹³ Yet it has been identified by numerous critics as striking a "discordant note" (Ray 113). These critics highlight the apparent inconsistency between the novel's "too easily achieved harmonious ending" (Ray 119) and its vivid critique of the sexism that oppresses Bim and the other women in the novel. The novel poignantly depicts the curtailment of Bim's opportunities and her gradual renunciation of personal ambition. Yet this conclusion can be seen as an attempt to valorise Bim's continuing entrapment within a repressive gender ideology, one that reifies feminine self-sacrifice and self-abasement. In this way, as Jani writes, the novel appears to rest upon a deeply conservative model of "familial and national communities", even as it attempts to "reimagine them as potentially emancipatory" for women (Jani 133).

The opening chapter of *Clear Light of Day* is characterised by an overwhelming sense of stasis, which Desai associates symbolically with entrapment, stymied development and decline.⁹⁴ The Das household seems frozen in an attitude of Anglicised, nineteenth-century gentility. Their affluent neighbourhood is "not [one] from which people moved – they were born and married and even died in the same houses" (136). The children's mother and father sit "day after day and year after year till their deaths, playing bridge with friends like themselves, mostly silent, heads bent... sucked down into the silent centre of a deep, shadowy vortex..." (22). In the opening pages of the novel, Tara remarks that the house and garden have not changed at all since she left it. "Old Delhi does not change," Bim replies caustically. "It only decays... a great cemetery... [n]othing but sleeping graves.... [H]ere nothing happens at all... [T]he British built New Delhi and moved everything out" (5). Baba reinforces this sense of stagnation and inertia

⁹³ Ranu Uniyal describes this transition "from self-obsession to self-realization" as a "voyage out theme" (225), casting *Clear Light of Day* as a *Bildungsroman* with Bim at its centre.

⁹⁴ Numerous critics have observed the prevalence of static imagery in *Clear Light of Day*. See, eg, Mohan; Uniyal; Karamcheti; Sharma. Mohan draws attention to the "stasis of over-fullness" that defines the Das house, comparing it to "the stasis of emptiness outside". For Mohan, this pervasive imagery of stasis illustrates the exploitative class dynamics of modern India, suggesting "a parallel or even causal connection... between... [Indian] middle-class demoralization and subaltern deprivation..." (149). Yet he regards this as a point of "ideological blindness" in the novel, noting that "the narrative plays down the connections between the paralysis of the family members and the hidden labour of servants, gardeners and clerks, the unacknowledged workers who make it possible for the novel's main characters to spend time contemplating their suffering" (53).

by incessantly replaying 1940s American records on an ancient gramophone. His favourite song, “Don’t fence me in”, reverberates through the house, poignantly articulating the sense of entrapment and claustrophobia that pervades it.

Desai inflects this imagery of stasis with a distinctly female character.⁹⁵ The opening scene takes place on a “rose walk” in the garden. The narrative returns to this setting at the commencement of the second chapter, when Mrs Das walks up and down its length, heavily pregnant with her fourth child (102). The rose is a “traditional literary symbol of female perfection” (Langland 237), yet here, it epitomises neglect and decay. In the first scene, Bim observes bitterly that “the roses grow smaller and sicker every year”, shaking a rose and watching it fall apart before her eyes (2). A snail discovered underneath one of these roses offers a further potent symbol of thwarted female development, representing enclosure, slowness of movement and wasted effort. As Tara watches the snail “slowly, resignedly, making its way from under the flower up a clod of earth”, it seems to her “an eternal, miniature Sisyphus” (2), an allusion to the mythic figure who pushes his stone up a hill repeatedly, only for it fall down to the bottom again. This image of repetitive, futile movement recurs in the later scene, in which the children’s mother walks up and down the path. Tara recalls that their mother “usually did not take exercise”, but instead, lay “very still on her bed, with a suffering face...” (102). Her walking is due to her pregnancy and in deference to “doctor’s orders” (102). In contrast to the infant Tara’s “skipp[ing]”, “danc[ing]” steps and her cries of “delight” as she explores the garden (102), Mrs Das’s walking takes the form of a joyless and repetitive “pac[ing]” (102). Through this image, Desai associates Mrs Das’s slow, unwilling movement with her renunciation of agency and pleasure, in order to adopt the conventional role of an obedient, deferential wife and mother.

This physical constraint defines the female characters throughout the novel and throws into sharp relief the mobility of their older brother, Raja. As children, Bim and Tara steal into Raja’s bedroom and put on pairs of his trousers, “feeling grotesquely changed by them, not only in appearance but in their movements” (132). Intoxicated by their momentary freedom from their “ballooning frocks”, the girls briefly contemplate “going up to the garage, taking out their bicycles and going for a ride”, but change their

⁹⁵ Indira Karamcheti reads the novel’s spatial symbolism as a form of postcolonial critique. For Karamcheti, Bim represents a specifically female and colonial experience within “concentric circles of increasing constriction, stasis, and marginalization” imposed by gender, race and imperial geographies of margin and centre.

minds when they hear their brother approaching. By contrast, the adolescent Raja is “longing to burst out, reach out to life and friends and movement” (95). His escape is catalysed by his burgeoning friendship with Hyder Ali, the patriarch of a neighbouring Muslim family. Fittingly, their earliest encounter is a glimpse of Hyder Ali on his horse, “float[ing] by with a dim roar of hoofbeats” (122). As he grows, Raja becomes increasingly preoccupied with mechanised mobility, commandeering the soda-man’s horse and cart and the bicycle belonging to the driver’s son (116). In a passage that starkly contrasts Raja’s mobility with the girls’ impeded movement, Desai recounts a game of hide and seek in which Tara and Bim “cornered him, up against the impenetrable carvanda hedge... [b]ut, ducking beneath their arms, he turned and dashed his head madly into that thick, solid hedge behind him and broke his way through it with one desperate, inspired thrust of his body” (117). Squeezing through the hedge in his wake, the girls emerge to “the sad realisation that Raja had escaped them”, leaving them scratched and bleeding in “the forbidden area of the back garden” (117).

Transgressing beyond the domesticated landscape of flower garden, the young Tara and Bim encounter an abandoned well, which serves as one of the novel’s most striking and ominous symbols of female stasis. The well is overwhelmingly associated with a milking cow, purchased at the instigation of Aunt Mira to provide the children with fresh milk. The children love the cow’s “milky white and warm” flesh and her milk is “the subject of ecstatic admiration” (107). The cow is ill-fated, however. Within a week of her arrival, the gardener leaves her loose in the garden overnight, instead of housing her in the shed. Like “a white ghost”, the cow moves through the garden, “blunder[s] her way through the carvanda hedge... tumble[s] into the well and drown[s]” (107). To compound the horror of this incident, the cow is never removed from the well but is “left to rot... rooted... in the mud, like a tree”. The memory of the cow’s death intrudes suddenly into the girls’ euphoria as they break through the carvanda hedge in pursuit of their brother. Gazing down into the well, Tara and Bim imagine the cow’s “ghostly ship of bones” in the “still water” at the bottom, which has “stagnated and blackened, closing over the bones like a new skin” (118). This tomb-like well strongly connotes Rachel Vinrace’s dream of entrapment in a tunnel in *The Voyage Out*, while the cow’s submerged skeleton resembles the “bones” and “wrecked ships” she imagines at the bottom of the sea (VO 50). As in Woolf’s novel, this imagery serves as a potent and macabre symbol of the consequences of illicit or unauthorised female mobility.

Through Aunt Mira, Desai illustrates the destructive consequences of this literal and psychological entrapment. Destitute and friendless, Mira is “handed to” the Das family by her dead husband’s relatives, “like a discarded household appliance they might find of use” (107). At first, Aunt Mira seems scarcely human, resembling the “placid”, “bride-like” cow in her traditional white widow’s sari (107). The children understand instinctively that they have “power over” this “poor relation”, yet they quickly grow to love Mira, grateful for her genuine affection and her talent for inventing stories, toys and games. Literally and figuratively embracing Mira, the children “for[m] a ring, a protective railing about her”, and Mira responds “readily” (111) to their love. As she ages, however, Mira begins to perceive this encirclement as a trap. Succumbing to dementia and increasingly dependent upon alcohol, the bedridden Mira imagines herself in a “grey suffocating cell”, bound and immobilised by her “cotton swaddling” (89, 90). The children figure in her hallucinations as “fat white larvae that... swelled on the nourishment she brought them... slav[ing] and toil[ing]”, their persistent demands “bor[ing] through her ears” like the “angry buzzing of the queen bee” (89). More terrifyingly, she images the children as “flames [that] pricked her like pins, drawing out beads of blood so that she dropped her hands with a cry” (78). As her sickness deepens, Mira develops suicidal impulses and becomes “hopelessly attracted” to the well, longing to throw herself into its “hidden, scummy pool” (99). By wishing to die in the same manner as the cow, Mira seems to stage a belated and futile rebellion against the dehumanising effects of her life as a domestic “slav[e]”, a “drudge in her cell, sealed into her chamber” (89).

Desai suggests that, like Mira, Bim is frustrated by her entrapment within the home. In the novel’s opening chapter, Bim appears deeply embittered by her failure to leave Old Delhi like Tara and Raja. “It must seem strange to you and Bakul who have travelled so much,” she says to Tara, “to come back and find people like Baba and me who have never travelled at all... rocking on the backwaters, getting duller and greyer” (4-5). She scornfully dismisses Tara’s joy at finding the house unchanged, insisting that everyone wishes to “gro[w] up – leav[e] – g[lo] away – into the world – something wider, freer – brighter” (4). Her eyes “glin[t] with a kind of anger” when Tara reminds her of her own childhood longing for “the world outside” (157). As the novel proceeds, Desai reveals that the young Bim cherished secret fantasies of running away and becoming a “gipsy or a trapeze artist in a circus” (112). She is “ambitious at school, working

consciously and deliberately at coming first in the examinations and winning honours” (130). A “born organiser”, she serves as “patrol leader of the Bluebirds” and Girl Guides, captain of the netball team and finally, “gloriously... Head Girl” (122). She eventually attends a local tertiary college and becomes a history teacher. Yet unlike Raja, who elects to study Urdu literature in a distant town, Bim “drop[s]” her history course when Mira becomes ill (85); and it is she who takes responsibility for Baba, the house and the family business when Raja departs permanently for Hyderabad. As Mohan points out, Bim pays the price for Raja’s mobility, renouncing her personal ambitions in order to become the de facto head of the family (*CLOD* 4; Mohan 56-57).

Like Mira, Bim appears doomed to remain claustrophobic within the home like her aunt. This destiny is prefigured repeatedly throughout the novel. When Bim and Tara are young girls, they go on a rare excursion to the Lodi Gardens to attend a picnic, only to be attacked by a swarm of wild bees. Tara manages to escape unscathed, but Bim becomes caught in the swarm, the bees settling on her head and shoulders like “a helmet of chainmail... close-fitting, adhesive”. Looking behind her, Tara sees Bim “locked into the hive, as if she were the chosen queen, made prisoner” (135). This sinister image casts Bim as a “sacrificial victim” (135), while also symbolically linking her to Mira’s nightmarish hallucinations of the “angry buzzing” bees and the “fat white larvae” (128) that feed upon her. Mira’s death serves as a further ominous portent of Bim’s fate. Bim herself draws explicit parallels between herself and Mira. As she nurses Mira through the last days of her life, Bim “wishes, almost, that she could herself lower herself into that dark tunnel and slip along behind the passage made for her by the older, the dying woman” (98). This imagery, which again recalls Rachel’s dream of a tunnel in *The Voyage Out*, clearly identifies Bim as Mira’s successor as the self-denying mother figure in the Das household. Late in the novel, she offers further confirmation of this, confessing to Tara, “I always did feel that... I shall end up in that well myself one day” (157).

Unlike Bim and Mira, Tara appears to have freed herself decisively from the bonds of her oppressive childhood, becoming an internationally mobile and seemingly sophisticated, worldly woman. Tara dresses fashionably, in “elegant” Western clothes (3), and lives in a “china-white flat in Washington” (20). Tara herself believes these forms of consumption to be synonymous with personal expression. She is horrified to find that her old home is much as she left it as a young girl, and wonders that in the intervening decades Bim has not “developed... taste of her own... likings that made her wish to sweep

the old house of all its rubbish and place in it things of her own choice” (21). Yet Desai suggests that Tara’s Western lifestyle and “not quite assimilated cosmopolitanism” (37) only disguise her entrapment in a conventionally subordinate role within her marriage.⁹⁶ Recalling Tara as “a languid little girl, listless, a dawdler,” Bim notes with surprise how Tara “instantly get[s] to her feet” in response to Bakul’s summons (10). Tara herself reflects that Bakul has “trained her and made her into an active, organised woman,” one who “made plans and programmes... and then walked her way through them to retire to her room at night... with the triumphant tiredness of the virtuous and the dutiful” (21). This image of joyless, coerced movement strongly recalls Tara’s mother, trudging obediently up and down the rose walk during her final pregnancy. Significantly, it is only upon return to her childhood home that Tara acquires the confidence to resist Bakul’s demands. Refusing to accompany him on a visit to relatives in New Delhi, she reflects that “she had followed him enough, it had been such an enormous strain... it had drained her of too much strength, now she could only collapse...” (18). In this way, Desai’s depiction of Tara mounts an implicit critique of mobility as a symbol of female autonomy.

Through her male characters, Desai persistently associates mobility with a kind of emotional detachment from one’s surroundings that is both self-indulgent and deeply unethical. This is most vividly demonstrated through the figure of Raja, the vain, selfish brother who worships Romantic poetry and abandons his siblings, initially in order to pursue his passion for Urdu literature at a distant university. Like Byron, fighting on behalf of the Spanish, Raja becomes a vociferous advocate for the Muslim population in the political upheaval following the Indian partition. As Mohan notes, Byron is an apt model for Raja, since he embodies both revolutionary ideals and expatriatism, expressed in the Byronic injunction that “[w]hen a man hath no freedom to fight for at home” he should “combat for that of his neighbours” (Byron 107). As Mohan astutely observes, “Raja seems to have taken this exhortation to heart literally, albeit selectively, for even though there are freedoms to fight for at home, his sister’s and brother’s... he espouses his neighbour’s cause” by running away to Hyderabad in pursuit of Hyder Ali (55). In contrast to his extreme sympathy for the plight of the Muslims in India, Raja seems astonishingly indifferent to the needs of his own siblings. When their father dies, naming Raja in his will as successor in the family insurance business, Raja appoints Baba to take

⁹⁶ As Ranu Uniyal writes, Tara moves away spatially but “fails... to free herself” from conventional gender roles (107, 109).

his place, despite Baba's significant mental disabilities. When Bim attempts to manage the business by proxy, begging Baba to make a token visit to the office, Raja rebukes her for treating Baba "like a baby" (66).

A similar hypocrisy characterises Tara's husband, Bakul.⁹⁷ Despite his official role as India's representative abroad, Bakul seems utterly unaware of his country's problems and oblivious to his own extreme privilege. "Elegantly holding his cigarette in its holder at arm's length," he declares "in his ripest, roundest tones":

What I feel is my duty, my vocation, when I am abroad, is to be my country's ambassador... I refuse to talk about famine or drought or caste wars or – or political disputes... I choose to show them and inform them only of the best, the finest... The Taj Mahal... Indian philosophy – music – art – the great immortal values of ancient India. (35)

Bim responds caustically that "it does help to live abroad if you feel that way" (35). "If you lived here," she tells Bakul, "...I'm not sure you could ignore bribery and corruption, red-tapism, famine, caste warfare... In all the comfort and luxury of the embassy, it must be much easier" (36). While Desai gently satirises Bakul's romanticised image of Indian life, she is also more sharply critical of his domineering attitude towards his wife. Noticing that Tara seems concerned by her siblings' predicament, he only reflects "how nice it would be to have [her] stop looking so preoccupied... and be impressed by him instead" (159; Chakravarty 83). Imagining himself and Tara immersed in "a night of Persian glamour and beauty", Bakul is incapable of comprehending or caring about the inner workings of the Das family, being utterly preoccupied with his own image of himself as a sophisticated international traveller. As Chakravarty notes, his apparent cosmopolitanism is little more than a form of narcissistic "posturing" (Chakravarty 83).

Desai reinforces this association between mobility, cultural eclecticism and pathological self-absorption in her portrayal of Bim's only suitor, Dr Biswas. Biswas regales Bim with an account of his studies in Germany as a young man, speaking garrulously of how he used to "walk down the broad avenues... and hear music at every street café, in every park", how "his professors... had invited him home for fruit wine and biscuits... and how inspiring it had all been and how much he owed them all, how they had made him what he was" (86). He confesses to Bim that when he first heard Mozart,

⁹⁷ Bakul is preternaturally mobile. While Tara and her children seek refuge from the cold of a Moscow winter by wrapping themselves in their bedclothes, he refuses to be "immobilize[d]", insisting that it is possible to "rise above" an inhospitable climate (21). This belief is contradicted by the experience of Aunt Mira's young husband, who is never named. This husband left India immediately after their wedding, in order to undertake higher education in England, where he promptly "caught cold in the rain... and died" (108).

“...it was as if my whole past vanished... the country of my birth, my ancestors, my family, everything... After that there was nothing in my life – only Mozart” (83). As Mohan notes, Biswas’ reverence for Western classical music constitutes a “renunciation of his cultural past” and his submission to a form of “colonial hegemony” (52). This transformation has not enriched his life but instead rendered him incapable of living happily at home. In comparison with his “rich” life in Germany, Biswas regards his life in Dehli as “useless” (84), feeling that he has “nothing... left” (84). He vainly attempts to induct Bim into the pleasures of European music by taking her to a restaurant where a band is playing Strauss waltzes. Yet this effort only underscores the hopelessness of his situation. Like the rest of Old Delhi, the restaurant’s elaborate European furnishings are buried under layers of dust. For Bim, the “sweet treacle” of the music only compounds its somnolent atmosphere, “slowing everything down until it seems stuck” (85). The performance is little more than a grotesque simulacrum of the rarefied experiences Biswas had in Germany, the waltzes “sp[inning] and stagger[ing] from table to table like exhausted bees” (85). Ironically, the spectacle fails to impress Bim, who observes critically that Biswas’ “thoughts [a]re on another continent... mov[ing] to a different tune” (85). Through Biswas, most explicitly, Desai casts international mobility as an alienating, rather than enriching, experience.

In counterpoint to the detachment and solipsism of these mobile male characters, the static, domestic life of the female care-giver assumes a more ambiguous character. Through her depiction of the tender, intimate relationship between Mira and the Das children, Desai illustrates her deep ambivalence regarding the maternal role that confines women to a narrow, domestic life. This ambivalence is clearly evident in her portrayal of the cow that represents Mira. While the tethered cow serves as a symbol of imprisonment, exploitation and neglect, her warm, sweet-smelling flesh and creamy milk is also tangible evidence of the love and nurturance Mira offers the children, in stark contrast to their parents’ emotional detachment and frequent physical absence. Moreover, the image of the children encircling Mira has a distinctly positive dimension, conveying reciprocal desires and needs, rather than a simple relationship of exploitation. The children are a “protective railing” around Mira, shielding her from any “threat” or “menace” (111). While their love is possessive, “she wanted to be owned. She owned them too, and they needed to be owned. Their opposing needs seemed to mingle and meet at the very roots, inside the soil in which they grew” (111). Through this organic imagery, Desai casts the relationship between Mira and the children as one that is deeply sensual and mutually

joyful. “Touching them, dressing them, lifting them, drawing them to her,” Mira perceives the children as “the leaves and flowers and fruit of the earth” and is enraptured by “the beauty of this little grove that was the whole forest to her, the whole world” (111). This relationship transfigures Mira, who was formerly likened to a piece of rubbish, “cracked pot” or “picked bone” (108), into a tree, wreathed in “leaves and flowers... tower[ing] into the sky” (111). The lyricism of this passage suggests that Mira’s devotion to the children is not merely an accession to oppressive “ideal[s] of maternal sacrifice”, as Mohan claims (60). Rather, it is a form of spiritual sustenance, an intense source of joy for an individual whose life has hitherto been marked by loneliness and neglect.

Bim’s life in Old Delhi also assumes a positive dimension, illustrating the importance of relationships to personal fulfilment. After she rejects him, Dr Biswas concludes that she does not wish to marry because she has “sacrificed” her life to care for Baba and Mira Masi (97). The exchange highlights the ethical gulf between her own decision to remain in Delhi and her brother’s and sister’s decision to leave. Yet Bim refuses to accept this characterisation, dismissing it as a “grotesque misunderstanding” (97) of her situation. Bim’s relationship with Biswas also illustrates the way in which her work as a teacher affords her a meaningful engagement with her community that he appears to lack. As she travels through the streets of Old Delhi by bus, Bim ignores Biswas’ effusive account of his travels, which is “not quite as interesting as it might have been” (86, 85). Instead, she is captivated by the “passers-by... the shops being lighted up and filled with after-office crowds... the pavement stalls with their paper and plastic and tin goods, and the beggars and their individual and flamboyant ways of attracting attention” (86). As the bus passes the city walls, Bim notices “the massed jungle of rag-and-tin huts that had grown beneath them, housing the millions of refugees who were struggling in across the... border” between India and the newly formed Pakistan (86). Bim does not attempt to discuss this brief excursion, but gains a new perspective on the events of the Partition, one that briefly awakens her to the experiences of those outside her privileged neighbourhood. In contrast to the narcissism of Raja, Bakul and Biswas, Bim in this scene demonstrates her attunement to those around her and her capacity to empathise with people of a different social class.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Shantha Krishnaswamy sees *Clear Light of Day* as “a new concept of feminist fiction,” a “documentation... of radical female resistance” to repressive social codes (237, 244). For R. S. Sharma, Bim’s desire to smoke and wear trousers identifies her as an embodiment of “the new Indian woman” (138). Sunaina Singh points out that Bim is courageous, independent and strong-willed, in defiance of

The novel's concluding scene suggests that unlike Raja, Bakul, Biswas and Tara, Bim has attained a coherent and authentic identity by remaining at home and retaining her connectedness with her family, neighbours and native country. The novel culminates with a traditional concert in the garden of the family's neighbours, the Misras, at which a famous guru sings the lyrics of Raja's favourite poet, Iqbal. Bim is overcome by the music, and by the "lamps and the dark and scent of night-flowering plants", all of which combine to form "a picture as perfectly composed as a Mughal miniature..." (179-80). For Bim, the meaning of the music is profoundly personal and specific to her familial context. Listening to the sounds of the tabla, the tanpura, and the ancient guru with his time-worn voice, Bim experiences an epiphany, coming to perceive her home and her family as the place in which "her deepest self live[s]" (182). Here, as Jani notes, Desai explicitly repudiates her earlier conception of the family home as a prison, reimagining it as a liberating space: it is "not some dead and airless cell" but the "soil" in which Bim and her siblings "send down their roots... grow and spread, reach out to new experiences and new lives, but always dra[w] from the same soil, the same secret darkness" (182). In the context of the musical performance, this conclusion assumes a wider significance, illustrating Bim's continuing attachment to specifically Indian cultural forms as distinct from the superficial, "not quite assimilated cosmopolitanism" (37) personified by Bakul and Tara. Read as a political allegory, this conclusion suggests the possibility of a "resurrected and rejuvenated" postcolonial India (Sharma 147), based upon a shared cultural tradition.

Yet the imagery of this concluding scene confirms the ambivalence with which Desai regards the home, as both a life-giving source of identity and as a site of oppression and constraint for women. Bim's epiphanic vision contains strikingly discordant imagery of blood and pain, reminiscent of Mira's dying hallucination: "if there were wounds, these gashes and wounds in her side that bled," Bim reflects, "then it was only because her love was imperfect..." (165). Noting this imagery, Mohan identifies an unresolved conflict in the novel's conclusion, between a "deeply felt... need for closure, resolution and reconciliation" (64) and an equally powerful desire to denounce and resist the "obscene violence" (60) of the patriarchal structures that have radically curtailed the lives of Mira and Bim. As Mohan points out, Bim's organic imagery of soil and roots also recalls

Indian feminine norms that require women to be "passive, meek and obedient" (18). Similarly, Uniyal contends that Bim "renegotiates the terms of woman's life" by refusing marriage and maternity in favour of a fulfilling professional life (209-11).

Mira's dying hallucination in which she perceives the children as parasites, "suck[ing] her dry" (111; Mohan 64). This imagery suggests that Bim's acceptance of her circumstances does, in one sense, represent acquiescence to the unjust and exploitative patriarchal structures that constrain her, while affording unjust privilege to others. There is a subtle note of complacency in Tara's observation, near the end of the novel, that Bim has "found everything she wanted in life" without having "to go anywhere to find it" (158). With this self-serving statement, Tara exonerates herself of any responsibility for her sister's situation, while signalling to Bakul that her focus will now revert to him and to her primary role as wife and mother. Even as she attempts to attribute a positive value to the role of matriarch, "the still centre of the family" (Mohan 64), Desai concedes that for many Indian women, this role involves a degree of self-denial that verges on self-annihilation.

Through subtle, encoded images of voyaging, this conclusion also conveys Desai's ambivalence regarding the sufficiency of domestic life, and familial relationships, as the preeminent sources of women's personal fulfilment. After an angry, frustrated outburst, in which she tells Baba he should go and live with Raja in Hyderabad, Bim is overcome with remorse. She contemplates Baba as he sleeps and feels "an immense, almost irresistible yearning to lie down beside him", imagining that they "would form a whole that would be perfect and pure", "silent and immobile" (166). Bim swiftly retreats from this ideal of "perfect" love, a kind of merging of self and other, recognising that it is merely a fantasy. In the ensuing passage, she reflects that her anger at her siblings, her failures to understand them, have been "rents and tears" and that she must "mend and make her net whole so that it would suffice her in her passage through the ocean" (165). Here, the "perfect love" that Bim seeks to cultivate in her relations with her siblings is no longer associated with immobility, but rather, with mobility, a kind of pursuit through which she seeks to "encompass" her siblings within a "net" of love and intimacy. Here, Bim emerges as a kind of questing figure, an image that recurs in the ensuing passage, when she reflects that she has been "dragged back and forth all summer... in a vast, warm ocean" (169). The concluding scene also casts the singer's performance as a figurative voyage, suggestive of spiritual release. In a passage that appears to break free of any single character's perspective, describing the audience members as a collective, Desai describes how the singer "launched their boat, now they were all in motion. Now they rose upon a crest, now they moved forward upon a wave of sound" (179). With this

imagery, Desai seems to suggest that Bim is engaged in a spiritual, figurative voyage, one that constitutes her attempt to form and maintain loving relationships with others who remain intractably distant, detached and elusive.

With this juxtaposition of static, domestic imagery and a purely symbolic form of spiritual voyaging, Desai illustrates the profound, irresolvable conflict that characterises Bim's situation. This conflict has been described by Hena Ahmad as that "between a woman's desire for autonomy and her sense of familial duty" (Ahmad 97). Ahmad, Mohan and others are right to identify this as a problem that confronts Indian women with more than usual acuteness, in the context of an Indian cultural tradition that places particularly "relentless demands" upon women, as the chief custodians of domestic and family life (Mohan 65). Yet in a sense, this challenge is not dissimilar to that confronting Rachel Vinrace and Clarissa Dalloway in Woolf's novels. As Woolf intimates in *The Voyage Out* and *Mrs Dalloway*, there is an inevitable tension between the individual's desire for autonomy and her desire for genuinely intimate, loving relationships with others. Bim intimates this, subtly, when she reflects that she will be glad when her sister departs and she will have some solitude – "Perhaps that was what Aunt Mira had needed, she felt... they had never allowed her to be alone, never stopped pursuing her and surrounding her for a minute" (173). Ironically, Bim recognises the demanding, possessive, even predatory nature of even the most loving relationships, even as she herself resolves to renew her figurative pursuit of "perfect" (166) spiritual union with her siblings. The "hurts... gashes and wounds" that torment Bim are thus not merely signs of her subservient status as a woman in a patriarchal society, entrapped within the home. Rather, they attest to her heightened capacity for love, a capacity that Desai also associates with Mira-Masi, and contrasts favourably with the self-absorption of Tara, Bakul, Raja. In this sense, the ambivalent, "discordant" (Ray 113) conclusion of *Clear Light of Day* is not merely an unsuccessful attempt, on Desai's part, to mediate between the competing pressures that come to bear on an Indian woman who aspires to personal autonomy. Instead, this tension reflects Desai's profound conviction of the importance of personal relationships, and her recognition that the demands of such relationships are inevitably in conflict with the individual's desire for autonomy.

***Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988)**

In an apparently radical break from the female-centred narratives of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* and *Clear Light of Day*, *Baumgartner's Bombay* adopts the perspective of a male, internationally mobile figure. Its protagonist, Hugo Baumgartner, is a German Jew, who travels to India as a young man and finds himself unable to return to his native country, due to the rise of Nazism and the events of the Second World War. In comparison with Sita, Bim, Mira and the other women of the earlier novels, Hugo is a privileged figure, in so far as he is not confined by domestic or familial responsibilities. Yet, as in these earlier novels, Desai refuses to idealise Hugo's mobility or the untrammelled individualism it seems to represent. Instead, she stresses the alienation and loneliness of Hugo's life in India. Like Dr Biswas in *Clear Light of Day*, Hugo is "an outsider" (Bliss 537), effectively expelled from his native Germany yet unable to find a niche in Indian society. Although the novel's title echoes the well-known *Baedeker's* travel guide (Newman 204), it does so ironically, since it is not a conventional travel narrative, but rather a deeply melancholic account of rootlessness and exile. Traumatized by his violent separation from his home and his past, and his parents' death in the Holocaust, Baumgartner travels literally but fails to develop or establish an independent life for himself. In this sense, *Baumgartner's Bombay* continues the theme of Desai's earlier novels, refuting the connection between travel and personal growth or transformation. As in *Clear Light of Day*, Desai suggests that Hugo's deracination prevents him from developing or fulfilling his potential.

In the early chapters of the novel, Desai emphasises the intersecting forms of class, racial and imperial power that impel Hugo's travel to India. She stresses Hugo's bourgeois upbringing, describing the piano, *objets d'art* and "leather-bound volumes of Goethe, Schiller and Heine" (27) that fill his affluent childhood home in Berlin. Through this somewhat nostalgic evocation of the "old Germany" (55), prior to the Holocaust, Desai illustrates Hugo's deep "filiation" with a European culture that is both capitalist and imperialist (Ho 53). Hugo recalls his father, the owner of a furniture shop, "moving gracefully" and proprietorially among the sumptuous "Empire suites" in his showroom (26). A "wooden negro" serves as an umbrella stand in the Baumgartners' home (51), and as Hugo prepares to depart for India, his mother declares that she herself could never live among the "*Schwarzen*" (57). After Hugo's father is briefly interned in Dachau, he commits suicide, and his business partner, Pfuehl, assumes control of his assets. Pfuehl,

who is not a Jew, betrays a degree of sympathy with Nazism, yet he feels compelled to offer Hugo and his mother some protection, identifying them as members of his own social class. “[O]ne had to admit”, he reasons, “that a paint or steel factory... was no place for the late Herr Baumgartner’s widow or son, so delicately brought up... with their piano-playing and singing and reading of the classics” (55). It is Pfuehl who decides to send Hugo to India on the pretext of a business trip, but in reality to “begin a new life there “before the trains stop” (53). When Pfuehl appropriates the Baumgartners’ “wooden negro” umbrella stand, Hugo is astonished to see it “uproot itself after so many years of standing stock-still” in the hallway (51). The sudden “uproot[ing]” of the statue reflects Hugo’s increasingly tenuous position in Hitler’s Germany and symbolically anticipates his own violent, unwilling dislocation. In this way, it illustrates his ambiguous status as both citizen and victim of an imperialist and racist European state.

As Hugo sets off on his journey to India, he seems to embody the archetypal wanderer, leaving his past behind in order to embark on a genuinely transformative and liberating voyage of discovery. He spends a week in Venice, awaiting the ship that will bear him to India. Here, for the first time in the novel, Desai employs the overtly Orientalist tropes that she will later adopt to describe Hugo’s initial impressions of India. Hugo marvels at the Venetian flower stalls, which seem to exude a “tropical luxuriance” (60), and a window full of tiny cages, “filled with canaries that trilled and sang because a little light was shining on them...” (59). These deliberately Orientalist images, which recur in Desai’s subsequent descriptions of India, have prompted Tony Simoes da Silva to criticise the novel for using the East as little more than an exotic “background” for its European characters’ psychological dramas (65). Yet this “reductive” (Stähler 79) reading does not sufficiently acknowledge the extent to which Desai satirises Hugo’s preconceptions of the East. Desai’s evocation of Venice, through Hugo’s eyes, is highly romanticised: the city seems to him to represent a “bewitched point” of perfect fusion between Europe and Eastern cultures, a “land of which he felt himself the natural citizen” (63). Hugo is entranced by the “magical... poetical quality” of Venice, which seems to him a kind of “fairylane” (58). In its childlike evocation of magic and fantasy, these stylised, even clichéd images of Eastern exoticism serve to emphasise the youthful Hugo’s naivety and lack of worldliness.

Though it only occupies a short space in the novel, Hugo’s brief sojourn in Venice plays a vital role in articulating an optimistic view of transnational mobility as potentially transfiguring. In this respect, the Venetian interlude of *Baumgartner’s Bombay* contrasts

markedly with Desai's much more cynical portrayal of transnational mobility in *Clear Light of Day*. Like the birds in their cages, Hugo draws "comfort from the light [and] warmth" he senses in the city's "eastern breeze" (61), feeling that the air of Venice "quiver[s] with possibilities, with the suspense of quest and choice" (63). Pippa Brush regards his brief interlude in Venice as significant because it offers Hugo a fleeting experience of "community," one that contrasts with the alienating, solitary life he subsequently endures in India (282). She points to Hugo's momentary encounter with a German-speaking Jewish woman in a Venetian restaurant as his single, "brief opportunity to feel defined by something positive, by association with a group of people," the members of the Jewish diaspora (282). Through this episode, as Brush suggests, Desai shows how the utopian promise of travel entails a form of renunciation, the destruction of communal bonds and with them, an important source of personal identity. Yet Desai relegates this encounter to parenthetical status, subordinating it to her overarching narrative of Venice as a cosmopolitan city. Significantly, Hugo rebuffs the woman's friendly overtures. He quickly regrets his decision and sets out in search of the "Jewish quarter" the woman has mentioned (62). But he becomes disoriented and finds himself in the Rialto "with its sudden flurry of sound and activity, crates of oranges... arabesques in stone and colour" resembling an "eastern market". "[E]ntranced" by this spectacle, Hugo forgets the Jewish woman and boards a vaporetto, "believing himself... to be on his way" to his new life in the East (63-64). With this sequence, Desai appears to discount the possibility of Hugo's establishing a meaningful life for himself within the confining milieu of the Jewish-Italian diaspora. In contrast to his brief, abortive search for the Jewish quarter, his undirected "wandering" (63) through Venice seems, at least initially, to offer Hugo the prospect of a liberating release from his past and a more sophisticated, worldly subjectivity.

Yet if Desai initially invests Hugo with a romanticised notion of cosmopolitanism, she also shows how his travel takes place within a deeply pragmatic capitalist system of trade and commerce. When Hugo appears initially unwilling to travel to India, Pfuehl stresses the importance of the East to European prosperity. "Don't you know... that it is a colony of our neighbours in Britain?" he demands. "You ought to know how much of my timber comes from there, all the finest mahogany and rosewood... where else but from the East, from India and Burma and Malaya?" (53). In agreeing to act as Pfuehl's emissary in India, Hugo becomes part of an international network of trade that seems impervious to political or racial differences. On arrival in Bombay, armed with Pfuehl's

letter of introduction, he receives a warm reception from Chimanlal, who speaks enthusiastically “of business, of exports, of shipping, of trade in what seem[s] to Baumgartner a bewildering combination of two or three languages” (88). From Chimanlal, Hugo obtains “a valuable introduction to an associate in Calcutta”, and discovers that there are “all kinds of possibilities in the business world of India” in which, “miraculously”, he can play a “quite profitable” role (88). Travelling around India as a businessman, Hugo finds himself transformed from a hesitant, naive foreigner into a “[v]ery big *sahib*”. Even when the war breaks out, and he is arrested by the British colonial government, and taken to a camp for “enemy aliens”, he is treated with courtesy by the Indian police and addressed as “*Sahib*” (103). After his eventual release from the camp, he returns to his former business associates, who quickly re-establish him in business, “transporting bauxite down Goa’s rivers” and setting up factories for “aluminium pots and pans”, all for “a reasonable commission” (185).

Desai also stresses the exclusively masculine character of this international trading fraternity, through the dyadic pairing of Hugo with his female compatriot, Lotte. A German-speaking Jew, Lotte claims to have lived in Berlin, though Hugo finds it “unthinkable that Lotte had occupied the same Berlin he had”, “disgraceful Lotte” with her dyed hair, bare legs and “gin-drinking, disreputable ways” (65-66). Overlooking Lotte’s working class background, evidenced by her “foul... accent” and “coarse... expressions”, Hugo befriends her because “she sp[eaks] German, ha[s] his language” (66). Yet despite their shared language and nationality, Lotte and Hugo have vastly different experiences as exiles in India. While Hugo acquires wealth and elite social status as a member of the business community, Lotte must earn her living in the far more precarious and socially marginal world of the cabaret. When Hugo first encounters her, she is dancing “like a tattered doll” before a group of predatory men who “crow[d] around the dance floor as if it were a circus ring” (95). In her later “incarnation”, as the mistress of a wealthy Indian man, Lotte seems to acquire a measure of respectability and security, living in a well-appointed apartment with a servant. She attempts to start her own business making hats, but since she has no “letters of introduction” and no access to male business networks, the enterprise fails. When her lover dies, Lotte is evicted from her home by his adult sons and forced to live in her former shop, “no more the *memsahib*... just [a] poor old woman” (77).

Hugo’s position of relative privilege, as a European expatriate, is thrown into even sharper relief by the poverty of the rural migrants who populate the footpath outside his

flat. These internal refugees, who are all but invisible in *Clear Light of Day*, figure much more prominently in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. In the novel's opening pages, Hugo is forced to "pic[k] his way past the family that lived on the pavement" in front of his apartment block (6). Desai describes the precariousness and "absolute degradation" (7) of their lives in graphic detail. The refugees "wor[k] constantly at reinforcing the shelter they ha[ve] built" on the pavement, "flattening out packing-cases for walls and tin cans for the roof, attaching rags to the railing... and stretching them on to their own rooftop; yet it remain[s] tremulously impermanent..." (6). The father of the family lies "in a drunken stupor" inside this shelter, his "gnarled and rotting feet" protruding from it, while his child, with "the straw-coloured and straw-textured hair of the famine-struck", defecates on the pavement. The woman washes cooking pots in the gutter, amongst "the heaps of faeces that the children left" (6-7). The family are "part of the migrant wave from the drought-stricken countryside, refugees from famine, or riots" (7). Hugo feels "shame at being alive, fed, sheltered, privileged" in such close proximity to their abject poverty (207), but remains aloof, fearfully avoiding their hostile gaze. It is Farrokh, the proprietor of a local cafe, who points out the fundamental difference between these subaltern vagrants and the Europeans who travel to India. "No one stop and stare if one of your own beggars drop dead in the street," he observes bitterly. "But when they see a white man with golden hair lying in the street, everyone stop, everyone cry... 'Poor boy, call doctor, call ambulance...'" (139). In contrast to these "ragged creatures who seemed hardly human to the citizens of the *urbis et prima* of the west" (207), Hugo enjoys protected status that allows him to turn his back, literally and figuratively, on the harshness and violence of Indian society.

Yet despite his privileged mobility, Hugo is a profoundly melancholic figure, a misfit whose travel only exacerbates his sense of loneliness and estrangement. When he arrives in India, it seems "desperately important to belong and make a place for himself" (93). Yet rather than assimilating into his new environment, Hugo seems persistently anomalous: whereas "in Germany he had been dark", "[i]n India he was fair", transforming him from "*der Jude*" to "*firanghi*", or foreigner (20). In contrast to Venice, India seems inscrutably and impenetrably foreign. Unlike the captivating "flurry of sound and activity" he perceives in the Rialto, the railway station in Bombay strikes him as "bedlam", crowded with "hawkers and traders... *memsahibs* and blonde children... Indian women... with their baskets or babies – and over it all, congealing them into one restless, heaving mass, the light from the sky and the sea, an invasion of light such as he

had never known..." (83). Having no visible signs of wealth to attract porters or beggars, Hugo is "left to himself... [o]n that first day as on every other day" (83). His initial sense of isolation does not dissipate but increases with time. As an old man, having spent fifty years in India, he makes his way through a Bombay market in a scene that recalls his time in Venice, complete with "twittering cages" and a fortune teller. While the scene no longer strikes him as "fantastic and exotic", he senses that he himself is still "strange and unfamiliar" to the people there, his sun-burned face "like an over-ripe tomato" in stark contrast to their "dusky chocolate, coffee bean [and] tea leaf" complexions (20).

Hugo's trips to the Mahaluxmi racetrack in Bombay underscore his inability to integrate into Indian society. Hugo first attends the track with his business partner, Chimanlal, who is "delighted to have a companion for he could not have brought his Indian associates" (194) to witness his "only vice" (192). He experiences rare moments of pure happiness as he "mingl[es] with the Bombay society ladies in their silks and chiffons and pearls and the gentlemen in their white suits and field glasses and gold cigarette-cases" (155). Like Venice, the race track appears to represent a utopian point of convergence between East and West, one in which Hugo and Chimanlal can form a genuine and enduring friendship. In this respect, it contrasts starkly with Chimanlal's home, where Chimanlal's wife and daughters make Hugo uncomfortably conscious of his "clumsiness" and foreignness (192). Yet the sense of cosmopolitan community afforded by the race track is fleeting. In contrast to his own solitary state, Hugo intuitively feels that Chimanlal derives his "rocklike complacency" and "confident calm" (191) from his family and happy domestic life. Their trips to the race track underscore this fundamental difference between the two men: while Chimanlal spends his winnings on gifts for his family, Hugo has "no one for whom [to] buy such gifts... why should he take large bags of dried fruit back to his empty flat...?" (195). When Chimanlal dies, Hugo attends his friend's funeral, but is acutely conscious of being out of place: the other mourners "shr[ink] away from him, horrified by the presence of a foreigner... at such an intensely private rite" (206). In this way, Desai casts the cosmopolitan sociality of the race track as tenuous and ultimately illusory.

Like the novel's recurring imagery of caged birds, the race track serves as a powerful symbol of the inescapability of the past and the futility of Hugo's attempt to achieve a "new life" (53) through travel. The sight of the horses conjures up powerful memories of Hugo's father, who frequented the races in Berlin, making Hugo want to

shout, “exuberantly – Papa, do you see me here, at the races?” (193). The race track seems to offer Hugo a form of symbolic return to his lost childhood, which he experiences as a euphoric release. Yet Hugo also wonders “what his father would have made of... the circular track that began in Berlin and ended here in Bombay which became, by magic, the Berlin of thirty years ago...” (194) This complex image seems to suggest a return to lost origins, while also registering the disjuncture between Hugo’s past and present. In this vein, Hugo’s trips to the race track reaffirm the trauma of his parents’ murder, a trauma that he himself does not fully comprehend. It is “extraordinary”, Hugo reflects with some surprise, “how low his spirits fell after having been raised so high by the sight of those horses and the memory they called forth” (195). Through Hugo’s repeated returns to the track, as well as through the circular movement of the horses, Desai presents a Freudian image of obsessive repetition that seems to deny any possibility of healing or personal growth.

It is ironic but fitting that Hugo’s success at the race track leads ultimately to his death, at the hands of a German tourist who murders him for his trophy collection. The “filthy”, destitute Kurt is immediately recognisable to Hugo as “a fair Aryan German” (141). Hugo insists that he wants to help Kurt, “[n]ot because he [i]s German... but simply because he [i]s in need”. But he quickly concedes that the refugees living outside his flat are “in need too; did he think of asking them up here and cooking for them?” (151). Hugo invites Kurt into his home and treats him as a “gues[t]”, yet the younger man throws his dinner on the floor and storms out, hurling insults as he goes. Intending to steal Hugo’s silver racing trophies, Kurt later returns to the flat and murders Hugo with a kitchen knife. Despite his fifty years’ sojourn in India, Hugo’s enduring affinity with German culture makes him blind to the danger Kurt represents. His violent death seems to confirm the futility of his flight from Germany, in an attempt to escape his “fate” as a victim of German anti-Semitism.⁹⁹ As Julie Newman observes, this conclusion renders the novel’s title “deeply ironic”. For all his attempts to escape his traumatic past, Hugo’s Bombay has proved to be “n[o]... different from his Berlin” (204).

Through the grotesque figure of Kurt, Desai vehemently repudiates the notion of travel as a form of individual self-fashioning. With his repeated insistence, “I am free wherever I go... I am free, always” (159, 161), Kurt confirms his role as an extreme

⁹⁹ Desai has spoken of Kurt as a symbolic representative of Nazism, a conduit of the inevitable death that “fate had devised” for Hugo as a German Jew (Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 176).

embodiment of the self-regarding, detached and privileged Western traveller.¹⁰⁰ Desai subjects this figure to harsh satire, casting Kurt in somewhat hyperbolic fashion as a modern equivalent to Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Da Silva 74). In response to Hugo's questions, Kurt produces a lurid and grisly account of his travels through India. He claims that he has lived in Benares with the *doms* who feed the funeral pyres, "help[ing] to spear the bits of flesh and bone that remain and fling them down... to the river bank where the dogs fell upon the pieces..." (156). He regales Hugo with his tales of living in a garbage tip with lepers and being "loved" by a leper girl; of "lov[ing]" a "temple priest's boy" in Kathmandu; and of the "fun" he has had watching beggars fight over scraps of food. In his determination to seek out "the bizarre [and] the macabre," and to see only "the reductive *strangeness*" of India, Kurt resembles his literary namesake in Conrad's novella (Da Silva 74).¹⁰¹ For him, as for Kurtz, travel has not brought enlightenment but rather, complete physical, psychological and moral dissolution.¹⁰²

Encoded within its violent conclusion, *Baumgartner's Bombay* offers an oblique, muted affirmation of the importance of home, community and familial relationships. Ironically, Hugo's death is a communal event, in contrast to the isolation that has characterised his entire life in India. The discovery of his body prompts a sudden influx of visitors to the flat, "more... than Baumgartner had had in years" (223). Surveying the scene, Lola sweeps up a collection of postcards that have fallen from the shelf where they stood with Hugo's trophies. She returns to her own flat, where she finds that the postcards have been written by Hugo's mother, stamped with the official markings of an internment camp and dates from 1939 to 1941. The postcards give no hint of the circumstances in which Mrs Baumgartner died, but only enquire anxiously and repetitively "Are you well, my rabbit? ... [H]ave you enough... my darling?" (3), in "antiquated baby-language" that Lola "feel[s]... on her tongue like crystals of sugar" (3). Appearing in the opening and

¹⁰⁰ Farrokh, the cafe proprietor, denounces such tourists as parasites, "baby-men" who only travel to evade the responsibilities of adulthood. In stark contrast to the relentless demands of "school, shop, work, wife, children" that dictate his own life (15), Farrokh scornfully describes the decadence and dissipation of Western travellers. They "say they want to visit temples, live in ashrams," but in reality, only "[p]ay fishermen ten rupees to build hut with coconut palm leaf. Crawl in with woman, with hashish, not come out for two day, three day, five day even" (15).

¹⁰¹ Ho writes that "the young man's diseased mind constructs an orientalist nightmare" out of his travels (Ho 63).

¹⁰² It is difficult to accept Newman's characterisation of Kurt as Hugo's "alter ego" (204). Desai underscores the ethical difference between Hugo and Kurt when the two make their way to Hugo's flat, passing the refugees' camp. While Kurt "seem[s] not to notice" the refugee family, and seems likely to "break one of the strings that held up their shack," Hugo tries to "take the least amount of living space away from them who had already so little" (BB 144).

closing scenes, these postcards serve as an incongruous frame to the narrative. Appearing to Lotte to constitute “clues to a puzzle” (229), they reaffirm the fundamental importance of the home, native culture and familial bonds that both she and Hugo have irrevocably lost.

Despite its fleeting representation of transnational mobility as an enabling, liberating means of breaking with the past, *Baumgartner's Bombay* ultimately rejects the ideal of transformative travel. Hugo's travel to India fails to fulfil the promise of his brief sojourn in Venice. His life as a foreigner in India does not mitigate his childhood trauma, but rather, entraps him within it. Through the potent symbol of the circular Mahaluxmi race course, to which Hugo obsessively returns, Desai casts his exile in India as a futile attempt to escape from this traumatic past, a form of arrested development rather than a productive quest. The novel appears to represent a break with the earlier novels, with its focus on a male, European protagonist, whose international mobility is facilitated by intersecting forms of class, gender and geopolitical privilege. Yet through Hugo, and more emphatically through the monstrous figure of Kurt, Desai savagely critiques the untrammelled individualism she associates with the privileged, male, Western traveller. Recapitulating the themes of *Where Shall We Go Last Summer?* and *Clear Light of Day*, she stresses the importance of family and other personal relationships in constituting and preserving individual identity. In its disorienting, isolating quality, Hugo's displacement does not afford him freedom but rather makes it impossible for him to develop a coherent, “meaning[ful]” (230) sense of self.

***Fasting, Feasting* (1999)**

While Desai's novels focus consistently on the alienating nature of displacement, the interlinked novellas of *Fasting, Feasting* break with her earlier fiction by presenting an unusually stark and harrowing account of the oppression suffered by Indian women within the home. In *Fasting, Feasting*, Desai juxtaposes the experience of a housebound Indian woman, Uma, with that of her brother, Arun, who is sent to America to study. With its connotations of imbalance and excess, *Fasting, Feasting* suggests that Uma and Arun are both oppressed, Arun by his forcible ejection from his home and Uma by her entrapment within it. Yet the text does not suggest that their experiences are equivalent or comparable: on the contrary, by presenting the two siblings' experiences in two discrete narratives, Desai emphasises the privilege accorded to the son, at the expense of

the daughter, in a deeply patriarchal, “provincial” Indian family (FF 67). Despite the mobility he enjoys, by virtue of his gender, Arun finds his displacement profoundly alienating and distressing. In his sense of isolation and profound disorientation, he bears a striking resemblance to Hugo in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. Yet even Arun’s melancholic experience of dislocation and estrangement appears preferable to Uma’s painful, frustrating adolescence and adulthood entrapped within her parents’ home. Unlike Bim in *Clear Light of Day*, Uma is removed from school at an early age in order to carry out unpaid domestic work, and in particular, to care for her young brother, Arun. Throughout her adult life, she remains subject to the control of her autocratic parents, who neglect her emotional and physical needs in order to lavish attention and resources on Arun. In contrast to *Clear Light of Day*, this extremely bleak narrative affords Uma no release from her confined domestic role and gives no hint of pleasures within the home that might compensate for those available outside. Casting Uma’s situation as one of almost literal imprisonment, *Fasting, Feasting* constitutes a sharp repudiation of the idealised domestic imagery present in Desai’s earlier fiction.

Desai’s depiction of Uma in the first novella constitutes a devastating and deeply nihilistic protest against Indian women’s incarceration within the home. Like *Clear Light of Day*, the first novella in *Fasting, Feasting* is replete with images of arrested, constrained or coerced movement. It opens with Uma’s mother slipping through a gap in the hedge to visit their neighbours and to play cards, an “indulgence frowned upon by Papa” (7). In the following scene, Uma’s father declares that “the women... must get some exercise” and abruptly drives them to the nearest park (11). Yet on arriving at the park, he “jumps out” of the car and “rushes away with great urgency”, berating Uma and her mother for being “[s]o slow. So slow”, before swiftly bundling them back into the car (12-13). Throughout the novel, imagery of stasis illustrates Uma’s social entrapment within a suffocating domestic and familial environment. Unlike Bim in *Clear Light of Day*, Uma is incapable of “visualis[ing] escape in the form of a career” (131). Like Tara in *Clear Light of Day*, her younger sister, Aruna, adopts the conventional “escape” route of marriage, moving away to live a modern and fashionable existence in Bombay (Poon 39). By contrast, the unmarried Uma is subject to her parents’ constant surveillance and control, being forbidden even to visit the neighbours “too often, or without [their] knowledge” (129). Over the course of the novella, Uma makes two bids for independence, fleeing first to a convent and then to an ashram, but each time she is forcibly returned, in “ignominy” (29), to her parents’ home. Without the academic or professional outlets

available to Bim in *Clear Light of Day*, Uma is almost literally imprisoned within her domestic environment.

Desai portrays Uma's literal and spiritual entrapment through repeated allusions to Woolf's narrative of failed female development in *The Voyage Out*. Desai describes Uma's sister, Aruna, as "ripp[ing] with an inner momentum" as she launches herself on the marriage market, recalling Woolf's description of the virginal ship, the *Euphrosyne*, "moving by her own power and sustained by her own resources" (VO 26). In stark contrast to Aruna's serene, purposeful motion towards a conventional married life, Uma seems destined for a life of spinsterhood, a destiny that she and her family perceive as deeply shameful. After two disastrous attempts to marry her off, which result only in the loss of a valuable dowry, Uma is deemed to be unmarriageable and relegated to the role of unpaid servant in her parents' home. Uma stages a series of tacit protests against her abject status in the form of intermittent fits, which cause her to "roll on the ground, her teeth clenched, jerking her shoulders and drumming her heels uncontrollably" (101). Her involuntary rolling on the floor connotes Rachel's dying delirium, in *The Voyage Out*, in which Rachel imagines herself "turn[ing] over at the bottom of the sea" (VO 363). It also aligns Uma with her mother, rocking perpetually back and forth on her sofa-swing, "moving but not getting anywhere" (Poon 40). This faint identification with her mother does not offer Uma any solace or emotional support, but only renders her incapable of mounting an effectual, explicit protest against her confined circumstances. Following one fit, she agrees with her parents' assessment that she "should be locked up", sobbing, "Lock me up, Mama, lock me up!" (103). This image of incarceration strongly connotes Rachel's nightmare in *The Voyage Out*, in which she finds herself "trapped" in a "vault", "bricks meeting her wherever she turn[s]" (VO 75). These ominous echoes of *The Voyage Out* recur later when, during a religious ritual, Uma nearly drowns in the "great green depths" of the river, feeling it "close quickly and tightly over her... dr[awing] her along, clasping her and dragging her with it" (111). For Uma, as for Rachel in *The Voyage Out*, death appears to offer the only release from an otherwise hopelessly constrained, static existence.

Desai contrasts Uma's utter lack of agency with the relative independence of three other single, mobile women who appear only briefly in the narrative. The first is Moyna Joshi, the youngest daughter of their next-door neighbours, who has "inexplicably developed a desire to 'be different'" and moved to Delhi "to have 'a career'" (130). Although she is physically absent, Moyna is a "troubling" emblem of "possibilities" (131)

that intrude more visibly in the form of Doctor Dutt, the daughter of a former Chief Justice. Like Moyna, Dr Dutt is to some extent liberated by her family's unconventional, "Westernised" attitudes. Despite his disapproval of "unmarried... working wom[en]," Uma's father "put[s] on a progressive... front" when she calls at their house, in deference to her family's high status. Like the absent Moyna, Dr Dutt is characterised by her mobility: she has a "quick, no-nonsense walk" and arrives at by bicycle, her sari "tuck[ed]... to keep it out of the bicycle chain's teeth" (141). But Desai makes it clear that both Moyna and Dr Dutt enjoy only a tenuous freedom. Moyna's family does not take her "career" seriously, but rather "indulg[es] her little whim" and "laugh[hs], waiting for her to return" (130). Dr Dutt is also the subject of mockery: Uma's mother looks "pointedly at the frayed and oily hem" of her sari with "a little laugh" (144). Ultimately, Dr Dutt's personal autonomy is not enough to render her a useful ally to Uma. Although she offers Uma a job, she ultimately accedes to the authority of Uma's parents, accepting their claim that Uma is too busy with her domestic duties to work outside the home. Still, the relative freedom of both women serves to emphasise the extremity and seeming inescapability of Uma's entrapment within her parents' home. When Uma telephones Dr Dutt to beg for her help in securing the job, her father only rebukes her for costing him money, observing angrily that she has "never earned anything in her life" (146).

The third and most significant mobile woman in *Fasting, Feasting* is Uma's Aunt Mira, who unlike her namesake in *Clear Light of Day*, is fiercely unconventional and independent. The "second or possibly even the third wife of a very distant relative," Mira has "in her widowhood developed an unsettling habit of travelling all over the country, quite alone, safe in her widow's white garments, visiting one place of pilgrimage after another like an obsessed tourist of the spirit..." (38-39). Her visits afford Uma rare opportunities to leave the family home, taking her on visits to a local temple and an "obligatory trip to the river" which, despite the risk of crocodiles and "death by drowning," constitutes "a taste of paradise" (43) for the pious Mira. Like Moyna and Dr Dutt, Mira is an exceptional, anomalous figure who offers no viable model for the less assertive Uma. As the novella progresses, Mira becomes increasingly eccentric, "stomping along the pilgrim routes, her back bowed, a staff in her hands, her large feet plodding grimly and determinedly the worn earth..." (54) in fanatical pursuit of a small brass idol she has lost. Retreating permanently to a temple in the Himalayas, Mira disappears from Uma's life, since Uma knows that it is "pointless to ask" for permission to visit her (140). Yet Mira lingers in Uma's memory as a poignant example of "someone

who *had* won what she desired”, an idea that comes “winging through the dark, rustling her awake, sweeping across her and making her sit up so she could see its shadowy passage...” (140). This image strongly recalls the minstrel in “Joan Martyn”, and Joan’s feeling that “some strange bird had rested on [her] roof for a moment, and flown on” (*JM* 57). Like the minstrel, Mira offers Uma a tantalising glimpse of the opportunities she has been denied, due to her entrapment in the home, poignantly embodying her unfulfilled potential and dimly conceived aspirations.

Yet unlike Woolf’s short story, or indeed her own earlier novels, Desai refuses in *Fasting, Feasting* to portray the home as a viable alternative site for female development, or of loving relationships that compensate for the more solitary pleasures of mobility. Instead, in this text, she portrays the home as a site of unmitigated suffering and severe, even murderous physical violence for many of its female inhabitants. This emerges most vividly through the peripheral figure of Uma’s cousin Anamika, who is “not only pretty, and good, but an outstanding student as well” (68), winning a scholarship to Oxford. “Naturally, her parents would not countenance her actually going abroad to study” (68), so the offer from Oxford becomes no more than another attribute with which to entice prospective marriage partners. Submitting to an arranged marriage to a much older man, Anamika endures twenty-five years of violent abuse, including one incident in which she is beaten so badly that she suffers a miscarriage and is rendered infertile. Like Uma, Anamika has no allies to call on in order to escape her situation. When she is denied “permission” to attend a family wedding, her relatives only conclude that “they love her so much” that they “can’t let her out of their sight for even one day” (89). Anamika dies suddenly, in mysterious circumstances, her neighbours claiming that her mother-in-law, “possibly in collusion with her son... dragged Anamika out on the veranda... tied her up in a nylon sari, poured... kerosene over her and set her on fire” (151). The first section of *Fasting, Feasting* concludes with the scattering of Anamika’s “cold, colourless, motionless” ashes (152). Lowered into the river, the earthen jar containing these ashes remains “[b]riefly... visible,” “[b]obbing like a swimmer trying to keep its head above water” (155), but quickly sinks beneath the surface. With this image, which strongly recalls *The Voyage Out*, and Uma’s earlier immersion in the river, Desai suggests that Uma may yet seek release from her situation through death.

The second half of *Fasting, Feasting* portrays the international travel of Uma’s brother, Arun, in a way that seems equally nihilistic. Like Hugo in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*, Arun experiences international travel as deeply alienating. As Angelia Poon

observes, Desai's portrayal of Arun offers a stark repudiation of idealised cosmopolitanism. His perspective is not "the curious, delighted... gaze of the consummate cosmopolitan traveller... who glides in and out of different societies" (Poon 43); rather, he remains acutely aware of his status as an outsider, persistently incapable of understanding or acclimatising to his new environment. During his first university term, Arun resides in a college where he derives an ambivalent pleasure from "anonymity, the total absence of relations, of demands, needs, requests, ties, responsibilities, commitments" (172). Relishing his escape from the claustrophobic confines of his parents' home, he seems to embody the liberating isolation of the wanderer, fantasising that he has "no past, no family and no country" (172). Yet during the summer vacation, Arun is forced to move out of his dorm and takes up residence with an American family in their suburban home. Over the course of this summer, he is unwillingly drawn into a confrontation with American suburban culture, one he finds bewildering and faintly horrifying. Arun is appalled by the consumerist excess (Poon 200) he observes in America. He is baffled by the seemingly inhuman scale of the suburbs and their public spaces, which seem to be entirely given over to consumption: supermarkets, "Burger Kings, Belly Delis and Dunkin' Donuts stranded on huge stretches of tarmac" (181). Within the Pattons' home, this obsession with consumption takes the form of fanatical eating, particularly the reification of barbequed steak. Arun, a vegetarian, cannot participate in this nightly ritual, but is instead forced to subsist on salads prepared inexpertly by Mrs Patton.

Arun's incapacity to eat the Pattons' food starkly illustrates the failure of his journey to fulfil the promise of mobility, conceived as a liberating journey of discovery and a stimulating encounter with cultural difference. Arun reflects that he has "traveled and... stumbled into what was like a plastic representation of what he had known at home; not the real thing – which was plain, unbeautiful, misshapen, fraught and compromised – but the unreal thing – clean, bright, gleaming, without taste, savour or nourishment" (185; Poon 45). In its sterility and blandness, the consumerist culture of America epitomises the false promise of cosmopolitanism. For Arun, international mobility is not an exhilarating or liberating experience, but rather, a frightening and deeply disorienting one. The isolating and dehumanising nature of his experience is illustrated by his single, futile attempt to master the foreign practice of "jogging" (199). Arun is struck by his legs' "plodding inefficiency", compared with the "mocking ease and insolence" of the cars' motion on "chromium-centred wheels" (201). These cars seem to dominate the vast

landscape, “challeng[ing] the... desolation, pit[ting] their steel against the wilderness... rolling over it and laying it in the dust” (201). Arun perceives a kind of aggression, even violence, in their rapid motion, “like metal darts aimed into space by missile launchers in the towns they leave behind” (201). “[S]ealed” within these metal “chambers”, the inhabitants of suburban American seem to epitomise the atomising, alienating nature of Arun’s own experience as a global traveller.

At the same time, through this contrast between Arun’s pedestrianism and the mechanised movement of car traffic, Desai highlights his particularly vulnerable status as an Indian, a representative of the undeveloped third world, in the context of a technologised, affluent first world country. Like Rachel, Arun appears out of his element, acutely conscious that his claim to the status of questing, mobile subject is a tenuous one. In a striking allusion to *The Voyage Out*, Desai describes Arun “mak[ing] his way slowly through the abundant green” of a lush green lawn on his university campus, “as if he were moving cautiously through massed waves of water under which unknown objects lurked” (159). This passage strongly evokes Woolf’s description of the merchant ships that skim across the ocean, without “investigat[ing] the great white monsters of the lower waters” (VO 15). In casting Arun as a sailor, moving across the surface of the water, Desai appears to align him symbolically with the masculine world of action and agency. Yet she also implicitly compares Arun to Rachel, recalling Rachel’s glimpses of “wrecked ships” and “great eels” at “the bottom of the sea” (VO 21). Just as Rachel’s vision of these submerged objects alerts the reader to the precariousness of her journey, so Arun’s movement across the grass seems to identify his journey as a dangerous, difficult and ill-fated one. Like Rachel, Arun does not chart his own course, but rather, follows a well-established route, illustrating his participation in a global traffic of people and commodities structured by capitalism and imperialism. Just as Rachel’s journey is shaped by her father’s mercantile activities, Arun’s journey to Massachusetts is the product of his father’s will. Haunted by “memories of studying under the streetlights” in his own youth, this father has developed a “manic determination” that his son should study abroad (120). This conviction is profoundly shaped by his status as an Indian: the poverty of his own upbringing reinforces the lessons imparted by a colonial education, that Indian institutions are inferior to those of the first world. In this sense, Arun’s unwilling journey from India to America does not appear to offer any kind of freedom, but rather, confirms his subordinate status, both as a third world subject and as the son of a domineering father.

Arun seems to acknowledge this, reflecting mournfully, “It was all so much more complicated than he had expected. Life, travel, escape, recapture” (179).

Even so, Arun’s time as a guest of the Patton family does effect a transformation of sorts, affording him a degree of insight into the patriarchal gender relations that govern his own family life in India. During his stay, Arun sympathetically observes the plight of Mrs Patton, who carries out a conventional, subservient role as a housewife, and her daughter Melanie, who suffers from bulimia. Both are treated with contempt by Mr Patton and his son Rod, “whose phallic name underscores his... masculinity” (Poon 44). When Arun tries to draw attention to Melanie’s illness, Rod only remarks derisively, “That’s all these girls are good for... Too lazy to get off their butts and go jogging... So they’ve got to sick it up” (204). In contrast to Rod’s obsessive exercise regime, Melanie’s failure or refusal to jog aligns her symbolically with Arun. At the same time, he recognises his fundamental difference from her, as a man who assumes the role of favoured and privileged son within his own family. This sense of simultaneous sameness and difference produces a series of ambiguous, wordless encounters between Arun and Melanie that faintly echo Rachel’s encounter with the South American women in *The Voyage Out*. In the novella’s penultimate scene, Arun finds Melanie “lying on the ground”, face-down, among “poisonous-looking plants” (223) in the Pattons’ garden, her face streaked with vomit. This grotesque tableau recalls the engagement scene in *The Voyage Out*, in which Rachel lies paralysed in long grass that “fill[s] her mouth” (VO 302). In another scene, Arun watches Melanie “attac[k]” a tub of ice cream, and suddenly perceives “a resemblance to the contorted face of an enraged sister who, failing to express her outrage against neglect, against misunderstanding, against inattention to her unique and singular being and its hungers, merely spits and froths in ineffectual protest” (214; Poon 45-46). Through these ambiguous encounters, Desai suggests that Arun experiences his American journey as a kind of awakening. Viewing the Patton household from his vantage point as an outsider, he is able to perceive the workings of patriarchy that have so far been obscure to him in his own home. In the final scene of *Fasting, Feasting*, Arun leaves the Pattons’ home, and makes a parting gift of the shawl Uma has sent him. Placing it gently around Mrs Patton’s shoulders, Arun seems to confirm his identification with the women of the Patton household, and his rejection of the aggressive, misogynous masculinity epitomised by Rod and his father. With this conclusion, Desai offers a faint hope that on his return to India, Arun will become an ally to his sister and a proponent of greater equality between men and women.

This conclusion seems, in some respects, to be inconsistent with the overarching pessimism of *Fasting, Feasting*, inflecting the narrative with a faint sense of hope, at least for Arun and other privileged subjects who can engage in mobility. In this respect, it does not accord with Angelia Poon's otherwise highly persuasive reading of *Fasting, Feasting* as a "bifurcated... bifocal" narrative that presents two "circumscribed worlds" and discounts the possibility of productive "border-crossing" (37). In her reading of the text, Poon argues that Desai suggests an equivalence or "equilibrium" (Poon 46) between the constrained existences of Arun and Uma. Poon draws attention to the final scene of the novel, when Arun gives Mrs Patton the knitted shawl, noting that the aroma of the shawl "swamps" Arun, "like a river, or like a fire" (227). She suggests that in this image, Desai deliberately recalls the earlier scene in which Uma disperses Anamika's ashes in the river. For Poon, this earlier scene contains an element of "rejuvenation, renewal, and redemption", albeit of a "momentar[y]" nature (Poon 43). In contrast to Uma's literal immersion in the river, which she casts as a kind of epiphany, Poon dismisses Arun's sense of affinity with Mrs Patton as little more than a fleeting impression, produced by "a transnational world marked by rupture, shifting alliances and connections... before lives move on again" (Poon 46). She implies that Arun and Uma are parallel figures, equally isolated, vulnerable and incapable of changing their fates. Yet this reading does not account adequately for the way in which Desai differentiates these two characters and hints at their different destinies. As Poon herself astutely observes, the water Uma pours over her head is symbolically associated with fire. In "catch[ing] the blaze of the sun and flash[ing] fire" (FF 156), this water serves as a macabre reminder of Anamika's excruciatingly painful death, immersed in burning kerosene. In this respect, it hints ominously that Uma may commit suicide, completing her identification with Anamika's "cold, colourless, motionless" ashes (152). This contrasts starkly with Arun's gift to Mrs Patton, which is a gentle, tender act that seems to indicate his conscious defiance of the aggressive masculinity he observes around him. In this respect, while Poon is right to read *Fasting, Feasting* as a text that traces the "limits" of the "cultural knowledge" acquired by the "global traveling subject" (Poon 35), she does not acknowledge the limited prospects for growth that remain available to Arun at the novella's end.

“The Rooftop Dwellers” (2000)

Desai’s short story, “The Rooftop Dwellers”, can be read as a companion piece to *Fasting, Feasting*, but one that offers a much more affirmative vision of localised, urban mobility, as an expression of female autonomy.¹⁰³ “The Rooftop Dwellers” narrates the experiences of Uma’s neighbour, Moyna Joshi, as she pursues her career with a literary journal in New Delhi. Moyna experiences her life in the city as liberating and exhilarating, in a manner that evokes Woolf’s portrayal of female *flânerie* in *Mrs Dalloway*. The opening lines of the story describe her “[p]aying off the rickshaw driver” and “stepp[ing] down cautiously” (RD 158), just as Elizabeth “calmly and competently” boards a London bus (MD 148).¹⁰⁴ Like Elizabeth, Moyna constitutes a new type of modern, mobile woman, revelling in the new opportunities presented by urban life. Moyna lives in a hostel specifically catering to single working women and shares her daily commute with a large community of female “telephone operators, typists, desk receptionists, nurses, teachers, airline hostesses and bank tellers” (161). Though she does not enjoy unqualified freedom of movement, due to the threat of harassment by “crazed young men” (161) on the ordinary Delhi buses, she is able to navigate successfully through the city by travelling on a “luxurious” ladies-only bus (192). When she moves to her own accommodation, a solitary room on the outskirts of the city, she engages a private rickshaw driver, who proudly regales her with stories of his daughter’s academic achievements as he conveys her to work. With these images of Moyna’s movement through the city, Desai adopts mobility as a symbol of female independence and professional achievement.

In a decisive break with *Fasting, Feasting*, “The Rooftop Dwellers” presents an optimistic narrative of female maturation. Like the earlier novella, it alludes repeatedly to Woolf’s *The Voyage Out*, casting Moyna as a quester, embarking on a process of discovery and maturation. Yet whereas Uma is entirely isolated within her parents’ home, Moyna finds friends and allies in her quest for independence. Like Rachel Vinrace, Moyna forms a friendship with an older, married woman, Tara, the managing editor of *Books*. Tara embodies the contested and rapidly changing nature of women’s role in the modern Indian city. Her troubled relationship with her mother in law resonates ominously with *Fasting, Feasting*, raising the spectre of Anamika’s abusive marriage and violent

¹⁰³ To date, there has only been one scholarly essay devoted to “The Rooftop Dwellers” (K. D’Souza).

¹⁰⁴ Desai also compares Moyna to Rosamond Merridew, the wandering scholar of Woolf’s “Joan Martyn”. Preparing to knock on the door of her future landlady, Mrs Joshi, Moyna compares herself to a “saleswoman” (RD 158) just as Rosamond imagines herself in the role of a “travelling pedlar” (JM 33).

death. Yet Tara also personifies the independent, professional life to which Moyna aspires. She attests to the possibility of equal, respectful relationships between men and women through her capacity to speak to male colleagues “as equals” (174) and her marriage to Ritwick, an academic whose name identifies him closely with Ridley in *The Voyage Out*.¹⁰⁵ Ritwick offers frequent practical assistance to Moyna, helping her to move into her new apartment and offering support when she is the victim of theft. Like Helen and Ridley in *The Voyage Out*, Tara and Ritwick enable Moyna to experience a degree of mobility and social freedom that would otherwise be unavailable to her, as a young, single woman. They escort Moyna through the streets of Delhi, and Tara acts as her chaperone at meetings with male writers and academics, just as Helen facilitates Rachel’s social encounters with Terence. The parallels between Moyna and Rachel Vinrace become more evident when Moyna contracts a flu and becomes feverish. Her delirious visions of “lines of print... unroll[ing]” (200) connote the description of Rachel’s fatal illness, in which she repeats lines from Milton’s *Comus* and refers to something “rolling down the hill” (VO 354). Yet here the similarities end, because unlike Rachel, Moyna makes a full recovery from her illness and at the end of the story feels “free” and “determined”, having “made her decision” about the course her life will take (FF 207).

In embracing independent, urban life as a viable option for Indian women, “The Rooftop Dwellers” seems to constitute a rejection of the home as a site of nurturance, familial and specifically maternal bonds. When Moyna falls ill, her mother comes to care for her, swiftly transforming her “auster[e]” single room with the addition of “curtains, cushions... kitchen gadgets, foods [and] whatever comfort she could think of” (203). Though initially grateful for these ministrations, Moyna quickly becomes “annoyed” by them (203). She also reacts with uncharacteristic impatience to her mother’s expressions of affection. The “motherliness she had missed and longed for” now strikes her as “superfluous”, an “indigestible sweetness” (203). In her new incarnation as a modern urban woman, Moyna seems compelled to disavow her parents’ home, and with it, her “childish urge to run and hide her head in her mother’s lap, feel[ing] her mother stroke her hair” (189). In contrast to her mother’s traditional role as a nurturer, Moyna’s new identity as a professional seems to depend on the severance of family ties and the

¹⁰⁵ Taking a scholarly interest in “medieval trade routes through the Arabian sea” (191), Ritwick also resembles William Pepper in *The Voyage Out*, whose research interests include “vehicular traffic” and “the probable course of Odysseus” (VO 12).

cultivation of a new self, one that has no need for a home or for interpersonal relationships. This becomes more apparent in the concluding lines of the story, in which Moyna's mother writes to inform her of Arun's return from America. "He has taken a degree in geology," her mother writes primly, "and is expected to find a suitable job in the field. I am sure he would be pleased to meet you again" (207). Emitting a "shout of laughter" as she reads the letter, Moyna betrays little desire to renew her acquaintance with Arun, despite his American degree. Instead, she confirms her determination to remain in Delhi and to pursue her own career. More clearly than Elizabeth Dalloway, Moyna emerges in this conclusion as a successful and promising avatar of female independence.

Yet the story does not deny the necessity of companionship and communal bonds, in favour of a purely individualistic ideal of personal identity. Following her family's tradition of providing "shelter" to "maimed... pregnant... [and] dying" animals, Moyna adopts a starving kitten and is astonished to find that "instantly", her solitary room "cease[s] to be a prison" (162). When the kitten leads to her eviction from the hostel, she takes it with her in a basket, and rises at six every morning to buy it milk from the "Mother Dairy" stall at the local market (171). Through her devotion to the kitten, Moyna illustrates her capacity and indeed her need for affective relationships, distinguishing her from the archetypal figure of the solitary, self-sufficient wanderer and aligning her with figures such as Mira-Masi in *Clear Light of Day*. The vital importance of relationships is further underscored by Moyna's friendship with Gurmail Singh, her rickshaw driver. As they travel back and forth between her home and office, Gurmail Singh relates the details of his domestic life to her until she "g[ets] to know his entire family," his mother, wife and children, whose photograph are pasted to the dashboard of his autorickshaw. She relates these anecdotes to her work colleagues until Tara protests in frustration that she "can't talk about anything" else (172). Yet Moyna reflects, defensively, "didn't Tara talk about Ritwick's position in the university, and about her own son and his trials at school, or the hardships of having to live with her widowed mother-in-law...?" (172). This exchange between Moyna and Tara further highlights the tension between a sense of community, or fellowship with others, and the modern, independent, professional life to which Moyna aspires.

Reprising *Clear Light of Day*, "The Rooftop Dwellers" endorses a localised form of mobility, as distinct from international travel, as facilitating personal autonomy while also preserving links to community, family and home. Moyna's commitment to a literary

career in New Delhi sets her apart from her male colleague, Mohan, who despite his university education has little desire to work for *Books*. Mohan tells Tara that his ultimate goal is to work in “Travel and Tourism... going to airport, receiving foreign tourists, taking them to five-star hotels in rented cars... and receiving tips” (179). In contrast to this impersonal and purely mercenary form of participation in the global tourist economy, Moyna’s work for *Books* appears to constitute an investment in the work of building a distinctly Indian literary culture: she reflects that it is “interesting” to read over the list of subscribers, “a circle so far-flung as to read like a list of the districts of India” (175). In this vein, Desai casts Moyna’s home as the site of a social life, an extension of the city’s cosmopolitan milieu. After their visit to the British Council, Tara unexpectedly appears on Moyna’s doorstep with Adrian, the clerk who assisted them there. After sampling the wine that Adrian has brought with him, Moyna experiences a moment of bliss, feeling “her spirits break free and lift.” “Here she was”, Moyna thinks, “entertaining friends on ‘her terrace’ on a starry evening, just as she had imagined an adult working woman in the metropolis might do, just as she had imagined *she* would do – and now it was happening” (182). With this passage, Desai presents a euphoric narrative of successful female maturation and autonomous development. Crucially, she locates it *within* the home, which here figures as a convivial space of intimacy and companionship.

Desai’s fiction reveals a deep and enduring ambivalence regarding mobility, which she associates with personal agency but also with the destruction of relationships and the loss of important forms of communal and familial identity. This ambivalence emerges clearly in her early novels, *Where Shall We Go Next Summer?* and *Clear Light of Day*. In these novels, Desai stresses the alienating and isolating aspects of mobility, depicting mobile characters who, to varying extents, fail to form and maintain the relationships necessary to personal happiness. In these early novels, Desai is overtly critical of these mobile characters, who seem to personify selfishness and the evasion of responsibility. By contrast, she implicitly endorses the static, domesticated figures of Mira and Bim, who remain at home and in so doing affirm the importance of community, familial and specifically maternal bonds. In this respect, both novels reflect the fact that, in Desai’s own words, they were written “long before [she] left India or became at all a cosmopolitan person” (Jussawalla 163). *Baumgartner’s Bombay* is more ambivalent, evoking mobility in more positive terms as a cosmopolitan, transformative experience, even as it frankly depicts the alienating and melancholic quality of exile and cultural dislocation. This subtle transformation may reflect the fact that Desai herself, by this time,

was in the process of becoming “cosmopolitan”, having left India to take up a writing residency in the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁶

Fasting, Feasting continues this developmental arc. Written after Desai had spent several years as an immigrant in the United States, it does not romanticise the experience of migration, evoking it as profoundly lonely and alienating in a manner that strongly recalls Hugo’s exile in *Baumgartner’s Bombay*. Yet, like the earlier novel, *Fasting, Feasting* suggests that Arun’s difficult sojourn in America contains some potential for positive transformation. It emphatically contrasts Arun’s difficult, yet productive experience of dislocation with the deeply oppressive, violent conditions endured by his sister, trapped within her parents’ home in India. In this respect, both *Baumgartner’s Bombay* and *Fasting, Feasting* can be viewed as attempts, on Desai’s part, to reconcile her conflicting responses to her own transnational dislocation, an experience that she has described as “bewilder[ing]” and lonely (Desai, “Bicultural,” 24), yet one that she herself chose, in preference to a lifetime of static domesticity. Against this background, “The Rooftop Dwellers” offers an unusually sanguine vision of the home as a site of enlivening and potentially transgressive sociality for independent Indian women. This home is distinctly bourgeois, even if it lacks some of the comforts to which Moyna is accustomed in her parents’ home. In this sense, it reflects Desai’s own elite status within Indian society, something that has been frequently noted in Indian commentary on her work,¹⁰⁷ yet little remarked by English-speaking critics.¹⁰⁸ In its attempt to characterise the home as a liberating space for women, “The Rooftop Dwellers”, like *Clear Light of Day*, does not depict the “hidden labour” of those who serve the middle class inhabitants and facilitate their more or less leisured existence (Mohan 52).

¹⁰⁶ Ho writes that *Baumgartner’s Bombay* was Desai’s “first novel to be written outside of India, while Desai [was] resident at Girton College, Cambridge” (vii).

¹⁰⁷ In a 1972 article, Promilla Kalhan begins by asking pointedly, “Is it necessary for a writer to have starved to the depict the pangs of a hungry man?” Describing the “lush lawn” outside Desai’s “large, comfortable house” in the wealthy city of Chandigarh, Kalhan notes that Desai is the daughter of a civil servant, who married “an executive in an oil firm when barely out of college”, thus “mov[ing] from one comfortable upper class home to another”. Kalhan observes that Desai “does not expect to or need to live by her writing”, surmising that she writes in part because she has “little else to do”. In a similar vein, marking the publication of *Clear Light of Day* in 1980, Madhu Jain described Desai as being “fragile as porcelain”, living “across [a] moat of refined, mysterious sensibility” in her “ivory tower”. An article by Ranjana Sen Gupta, published in the same year, ends on a similarly cynical note, observing that the “main road with its traffic, money deals, and... greasy bread pakoras, is very far away” from Desai’s “calm beautiful house”.

¹⁰⁸ An exception is a 1980 review of *Clear Light of Day* by Auberon Waugh, published in the *Evening Standard*. Waugh observes that “[a]ll Mrs Desai’s characters are well-educated... All have four or five servants, however dingy their circumstances,” concluding, “I do not see how she can be said to have given us the real India...”

6 Conclusion

In the final pages of *For Love Alone*, after her night with Harry Girton, Teresa Hawkins experiences an epiphany as she travels home to James in London:

And suddenly as a strange thought it came to her, that she had reached the gates of the world of Girton and Quick and that it was towards them she was only now journeying, and in a direction unguessed by them; and it was towards them and in this undreamed direction that she had been travelling all her life, and would travel, farther, without them; and with her she felt many thousands of shadows, pressing along with her, storming forwards... She even heard the rushing and jostling of their patched and washed clothes and the flapping of their street-worn shoes, their paper-stuffed soles. She began to blush deeply... her heart thickened with shame, and... life itself seemed to choke her. She suddenly understood that there was something beyond misery... something on the citied plain for all of them... she knew why she continued restless... All on this fabulous railway journey seemed divine, easy and clear, as if she had a passport to paradise. (494)

With this extraordinary imagery, Stead articulates a utopian vision of mobility that promises both individual transcendence and a profound sense of fellowship with others. In this respect, the passage invites comparison with the most idealistic and optimistic passages in Woolf: Joan's pilgrimage to Walsingham, Rachel's twilit stroll through Santa Marina, and above all Clarissa's euphoric wandering through the streets of London in *Mrs Dalloway*. As in all these texts, Stead equates the act of movement with a feeling of untrammelled personal autonomy that is, simultaneously, a kind of release from the narrow boundedness of the self, a metaphysical union with the other that is radical and indeed revolutionary in its capacity to cross hitherto insurmountable barriers of gender, class and racial difference. As Brigid Rooney writes, it is this vision of simultaneous "self-identity" and "self-betrayal", "the betrayal of self that transforms the self", that gives *For Love Alone* its genuinely utopian quality (65). In narrating Teresa's "fabulous railway journey" in such terms, Stead vividly illustrates the symbolic power of mobility to engender a radical, even revolutionary sensibility.

The passage assumes another resonance, however, when it is read in the wider context of Teresa's quest and her trajectory from the grim streets of Sydney to the affluent environs of London's inner city. With its references to patched clothes and broken shoes, the passage strikingly evokes the scenes in the first half of the novel, in which the "grotesque[ly]" thin (276) and shabby Teresa walks the streets of Sydney, driven almost to insanity by fatigue and "perpetual hunger" (276). Teresa's insistence that the way

ahead is “divine, easy and clear” recalls her earlier, “delirious” belief that she is “walking her way to England” (278). Yet it also draws attention to her changed material circumstances, suggesting that these have worked a profound transformation on her state of mind. Whereas hunger and physical fatigue previously left her mind “tattered” (164) and disordered, Stead suggests that Teresa’s buoyant mood and newfound confidence are in some way a product of her affluence. No longer walking hungrily in worn out shoes, she now travels by train on a first class ticket, with hamper, drinks and elegant clothes all paid for by James. In this context, Teresa’s romanticised imagery of vagrancy represents a comic inversion of the novel’s epigraph: whereas her earlier idealism was a sublimation of her yearning for food, warmth and sexual intimacy, her metaphysical musings are now those of one whose physical appetites are sated. Stead hints that, in her good fortune, Teresa has already forgotten how it feels to be truly destitute, and it is this forgetfulness that enables her to use the trope of vagrancy as an image of spiritual transcendence. This interpretation is reinforced by the scene that immediately follows Teresa’s epiphany, in which she observes the “beggarman” outsider her flat, “pale and bowed, frightened and huddled” beneath the blows of the “vicious slum youth” who torments him (498). With this juxtaposition of literal and figurative vagrancy, Stead infuses Teresa’s epiphany with a note of bitter irony, suggesting that her seemingly radical vision is in fact distinctly bourgeois and elitist.

In this combination of the epiphanic and the ironic, this passage vividly illustrates Stead’s complex response to the imagery of mobility in Woolf’s oeuvre. It specifically connotes Woolf’s essay, “Street Haunting” (1927), in which she describes a fictional journey through the streets of London, on the pretext of buying a lead pencil. Like Teresa, Woolf’s narrator in “Street Haunting” imagines herself part of a revolutionary collective, a “vast republican army of anonymous trampers” marching through the twilit streets (*SH* 19). As she leaves her home to walk across London, the narrator feels the boundary between herself and other people dissolve: a “shell-like covering... is broken”, revealing the “soul” inside (20). As she sets out across the city, the narrator imagines herself “float[ing]... smoothly down a stream”, an image of fluid movement that seems to denote heightened perceptiveness. As she walks, the narrator glances up at lamp-lit windows, imagining the inhabitants within, “clerks... turning... the files of endless correspondences” while, in “the privacy of some drawing-room, its easy chairs, its papers, its china, its inlaid table... the figure of a woman” measures out tea (*SH* 20). She

announces sharply, "... here we must stop... we are in danger of digging deeper than the eye approves" (SH 20). Yet in the very act of rebuking herself in this way, she highlights the fact that she cannot remain detached from those she observes, and that her walking draws her irresistibly into an imaginative encounter with others.

The essay quickly reveals that the narrator's tendency to "di[g] deeper" is potentially subversive. In this opening passage, the narrator transgresses the patriarchal assumption, to which Woolf refers in *A Room of One's Own*, that the actions of "women in a drawing-room" are "insignificant" (Room 70). By suggesting an equivalence between the actions of the clerk and the woman measuring tea, she implicitly rejects the "masculine values" that deem male activities "important" and women's activities "trivial" (Room 70). But this suggested equivalence has more troubling implications. Symbols of colonialism pervade both scenes: the clerk the narrator spies through his lamp-lit window is perusing not merely files, but "maps"; and the woman in her drawing room is "measuring out... precise... spoon[fuls] of tea" (20), that precious commodity so intimately connected with the colonisation of India and Ceylon. In this way, the narrator presents both man and woman as implicated in an imperial system that furnishes the English with vast wealth and an almost dizzying array of luxury commodities. Repeatedly throughout "Street Haunting" Woolf illustrates the close relationship between the beauty of the London streets and the wealth extracted from England's colonies. Surveying the "bright paraphernalia" of the shops, her narrator imagines "the tide of trade which deposits its burden so punctually... upon the shores of Oxford Street" (23). While the tone here is celebratory, the trinkets and bibelots on display are described as "trophies" (21) and "treasure" (23), faintly evoking a piratical process of looting or theft.

In a similarly ambivalent fashion, "Street Haunting" reveals a marked awareness of class inequality that troubles and undermines its celebratory depiction of urban walking. Woolf's narrator is emphatically, indeed proudly, a member of the upper middle class. She walks the streets for leisure, rather than out of necessity, and stresses her own gentility by comparing her "rambling" to the aristocratic pursuits of fox-hunting and golf. The narrator of "Street Haunting" claims that her walk through London offers insights into the lives of those outside her own milieu. She watches bemusedly as hordes of suburban commuters, "wrapt, in this short passage between work and home, in some narcotic dream", make their way towards the train that will bear them away to "some prim little villa in Barnes or Surbiton" (SH 26). As Bowlby points out, the essay betrays a

marked disdain for these members of the petit-bourgeoisie and the suburban landscape they inhabit (*Crazy* 30). Yet when encountering other, more abject figures in the streets, the narrator abandons her tone of urbane condescension, seeming to recognise the subjective, class-bound nature of her own perspective. As she walks, the “republican army” becomes transformed into a far more abject group comprised of “the humped, the twisted, the deformed” (*SH* 22; Bowlby, *Crazy* 23). At first, the narrator seems reluctant to acknowledge the “poverty and shabbiness” of the people she encounters in the street, insisting that they “do not grudge us... our prosperity” (23). The narrator appears unperturbed by the sight of “derelicts” who “choose to lie not a stone’s throw from the theatres” (23), proceeding to describe a dazzling array of shop windows, “where commerce offers to a world of old women laid on doorsteps” a glittering spectacle of gilt, marble, rich carpet and “tables inlaid with... many coloured fruit” (23). Yet “suddenly, turning the corner”, she sees “a bearded Jew, wild, hunger-bitten, glaring out of his misery”, and “the humped body of an old woman flung abandoned on the step of a public building with a cloak over her like the hasty covering thrown over a dead horse or donkey” (23). Witnessing these spectacles, the narrator reflects, “a sudden flare is brandished in our eyes; a question is asked which is never answered” (23).

Evoking both brightness and blindness, the narrator seems fleetingly to recognise the limits of her own omniscience, when confronted by a kind of suffering and vulnerability that is unfathomable to her. Through her encounters with the poor and vagrant inhabitants of the London streets, Woolf ironically subverts her narrator’s claim to be able to “enter into the lives” of others. Even as she savours the pleasures of temporary affinity with “a washerwoman, a publican, a street singer”, the narrator clings to her reassuring knowledge that she remains ineluctably separate, “a single mind” (28). This sense of the unbridgeable gulf between the self and the other becomes more palpable as the narrator turns back toward her home, reflecting, “what greater... wonder can there be than to leave the straight lines of personality and deviate into those footpaths that lead beneath brambles and thick tree trunks into the heart of the forest where live those wild beasts, our fellow men?” (28). Far from being a “wonder”, in the sense of being “wonder[ful]”, these “fellow men” are bestial and faintly horrifying, symbolically recalling the homeless women the narrator has seen lying like “dead horse[s] or donkey[s]” (23) in the street. The image of penetrating “brambles and thick tree trunks” further compounds the ominous, sinister tone of the passage, suggesting a colonial

expedition with faint echoes of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Despite the narrator's urbane and guileless tone, "Street Haunting" is profoundly ironic, suggesting the limitations of her capacity or even willingness to see and empathise with the people she encounters in the street.

Stead appears to allude specifically to "Street Haunting" in the final scene of *For Love Alone*, in which Teresa experiences a final, discomfiting encounter with Jonathan Crow in the streets of London. At first, she does not recognise him. Watching him pass her in the street, she speculates with amusement that it would be nice to "write a story" about "that incomprehensible type, the bachelor... sucked into himself like a sea-anemone" (500). In the next breath, she appears to acknowledge the spuriousness of this fantasy, pulling herself up short in a way that recalls Woolf's narrator in "Street Haunting". Teresa reflects "what a shock" it would be if she were to follow the mysterious bachelor and find him "tak[ing] a ticket to Surbiton", to "a semi-detached villa with a black rusty-browed wife and two dirty-skinned children" (500-501). Teresa – who now explicitly identifies herself as a writer – appears to adopt the tone of Woolf's narrator in "Street Haunting", confirming her membership of a cultured metropolitan elite through her disdainful, snobbish reference to suburban commuters. Yet in the next moment, Stead makes a radical revision to the scenario outlined in "Street Haunting". Whereas Woolf's narrator "does not see herself as seen by" the figures she encounters in the London street (Bowlby, *Crazy* 24), Stead presents Teresa as she is seen by Jonathan. The confrontation between Woolf's urbane narrator and the "glaring", "bearded" Jew is repeated, but transformed into an encounter that is experienced by *both* parties as "horrific" (FLA 501).

Teresa and Jonathan confront each other under the light of a lamp that distorts them both into equally grotesque, even monstrous figures. When she takes a few steps to follow him, he turns around "quickly and viciously" to cast her a "repellent glance", taking her to be a "whore". Teresa perceives Jonathan as "vile-faced", his "unshaven lantern jaw" and "bent" back making him seem like a figure out of "melodrama" (501). Yet Teresa is also grotesquely transfigured by the street lamps' light into something "ghastly, blue, her cheek-bones protrud[ing] and her mouth... blue-black... her eyes... pale vapours in brilliant eye-balls, fastened upon him" (501). When Teresa recognises Jonathan, she recoils "as if faced by a murderer" (501). Yet Jonathan reacts even more violently, turning without a word and fleeing down the Strand in terror. This encounter closely parallels the earlier scene in which James pursues a frightened Teresa through the

streets at night, causing her to turn around fearfully to confront him. Here, Teresa assumes the role of the pursuer, just as she has previously cast herself in the masculine role of a knight errant. Yet far from evincing a romantic or chivalrous sensibility, Teresa appears in this final confrontation as a frightening, predatory figure. Reinforcing the symbolic equivalence between Teresa and Jonathan, this final scene suggests that she, like Jonathan, has degenerated over the course of her journey. In this respect, the novel's final scene undercuts the euphoric, utopian vision she experienced in the railway carriage. In stark contrast to the sense of fellowship Teresa felt, in the earlier scene, with the "many thousands of shadows, pressing along with her" (494), this scene of misrecognition and alienation emphasises the solitary, self-regarding nature of her quest.

Gallant's fiction draws a similar, sustained parallel between mobility and entrapment within a solipsistic, alienated inner world. For the most part, Gallant's fiction portrays mobile characters who fail utterly to respond to, or even perceive, the needs and desire of those around them. The encounter between Carol and Felix in "The Other Paris" is a rare instance in which a mobile protagonist appears, briefly, to emerge from her narcissism and to enter into a genuinely empathetic relationship with another. Carol experiences a fleeting affinity with Felix that sets her apart from most of the characters in Gallant's oeuvre. In Felix, Gallant presents a figure who in some respects resembles the homeless Jew in Woolf's "Street Haunting": in his poverty, his uncertain ethnic origin and his illegal migration status he is an abject figure, a fact underscored by Odile's chilling observation that he "should have been killed" in the war (24). Despite her presumed superiority to Felix, Carol is rendered vulnerable by the attraction that she cannot conceal from him. She envies Felix's "capacity to love", something she wants to do but cannot. The reversal of their situation becomes complete when Felix walks her to the metro. Carol urges him to come to America, promising that Howard will "vouch" for him, yet Felix only responds by asking wryly, "And Odile? Would Mr Mitchell vouch for Odile too?" (27). Noting that she looks "hurt and serious", Felix briefly takes her hand, attracting "sympathetic" glances from "passersby" (28). It is in this moment that Carol experiences her own form of epiphany, sensing "the weight of his love for Odile" (28), a spontaneous and irrational love of a kind she herself has never felt. Yet Carol ultimately recoils from her nascent love for Felix and the sense of vulnerability that it instils in her. Feeling her "exclus[ion]" from the intimacy that exists between Felix and Odile, she denounces it as "silly and immoral" (29), worthy only of contempt. In her enthusiastic

anticipation of her marital home, with its “draperies and Venetian blinds” (16) to shut out the light, Carol affirms her retreat into a sterile, solipsistic and ultimately static form of individualism that shuts out the vivifying potential of genuine human relationships. “The Other Paris” is thus emblematic of Gallant’s cynical and ultimately pessimistic attitude towards mobility. For Carol, as for all Gallant’s mobile protagonists, travel does not illuminate, facilitate maturation or enable genuine connection with others. Instead, it only illustrates the stubbornness with which the individual clings to his or her preconceived ideas in order to preclude or retreat from threatening encounters with “distasteful strangeness” (30).

Anita Desai’s work appears to adopt a similarly cynical stance in relation to mobility and its capacity to facilitate transformative encounters with others. Desai’s fiction contains no comparable meeting between a mobile female character and a figure in the street. When Bim undertakes her single, brief journey through the streets of Delhi, she contemplates the “massed jungle of rag-and-tin huts” that house the “millions of refugees who were struggling in across the new border” (*CLOD* 86). Yet she never perceives the particularity or individuality of any single figure; rather, the people in the camps seem to “swar[m] and crawl[l] with a kind of crippled, subterranean life” that fills Bim with “horror” (86). Desai’s closest approximation of Woolf’s depiction of the “bearded Jew” of “Street Haunting” is Hugo’s series of encounters with Jagu, the rural refugee who lives with his family on the pavement outside Hugo’s flat. Hugo is aware of their eyes upon him, and “never walk[s] past... without feeling... a brief prickle... of unease, an apprehension” (7). Yet these encounters only seem to confirm the ineluctable structures of class, race and imperialism that separate them. The homeless migrants never speak to Hugo, who merely “shuffle[s] past” their humpty with his “head bowed and eyes averted... to hide his shame at being alive, fed, sheltered, privileged” (*BB* 207). In what appears to be a stark contrast to the mobile protagonist of “Street Haunting”, Desai portrays empathetic, affective relationships as being primarily, if not exclusively located in the home. This positive evocation of the home, as the locus of transformative and ethical relationships, would seem to set Desai apart from Woolf, Stead and Gallant.

Yet to varying degrees, Woolf, Stead and Gallant also acknowledge the centrality of the home, as a site of empathetic connections and a sanctuary from challenges and threats that attend mobility. This sense is muted in the work of Gallant, whose fiction contains very few positive evocations of the home as a haven or place of succour. In her

fiction, the home is most frequently defined by its inadequacy or unhomeliness, as in Parisian apartment that Bob shares with Flor, with its “creaking or mournful or ghostly sounds” and “lingering vapours of adolescent nostalgia – that fruitless, formless yearning for God knows what.” (41) “Baum, Gabriel” is rare in Gallant’s fiction, in that it depicts a home in more positive terms, in the form of the bakery Dieter Pohl intends to buy upon his return to Germany. This imagined home represents a poignant contrast to Gabriel’s past, which consists of “empty rooms, letters left behind, cold railway stations washed down with disinfectant” (159); and his present, the dubious sanctuary of the “Pub La Méduse” (152). If the name of the bar casts Dieter and his friends in the ironic guise of Homeric wanderers, Dieter’s bakery serves as a reminder that even Ulysses eventually returns to Ithaca and to the comforts of domesticity. As imagined by Gabriel, Dieter’s domestic idyll in Bavaria is explicitly gendered, the product of his future wife’s unpaid and largely invisible labour. It is also ethnically specific: as a non-Jewish German, Dieter can maintain an affective connection to his birthplace and its traditions, something that Gabriel finds impossible. Revealing the various forms of privilege that facilitate Dieter’s return to this idealised home, Gallant reinforces her predominantly melancholic account of the home as remote and inaccessible.

Stead’s fiction also acknowledges the importance of the home as the concomitant to mobility, while recognising that access to such a home is an attribute of privilege. The Follits, the internationally mobile middle-class radicals of *Seven Poor Men*, live in a luxurious home, which contains a grand piano, a “polished walnut table”, “marble mantelpiece” and “long-stemmed champagne glasses” (SPM 228). Stead’s urban *flâneuse*, Letty Fox, also moves easily between the respective homes of her parents and her large extended family. Her eventual attainment of her own home, through marriage to Bill van Week, is in one sense a kind of retreat from the psychological pressures of life as a single woman in the modern city. Yet as Letty observes, it is also a simple, practical means of obtaining a “secure position” in bourgeois society – symbolised by the “suit of furniture” (LF 659) her grandmother promises to buy her upon her marriage. It is only when she has attained this position of security that Letty is able to embark enthusiastically and confidently upon the “journey” of life (LF 662). Similarly, in *For Love Alone*, Teresa only experiences mobility as pleasurable and liberating when she too has secured herself a home, through her relationship with James Quick. Her new relationship with James feels to her like a homecoming, the inheritance of “estates in distant lands” (460).

Crucially, it is on her return to James, and her new identity as his “backstreet wife”, that Teresa experiences her transcendental vision, feeling that she has at last obtained her “passport to paradise”, access to the “cited plain” of her utopian vision.

Woolf’s work provides the clearest articulation of this sense of the home, and domestic security, as the necessary corollaries to transformative experiences of mobility. *A Room of One’s Own* articulates the importance of a space in which the female writer can attain the privacy, tranquillity and security in which to bring her talents to fruition. The same sentiment informs Woolf’s early short story, “The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn”, where the family home serves not only as the space in which writing can occur, but as the repository for Joan’s diary and the means by which it is preserved for discovery by Rosamond Merridew more than four centuries later. Importantly, however, in contrast to the solitary act of writing represented in *A Room of One’s Own*, “Joan Martyn” presents Joan’s creativity as a communal endeavour, an oral tradition of stories narrated by the fireplace. A similar sentiment informs *Mrs Dalloway*, where the home figures as both a private retreat and a utopian social space in which familial and other communal bonds are nurtured and sustained. Yet this form of sociality is selective and exclusive, profoundly different from the democratic sociability of the city streets. Joan takes comfort in the knowledge that the gates of Martyn Hall are firmly barred, protecting her from the criminals who roam the countryside while also separating her from the peasants she regards with suspicion and contempt. Despite her sense of affinity with the people she encounters in the London street, Clarissa exhibits a similar sense of relief as she reenters her home, handing her umbrella and gloves to her waiting servants. In this respect, Woolf evokes the home ambivalently, as both a locus of communal identity and a bastion of elitism, a retreat from unsettling encounters with difference.

In “Street Haunting”, more explicitly than anywhere in her fiction, Woolf stages the privacy and security of the home as the necessary, indeed essential concomitant to the potentially threatening encounters with alterity that are made possible by mobility. Associating urban mobility with a temporary transcendence of the boundaries between self and other, the narrator of “Street Haunting” proclaims that “to escape is the greatest of pleasures” (29). Yet ironically, she says this not as she is leaving for her walk, but rather as she crosses her threshold and re-enters her own drawing room. In contrast to the street, with its disturbing spectacles of poverty, this drawing room offers an almost paradisaal sense of security. In it, “the self... which has batted like a moth at the flame of

so many inaccessible lanterns,” feels once again “sheltered and enclosed” (29). In returning home, the narrator “escape[s]” from the confrontations and threatening sights of the street into the more congenial environs of bourgeois privilege: she briefly notes the “brown ring” on the carpet (29), testament to the clumsy ministrations of a servant. As she settles back into this familiar environment, Woolf’s narrator abandons her attempt to empathise with others, betraying a palpable relief at feeling “the old prejudices... fold... round” her once more (29). Here, as Andrea Cirstea observes, Woolf evokes a “felicitous domestic space” as a “reliable reference point in one’s relationship with the... social world” (27). In this respect, she enacts what Caren Kaplan identifies as “one of modernity’s most enduring and complex oppositional binaries,” the “tension between the liberating promise of mobility and the security of fixed location...” (“Transporting” 35).

This thesis has argued for the existence of a tradition in twentieth-century women’s writing, one that employs narratives and images of mobility to explore female subjectivity, agency and potential for personal transformation. This tradition is neither one of straightforward transmission nor one of outright repudiation. Rather, it is one in which mobile tropes and narrative devices are continually revised to reflect the impediments to female autonomy in each writer’s historic and cultural context. Woolf, Stead, Gallant and Desai all experiment with imagery of movement, testing its potential as a symbol of genuinely transformative encounters with alterity. Yet in doing so, they recognise the vulnerability of the solitary mobile individual, acknowledging the important role of affective relationships and a stable, secure home in the development of personal identity. For each writer, romanticised narratives of untrammelled mobility are inherently suspect, associated with privilege, excessive individualism and an evasion of responsibility to others. In so far as they draw attention to the various forms of structural inequality that enable or inhibit the mobility of their protagonists, these narratives are powerfully political.

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