# GENDER AND LITERACY IN BRITAIN, 1847-1987:

# THE RHETORIC OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

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Considers significant moments in the changing literacy practices in the context of girls' and women's education reform, circa 1860-1960. Looks at forms of writing that were shaped by, even produced as a result of, this social movement: girls' school stories, women's school novels, and the autobiographies of women educational administrators. Chapter one reads against anti-social constructions of Jane Eyre and places it in a rhetorical context of teacher activism. Considers the anti-vocational ethos of Brontë's novel in comparison with Clemence Dane's Regiment of Women, which endorsed anti-equal pay and maternal-vocation rhetorics with regard to women teachers. Compares these to Winifred Holtby's South Riding, which rebuts Dane's anti-teacher and lesbophobic rhetoric and self-consciously echoes Jane Eyre. Chapter two provides a rhetorical analysis of the memoirs of women educational administrators, who did not fully support the materialist claims of activist teachers. Examines the "dual closure strategy" at work in their rhetoric, by which they construct their own professional status, but at the expense of those working under them. The hierarchies at work in school are examined in chapter three, which considers how the school stories of Winifred Darch are

imbued with rhetorics of girls' independence and rebellion, especially located in the form of public speeches. Shows how Darch navigates democratic ideals embodied in new high schools for girls. Questions why narratives of girl rebellion in school stories have not been more readily associated with women's narratives of rebellion in school novels. Chapter four considers the political implications of the lesbian camp approach found in Nancy Spain's writing, especially her school-mystery novel Poison for Teacher. Argues for the political significance of her humorous commentary on gendered literacy practices.

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Had it not been for the friendly responses to my queries on Victoria-L, this dissertation would not have taken shape as it did. I would like to acknowledge three individuals whose suggestions ultimately helped determine the path this project has taken: Margot Louis let me know about Sims and Clare's Encyclopaedia of Girls' School Stories (and, in doing so, opened my eyes to the whole genre); Chris Willis and Lesley Hall suggested I take a look at South Riding and Regiment of Women, respectively. I also owe thanks to the mostly-anonymous compilers of the "adult school fiction" bibliographic essay in Sims and Clare's Encyclopaedia, for exposing me to Poison for Teacher and other novels. Others responded in an equally friendly fashion to personal email queries: while I was in London, Sally Mitchell pointed me to the newspaper library at Colindale to look at the school story periodicals there. Ellen Jordan and Christine Krueger's support for an earlier and much more polemical version of the headmistress chapter helped me see that this project would have a sympathetic audience. I thank Suzette Henke for her interest in the writing as it was being formed and for her cheerful collegiality and solidarity.

Jennifer Haynes, then the University of London Institute of Education's archivist, provided me with the opportunity to read Isabel Fry's unpublished diaries and other papers, while the librarians and student circulation staff at the University of Louisville and Santa Clara University facilitated access to countless primary and secondary sources through interlibrary loans. Undergraduate students in my advanced composition course and a first-year composition course at the University of Louisville surprised and delighted me with their readings of some of the primary and secondary sources here and helped me make the case for their relevance to present-day U.S. educational contexts.

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My family's love and support extended to their belief that this dissertation was a worthwhile endeavor and to their patience in seeing me through to the end of it.

Marc Bousquet's contribution to this project began with a conversation over pirogues on Second Avenue and Twelfth Street about Victorian women administrators. It continues in countless ways. The conversations we have shared about the ideas and people in the following pages have all helped me think about what it was I was trying to do and say there. His readings of early, intermediate, and final versions of these chapters have helped me both to be more precise and to say what it was I was really thinking, when I was hesitant to write about the topical connections that I think strengthen the following arguments. His belief in the project has helped me imagine its uses and its audiences.

Table of Contents

# Introduction

## Deeds With Words: Women's Education Literacies

Women's and girls' literacy practices evolved in the context of British education reform movements from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1960s. The latter decade saw at least two major changes in the girls' education world. First, state-funded single-sex education came to an end, so that "girls' education" itself came to mean something entirely different than in the previous decades. Second, after generations of struggle, women teachers earned pay parity with men. This is not to say that gender, as well as class, race, and other categories of inequality have been overcome or eradicated in the British educational system. But these changes, and the struggles that produced them, have had significant consequences for women as writers and as educated subjects.

The chapters in this dissertation consider various forms of written material: historiography, journalism, autobiography, education-management treatises in the form of autobiography, feminist criticism, and literary and popular novels. These writings represent what literacy scholars, with their attention to pragmatic social contexts, would call "literate actions." They are the literate actions of women -- teachers, students, administrators, and writers -- involved actively in the rhetorical projects that constituted movements for reform.

One traditional sketch of literacy emphasizes literacy as the skills of reading of writing, necessary for functioning in a print-saturated modern world. In this view, acquiring literacy requires some degree of isolation, as reading and writing are solitary and silent acts. Literacy represents a break with an oral past, whether historically or developmentally in the context of an oral-based home culture, as is the case in some disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus the theme of the "scholarship kid" leaving his (as the case may be) village or family behind to successfully enter the world of school and print. Contrary to the isolation model are social models which posit that literacy is learned and practiced in a social context and goes beyond the "mere skills" of reading and writing. Some social definitions of literacy include "rhetorical concepts of literacy." The recognition that "literacy is rhetorical," though it is still being played out amongst literacy scholars in the first decade of the twenty-first century, derives from structuralism and its aftermath, and from a discursive understanding of reality or identity. That is, acts of writing and reading are inseparable from social forces and power relations. There *is* no isolated individual reader/writer, however much this idealized figure is lamented or celebrated. The present study takes as a starting point social and social-constructionist paradigms of literacy (literacy as actions transpiring in a social context) rather than functionalist ones (literacy as skills). Within this paradigm, literacy has been defined by various scholars as: "social involvement" and "learning how people stick together through literate means" (Brandt); the "rhetorics of public life" (Duffy); "sociopolitical action" (Royster); and "how we do things around here" (Heath).

An important parallel to what I would call the discursive turn (or, rather, fork in the road) in literacy studies has been the discursive approach to professionalism. Once

imagined as a static set of characteristics to be identified, measured or acquired, professionalism came to be understood in Annie Witz's words as a social project -- a discursive, rhetorical, social formation. To be sure, the static-descriptive meaning of professionalism is still dominant today, and coexists uneasily with the social-constructionist approach. The tension between these two meanings is, I hope, demonstrated in some of the following chapters.

This dissertation considers some significant moments in the changing literacy practices in the context of girls' and women's education reform. Several forms of writing were significantly shaped by, even produced as a result of, this social movement. One of these forms is the women's school novel: the woman-authored novel set mostly at a girl's school. As these novels were more often than not auto-fictional, their publication dates roughly follow along the heels of the reform movement itself (arguably from the 1860s through the 1960s). An important precursor to the women's school novel, written just on the cusp the movement, is Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, discussed in chapter one. Echoes from Brontë's writing, and the mythic Brontë narratives of education more generally, reappear frequently in other women's school novels, particularly in another text also treated in chapter one, Winifred Holtby's South Riding (1936). Like the idealized or lamented figure of the reader/writer-in-isolation, much of the reception of the Brontës' work and lives has been focused, and understandably so, on myths of isolation. The treatment of Jane Eyre in chapter one reads against this grain and places the novel in a political context of teacher activism.

Perhaps a parallel can be drawn between the tradition of anti-social readings of Brontë's work and the ways in which a related genre -- girls' school stories -- has

historically been marginalized. School stories for girls were closely related to the women's school novel, but their intended audience was younger, and they represented a recognizable segment of the publishing market. In a consideration of the work of prolific school story author Winifred Darch, in chapter three, I raise questions about why narratives of girl rebellion in school stories have not been more readily associated with women's narratives of rebellion in school novels.

In both genres there can be found what I might call "decadent" examples: moments where the genre can no longer contain itself. In the case of girls' school stories, the intermingling of other gothic-derived genres is an example of decadence. In the women's school novel, it might be found in parody, extensive self-referentiality, and a similar intermingling of genres such as detective fiction. An example of this can be found Nancy Spain's school-mystery novel, considered in chapter four. In Poison for Teacher (1949), she comments humorously on literacy practices -- the reading and writing, meaning-making, consumption, and production -- of school stories, women's school novels, mystery novels, and other forms. Spain was not particularly interested in the question of economic inequality or exploitation. Nonetheless, her camp approach supports a class critique which exposes structures of power and even domination on which the institution of girls' schooling is built.

Class relations and structures of power in education are shown from a managerial perspective in the memoirs of headmistresses, treated in chapter two. Related to the Victorian traditions of the professional woman's autobiography and the spiritual autobiography, these memoirs perform various kinds of cultural work. In particular, in writing and publishing these texts, headmistresses constructed their own profession and

professionalism; vaunted myths of vocation but displaced them onto the teachers in their charge; provided conduct books and management treatises for those following in their footsteps; and created positive PR for both their schools and the education reform movement.

These examples of girls' and women's literacies within the context of education are just that: examples taking place in different moments. Each one of the conflicts and themes discussed in the dissertation -- the meaning of professionalism, teacher activism, constructions of womanhood and girlhood, for example -- can be traced all throughout and beyond the century-long reform movement. In presenting the four different chapters I have attempted to offer a sense of chronology, beginning with an 1847 text and ending with the postwar media phenomenon of Nancy Spain. The middle chapters, with notable exceptions, focus on parallel periods, from 1920 through 1939.

**Some approaches to literacy**

In The Uses of Literacy (1957), Richard Hoggart wrote about himself as a "scholarship boy" whose entrance into literacy required an alienation from his family and home life. Hoggart's book was an important landmark in literacy studies. Many intellectuals after Hoggart, including more recent ones like Richard Rodriguez in the U.S., have written similar accounts of their academic lives. His story also resonates in the context of girls' education reform. For example, the new girls' high schools that flourished after the 1902 Education Act gave some exceptional working class girls the opportunity to attend secondary schools for the first time. The generation gap between them and their mothers, and their experience of difference in a largely middle-class milieu caused alienation parallel to that which Hoggart described in the 1950s. Scholarship girls are often

represented as alienated from their families. Their immersion in a world of print, often a predisposition which pre-dates their qualification for the scholarship, already places them in a world apart. Once at school, the alienation increases in proportion to the time they are obligated to devote to their studies. Girls are no longer at home to help their mothers with the housework or look after their siblings. Instead, their time is consumed with study.

Almost three decades after Hoggart's book, Shirley Brice Heath's Ways with Words provided another understanding of literacy within a context of community and family. The idea that literacy is a socially situated set of practices understood as "the way we do things around here" offered a radically egalitarian paradigm of difference. It illuminated how marginalized subjects' existing literacies could go unrecognized and be held against them. This was the case of the African American children in the newly integrated, largely white working class community Heath observed. The observations Heath makes in this ethnography of two very particular communities has been employed to understand very different literacy scenarios and locales. In this case, British women educators' reform projects can be analyzed as a minority rhetoric. In the context of the male-dominated unions that set standards of the profession like compensation, women members were disenfranchised. Male comrades fought against their mere presence on the podium. Feminist labor activists' campaign for equal pay within a rhetoric of responsibility and fairness was countered with rhetorics of monstrosity -- "ad feminam" attacks against the possibility of full citizenship and full humanity in the public sphere for women. Trade unionist critics joined reactionary social critics in generating false claims that women were and ought to be economic dependents not responsible for supporting

their families. Rather than simply a clash between two equal and opposing discourse communities, the relationship between male and female education unionists was characterized by radical inequality. Women teachers who made the most convincing arguments did not win. It took half a century or more for women to achieve pay parity with men in the profession.

Social inequality, particularly as experienced by children and other young students, is at the heart of Paolo Freire "critical literacy" paradigm. Critical literacy can be characterized as productive resistance to marginalization and (deliberate) misunderstanding. It is similar to that which Heath characterized among white teachers of African American children in the newly integrated schools. Critical literacy involves understanding how local and other institutions can be oppressive to working class and otherwise marginalized subjects, the social construction of class, and the forces that are intended to keep the poor and otherwise disenfranchised in their place.

This dissertation does not focus exclusively on schoolchildren or students. Freire's paradigm can be usefully extended to other relatively disenfranchised groups. Women educators were (obviously) adult, educated, literate, and mostly employed professionals. They were also often exploited workers whose claims to professional rights were not fully realized. In the context of sexism and exclusion in their own professional union, women teachers developed their own critical literacies: they developed new rhetorics of resistance. They resisted the command to stay in their place.

Women educational administrators -- too often, unfortunately, complicit in the exploitation of those women teachers with whom they might have more closely aligned themselves -- also fought against inequalities between the sexes in secondary and tertiary

education. Put another way, they had an all-too-keen critical literacy with respect to their position vis-a-vis their male colleagues, and then a stunted ability to read and write the experience of women under their administration. Woolf's A Room of One's Own is the most widely known and celebrated materialist critique of the inequality of women's higher education within the realm of some of the most privileged women in the Empire. The relative inequality experienced by these privileged women can be used to examine other, deeper divides within British education. The headmistresses' deliberate ignorance of the material claims and campaigns of the women teachers who served under them; women teachers' sometimes snobbish attitudes with regard to the working class communities in or near which they worked; high school girls' snobbery towards "cram schools"; the inability of a scholarship girl to take advantage of the tokenist opportunity offered her; one inequality bespeaks many, many others. The critical literacies of marginalized subjects -- their development of literate ways of resisting measures to keep them in their respective places -- did not often translate into even a desire for universal equality. That is, headmistresses in turn wanted to keep the teachers who worked under them in their place as well. Passively or not, they often resisted teachers' campaigns for better pay and conditions.

By a narrowly functionalist standpoint -- by the "skills" definition of literacy -- women educators were some of the most "literate" members of British society. They could also be described as increasingly *critically* literate about their place in society and in their changing profession, and specifically in their union, the NUT, within which they were silenced. Women teachers' union activism was achieved through a growing recognition of their interpersonal claims and responsibilities to one another as workers

and as women. It is notable that they achieved this as products of an academic education which placed most value on individual achievement. (In the context of reform, one individual's achievement -- for example, when a woman at Oxford took the highest honor in mathematics -- was seen as changing the course of women's higher education.) The victory of women teacher activists then was to forge out of this education-in-individualism a sisterhood of teachers *despite* their training and *because* of the literacies they acquired on the job. These new critical labor and feminist literacies are what Deborah Brandt could be describing in her "literacy as social involvement" paradigm. Brandt's paradigm, drawing as it does (and as much liberal composition and rhetoric theory does) on Soviet intellectual Vygotsky's 1930s work on the social nature of learning, can be understood as a "class consciousness" paradigm. It draws on many of the same fundamental sources as Freire did and has more in common with them than has been generally acknowledged.

The history of women teachers' unionism is at the same time the story of women teachers' professionalization. New sociological approaches explained professionalism as a social construct and social project. It reflected a contemporaneous social-constructionist turn in sociology. Rather than a quantifiable ontological condition, literacy came to be redescribed as a collective and intersubjective process. Similarly, rather than an all-or-nothing status that was seemingly handed down by divine right and unquestionable, professionalism was redescribed as a fluid set of characteristics which individual and collective agents worked towards. Both professionalism and literacy came to be approached as dynamic human engagements -- what I would call discursive, rhetorical projects.

This new social approach, then, was an epistemological one. A prominent literacy scholar working in the field of rhetoric and composition, Patricia Bizzell has called for "a view of literacy based on a properly rhetorical understanding of the history of knowledge" (142). This is relevant to the new understandings of professionalism. Specifically, Annie Witz has looked closely at several case studies of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century women's struggles to attain professional status despite male counterparts' attempts to keep them out. Witz's thesis is that professional projects (whether women's or not) are always double edged: that is, professionals must carve out authority for themselves and at the same time demarcate themselves from those they deem unprofessional, less professional, or otherwise unworthy or unqualified to be a member of their group. The headmistresses are a classic and under-explored example of just such a professional project. Their autobiographies could serve as another case study in the rhetorical project of professionalism and the more-than-doubly-edged sword (more like a multi-faceted one) implicated in women's professional projects. In these documents, they demonstrate acute awareness of their own development of new rhetorical literacies in order to fashion their own identities (individually and as a class) as well as construct the identities of teachers and students.

Recently, a few literacy scholars have made the social activism of marginalized groups the subject of their study. In her study of historical African American women as agents of social change, Jackie Joynes Royster redefines literacy as "sociopolitical action," a "sociopolitical phenomenon" and "ability" (45). In John Duffy's case study of the rhetorical literacies of Hmong people living in Wisconsin, he defines literacy as social activism and the "rhetorics of public life" (226). Early twentieth-century headmistresses

were in an extremely different position compared to either of those two groups. They were often upper-middle class and educated at an elite level. They were healthily salaried professionals who enjoyed the services of assistants and domestic help and may have owned property. However, they did not have equality with their male counterparts. They could not, of course, vote in national elections until decades after education reform and the admittance of women into higher education. They could do highest-honors work at Oxford but were not eligible for a degree until 1920. Like the women in Royster's study, these were some of the most rhetorically literate and vocal people of their generation and class. While differently positioned, all these groups employed their rhetorical literacy to the ends of sociopolitical change. Headmistresses' social activism was undertaken on two main fronts: in their own professionalization project and in their fight for the expansion of girls' and women's education.

What is often left out of the historiography of girls' education reform in this period is working class activism. The most relevant example of this is what Pamela Scobie and others have called "longest running strike in British history," in which working class parents and children struck to protest the firing of the local school's headmistress. Similarly, as Dina Copelman has shown, teachers were increasingly drawn from the newly college-educated working classes, so that women teachers' labor unionism was to some extent a working class movement. Schoolgirls' rebellion against institutional authorities is another form of social activism that has not been taken as seriously as it might be, as these rebellions were extremely circumscribed and local. This disseminated form of social activism was underwritten by girls' emerging critical literacies -- about their rights as citizens of the school's polity, for example. It was also

underwritten by the rhetorical construction of girlhood in which girls themselves -- in reciprocal relationship to writers, teachers, headmistresses, and others -- developed new "girls' literacies." The invention of "girlhood" in this period has been chronicled by scholars such as Sally Mitchell, and it is an area that is seeing much more discussion with the growth of children's culture as a field of study.

In her recent study of the second-wave women's movement in the U.S., Kathryn Flannery shows how everyday women "educate[d] themselves into feminism, how they took cultural materials and practices not necessarily intended for them and turned those materials to their own uses" (14). Like Flannery's book, this dissertation constructs feminist epistemology as literacy. Flannery's goal was to show that, in histories of the women's movement, verbal and gestural performance (such as demonstrations and speeches) has been over-emphasized with respect to the print culture that constituted, informed, and was the medium of transmission for these acts. While that is not the thesis of this dissertation, it is interesting to observe a similar phenomenon with regard to the earlier British wave. Hilda Keane's important book about the lives of suffragettes, Deeds Not Words, bespeaks just such an approach. Historiographers retelling the stories of significant feminist performances -- at podiums, in marches, etc -- often focus on women's bodily presence (speaking, marching, fasting/starving) rather than on the verbal text of their speeches and printed material. Headmistresses' writings are a good example of the way in which the written material of even the more well-known historical figures (Dorothea Beale, Frances Buss) is not the focus of the stories told about them.

The literacies produced by the education reform movement might be also seen, to use Flannery's words about her second-wave study, as an example of how women during

the long first wave of feminism "took cultural materials and practices not necessarily intended for them and turned those materials to their own uses." The following chapters discuss some of the uses of those artifacts of literacy.

**Chapter One: Women's Work, and Maternal Vocationalism**

Two activist lesbian writers, consecutively serving as book review editors at British Good Housekeeping, wrote two very different school novels. Both used one of the most mainstream, heteronormative examples of the growth of popular literacies imaginable -- the woman's magazine -- to fulfill their goals of reaching the broadest readership possible. Clemence Dane's 1917 novel Regiment of Women disseminated anti-teacher and anti-lesbian rhetorics -- despite her own campaigning on behalf of teachers' rights. Winifred Holtby's 1936 novel South Riding on the other hand popularized rhetorics in support of professional women educators, girls' education reform, and anti-heteronormative sexual politics. Both novels have elements of romance, Holtby's most especially, which is perhaps one of the reasons for its immense popularity and translation into television and radio. Both took the tools of popular culture and communication and turned them to their own uses.

Both novels reflect on the most ubiquitous text in women's education narratives, Charlotte Brontë's 1847 Jane Eyre. The rhetoric of anti-vocationalism in Brontë's text and its relationship to later teacher-activist rhetorics is brought into sharper relief when compared to these later works.

**Chapter Two: "My Difficulties in Management": Autobiographies of Head Teachers, 1920-1987**

This is a rhetorical analysis of seven British headmistresses' autobiographies, mostly written in the 1920s and 1930s, reflecting back on careers that spanned the late Victorian through the interwar period and beyond. It looks at their constructions of schools as public spheres; their rhetorical projects of professionalism; their negotiations of power and hierarchy; and recurring tropes in their representation of the previous generation, Victorian women's educational "pioneers." Their consistent attribution of spiritual vocation to their predecessors contrasts with their own understanding of their professional roles. They also consistently refer to the Brontë sisters' lives to invoke their own past oppression as teachers starting out in their careers. With regard to the teachers they managed, headmistress memoirists sometimes take an instrumentalist attitude and profess skepticism about teachers' efforts to organize themselves.

The everyday power negotiations represented in the memoirs are consistent with what one finds in these women's more ephemeral written documents: the thousands of pages of meeting minutes and other written material contained in the Head Mistress's Association archives, which I read at the Secondary Heads' Association in Leicester, UK.[1]

**Chapter Three: Learning to be Modern Girls: Winifred Darch's School Fictions**

A high school English, classics and drama teacher, Winifred Darch's twenty-three school stories spanned the high point of the genre: 1920-1939. Each novel dramatizes girls' growing independence and rebellion against adult authorities. They chronicle the rhetorical literacies of schoolgirls, showcasing girls' leadership, speechmaking, and self-organization. The student strikes she represents are significant in that they take part in both actual and literary strike traditions associated with education. On the one hand they

reference the so-called longest strike in British history, involving parents and children who struck in protest of the firing of a headmistress whose husband, a farm labor organizer, presented a threat to local authorities. These "striking" parents and teachers eventually created their own school. Additionally, Darch's representation of strikes reference a recurrent 20th-century theme in women's school novels, in which schoolgirls imagined themselves as an oppressed proletariat and rebel against school authorities in that collective imagined consciousness.

Darch's novels are significant because they focus on state-funded day schools and because the plots engage explicitly with reform themes such as local communities' reactions to the new girls' High Schools and the effects of scholarships on working class girls. The novels are unabashedly optimistic about the new democratic possibilities represented by girls' high schools. Reading the novels offers a glimpse into the idealization of the new classless, meritocratic schoolgirl: self-sufficient; community-minded; and nurtured by female friendships, women professionals' expert guidance, and new career ladders. The schoolgirl-as-citizen was formed through these emergent rhetorical literacies.

**Chapter Four: Schools and Rules: Nancy Spain's Lesbian Camp**

This chapter considers the lesbian camp critique in the mystery novels of British postwar lesbian media icon Nancy Spain. Camp has historically been a mode of queer literacy. It provides a mode of critical sociopolitical commentary and a vehicle for queer visibility. Spain's novels and the way in which she referenced her own media visibility in the novels are instructive examples of camp-as-queer-literacy. Spain was a journalist who

first received critical acclaim with a memoir written about her experience as an ambulance driver for the Women's Royal Naval Service (Wrens). She pioneered celebrity gossip, wore men's-style clothing in her television sports reporting, fashioned herself as a celebrity, was (like Dane and Holtby) a book review editor for Good Housekeeping, and was the most visible lesbian in postwar Britain. Her camp murder-goes-to-school novel Poison for Teacher plays on her own identity as a graduate of legendary girls' school Roedean. The novel as well as the stories she recounted in public forums were a celebrated example of girl school folklore.

The chapter provides a metacritical discussion of lesbian camp, relating it to: feminist camp; theories of women and comedy; gender and genre in the mystery novel; lesbian visibility; the lesbian detective novel; theories of camp modes of production; pre-Stonewall popular representation; Radclyffe Hall's canonicity; popular representations of schoolgirls; and the girls' school story. Spain's novels are excellent examples of the sociopolitical literacy implications of "nonserious," popular cultural forms. Their critical reflexiveness about popular modes of cultural production raise important questions about the gender, sexual, and class politics of literacy.

**Thoughts on Genres and Genre Literacies**

There has recently been a great deal of focus on the importance of genre in fostering workplace and academic literacies. Most genre theory of the present is focused on teaching undergraduates how to become academically literate. There is a gulf between these approaches and one that considers non-academic genres such as fiction. This dissertation is not about academic genres per se. Though the genres discussed here -- popular and camp novels, memoirs, and children's books -- are not academic, they all

critically engage the academic world. Women have written them, learned from and have in turn informed them. Looking at these school genres enables an analysis of the social context for the production of various rhetorical forms of language (including academic language).

Unlike the "serious" academic genres that contemporary genre literacy promoters are concerned with, genres in the camp register seem on the surface to be anything but serious. However frivolous they may seem, camp genres can also have serious sociopolitical implications -- as was the case for Nancy Spain's life and work. Her books were part of a popular tradition of homosexual and homophilic representation after World War II and before Stonewall. These books include examples of two important popular genres -- mystery and noir -- written in a camp register. She produced this body of work at the same time that she made her mark in many venues: women's magazines; print, radio, and television journalism. Spain deliberately linked her books to her own visibility in the media.

Lesbian camp novels like Spain's have important been locations for queer identification and recognition for many readers. Like Murray Healey's argument that maintstream sit-coms of the period -- accused of perpetuating homophobic stereotypes -- provided a sense of possibility to young gay viewers like himself, I would argue that lesbian camp novels were socially significant because they promoted queer, and especially lesbian, visibility. Camp is a vehicle for visibility for popular audiences.

Theories of camp and visibility lend themselves well to theories of literacy. Pamela Robertson redescribes women's camp in a way that I would call critical genre literacy. She calls it "a female form of aestheticism . . . that articulates and subverts the

'image- and culture-making processes' to which women have traditionally been given access" (9). In one of the earliest studies of camp, Esther Newton described it as an active rewriting or reinterpreting of reality: "The homosexual 'creates' the camp, by pointing out the incongruity or by devising it" (106). This mode of re-presentation is the epitome of a literate act. I would label it queer literacy. Matthew Tinkcom has revised definitions of camp which emphasize cultural consumption to one which focuses on camp as a process of production. Tinkcom's reconceptualization of camp as a process is similar to the new literacy studies turn towards literacy as a process of production rather than a static quality. Finally, Eve Sedgwick's emphasis on the "democratic gesture of camp" enables an understanding of camp as a promotion of queer literacy for a wider audience. This could be described as an invitation to literacy.

The camp novel set at school -- a specialized subgenre but nevertheless significant -- has the specific function of making queerness-at-school visible in a comic register. This was an important counter-discourse to the shame-promoting anti-lesbian school narratives of exposure -- exposés -- that were found in more culturally sanctioned texts and that more often took on a tragic tone. Camp novels are literate acts of social activism. They produce visibility in part by commenting critically on economies of shame and invisibility. Camp is an inherently social, intersubjective literacy. It has almost always been enacted and theorized with audiences in mind. Camp -- as noun, verb and adjective -- is an ideal example of literacy as sociopolitical action and social involvement.

Compared to postwar camp novels, the memoirs of headmistresses from the interwar period were intended to be read seriously, more for edification than for pleasure. In fact, the serious ethos cultivated by headmistresses and constructed in their memoirs

provided a basis for parodies and camp representations of them in the decades to come. Along with the thousands of pages of meeting minutes and other written material, they are extremely important literacy artifacts of an emergent group of women professionals. At the time they were published, the memoirs functioned like PR statements, ideally beneficial to their institutions. Given that the headmistresses were identified (by themselves and others) so strongly with the schools they managed, their memoirs were like a biography of the school. At a time when those institutions were still new, it was important to formally and publicly display their successes.

These memoirs offer narratives of coming-to-literacy: in this case, on-the-job literacies. One of the most important types of workplace literacy headmistresses wrote about and enacted in their texts is also something recent scholars have recognized as important: rhetorical literacy. They analyzed their own growing mastery over the "rhetorics of public life," to use John Duffy's phrase -- "practical public discourse," to use Drema Lipscoomb's. They offered their own theories of rhetorical literacy, both reflective and pragmatic. They demonstrated an acute awareness of rhetorical literacy as a means to various ends, a social construct, and a gendered minefield. Headmistress memoirists displayed the many uses for their growing rhetorical literacy: organizing themselves as professional managers, providing leadership in their schools and communities, standing up to external authorities.

The memoirs also provided a slice of institutional life. Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith have theorized how "institutions shape and solicit autobiographical narratives." Another way of putting it would be that institutions call upon certain kinds of literacies which in turn shape the institutions. Headmistresses' autobiographies are called up by

their professions, and turn their writing helped shape their schools, their profession, and the formation of literate female citizens. Linda Peterson delineates the generic roots of nineteenth-century women's autobiography. These education managers' memoirs are what I would classify as professional women's literacy autobiographies. They are related to the women's genre of artist's autobiography. Working in a later period, Regenia Gagnier has distinguished between the introspective tradition of Edwardian middle class autobiographers and the communication-driven working-class autobiographies of the same period. Headmistress autobiographies are literate appropriations of both the introspective and the communicative traditions.

There has been much attention paid by rhetoric scholars in the U.S. to the types of rhetorical education provided to women in college around the same time as the British reform (Lunsford, Johnson, Glenn). A look at headmistresses' memoirs shows how newly empowered women educational leaders -- obviously, products of higher education -- thought self-consciously and at great length about rhetorical literacy. It was a major aspect of their roles and their day-to-day jobs.

By the time the second generation headmistresses were writing their memoirs and winding down their careers, school stories were experiencing what critics call their "golden age." Fictional representations of schools had been an established genre since before the turn of the twentieth century. While headmistresses' memoirs are very few in number, school fictions are numerous. Unlike the smaller readership of the memoirs, school stories had a mass audience. Some of the bestselling authors' books made it to dozens of reprintings, and the most prolific and popular authors produced twenty to forty school stories in their respective careers. This project examines two major variations on

school stories: those marketed to and written for children (girls' school stories) and those marketed to women (women's school novels). With very few exceptions, these are clearly demarcated. However, both genres have crossover readership with respect to both age and gender. Whereas girls' school stories emerged in the 1880s and ceased to be a publishing phenomenon by the 1950s, women's school novels did not emerge until after a generation or two of students had graduated from reformed or newly formed girls' schools. (Charlotte Brontë represents a mid-nineteenth-century precursor exception.)

Girls' school stories have been a very important location of girls' literacy practices. They represented what literacy scholars might call a deeply socially embedded and embodied literacy. Girls may have read alone at first but they discussed stories together and took on identities through their reading. They acted differently in real life because of their reading. They internalized and formulated social codes and habits of self-government. All kinds of social activities and orientations were imagined in the rich contexts of their engagement with this genre. Although late Victorian and early Edwardian girls' school stories have been described as "monoglossic," girls did not uncritically internalize the official messages presented there. School stories operated in girls' everyday lives. The genre and its readers were, as with most popular genres, mutually constitutive. The idea of girlhood was reflected in and constructed by the stories. Girls understood and modeled themselves after the stories and helped shape them in turn. Thus the suppression of this important genre was a suppression of emergent schoolgirl identities.

Rosemary Auchmuty, Sheila Ray, Sue Sims, Joy Wotton and other scholars have chronicled the significance of this still "astounding[ly] popular genre" and its reception

by skeptical critics ("Origins" 148). Auchmuty's arguments about the significance of the stories to girls' lives demonstrates that children's literacy practices help construct their aspirations, identities, and notions of the real and the possible. This is particularly the case with regard to the vision they provided of independent womanhood and female friendship. Sheila Ray's observation about the disjuncture between the boarding school setting and most authors' and readers' experience can help get at an understanding of the folkloric and fantasy aspects of this location of girls' and women's literacy. School stories' readership include women in large numbers: McAleer's history of literacy practices documents this crossover phenomenon. The critics responsible for serious reconsideration of this "children's" genre have illuminated the history of censorious criticism. Geoffrey Trease and others' critical dismissal and even ridicule of this popular genre from the 1940s to the 1980s is a useful example of the sometimes wide gulf between the judgment of professional critics and the literacy practices of millions of people. Gill Frith's classroom ethnography of the covert school story addiction of her teenage students in the 1980s and 1990s is further testament the ineffectiveness of critical censure on people's reading interests. A changing culture, the end of state-funded single-sex education, the sexual revolution, and increasing (hetero)sexual pressure faced by young girls were certainly important factors in the disappearance of "schoolgirls" as they were. Despite all of this, despite declarations of obsoletion, late twentieth-century girls continued to enjoy these books often after the "appropriate" age of readership.

Notwithstanding years of critical ridicule, the genre's several international fan clubs flourish today. These fan clubs, which have grown in numbers and in organization with the use of the internet, are ideal examples of "deeply situated" and "embodied"

literacies. Fans bond through their arcane knowledge of the genre and also reflect on the importance the genre had on them while they were growing up. The fact that the books lack a literary stamp of approval only serves to enhance readers' bonds, since there is not much cultural capital to be gained in the same way as, perhaps, there might be gained by being a member of the D.H. Lawrence society. The importance of the genre to them as young readers forging an identity is something that stays with adult readers who comprise the majority membership of the fan clubs.

If women's school novels have not suffered the same critical fate as the girls' school stories, neither have they been the subject of so much attention. They have not, after all, been widely recognized as a genre. However, they have enough in common to define them as such.

Whereas girls' school stories promoted literacy in the vein of (to borrow from Heath) "the way we do things around here" women's school novels promoted a literacy of "the way we did things around there." They are retrospective narratives. One of the most important generic characteristics of the women's school novel is their tendency to be autobiographical and written from the point of view of the former student. Even when authored by teachers or headmistresses, school novels tend to take the student's point of view. This may reveal something about the school novel's relationship to the narrative of development, which has traditionally privileged the development of the young person's consciousness. School novels have often been a way for women to write their own encounters with well-known schools. Whether autofictional or not, school novels participate in the *folklore* about girls' boarding schools. They disseminate literacy about this folklore. They are intertextual within the genre as well as the related girls' story

genre, which allows readers to join into literacy games of the text. They are often a way for women to air their grievances with actual authority figures. Given the cloistered nature of some girls' schools, they were often akin to survival narratives.

Gillian Avery has called attention to the general public's literacy or lack of literacy with regard to the boarding schools which are the focus of the women's school novel genre. Her historical account of independent (not state-funded) schools actually uses the novels to help illustrate a picture of the institutions. Since the novels are (by definition) fictionalized accounts, the lay reader -- anyone not intimately familiar with the differences between the schools, which is to say nearly every reader -- must rely on Avery's revelation of which novel corresponds to which school (and likewise under which headmistress). This need for an expert's decoding key lends itself to a theory of school novels as folkloric literacy. The novels both enable the public's literacy about girls' school culture and also render it mythical, both because of its mysterious relationship to known reality and because of the way in which the novels are intertwined in a common narrative of girls' education which included the often very different experience of state-funded education. An ominous side to this folklore can be found in other myths that circulated. Anabel Faraday's discussion of the pernicious anti-lesbian discourse about girls' schools and women teachers also reveals a folkoric mode of literacy. The public's literacies about girls' schools were informed (or misinformed) by hysterical myths of women's sexuality gone awry.

It is also significant that this women's genre is about girlhood -- arguably a stage at which women have more in common with each other than later in life, being equally at the mercy of adult institutions, rules, and authority. Readers who did not attend a school

like the one they read about may be outsiders to the institutions but can be insiders in the folklore that writers and readers share in common. (The same goes for the girls' school stories.) Finally, schools are places where people become literate. Women's school novels are chronicles of coming-to-literacy. Together in the same class, dorm, or group, girls are represented as making meaning through assigned and pleasure reading -- or failing to. Besides this print material, they also make meaning together with other texts, like unwritten codes of conduct. The subtexts of these lessons were often, how to be a woman and a citizen.

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[1] They have since been moved to the Fawcett Library in London.

## Chapter One

### School Novels, Women's Work, and Maternal Vocationalism

Long before teaching was professionalized in the late nineteenth century, the dominant way of thinking about women's teaching was that it was already both maternal and vocational. Women's employment as teachers -- -- that is, when women occupied themselves with instructing other people's children, whether in a home or in a school -- was imagined as continuous with and related to the primary work of mothering. It would be inadequate to claim that women's teaching work was "seen as" maternal, since the idea of motherhood already incorporated aspects of teaching. Since the late eighteenth century, feminists and anti-feminists debated the meaning of woman's role as mother because that role was understood by all as a core agent of social reproduction. As Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes put it, "throughout the Victorian period, the widely held perception of motherhood as intensely moral, intensely selfless, and above all intensely pure allowed feminists and antifeminists alike to justify their stance pro or con women's involvement outside the home" (1997, 3). Arguments about what kinds of future mothers schools should be turning out were central to the discourse of nineteenth-century reformers of girls' and women's education. The ideology of maternal vocationalism

implies that what women teachers do “comes naturally” and like mothering is an extension of the self and not work.[1]

With the emergence of women teachers' unionism, significant counter-discourses to maternalism began to appear. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century women teachers struggled for equal pay and other rights with their male counterparts in their own union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT). Women teachers were arguably the most vocal, organized and militant groups of British feminists in the first third of the twentieth century, as Alison Oram has shown. In fact, women teachers made up one of the most active labor groups of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Corr). They began agitating for equal pay in the late nineteenth century and remained “prime movers” in equality campaigns even when other feminist groups gave in to the interwar backlash. (Oram 4). There is little trace of sentimentality in the discourse of activist teachers, which in addition to equal pay demanded fairer representation in the union, and more promotional opportunities for women.[2]

Women teacher activists and other feminist labor advocates have themselves invoked the importance of motherhood -- not least in asserting women teachers’ right to both teach and be mothers at the same time. Nor were they necessarily "anti-vocational" in their stance. Nonetheless, activists' insistence on equity issues eroded the social consensus that what women did when they taught was somehow different from what men did, that it was not indeed "work" but rather an expression of idealized maternalism. Therefore the insistence on women's teaching work *as* work was in this context radical. Increasingly, women activists based their claims on principles of equality, merit, and full economic citizenship rather than any special feminine or motherly content to teaching. To

clarify this conflict: maternalist rhetoric emphasized women's difference -- biologically-ordained gifts and responsibilities which, in this view, translated from private to social and indeed public realms. On the other hand, the opposing rhetoric of professionalism was rooted in a gender-blind appropriation of meritocratic values: it placed training, credentials, experience, and other objectively measurable qualities at the center of importance. In professional ideology, the social value of work is quantifiable, and professionals themselves become responsible for establishing a wage commensurate with their value. Rather than placing the "product" of girls' education -- girls -- at the center, activists placed the "work process" of women teachers at the center.

The tensions between maternal-vocational and feminist-materialist rhetoric surrounding women's teaching work can be seen over time in three British novels – Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847), Clemence Dane's Regiment of Women (1917), and Winifred Holtby's South Riding (1936). Literary scholars have tended to read these school novels and others with reference to the formation of female subjectivity through education -- emphasizing maternal vocationalism as an ideological factor in the social reproduction of women, but without exploring the role of organized resistance to dominative institutions. By reading with equal attention to the rhetoric of professionalism and teacher activism, we might also better understand the relationship of early feminism to other social movements and explore questions of class and the labor movement in the formation of female-feminist subjectivity.

**Three School Novels**

The reform of girls' education has been a popular theme in fiction from Charlotte Brontë to A.S. Byatt.[3] I use the term school novels to designate those narratives which take place

in, and concern themselves primarily with, girls' schools. Although there is not an agreed-upon term for this category of fiction, nor agreement to accept the category as a genre, there is a proliferation of interdisciplinary criticism which treats school novels (Copelman, Faraday, Kean, Summerfield). For example, school novels are often considered with respect to lesbian experience and culture; Terry Castle has suggested that the girls' school setting is a logical place for lesbian plots to develop. (See also Auchmuty, Smith, Wachman, Zimmerman).

The education critique in Jane Eyre predates what has been accepted as the beginning of the reform of girls' education – the1850s Taunton Commission, after which followed decades of struggle to define the meaning, form and purpose of girls' education. The Commission heard testimonies from headmistresses of girls' schools and others concerned with the often total absence of scholarly or academic pursuits in girls' schools. Leaders of the reform movement sought more academic instruction for girls, and the introduction of "boys'" subjects such as science and math (Bryant, Fletcher, Kamm). Readers have placed Jane Eyre in connection with the reformist sentiment, viewing Lowood, a version of Brontë's two childhood schools, as a fictionalized exposé of physical and moral unhealthiness in a certain type of girls' school. (In her 1848 review, Lady Elizabeth Eastlake referred to Lowood as "Dothegirls Hall" -- referencing Dickens's representation of the abusive "Dotheboys" school in Nicholas Nickleby.) Brontë's feminist interest in teaching goes beyond the issues of student experience to embrace the question of teacher experience, often exploring the latter with an unsentimental materialism.[4]

By the time Clemence Dane published Regiment of Women (1917), half a century after Jane Eyre, Britain had seen the rise of academic secondary schools for girls and the growth of women's postsecondary education along with many other innovations and reforms. These included the success of girls' boarding schools – a few modeled on boys' public schools -- which were academically rigorous, with a large emphasis on examinations. While girls' boarding schools only educated an elite minority, they had a large cultural impact and strongly influenced the discourse respecting all girls' and women's education. Contemporary with women's further inroads into higher education was the New Woman, alternately celebrated and decried in journalism and fiction. Often this symbol of newfound social and economic independence was represented as the product of women's education. Increasingly vocal and prominent exemplars of New Womanhood, teacher activists and some elite feminists forged a political front of single women dedicated to equal pay. The backlash against these women, single women generally and women teachers in particular, is the context for Dane's novel.[5] (The title comes from the Calvinist John Knox's 1558 treatise, "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women," in which he rails against the "idolatr[ous]" obedience to Queens Mary and Elizabeth, referring to these and other women in positions of authority as "wicked," "degenerate," "cruel," and "subversive.")

Many of those involved in the backlash against the equal pay movement were women and feminists, reflecting the greater attention given by some feminists to the social reproduction of girls rather than the working conditions of teachers. Additionally, single women educators and activists were targets of the campaign against spinsters, an implicitly anti-lesbian movement rooted in sexology and the "new psychology."

Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* contains passages attacking girls' schools as breeding grounds for lesbianism, and this was an early example of an attack that would continue to gain force in the decades following (Faraday 34). Anti-spinsterism vilified single women teachers as narrow-minded, sexually "thwarted" and even predatory.[6] Many teachers were themselves responsible for perpetuating the anti-lesbian hysteria. Dane's novel is emblematic of the contradictions of this moment in feminism. On the one hand, Dane served as Vice President of the equal-pay-endorsing feminist Six Point Group, and urged that women teachers should have the privilege of marrying. On the other hand, it urged the marriage privilege by way of an egregious participation in the anti-lesbian and anti-spinter backlash, representing the "dangers" of permitting potentially lesbian spinsters to educate girls. Clemence Dane's own lesbianism is evidence of the contradictions of her own position and of the regulatory power of heteronormative ideology in the women's movement.

The continuing backlash against feminism and the women's labor movement in the form of hostility to single women provides the historical context for Winifred Holtby's South Riding (1936). It is perhaps a measure of the virulent pitch to which the anti-single woman/anti-woman teacher campaign had risen that one of South Riding's most important contributions is Holtby's heroine Sarah Burton, a forty-something headmistress with a trail of ex-boyfriends and a love interest. Sarah Burton's character is reminiscent of Jane Eyre in her spirited rejection of strictures on properly feminine behavior; Holtby makes humorous and revealing references to her fellow Yorkshirewoman's school novel throughout South Riding. She mobilizes Brontë's novel in order to refute her own close contemporary, Clemence Dane. Insofar as Brontë's novel

decries not just the condition of girls' education but the conditions of women teachers' work, South Riding celebrates the emergence of the professional woman educator as a response to the conditions of which Brontë complained, and provides an optimistic counter-narrative to Dane's portrait of "predatory" women teachers. Her fulfilled single heroine should also be seen in the context of the postwar lost generation: Sarah Burton mourns a fiancé who died in the war. Holtby's narrative exemplifies the life of a woman who otherwise possibly would have ended up married (and not a headmistress).

Regiment of Women contains two romance plots – part one, the "awful lesbian warning" (as Alison Hennegan calls it), and part two, the execution of compulsory heterosexuality. By contrast, South Riding's real love affair is a romance of work. Despite Sarah Burton's Jane Eyre-like love for a landowner and numerous interchangeable old boyfriends and male companions, the novel's affective center is Sarah Burton's work, which she "love[s]" (209). Locating her narrative in the domain of public rather than private education, Holtby's portrait of female-feminist professionalism appealed to women teacher unionists who saw themselves as having materialist claims of their own, not just an obligation to do the work of reproduction (albeit feminist reproduction).

**Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, and "the old business teach – teach – teach"**

There is a long tradition of reading Jane Eyre's rebellious individualism as evidence of the novel's radicalism.[7] There is an equally long tradition of using the novel as a lens to focus attention upon the cultural and ideological history of the governess, as well as the critique of girls' education as represented by Lowood. Contemporary observers viewed governesses in a position closely parallel to ordinary schoolteachers, i.e., as working

women. Singled out for charity and analytical observation in the nineteenth century, the larger context of governessing was teaching labor. In one of the letters Brontë wrote to William Smith Williams – giving advice about his daughter's plans to take up education work – "teaching" and "governessing" are used almost interchangeably (Barker 186-7). For contemporaries, governessing was a subset of teaching; the class contradictions of the governess indicated the class contradictions of educated women (and women educators) more generally. The notion that the governess is a lady "in disguise" as a worker was understood by contemporaries the other way around as well: governesses were workers disguised as ladies. As teachers, governesses transmit elite ideology without themselves belonging fully to the elite class. This idea is helpful for recognizing why the figure of the governess has been so appealing to feminist critics concerned with the intersection of gender and economics.

The present reading focuses on the governess as a working woman. In addition to the feminist individualist themes for which the novel is celebrated (for example the "I will respect myself" internal monologue), as Mary Poovey has demonstrated, the novel's radicalism is informed by the materialist feelings of the 1840s. It also anticipates some of the collectivist orientation of early twentieth-century women educators's trade unionism. Eastlake's contemporary review, for instance, alludes to Sarah Lewis's idea for the "combination" (organizing and unionism) of governesses as a group of workers in need of better conditions.[8] This is not to argue for Brontë or the novel as "proto unionist," or to argue that Brontë given the opportunity would have been speaking on behalf of a governess's combination. Instead, my intention is to focus on Brontë's critique of the conditions of women's teaching work, as well the degree to which contemporary

materialism informed her representation of schooling. Brontë was particularly concerned with the class issues raised by the charity schools, where the children of the poor were often starved, neglected and educated into a life of drudgery. One result of the emphasis on Brontë's feminist individualism is to attribute to her other elements of a bourgeois-feminist critique, such as faith in wage labor as fulfilling. On the contrary, Brontë's novel and diaries and other works generally represent wage labor as quite unfulfilling. This unquestionably reflects her personal experience of paid work. Judith Newton captures this when she observes that "the Brontë family felt some lingering though uneasy adherence to the idea of work and rising" and that Charlotte Brontë knew "how arduous and how barren of achievement the working life could be" (97).

Brontë uses an analogy to slavery throughout Jane Eyre, including to teaching work. For instance, she describes the governessing positions of the Rivers sisters as "slaving amongst strangers" (392). In personal correspondence she likewise describes her sister Emily's school-teaching job as "slavery," averring that teachers are "hard-worked, ill-paid and despised" (Barker 49, 241). Brontë has Jane Eyre describe her teaching work as "servitude," explicitly rejecting the notion of a woman's vocation to teach. For this heroine, teaching is just a "business," which is how Charlotte Brontë describes schoolteaching in her letters (Brontë 387; Barker 57). When compared with starving or going into domestic service, teaching at the village school is described by Jane Eyre in highly qualified terms as a position of relative dignity: "it was humble – but . . . sheltered . . . [a] safe asylum; it was plodding . . . but . . . independent . . . not ignoble . . . not mentally degrading" (381). But it is never a question of a higher calling to the woman's task of (social) reproduction. When St. John asks if a life committed to "regenerating

your race" through education would be "well spent," she firmly repudiates any sense of vocation: "don't recall either my mind or body to the school" (415).[9]

Jane Eyre's most explicit rejection of the maternal vocational teaching ideal occurs in a speech in which she denounces cant about children, teaching, and conventional expectations for women at once. This dismissal nearly resembles Rochester's blunt opinion: "It would be intolerable to me to pass a whole evening *tète à tète* with a brat" (130). Jane's monologue is characteristically unsentimental: she relates how Adèle

> entertained for me a vivacious, though perhaps no very profound affection, and by her simplicity, gay prattle, and efforts to please, inspired me, in return, with a degree of attachment sufficient to make us both content in each other's society. This, *par parenthèse*, will be thought cool language by persons who entertain solemn doctrines about the angelic nature of children, and the duty of those charged with their education to conceive for them an idolatrous devotion: but I am not writing to flatter parental egotism, to echo cant, or prop up humbug; I am merely telling the truth. I felt a conscientious solicitude for Adèle's welfare and progress . . . (109).

Rather than a maternal feeling for Adèle, Jane Eyre acknowledges a sense of duty and workaday concern and pride in her achievements. On the eve of her wedding to Rochester, Jane Eyre holds a sleeping Adèle in her arms in what could in another novel have been painted as an idealized symbol of maternal feeling. But Jane's inner monologue contradicts any such expectation: she embraces Adèle but is preoccupied with herself and her future with Rochester: "All my life was awake and astir in my frame. . . . I

cried over her with strange emotion . . . . She seemed the emblem of my past life; and he, I was now to array myself to meet, the dread, but adored, type of my unknown future day" (289). Rather than the focus of her energies, Adèle is an "emblem" who signifies the heroine's life.

Characteristic of this businesslike attitude to her teaching is the frank and funny exchange between Rochester and Jane about her salary ("you owe me five," she says) which demonstrates the tension between two conflicting value systems: one, the pricelessness of Jane and her work (the maternal vocational model); the other, the cost of domestic companionship (the materialist model) (226). The frankness about money and salary in the novel demonstrates Jane Eyre's lack of sentimentality about work and compensation. The businesslike approach to work is connected to the value she places on economic independence as a means to a domestic life free from wage "slavery." On the other hand, Jane Eyre's skepticism regarding wage work as a path to liberation is often accompanied by an idealization of unwaged domestic work, in the form of getting Rochester his tea or redecorating the Rivers house.

**"the thought of such a woman, molding the mothers of the next generation": Clemence Dane's Regiment of Women**

Clemence Dane, the pen name for Winifred Ashton, was well-known for her stage plays and screenplays as well as novels and book reviews. The book review editor for Good Housekeeping for many years, she was for a time the vice president of the Six Point Group (a group of feminist activists, one of whose points was equal pay for women teachers), and as a young woman worked as a teacher in a girls' school. Her 1917 Regiment of Women critiques girls' schools – but for revealingly different reasons than

Brontë's novel. Like many Six Point Group members, Clemence Dane came from an elite background and did not have a personal financial stake in the outcome of teachers' struggles. Likewise the novel concerns itself with the wellbeing of pupils and not teachers. Remarkably at odds with the facts, she represents teachers as well off and not in need of equal pay.

Dane writes after decades that saw a substantial string of successes for girls' education reform: the establishment of municipal high schools, a more rigorous academic curriculum, and the preparation for and admission to university, for example. By 1917, these successes created a spirit of virulent reaction. Fueled by the lesbophobic pseudo-science of sexology, many reactionary critics focused on what was deemed psychological health, commonly expressing hysterical concerns regarding the presumed sexual life of an all-girls-and-women environment. The single-sex arrangement supposedly fostered "unhealthy" attachments between girls and women, including relationships between pupils as well as between pupils and their teachers. Additionally the late-century turn toward rigorous academics -- the introduction of "boys'" subjects, and the vast importance placed upon performance through test-taking – was in a widespread backlash seen as dangerously unhealthy for girl pupils, contributing to enervation and physical collapse and ill-preparing them to be wives and mothers.

The plot of Dane's novel recapitulates the hysterical plot of this reactionary lesbophobic and anti-spinster discourse. The core of the narrative is the dangerous and charismatic influence exerted by lesbian teacher-cum-headmistress Clare Hartill. Her relationship with a fragile, gifted and motherless student leads the girl to jump out of a window. This suicide subsequently causes the nervous collapse of a nineteen-year-old

assistant teacher. The young teacher's recuperation is only complete when she is "rescued" from the school by a marriage proposal.

Understandably, the novel is considered to mark an influential (if infamous) moment in the annals of lesbian literary history (Auchmuty, Hamer, Wachman). It is also significant for its representation of the contradictory consequences of the growing power and authority of professional women in schools. On the one hand, headmistresses (mostly if not all single women) had the power to administer the lives of large groups of students and teachers. But this power was often the power to exploit, and, as Alison Hennegan points out in her introduction to the novel, Regiment is an example of how unmarried women were coming to be represented as dangerous on two different accounts: for their power to exploit other women, in the case of professional managers such as headmistresses, and also for their perceived threat to the heteronormal order. (1995)[10]

Dane perpetuates the demonized portrait of the single woman teacher that sexological discourse had been promoting since the 1890s. Her very dedication to her job is a sickness:

> Clare toiled early and late for them all. She fed them . . . from her own resources of energy, was willing to devitalize herself on their behalf. The strain once over, she appeared slack, gaunt, debilitated. She had, however, her own methods of recuperation. Her ends gained, she could take back . . . more than she had given. Moreover, the supply of child-life never slackened. By the end of the summer term Clare would be once more in excellent condition (99).

On the one hand, Dane paints a picture of the all-girls' school as a place of exhaustion, overwork, and physical and mental degeneration – a place where young girls vampirically drain the vitality out of their teachers. The novel includes scenes of teachers spending all weekend at the end of term reading "piles of reports and examination papers," skipping dinner because "hard at work" on school correspondence, and spending "a long evening over [student compositions], weighing, comparing, discussing" them (195, 185, 32). In this respect, the novel recalls other girls' school novels, often written by ex-teachers, which depict teachers' overwork.

On the other hand, the professional teacher, who has exhausted herself in the work of social reproduction, places on "the supply of child life" a demand for full compensation and more, even "more than she had given." This vampiricism is bound up with the novel's homoerotics. The contradiction that Clemence Dane, at one time a vice president of the equal-pay-endorsing Six Point Group, as well as a lesbian herself, wrote a book that accorded with the anti-spinster and anti-single-sex-girls' school platform, is intriguing to say the least.[11] Alison Hennegan has offered by way of explanation for the "muddle" of the novel's anti-lesbian agenda Dane's own "muddle about sex," manifest in her reputation for constant, unintentional double entendres (Introduction, x). Regiment of Women is credited with influencing The Well of Loneliness and other lesbian novels, in part for its representation of the vampiric "older woman" character. Nonetheless, while Dane's lesbian "villain" draws on anti-lesbian stereotypes, the character is not fully encapsulated by these negative characteristics. Dane is also responsible for representing a complex intellectual lesbian teacher who is often brilliant and dynamic in the classroom, who has human frailties and passions and even the capacity for self-reflection (as

Hennegan also argues). There are some positive or at least neutral representations of work in Regiment of Women which contrast with both the "vampiric" model and the vocational model which coded teaching as mothering and "not-work."

While clearly marking the space of teacher overwork, the novel also recirculates social anxieties about the economically independent woman, especially by associating her with a salary spent on selfish pleasures – not reinvested into the family. More specifically, the novel's anti-teacher lesbophobia is intricately bound up with an anti-labor discourse that divided the teaching workforce, rationalizing unequal pay and reduced opportunities for women educators. The majority of male teachers argued against equal pay. Since most women teachers were single by statute, anti-equal pay rhetoric represented that men's wages selflessly went to support families while women teachers inclined to profligate spending on themselves. Within the logic of the novel, economic independence becomes associated with Clare's negative characteristics: selfishness, megalomania, and decadent taste. The "unmaternal" Clare fits closely with the negative stereotype of the defenders of unequal pay: she is a car-driving, vacationing, orphan heiress with no dependents and "too much money" (5).

Dane's alternative -- the nineteen-year-old assistant teacher Alwynne Durand -- is maternal and heterosexual, and displays a pronounced lack of interest in monetary compensation, which testifies to her selflessness and the sincerity of her vocation. Initially under the charismatic influence of the older woman, Durand nonetheless has a very different philosophy of work, compensation, and teacher-student relations. She donates her time and sacrifices herself, "thinks nothing" of giving extra after-school lessons to her pupils, caring for them "as she would have looked after a starving cat . . .

as a matter of course, and instinctively as she ate her dinner" (51). This "instinctive" motherliness is the context Dane provides for a vocational approach to teaching, observing that her pupils were always on Durand's "motherly young mind" (161). Like Brontë, Dane constructs powerful homosocial versions of the *pietà* tableau (featuring the dead Christ in the arms of his virgin mother). Brontë's version employs the *pietà* in considered repudiation of maternalism: as Adèle sleeps, Jane Eyre's consciousness centers on herself -- specifically, on an awareness of herself as an agent in her own history. By contrast, Dane employs two *pietà* tableaux to reinforce traditional maternalism. In one, her heroine holds the actual corpse of a student "clasped to her breast . . . look[ing] like a young mother" (179). The other tableau underscores the message of sacrifice, taking place in the classroom in which Durand conducts extra unpaid private lessons. In both of Dane's tableaux the intent is to present changeless images of eternal motherhood, which even Durand experiences "without a thought to the passage of time" (53).

Regiment of Women's representations of maternal vocationalism accord with anti-equal pay discourse in at least two ways. First, the notion of women's teaching as mothering meant that it was associated not only with unpaid work but with something which could be construed as not-work. The insistence on Alwynne's teaching as instinctive and pleasurable moves the question of her labor toward domesticity and away from the workplace. Second, the motherly Alwynne is an economic dependent herself, first on her aunt and eventually on her landowning fiancé Roger. She uses up her salary on flowers, candy and Christmas gifts. For motherly-yet-childish Alwynne, her economic dependence is a byproduct of her properly "feminine" emotional dependence.

**"turning giggling little creatures into self-respecting women":**

**Winifred Holtby's South Riding**

In contrast to Dane's paragon of dependent maternalism Alwynne Durand, South Riding's heroine is decidedly independent. Forty-something Oxford-educated headmistress Sarah Burton is spirited and unconventional, with a trail of ex-boyfriends and an abiding faith in the project of girls' education reform. Written during a decade of continuing hostility to single women (particularly hostility directed at single teachers), South Riding has been called a "defiant reply" to women teachers' "detractors" after years of "bad press" (Summerfield; also see Auchmuty; Copelman; Faraday; Leonardi, 197, 199-201; Oram; Shaw 49). In contrast to her predecessor Clemence Dane and in a recovery of Jane Eyre's rhetoric, Winifred Holtby mobilizes the women's unionist rhetoric of equality and opportunity. South Riding, not nearly as widely known in the United States, has been very popular in Britain, having been adapted twice for radio and once for television. Like Dane, Holtby was a teacher in a girls' school before she became a writer and also was a Six Point Group member; she worked tirelessly on behalf of women teachers – at the same time that she was working for other causes – up until her death. Having made a name for herself in journalism and fiction, she was perhaps best known as a journalist and once described herself as a publicist for social causes, rather than an artist (Shaw).[12] She regarded her novel-writing as a politically charged intervention in the public sphere. Besides this rebuttal of the pathologized single woman teacher, it is not certain whether Holtby had Dane's particular novel in mind when she wrote South Riding. She definitely had Dane on her mind during the early stages of the novel's composition, agreeing to take over Dane's job as Good Housekeeping's book

reviewer. (Holtby, Letters 458; Brittain 364). Holtby may have admired Regiment of Women, even though she rejected its anti-spinster argument: in the past Holtby had admired Dane's other work while disagreeing with its political implications. (Holtby and Brittain 52,71; Holtby, Divorce).

This romance of the single woman teacher is remarkable, given the escalating hostility to single women by the 1930s. As Alison Oram puts it: "In popular romance and fiction, positive images of female friendships and fulfilled single women in their thirties disappeared by the 1930s" (188). Oram also shows how the 1920s were a high point for opponents of single sex girls' schools. This reaction was probably compounded by their growth: the state-aided girls' high schools (exemplified by the fictional Kiplington High School for Girls) was a sector which had doubled since the first decade of the century (Summerfield). Both Annabel Faraday and Margaret Littlewood show how the anti-spinster teacher movement continued to gain ground in the postwar years. Faraday writes: "The campaign towards co-education was greatly rooted in a loathing of lesbians, but especially of the lesbian spinster teacher. She personified the threat that women might not choose heterosexuality when left to their own devices. The phasing out of girls' schools was one way of making a lesbian existence seem impossible and unthinkable" (42).

While Dane's novel rails against the danger of single, economically independent women in authority, Holtby's Sarah Burton is not only financially secure and single but an exemplary leader, both within the school and in the negotiations outside of school which constitute the headmistress's role. The proponent of maternal vocationalism in the novel is the conservative aristocrat Carne (with whom Burton disagrees on every political

point), who is looking for "a nice motherly woman [to] be appointed to the high school . . . but none of the candidates had been kind and motherly" (46). Holtby's novel confronts the hysteria surrounding the sexuality of single women teachers in the anti-spinster discourse. When a careless teacher flaunts her marital engagement and insults unmarried women, Burton consoles one of the offended faculty: "There's too much fuss about virginity and its opposite altogether. And I think Miss Jameson may have been reading too many of those rather silly books that profess to serve up potted psychology" – a reference to the anti-lesbian sexology informing Dane's novel (316). Some critics have also pointed out that Holtby's recuperation of the spinster figure is an emphatically heterosexual narrative which stops short of addressing historical anti-lesbianism (Kennard 167). Not only is there "the usual dead fiancé in her background" as Rosemary Auchmuty points out: there are half a dozen ex-, deceased, and would-be male lovers distributed throughout the novel to confirm Burton's robust heterosexuality.(104). On the other hand, just because it is an emphatically heterosexual narrative does not mean it fails to challenge anti-lesbianism. Considering a pupil's crush on her, Burton contemplates the variety of human sexuality as a fact rather than a problem to be remedied. The novel does not address lesbianism directly; it does however refute compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory virginity for single women.

Unlike Regiment of Women, which in part collaborated with the reaction against the new woman, South Riding narrates a realization of the late-nineteenth-century new woman ideal, a world in which a meritocratic ladder is available to academically talented women and girls, and in which equality of opportunity and pay are assumed rather than debated. South Riding celebrates the academic and occupational achievements that public

high schools for girls signified: academic training and the preparation for jobs, professions, and university study on the one hand; and women in leadership positions and the possibility for women teachers' promotions on the other. Sarah Burton, whose father was the local blacksmith, is a product of the emergent career ladders provided by reformed education for girls. Her less fortunate pupil counterpart is the brilliant Lydia Holly whose future success depends upon her emancipation from the role of principal caretaker to her younger siblings and father. Holtby demonstrates that not everyone is able to benefit from the economic and social mobility that schooling can provide. She represents the girls' school as a social institution that needs defending and improving so that its benefits can be extended to all.

Holtby and Brontë have been compared previously by Vera Brittain, Holtby's friend. Brittain was the first to draw parallels between "the two Yorkshire women": "Substitute Winifred Holtby for Charlotte Brontë and you have at least half the truth" about Holtby, she wrote in the beginning of Testament of Friendship, her famous biography (10). Holtby and Brontë both had a family background in education work -- Holtby's father was a school inspector at one time; Brontë's father's involvement in education was lifelong and influential, albeit as a minister, in which capacity he observed and oversaw parish schools. Holtby's mother had been a governess (Shaw 23, 13).

The parallel between their heroines was intended by Holtby, who extensively appropriated Jane Eyr*e* for her own novel. Holtby's heroine thinks of Jane Eyre and Rochester when, in a scene echoing Brontë's novel, she is caught trespassing by the conservative landowner. Both heroines teach the landowner's daughter. Like Brontë's heroine, Holtby's main character is in love with a man whose wife has been locked up for

insanity, leaving him, like Rochester, married but available. South Riding's romantic hero is struck ill just as he and the heroine are about to make love, saving Holtby from having to directly confront issues that remain unresolved in contemporary feminism: the competing demands of marriage and work, and the morality of adultery in connection with a sexually liberated female subject.

Whereas her activism and her writer-as-publicist identity make Holtby a quintessential public intellectual, Brontë on the other hand has at times been accused by critics of social and political isolation. The most vivid if unjust example is Eagleton's contention that Brontë's failure to write about the Chartist rebellion going on practically outside her front door was evidence of her willful ignorance of the same. Perhaps Brontë has more in common with Holtby than we have thus far recognized. If so, Holtby's appropriation of Jane Eyre is more than just intertextual play: she shares with Brontë a materialist approach to the education debates which could be described as the ongoing woman question -- and "girl question."

In South Riding, the work of teaching is very far from the private, highly isolated activity it is in both Jane Eyre and Regiment of Women. Rather, teaching is shown to take place in a social sphere and is represented as one of many acts that enable a community to negotiate conflict and difference. South Riding reflects the social vision that informed all aspects of Holtby's public and professional life, from activism and speech-making to writing. Rather than a cloistered world, the girls' school is a vital location of the social progress for which Holtby argued. It is also a microcosm of the larger world and a place where girls learn to become citizens in the community and in the world. South Riding posits that the social danger is not single women teachers but rather

the failure to invest in education and other social projects. It is in this imperfect social sphere that Burton finds the professional fulfillment that comes with "turning giggling girls into self-respecting women" and negotiating for school improvements with the school board – quite different from the motherly fulfillment which Regiment of Women vaunts (209-210). In South Riding, school provides an environment for student-teacher relations based on the politics of gender, not the dynamics of mothering or the erotics of teaching -- although same-sex crushes are acknowledged by Sarah Burton as a normal event. Rather, school is a place which, at best, liberates teachers as well as girls from the isolation and drudgery of home life.

If Holtby engages Brontë in part to mobilize a legacy of Victorian feminist materialism against the resurgent ideologies of self-sacrifice for women, it is an engagement that remains relevant. As Jo-Anne Dillabough points out, present-day North American women teachers continue to face "reduced agency and autonomy, as well as an increased acceptance of the gender regime, and a reduced ability to participate in the redefinition of the meaning of their work" (1999). In moments when Victorian ideologies and forms of domination persist in the struggle over women's work as educators, it can be instructive to consider that the reform of girls' education involved not just the liberation of girls but the ongoing struggles of women educators.

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[1] Seth Koven and Sonya Michel are credited with originating the phrase maternalism, meaning the ideology which elevates the notion of motherhood – with regards to women's participation in the creation of the welfare state. Maternalism was a position which women themselves affirmed and which was also appropriated by men, sometimes paternalistically. In "Womanly Duties," they write, "maternalist women, while actively seeking to improve the conditions of women, were not necessarily feminists – some, in fact, deliberately refused to so define themselves" (1091).

[2] The history of the NUT's suffragist Equal Pay League has been well-documented by feminist historians. (Boston, Corr, Kean, Littlewood, Owen). The Equal Pay League

(EPL) severed their ties with the NUT because of their failure to maintain the pressure for equal pay in the face of setbacks for women's salaries and went on to become the National Federation of Women Teachers, and later the independent National Union of Women Teachers. Feminist teachers demanded equal pay, promotional opportunities, and fair representation in the NUT, whose membership was overwhelmingly female but which was controlled by men. In the interwar period, they fought to permit married women to teach. They also fought to preserve single-sex education for girls, since the growing number of coeducational schools provided few if any promotional opportunities for teachers as well as a more unequal education for girls, in what has been called "sex-segregation under one roof" (Copelman, Kean, Oram). These struggles were taking place in a larger context of the struggle over girls' education in general. As Alison Hennegan puts it, this consisted of "the battle over the true end and purpose of education for girls: was it to prepare them for marriage and motherhood . . . (o)r was [it] . . . to produce women capable of achieving and rejoicing in new fields of economic, intellectual, and psychological independence?" (vii) Girls' schools had been under attack for the ornamental education they provided as well as their inadequate physical conditions.

[3] Byatt's "Racine and the Tablecloth" (1982) deals with persistent anti-intellectualism in girls' schooling. See the "Adult School Stories" bibliography in Sims and Clare's Encyclopaedia of Girls' School Stories for more examples of school novels.

[4] Certainly, since the novel was first reviewed, critics have seized on Brontë's depiction of the plight of the governesses per se; this topic makes an appearance in nearly all critical studies of Jane Eyre. The governess has been seen, variously, as: a sexual threat to the bourgeois household (Poovey); unique in class position and therefore isolated (Eastlake, Lenta, Neff, Poovey); an outspoken rebel (Leavis); a victim (sexual, social, and economic) because she is really a lady in disguise (Eastlake, Lenta, Poovey); and, whether proletarian or petit bourgeois, a worker (Eagleton, Lenta, Lewis, Politi, Roy). By the late 1980s, after Mary Poovey's influential article was published, the terms *governess* and *Jane Eyre* were synonymous in much literary criticism. Jeanne Peterson's article "The Victorian Governess" can be credited with initiating the revival of interest in the governess by feminist critics and historians.

[5] For a discussion of the successes of feminist solidarity of unmarried women, see Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920.

[6] Following Annabel Faraday's study of interwar novels (in which she shows how nearly all of the lesbian characters are teachers), Rosemary Auchmuty shows how lesbianism and education were joined together in the popular and pseudo-scientific imagination. Just as governesses have been described as representing a sexual threat to the bourgeois household, in the first third of the twentieth century, single women teachers were represented as a sexual threat. Sexologists and those influenced by this pseudo-science constructed single women as deviant, potential predators of the girls in their charge and other staff members.

[7] Between 1973, when Nina Auerbach wrote that "Charlotte Brontë is out of critical fashion," and 1985, when Gayatri Spivak called Jane Eyre a "cult text of feminism," and up to the present time, there have been so many critical studies of Charlotte Brontë and Jane Eyre alone that to try to summarize them here would be to attempt a lengthy bibliographic essay. However, a distinction between some liberal and some radical approaches to the novel will be helpful. Radical or materialist-feminist critiques of Jane Eyre have been concerned with labor movements, structural changes in domestic life or the family, and the context of colonialism. Marxist criticism has focused on sorting out the novel's contradictory politics, which alternate between the apparently conservative and the seemingly revolutionary (Eagleton, Politi, Roy). Liberal critics have focused more on the ways that the novel's radicalism bears on subject formation, tending to emphasize an ethos of the rebellious individual (for example, Gilbert and Gubar's construction of Brontë's "rebellious feminism" (370). As Gayatri Spivak pointed out in her essay, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," one problem with the latter approach is that it doesn't historicize individualism but rather takes it to be a universally feminist mode of opposition (rather than one historical mode of feminism among many). Spivak warns against the limited vision resulting from lauding Jane Eyre's individualism without examining the novel's imperialist context.

[8] Poovey's influential article, which also references Eastlake's review, demonstrated the materialist concerns and assumptions of nineteenth-century critical discourse on the governess – conservative and radical alike.

[9] The word "vocation" occurs elsewhere in the novel: once as a synonym for occupation ("It became urgent I should have a vocation of some kind" [357]), and once to refer to Eliza's conversion and entrance into a convent ("the vocation will fit her to a hair," Jane Eyre notes critically [244]).

[10] In her 1927 essay "A Problem in Education," Dane – like many educationists and theorists before her – warns against the "dangerous" crushes which could develop in the environment of the all-girls' school.

[11] This contradiction stems from conflicts within feminist organizations themselves as much as within Dane individually. Scholars have discussed the disjunctures between middle-class and liberal feminist organizations on the one hand and feminist labor groups on the other (Banks). The Six Point Group was just such a middle-class organization, while the NUWT was a unique "combination of . . . feminist pressure group and trade union" (Owen 83). Members of this group, founded by the militant suffragist vicountess Lady Rhondda, included titled women, members of parliament, and writers like Dane. (Maxine Willett at the Fawcett Women's Library -- the location of the Six Point Group papers -- helpfully pointed this out to me.)

[12] Additionally, Holtby wrote the first critical study of Virginia Woolf in 1932.

## Chapter Two:

## "My Difficulties in Management": Headmistress's Memoirs, 1925-1987[1]

The term "headmistress" covers many possible situations: proprietor or co-owner of a school; head of a grand public school, an elite boarding school, a municipal high school, or a small school run on its own individual lines; president of a single-sex school or a co-educational one. Headmistresses, public women who took part in a national discourse about women's and girl's education, were well-versed in educational theories. They oversaw all matters large and small concerning their schools, from hiring and firing teachers to enforcing discipline to making sure the leaks got fixed. The degree to which they taught while occupying the post varied. Some taught just one subject; some not at all during their post. Rarely, they were responsible for teaching nearly the whole curriculum single-handedly. Even though the schools over which they presided were remarkably diverse, headmistresses were a cohesive group of women professionals with similar goals, working together in a concerted professionalization project -- best exemplified in their efforts through the national Headmistresses' Association.[2]

As part of their construction of themselves as professionals, they described the identities of the teachers whom they managed as other-than themselves -- other-than-professional, or less professional. Some examples of the ways they described teachers

include: quasi-professional; maternal; subjects devoted to their chief; and, at worst, tools they used to make the education machine run. There are many ways to read headmistress's autobiographies, but the second half of this essay focuses on the ways headmistresses negotiated professional identities for themselves *at the expense of teachers*.

Over the decades, several headmistresses wrote memoirs, sometimes during their retirement, which chronicle the development of the reform of girls' and women's education in Britain since the latter half of the nineteenth century. Those who published their texts in the 1920s and '30s represented the first generation to benefit fully from the reform of girls' education that had gotten underway in the late 1860s. In these memoirs they pay tribute to the "pioneers" who came before them, taught them, and mentored them. Rather than representing a cohesive group of texts that build upon a tradition of autobiography, obey a set of conventions, and conform to expectations of historical professional women, these examples of lifewriting build on diverse traditions, invent new ones, diverge more than share in conventions, and surprise many of our expectations.

The texts discussed in this essay may be of use to anyone interested in the history of women and work, particularly professional work, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They have particular relevance for those interested in accounts of schooling, professionalism in theory or testimony, or lifewriting. The texts themselves will vary in interest depending on the reader, but anyone interested in the work of teaching or administration will probably find them compelling. The autobiographies under consideration here range in publication date from Lillian Faithfull's 1925 In the House of My Pilgrimage to Rosemary Manning's 1987 A Corridor of Mirrors, which discusses a

career that extended from the 1930s to the 1970s (parallel to her writing career). The context for this discussion includes: historiography of girls' and women's education, autobiography theory, fictional representations of headmistresses, and the sociology of professionalism and the women's movement.

Barbara Penny Kanner's archival resource, Women in Context: Two Hundred Years of British Women Autobiographers, published in 1997, lists nine entries indexed under the profession "headmistress," six under "school administrator," one under "boarding school owner," and fifteen under "school founder."[3] Given the commendable scope and ambition of Kanner's recovery project, it is to be expected that some published autobiographers would be missing from this count. The present essay, then, is a partial examination of some available texts, addressing the autobiographies of six headmistresses along with unpublished diaries of one other. Of Kanner's nine headmistress entries, I have read and discuss three (Burstall, Cleeve, Gray). I also have read and will discuss two headmistress's autobiographies classified in Kanner -- along with six others -- as "school administrator" (Faithfull, Manning).

The sixth text I treat is not indexed in Kanner, because it is not called and in some ways does not resemble an autobiography, but I include it because it is strikingly similar in content and tone and ought to be grouped with other headmistress's autobiographies, which are largely comprised of not-strictly-autobiographical elements (Hiley). One other non-autobiographical text is also treated as a primary source: the unpublished diaries of Isabel Fry, relatively unknown sister of the famous Roger and Margery Fry (painter and prison reformer, respectively), whose headmistress career extended from World War I to the 1950s. Ideally, a revision of this chapter would incorporate discussions of some more

of the remaining six texts classified as "headmistress." Some of these remaining texts are hard to find in libraries in North America and are costly to buy if any copies are available (Riddell, Tennent, Jones, Helps). At least one is an autobiography of a college principal (Farningham). Headmistress lifewriting has functioned as source material for the historiography of women's education, probably since the first headmistress memoir was published. These historical accounts usually treat autobiographical texts as transparent accounts of reality without a lot of attention to questions of genre. This was perhaps necessary when the goal was to document and narrate the women's education reform movement. Recent historiographies, however, including those informed by feminist or other theory, duplicate the same tendency to treat self-writing transparently. The memoirs are indeed valuable chronicles of history at the same time that they are representational performances that require analysis; I read and discuss them from both perspectives.

These autobiographies are instructive to read for the variety of responses they provide to professionalism, and the way they demonstrate that professionalism is a rhetorical and ideological project. Headmistresses were in a position to critique ideologies of professionalism as they were both insiders and, as newcomers, outsiders. Their autobiographies shed light on the key elements of professionalization as it has been understood by sociologists: they make claims to unique expertise; in doing so, they "close off" access to this expertise from teachers below them; at the same time, they narrate a process of shoring up authority against those who had decision-making control over them or who simply might have questioned the degree of authority they were claiming. As for the women they managed, they call on a more antiquated value of professionalism: that

of spiritual vocation. However much they may have conveniently ascribed an essentialist vocational professionalism to those teachers who worked under them, headmistresses usually construct a performative understanding of professionalism as it applies to themselves. They testify to a self-consciousness in their role that represents professionalism as an act. They all discuss their own conscious construction of a headmistress ethos and make parallels between the performance of autobiography and their other everyday public performances. This double-edged negotiation of professionalism is the central topic that I will be exploring in depth in the second half of this essay. However, there are many other ways to read these autobiographies.

These autobiographies are also instructive to read because they are negotiations of the writers' roles as public women. The writers construct the school itself as a public sphere. This is an important feat and one necessary to these educators' participation in the discursive formation of the literate female citizen -- a project on which they explicitly reflected in their writing. Their metaphors of school-as-polis and school-as-cosmos play a part in the construction of their own identities -- and that of other headmistresses -- as administrators, leaders, even rulers and "autocrats."

One way they accomplished this was through their everyday role as public speakers. This was a in which they defined themselves as public women and professional experts. Most write about overcoming a hesitation to speak in one form or another; for example, learning to speak up on an otherwise all-male education committee is a subject of concern in many autobiographies. There were other occasions for addressing various audiences: mostly-male educational authorities or other bureaucrats, parents and members of the community, peers in their professional association, teacher union leaders.

The degree of "publicity" and the size of the crowd varied, so there are some problems defining exactly what constitutes public speech. Should a closed-door meeting with a dozen all-male bureaucrats be described as public speech? What about a school audience of hundreds of students and teachers? I would define those two circumstances provisionally as public speech, since the autobiographers themselves seem to view them that way.

Other everyday circumstances that call for speech would not seem to allow the description "public" -- a meeting with one student or two parents, a discussion with one secretary or one teacher. Even so, these types of "interviews" as they call them also called up descriptions of anxieties-of-authority, if smaller in kind. Although they may not qualify as public speech, they are not exactly private either. Public speaking was also a way of modeling citizenship for girls, who were in turn were trained for public speaking and administration, via clubs and school organizations like model League of Nations. D.F.P. Hiley, in her own autobiography, writes what is required in terms of headmistress's public speech:

> Oratory would, of course, be out of place: what is needed is a master of homely and incisive words, and language of the people only slightly and almost imperceptibly rarified (118).

This seems to be what Hiley strives for in her own text, Pedagogue Pie -- at times a blueberry pie of purple metaphors.

In the narratives of women's educational reform told in historiographies and biographies, writers locate the genesis of the movement in women's public speech. Headmistresses and educationists Frances Buss and Dorothea Beale and others ascended

the podium to testify in front of the Taunton Commission. This official body was charged with inquiring into the state of secondary education. The "pioneers," as those headmistresses and reformers were usually referred to, testified to the obstacles besetting their institutions. These included lack of funding and the social taboo against academic learning as well as against training middle-class girls for waged work; at the time, there were only thirteen secondary schools for girls in the country. Fundamental to headmistress's construction of their profession was the necessity of women's public speech. In parodies or farcical representations of headmistresses, the moment of public address is often the one on which the mocking or parodic energies are concentrated (The Belles of St. Trinian's, First Term for Ziggy, The Hippopotomus Takes Wing).

An important mode of more ordinary public speech instituted by those pioneers like Buss and Beale and carried out by their successors were the lay sermons they delivered to students and teachers, otherwise known humbly as "talks." The religious and spiritual nature of the Victorian talks are overt. An example from Buss is typical: "only when we behold the Face of the Father can we truly teach" (72). These metamorphosed later into the century as moralizing talks that did not have much to do with religion, as in A.S. Byatt's fictionalized representation of the headmistress who, in her school address, condemns unseemly ambition for examination success at the expense of domestic virtues. But in the meantime, the second-generation successors who were students in the 1880s and '90s and got their headmistress posts around the turn of the century -- that is, five of the seven subjects under consideration -- regularly delivered what I would call lay sermons on all kinds of subjects ranging from girls' home responsibilities to their

responsibilities as citizens. The spiritual and religious nature of their talks may have been less explicit than their forebears' but was nonetheless present.

An always-recurring theme in headmistress memoirs (as in fictional and autobiographical representations from the point of view of students and teachers) is that of their clothing. The importance of an almost-magisterial sartorial presence can be related to their lay-sermonizing role -- their imposing and rich garments are almost priestly. The obsession with their own self-imposed dress code should not be read as a natural expression or outcome of these women's positions as daughters of the upper-middle-class (though many but not all were) or their existing status but rather a highly conscious, sometimes defensive, even affected assumption of authority and status that they themselves were responsible for projecting. Rosemary Manning's autobiography is a strict exception to this rule, largely because she was of a younger generation and because her school was unconventional and less formal, but also because she resented and rejected the role even as she carried it out over four decades. As usual, Isabel Fry represents the other exception: from a prominent Quaker family, her formal education encompassed by one year in a boarding school, Fry abhorred displays of pomp and did not conform to any existing rituals of school life. She hardly mentions her own clothing in decades of diary entries. However, her students describe their surprise at her unconventional "tweed suits and, for best, flowing Liberty silks" and her old-age "interest in pretty clothes" (qtd Brown 108). Elsewhere it has been observed that people often focus on the clothing of persons who are newly powerful and who would have previously been barred from positions of social authority.

It is not sufficient to say that headmistresses represented their schools. They were seen to stand in metonymically and otherwise symbolically for their schools. This meant quite explicitly their physical presence: their bodies, their clothes, their gaze, their voice, their footsteps, their casually warning whistle. In The Chinese Garden, Rosemary Manning's fictionalized account of her school days, the headmistress -- whom they called "Chief" -- synechdocally represented the school. Bampfield (her fictionalized name for the school) *was* "Chief." Manning writes, Chief was "the air we breathed." This equation of the headmistress with the school is related to the use of "school" as an adjective in golden age school stories from the 1920s, as in, so-and-so "is school" or "is (fill-in-school-name)." In their 1920s and '30s autobiographies, headmistresses were aware that others saw them as the school and responded accordingly.

Unsurprisingly, it is safe to assert that these autobiographies are distinctly unglamorous and unliterary. They are institutional, collective, and ordinary. Smith and Watson have written that "institutions shape and solicit autobiographical narratives." I would posit a more reciprocal relationship in this case: their autobiographies are constructions of their institutions. Headmistresses shaped and built their institutions partly through their writing.

The notion that these are women's "institutional autobiographies" raises interesting questions for genre, the rhetoric of autobiography, and related questions of privacy versus publicity. For example, Cleeve (a pseudonym) calls her book a "professional autobiography." Is this title, which could be read as confident compared to the self-minimizing "little pen-and-ink sketch" rhetoric found in other autobiographies, enabled by the author's adoption of a pseudonym? Would the other autobiographies fit

neatly into the origins of Victorian women's autobiography as identified by Linda Peterson, domestic memoirs or artist's or professional's autobiography? It is interesting to see how they take on conventions from both traditions and, mostly, diverge from them. Sara Burstall discusses home life and public life in equal and great detail. Rosemary Manning spends at least as much time narrating what she calls her life's "true centre," her search for love, as her professional life. Of that, she focuses mostly on her struggles and achievements as a writer; the demands of headmistress-ship are unwelcome (though invited) and likewise pushed into a corner chapter.

These texts clearly take on other generic resemblances and functions: specifically, those of conduct manual, advice book, management science treatise, historiography, and hagiography. In her study of late-Victorian and Edwardian self-representation, Regenia Gagnier has observed a tendency for working-class persons' autobiographies to have explicit communicative functions, in contrast to the introspective and aesthetic ends of middle-class autobiographies. The headmistress autobiographies take on qualities of *both* bourgeois texts *and* workers' texts, and they may sometimes be both, since the professional is a worker, though not necessarily working class. On the one hand, there is sometimes a tendency, as in Hiley's and Faithfull's texts, to adopt what has been characterized by Carolyn Steedman as a

> strategy of writing and representation long employed by the English middle classes: that enclosing 'we' that permits of no other version, no other story; that closes off alterity (67).

There are exceptions: Burstall, daughter of a navy man and scholarship recipient, does not make the same class assumptions. Manning is self-conscious at times about her own

middle-classness. On the other hand, the texts have a "workaday" -- and "workmanlike" -- quality about them; Faithfull lets it be known in the preface that she makes no aesthetic pretensions to the quality of her writing. Their subject is, mostly, their work. They exhibit -- if not aesthetic pretensions -- an introspective purpose, but more central are other communicative functions. These functions include to warn ("woe be the clumsy administrator who . . . "), advise ("a headmistress should always . . . "), and narrate history and hagiography ("they were giants in those days . . . ").

Jane Marcus has observed about the autobiographies of "women of extraordinary achievement in late Victorian and Edwardian Europe" that since they

> were not in positions equal to men . . . one solution was to remove the self from the center of preoccupation, as Ethyl Smith creates circle after circle of overlapping communities of female friendship (126-127).

This might be said of the five '20s and '30s autobiographers considered in this chapter, who pay homage to their Victorian predecessors, who did not themselves write autobiographies. The "circle after circle" metaphor is apt for Burstall, whose subtitle to her autobiography, Sixty Years of Women's Education, is a clue to what the reader will find in the text: pages devoted to thanks-giving and homages to her mentors, teachers, and even the sponsors of her first scholarship. She explicitly aligns herself -- and her readers -- with women of ordinary talent when compared with the extraordinary women who came before, even though she (partly because she was younger) was able surpass many of her mentors' achievements.

One often reads gestures of self-deprecation or self-censure; these should be a read as attempts to negotiate the questionable propriety of seeming to toot their own horn,

to use a worn expression but one which they used too. Thus they self-authorize paradoxically by self-censoring or self-deprecating. Faithfull writes as though she had two selves, including one unauthorized, authoritative one: "I must keep to my business [of writing a memoir], but I feel the 'school-marm' stepping forward and haranguing from a platform all too often, and I take the opportunity for apologizing for her" (147).

It is interesting that she claims a "school-marm" part of herself, since schoolteachers play a marginal role in their texts. The texts shed light on the fact that most historiographies of women's education have focused on these leaders of a certain standing rather than the struggle of hundreds of thousands of women teachers. There is the sense that only those in prominent positions were agents of reform, which runs counter to the knowledge that women teachers acting in solidarity and in their strength of numbers achieved reforms in their profession, by and large without the help of their heads (Summerfield). In the autobiographies, there is a notable absence of almost any mention of women teachers' organizing, which was very active in this period. Organizing, if it is mentioned at all, is hinted at and dismissed as doomed or misguided. As former teachers, and insofar as they may gesture sympathetically to teachers' ongoing plight for better pay and conditions, headmistresses may give a glimpse of a history of women's education from below. However, this perspective is quickly eclipsed by the view from "the middle": as "elites in education" (Pederson's phrase), they managed much lower-paid teachers, all the while they were waging various battles with influence-brokers like governing boards and the other mostly male bureaucrats. It is notable that there is no mention of the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT), who had broken away from the NUT in 1920 to form their own union, when they perceived that their

equal pay platform was not being listened to. Many historians, it would seem, rely on this perspective, and it wasn't until feminist historians began retelling the story in the 1970s that the NUWT and the agency of women teachers, as well as their opposition to being marginalized within their male-dominated union, was brought to light.

It should also be mentioned that they did not see themselves in the business of reproducing themselves. The rhetoric was that most students would go on to be primarily wives and mothers, and they struggled with the seemingly competing needs of girls to be trained in domestic arts and academic ones as well.

These texts tell a story of women bureaucrats, a title usually historically reserved for men. They combine the rhetoric of bureaucracy -- the administrator's canny negotiation of bureaucracy, which itself is bureaucratic -- with other "home-spun" maternal rhetorics. This combination was not new: it resembles, for example, Charlotte Brontë's description of headmistress Madame Beck's administrative energy in her autobiographical novel Villette. Women minister, and administer.

Parallel to the headmistress's autobiography tradition runs a student-centered autobiographical tradition of women's fiction based on their own schooldays. Most "adult school fiction" (Sims and Clare's term, as distinct from the school stories for girls) is autobiographical to some degree or another. This phenomenon has been acknowledged, and there have been isolated readings of individual fictional texts -- most notably Jane Eyre -- but it has not to my knowledge been examined in depth. School novels, unlike headmistress's texts, are often written by ex-students from the student perspective. They all offer fictional portraits of headmistresses. Some fictional

headmistresses appear in the background and some are central to the plot; some are represented as benevolently influential and some as megalomaniacal tyrants.

The figure of the headmistress has been a target elsewhere in fiction besides the women's school novel. They appear in Victorian novels often in their older pre-reform incarnation as proprietors of a small private school. Some examples include Dickens's Misses Crumptons, Wilkie Collins's headmistress in Evil Genius, and Barrie's Misses Throssels. Orwell's conniving Mrs. Creevy is has the aura of a Dickensian throwback. But Charlotte Brontë's representations are undoubtedly the most influential, and the most present, in adult school novels and autobiographies.

Today the figure of the headmistress is appropriated as a historical cipher onto which is projected all sorts of fantasies. Aside from (and related to, but that is the subject of a different study) explicitly sado-masochistic appropriations there are romance novel versions, whose predecessor is Angela Thirkell's The Headmistress (1945) and the Y-TV movie version of Winifred Holtby's 1936 novel South Riding.

Some headmistress autobiographers demonstrated that they were acutely aware of the bad rap they got in fiction as well as elsewhere in the popular imagination, and they engaged with those representations in their texts. They even demonstrate that the prior representations helped constitute the idea of headmistress-ness for them. The Victorian cliché of the rustling, bustling, grandly dressed, austere peerer, pillar of women's education, gliding (in strangely disembodied fashion, seemingly leglessly) down the school corridors functions as a kind of distorted image which the headmistress writers look to, analyze, and compare their professional selves against.

**Headmistresses: Managers Staking Their Own Professional Claims**

If the Edwardian student autobiographers Gagnier writes about "were denied economic, political, and social agency," their headmistresses were not. As managers, headmistresses were not simply teachers -- they were former teachers who were for the most part responsible for managing other women teachers, including hiring and firing them and setting the terms of working conditions and, sometimes, salaries. While they were at times individually (and more rarely, collectively) supportive of women teachers, in the course of their own professional struggles, their main concern was not to improve the teacher's lot, and they often acted counter to teachers' best interests.

The autobiographies functioned to define professionalism (and their profession) for themselves and their peers, other headmistresses. Often, other headmistresses are the explicit intended audience. While their constructions of professionalism varied greatly, they all have at least one thing in common: I would call it a performative understanding of professionalism. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson wrote chronicle a shift in which "the terms of analysis focus on auto/biography as performative." (35) What I mean by the word in this case is that, for headmistress autobiographers, professionalism was not simply an already-existing, static set of values or behaviors. Rather, it was a discursive project in which they were self-consciously and dynamically engaged.

However, when it came time in their narratives for discussing teachers, it was a different story. Some grant teachers the status of professional. But mostly they describe them in other ways: followers of a spiritual vocation; maternal; tools for the administrative machine. Interestingly, given the importance they attach to it for others, none of the autobiographers claim a sense of vocation for themselves. In fact, nearly all

remain cut off from the question of vocation, claiming to have accidently fallen into or been pushed forward into or to have adopted grudgingly their positions.

Women teachers had a fraught relationship to the concept of vocation, since for a long time, it was the only occupation open to middle-class women. There are many accounts, fictional and not, of women who taught and ran schools as the only means to financial independence or survival. The vocational ideology as it applied to women teachers usually was combined with the ideology of vocational motherhood. Vocational ideology has historically been deployed as an argument against material claims for teachers and to forestall or combat their struggles for workplace justice since the turn of the twentieth century. The vociferousness with which vocational rhetoric has had to be expressed is in direct proportion to the degree to which women teachers have rejected it. That is, for middle-class women, teaching was historically the only means open to them to gain financial independence or to survive when left without means. As Dina Copelman has shown, it also became one of the only avenues of upward mobility available to lower-middle-class and working-class women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. An interesting fictional representation of this can be found in Emma Frances Brooke's 1895 novel Transition, in which an unqualified clergyman's daughter works next to qualified working-class teachers in a high school. Through her work she comes to class consciousness.

If the headmistress's approach to professionalism seems two-faced, that is exactly how sociologists have described the process of professionalization. The most explicit confrontation of this two-facedness is found in the autobiography of Frances R. Gray, who served as headmistress at St. Katharine's and St. Paul's Girl's School and was

President of the AHM in 1923. She had much to say on the subject of headmistresses who ignored the matter of fair compensation for their staff in while possessing lofty vocational ideals:

> No one can read the lives of our great pioneers at the head of girls' public schools without understanding that they were inspired and exalted by their mission in all respects . . . . In regard to the salaries of the young women who, for the most part, worked very hard under their direction, these great Headmistresses were, or seemed, strangely oblivious. It is true that they were equally unmindful of their own worldly interests, but some, at least, of them were furnished with private means, and, though their own salaries were far too low, they were not poor in the sense in which their Assistant mistresses were poor. . . . [The teaching] reward will not feed us and clothe us and give us a holiday and pay a doctor and subscribe to a good library. (83)

Gray does not include herself or even her generation in this lack of concern for teachers' salaries, instead singling out the previous (first) generation of headmistresses for this fault.

In what can aptly if awkwardly be called a double deflection, Gray locates vocation in both the previous and the succeeding generation but avoids claiming it for her own. Just as the Victorian headmistresses were "exalted by their mission," so perhaps would the younger generation be, since "at the time of writing" her text (her own retirement), more career opportunities had opened to girls, so that they could freely choose the profession as one of many. She contrasts this contemporary widening of

possibilities to an earlier era by quoting from Mrs. Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë: "teaching seemed to her at this time as it does to most women at all times, the only way of earning an independent livelihood" (129). Earlier in her text, Gray herself identifies with those paragons of unwilling and resentful teachers, Anne and Charlotte Brontë. In a move which she initially claims to be a gesture of solidarity with teachers, but on second thought seems like a solipsistic reminiscence, she recounts her own early hardships teaching in an elite girls' boarding school:

> in that moment I was allied with Anne and Charlotte Brontë in the sufferings of their governess life. Just as a Brontë would be, I was meek on the outside and mutinous -- a good Brontë word -- within (48).

Whether consciously or not, Gray has performed an interesting trick, by which she escapes both the missionary vocation of the pioneers and the freedom of choice of "today's" girls.

As to her discussion of actual teachers in the present day, Gray's rhetoric resembles other headmistresses: she tends to talk about them unselfconsciously as the help. She extols the "rarity" of "a good Second Mistress" -- i.e. deputy headmistress. In this she sounds very much like Lillian Faithfull when she writes of every headmistress's need for the all-to-rare "good maid" and "perfect secretary." Faithfull was headmistress of Cheltenham Ladies College, the oldest girls' public school in the country, whose first headmistress, Dorothea Beale, presided over it for forty-eight years. Beale's testimony for the Taunton Commission had made the school famous. As Gillian Avery writes, however, although Cheltenham had a reputation for its academic standing, Beale held out against academicization longer than heads of other girls' schools did. Faithfull's voice

most resembles that of Steedman's middle-class "we," the "voice of an owner." Faithfull's emphasis on, as it were, "the care and feeding of the headmistress" is a materialist approach to the requirements of the demanding job recalling to Virginia Woolf's argument for the care and feeding of scholars and authors in A Room of One's Own, published two years earlier. She affirms the needs of headmistresses: real vacations in term time, a hobby, regular athletics, well-prepared and varied meals, time with friends and family, a secretary who doesn't take it personally when one becomes cross (which, she implies, one will, of course). Headmistresses, she contends, should broaden themselves by listening to their maid's Labour views. All of this material and emotional support enables the headmistress to partake in "the joy of work." However, her "joy" should not be confused with vocation. That is, reserved for the "perfect secretary," who is characterized as one who joyfully and completely identifies with her "chief" (87, 98).

The bourgeois and managerial -- even patriarchal -- assumptions in Faithfull's text are not universal to the genre, of course. However, they are definitely present in D.F.P. Hiley's Pedagogue Pie. Hiley is most explicit in her construction of an intended audience of fellow headmistresses. Her text most resembles a conduct book and a management science treatise, comprised of that "homely" but "rarified" language she extolls. Like Faithfull, she objectifies those whom she manages. However, unlike Faithfull's "ladylike" benignity and lady-bountiful-like occupation of her "pedestal," Hiley's tone is rougher around the edges as she unceasingly carps on the faults of teachers. The best she can say of them is that

> A staff after all is an amalgam, a sort of pudding, in which certain nourishing and flavouring qualities are required that should not, and could not, be present in all the ingredients (34).

This is faint praise indeed. Otherwise, she instructs the administrator in how to avoid letting her school become "hag-ridden" by "jaded," "nervy," "casual," "martinet," or "harried" teachers. She comes out explicitly against the Burnham Scale (a national system for regularizing teachers' pay based on qualifications and experience), laments "the soporific effect on the girls of an ageing staff," instructs the audience in whom to "sack" first if necessary (the old if possible), and reminds readers that "a school is not run for the comfort of the staff" (41, 26).[4] (Unsurprisingly, the chapter on "The Staff" is separated from the one entitled "People.")

Hiley's crass managerial tone is quite different from the vocational ideal she projects -- in keeping with the hagiographic tradition, as we saw with Frances Gray -- onto the pioneers:

> There could be no doubt at all of the reality of the term vocation as applied to them. . . . They were touched with a prophetic fire and also prophetic austerity. . . . In spite of their dusty warfare there seems to us something cloistral in their exaltation, their aloofness. . . . Their example shames us, inspires us, but could we, should we, imitate it? (64)

The continuity of language between Gray and Hiley -- "exaltation" -- is found in many other texts. Like Gray, Hiley distances herself and the "head mistresses to-day" from the vocational, in this case by arguing that different times call for different kinds of leadership: there is no need at the present time for such "austere" vocation.

On the subject of her own professional identity Hiley is silent. That is, she speaks of herself only indirectly, via Steedman's "enclosing 'we' . . . that closes off alterity" -- rather than the autobiographical "I." "We headmistresses," "we managers." The same degree to which she exhibits callousness towards teachers, she is incisive and articulate about the contradictory demands placed on headmistresses:

> We are expected to be specialists but familiar with many subjects . . . to be all things to all men and rigidly consistent; to be conciliatory but obdurate; to lead a social and public life but always be in our schools; to procure record examination results but not work for them; do all the things that pay, with uncontaminated ideals; to be financiers but have no interest in money; to advertise on all occasions with becoming modesty; to be scholars, orators, leaders of the profession, 'mothers' to our girls, spiritual forces; to have all things and possess nothing (114).

Perhaps it is a paradoxically unscrupled dedication to her job which allows her to be so eloquent on the trials of headmistresses.

Similarly to D.F.P. Hiley, Marion Cleeve (a pseudonym) launches an incisive critique of the contradictory demands of professionalism placed on headmistresses. Like Hiley, she debunks the myth of disinterestedness that is integral to the ideology of professionalism.

> I began my official life with a genuine admiration for what is called a sense of duty; when I closed it, I had come to see that there is a much more excellent way of service and to distrust duty as a motive. Before the psychologists told us that there was no such thing as pure philanthropy, by

> self-examination I had come to disbelieve in the existence of unmixed motive (199).

In an unusual move, Cleeve claims the right of headmistresses to "a political axe to grind" (42). The particular ax she grinds is an unmitigated disdain of the local industrialists, whom she paints as boorishly anti-intellectual negative role models to her mostly working-class students. Assuming, as I do, that this pseudonymous author is genuine in her claims to be a headmistress who has spent thirty years in a girls' school, "guiding its development from a very small beginning into a large girls' school of the kind now called municipal secondary," one reason for her unusual adoption of a pseudonym might be the contempt she vents towards the capitalists of her adopted industrial town (renamed by her as "Snellham") (v). Whatever her many possible reasons for disguising her own and the school's identity so assiduously, the right she claims to be political can be read as a wish rather than something she has fully achieved. For Cleeve, the professional ideal of the headmistresses is to resist the forces of industrial capitalism -- up to a certain point. The resistance she describes and advocates does not take the form of revolution but, rather, the Arnoldian balm of high culture, which she claims smoothes the edges of her rough working-class pupils, "giving the girls better manners," and in turn, maybe a better chance of getting out of "Snellham" (18).

The double-edged knife that defines professional projects is clearly articulated in Cleeve's text -- the only one explicitly called a "Professional Autobiography." She shores up the authority of qualified headmistresses and argues explicitly against a tendency to hire unqualified persons, complaining that "the vulgar mind does not realize that expert knowledge is needed in educational administration." At the same time, she must distance

administrators from teachers below them. Like the other autobiographers, Cleeve claims no teaching vocation for herself; she was "pitchforked into the position" of headmistress, which is similar to the way others describe their career beginnings (5).

Teachers, on the other hand, bear all of the burden of spiritual vocation, as is evident in her lengthy dissertation on their mysterious "glow". This is a figure for the vocational teacher motivated not by any material need but by pure spirituality. Cleeve's attitude to teachers' continuing professionalization -- another word for their organized struggles to achieve greater dignity and better conditions in their work -- is, at best, out of touch and, read less forgivingly, full of ill-will. Like Gray, who aligns herself with those ill-paid Brontës, Cleeve comes close to glorifying her formerly oppressed status while pointing out how good teachers have it now:

> My recollections of staffs and staffing extend back to a time when the Burnham scale was not so much thought of -- when we were all ill-paid. . . . How different the outlook now! . . . I sometimes wonder whether dignity and devotion have not gone out with dowdiness. I hear of young teachers who are ashamed of their high calling, and of those why try to ape the fashionably frivolous. Teachers have been successful in securing for themselves better conditions of life and wider opportunities and are to be much congratulated. But -- *nothing fails like success* (82, emphasis in the original).

On this vaguely ominous note she terminates her chapter entitled "Discipline: the Assistant Staff." While Cleeve is disappointed in women teachers' failure to embrace their "high calling" and "dignity and devotion," the way she imagines these managed

subjects in relation to herself is less-than-dignified. The bodiless, "exalted," "austere" spiritual ideal of the teacher that thinks nothing of living on nearly nothing is discarded in favor of embodied-but-objectified collective figures. Sometimes the managed teaching subjects are figured as mechanical: "the head may supply the power, the assistants were the machine." Sometimes, as in Hiley's staff pudding similie, the image conjured up is more homely, as when Cleeve likens ideal teachers as a group to, perhaps, a set of furniture or books: "A headmistress who is backed by a complete set of clever and devoted form mistresses is omnipotent." (97)

That this instrumental attitude towards teachers is widespread is evident from Sara Burstall's writing when she praises her own former headmistress Frances Mary Buss, claiming: she "never treated her staff as tools, but as persons" (107). Like Cleeve, Burstall was headmistress of a large urban municipal secondary school, the Manchester High School for Girls. A former scholarship girl, as well as a protégée of Buss, she attended Girton College (Cambridge), received her teaching degree from University College London, worked under Buss at her alma mater, and went on to serve as AHM president**.** Burstall describes her own relationship to the profession as a "calling" -- and, more unusually, a "career," a word she repeats with much frequency in her text, as she returns to the theme of helping other talented working-class girls onto an academic ladder towards the pursuit of a profession.

Burstall uses her autobiography as a platform to call for the further professionalization of women educators, asserting that "we need more professional autonomy" (281). Unlike the autobiographers discussed so far, Burstall's primary identification seems to be as a teacher. For example, she writes that theater "is, of course,

an art of the greatest importance to a teacher" because of what it teaches about public speech. Public speaking is an act more associated with administration than teaching, which makes it seem as though Burstall sees headmistress-ship as subsumed under the larger and more encompassing category "teaching." This is a more democratic approach than the managerially-oriented Hiley and Cleeve, who valorize their own institutional status and seek to distinguish it clearly from the teaching ranks.

Similarly to those administrators, Burstall is anxious to make a case for headmistresses' professional status, but the difference is, again, she subsumes the head's role under the category "teacher":

> Parents have to realize the teacher is an expert professional and entitled therefore to the deference shown to the skilled professional opinion of the doctor, lawyer, or architect. I often suffered from the lack of parents' deference to professional opinion as such (161).

Perhaps the similarity to Cleeve's rhetoric ("the vulgar mind does not realize that expert knowledge is needed") can be traced to the fact that both served working-class industrial communities. The teacher-student-parent dynamic in this milieu would have been quite different than that at Cheltenham or St. Paul's, where the students were largely upper-middle class. This is not to assume that the upper-middle-class parents there showed "deference" to the teachers. It is simply to raise the possibility that teachers often perceived a lack of respect on the part of parents and others in the community (there is ample evidence of this), but the class relation between teacher and parent would have shaped the way teachers perceived a lack of deference. Perhaps Cleeve and Burstall

expected more deference, that is, from working-class parents than they would have expected from bourgeois ones.

Burstall's scholarship girl, rather than elite, background is one way of contextualizing the unusually generous degree of thanks-giving and praise she showers on her mentors and benefactors. Even within the context of the hagiographic tradition, Burstall's praise distinguishes itself for its thoroughness. She does not neglect her earliest benefactor: "I am in duty bound to honour [the clothworkers] company, for I became in 1878 a clothworkers scholar as head girl of North London Collegiate School." (48)[5] Much of the book is comprised of homages paid to women educational reformers who came before her. In one of many passages about her mentor Buss, she extolls

> the statesman's far-seeing thought, the general's eye for a situation, the mother's unconquerable instinct to fight for her young, the leader's power to inspire self-sacrifice (43-44).

This praise is quite different than the more common spiritual-vocational model.

Although she identifies as a teacher, even Burstall is very hesitant to celebrate the gains they fought for. Her autobiography -- because it comes so close to discussing unionization -- calls attention to the resounding silence about the National Union of Women Teachers. We have read Cleeve's vaguely ominous and unsupportive warning of teachers' successes. Burstall is more positive but nonetheless is careful not to endorse unionism:

> The position of the teacher has improved, and some degree of professional status has been achieved through the various associations and the Royal Society of Teachers. . . . We are, however, very far from the freedom and

> independence of the medical profession, and may never be able to attain to this, because the conditions are so different. But we need to work towards better conditions; not regarding merely pay and conditions of service, as some teachers' associations are disposed to do, but the whole field, putting the pupils first, but remembering that what is bad for the teacher must in the long run be bad for the children (281).

By "some teachers' association," Burstall may have been referring to the NUWT. The absence of support for unionism is not explicit but can be inferred.

Isabel Fry, like Burstall, identified primarily as a teacher. Herself taught mostly at home in a prominent Quaker family, Fry pursued teaching as an avenue out of the all-consuming family home as well as a genuine desire to fulfill a social justice mission that was her family's religious tradition. Compared to the six other writers, she professes the closest relationship to teaching. An ex-student quotes her: "My dear, I think if there were no child in the world I would teach a brick wall" (Brown 39). She was 48 years old when she opened her first school and in her seventies when she closed the doors of her second: a good deal older those on traditional career paths such as the '20s and '30s autobiographers, who belonged to the same generation as her. Fry built two small farm schools -- The Farmhouse School, which she ran from 1917-1930, and the Church Farm School, 1934 through the 1950s. She was proprietor, headmistress, sometimes the sole teacher, and looked after everything that a small farm and a house full of a dozen boarding students of various ages and educational backgrounds entailed. She very carefully and consciously built the schools on her own lines after contemplation and rejection of popular educational theories and her own classroom experience. Fry's

classroom experience before she began The Farmhouse School consisted of three years at an elite boarding school, from which, she writes, she was fired for allegedly trying to infuse her lessons with moral instruction. She and her friend and fellow teacher Constance Crommelin left the school together to run a small private school in London. Fry's farm schools were beyond the pale of conventional English schools in their various types. As Gillian Avery points out, there were hundreds of boarding schools in the south of England that started during World War I, and it is probable that some of those proprietors had been governess-educated to the exclusion of much formal education, as was Fry. Her situation may not have been unique in every regard. However, Fry's accomplishments were remarkable on several accounts. The students at her second school consisted primarily of refugees from around the world. Her English students were also refugees, though from a system of elite preparatory and public schools.

To say that Fry rejected professionalism would be to miss the larger picture of her struggle. She once wrote, "All institutions are disagreeable to me. They are impersonal, unnatural and unhomelike." The notion of professionalism was foreign to her very notion of teaching. Of course, this purity of approach was enabled by Fry's family's means. Private wealth enabled her to make her initial capital investments into the schools' infrastructures. Few administrators, however, and none of the autobiographers considered here would seem to have struggled like Fry did throughout her career on a daily basis to carry on the mission of her school. A typical diary entry reads thus:

> May 28 (1918)
>
> Busy most of the day with farm -- children. Up at 6, milking till 8. Then working and supervising out-of-doors till 10. Teaching Eng. History,

> Romn. History, Economics & Egyptian History till 1. Reading Macbeth to children 2-30 - 3-30. 20 minutes to read the paper for myself. Milking etc. till 5-45. Then seeing children etc. till they went to bed. Letter-writing & preparing lessons, & a gossip in the kitchen Mrs. Grey, Harriet, Kelard & myself.

It is interesting that the headmistress with no professional credentials, no formal participation in the professional association -- although she was acquainted with many prominent headmistresses, and gave talks at the annual Ideals in Education conferences -- whose school existed outside the margins of convention, would fit what sociologists call the ideal-type of professionalism: the devotion to her work, pursued for the betterment of society, and her financial disinterestedness outside of the need to keep the enterprise viable. This is probably revealing of the bourgeois assumption of private wealth that enables such professional ideologies as total freedom in choosing a career and the purity of the social contract between professional and "clients."[6]

Like Isabel Fry, Rosemary Manning was proprietor and head of an alternative co-educational school. Also like Fry, Manning writes about her role in the school as primarily that of teacher rather than administrator, and she also resented her role as supervisor of other teachers, although she was.[7] Manning's school -- of which she was co-proprietor, with a former teaching colleague -- was centered on her music instruction, which she approached not as a way to create musicians but as a means of creating more fully-rounded thinkers and people.

Published in 1987, A Corridor of Mirrors is separated by the earlier texts by more than half a century. Manning was an acclaimed novelist (she died in the year following

the publication of Mirrors), and this was her second autobiography.[8] It is artfully crafted and highly self-conscious about the project of autobiography (one chapter meditates on Tristram Shandy) as well as introspective about her own identity -- lesbian, white, middle-class intellectual, socialist. Educated in a girls' public school and Royal Holloway College in the '20s, Manning's headmistress career began in the early 1930s, around the time when the other five autobiographers were retiring and writing and publishing their texts. After college, she writes, "I had no idea as to how I was going to earn my living except for a strong resolve not to go into teaching" (92). She was co-proprietor of her school until the 1970s.

In her text, Manning professes a fairly happy relationship to actual classroom teaching.

> Since I was by all accounts a good teacher, it would be unfair to leave the subject without saying what I found positive and rewarding about being a member of a profession which since my youth I had sworn I would never enter (131).

She describes teaching as a deliberate and anguished turning away from her primary vocation -- writing. Having found literary success, Manning is frank about her decades-long resentment of the obligations of school proprietorship and headship -- even though, as she freely admits, it was a path she chose for herself. Manning writes that in World War II she was unable to join the WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service, the most prestigious branch of women's service) as she wanted because teaching

> was a reserved occupation . . . I could not get out of teaching. . . . it was with inner and unexpressed despair that I agreed to go into partnership . . . [to open a] small day school in Hertfordshire (121).

Later she admits that she would easily been exempted from this "reserved occupation" rule, demonstrating her love-hate relationship to the profession. This "despair[ing]" decision is followed by four decades of constant daily "interruptions" -- similar in description to that which the earlier autobiographers write about. Rather than embracing the life of interruptions that is a headmistress's lot, as the earlier autobiographers seemed to do, Manning writes about tolerating it only in order to run back to her room and continue writing.

> I wanted to distance myself from the school and protected my privacy fiercely. . . . The school was an intrusion. I resented bitterly that as a headmistress I was necessarily interrupted by children and even more by staff (126).

Throughout her life, she tried and failed to "escape" teaching. "In the late '50s I decided to escape from the school, but I had to find some other way of earning my living" (128). When her co-proprietor died, she writes, "I grasped the opportunity to get out of teaching, but this was no simple matter" (162). Fittingly, the work of the school only takes up one chapter of her text. Decades before she wrote Mirrors, women teachers had finally achieved equal pay with men teachers. But she lamented the low pay that continued to plague the profession in general.

Managerial deployments of the ideology of spiritual vocation are still with us. This ideology is used in remarkably similar ways to those in the '20s and '30s texts:

teacher unionism is represented as misguided; managerialism (as an art and a science) is valorized; vocation is projected onto present-day managed teachers and, possibly, a nostalgic, oppressed past self. Very often, this is cloaked in the discourse of "professionalism." Scholars like Jo-Anne Dillabough has demonstrated the ways in which the approving designation "professional" is used to label teachers compliant with state demands. This has a gendered dynamic, in which women teachers are supposed to be caring and maternal. A contemporary example can be found in the work of composition scholar Richard Miller, a manager of contingently employed university writing instructors, whose writing also projects vocationalism onto subjects whose jobs are less-than-secure and ill-paid. In the process, he appropriates Matthew Arnold as a benign administrative figure to model. Matthew Arnold was a tremendous figure in the reform of both boys' and girls' education, but we should not forget that he also at one time expressed that women were not qualified to be administrators. This is just one example of the dubious invocation of a service-ethic-for-others. In appropriating similar rhetorics of service, contemporary education workers should remain conscious of the interests to which vocationalism and even "professionalism" have been deployed.

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[1] The quotation is taken from Fry's diary.

[2] For a gloss on the history of what was called at first the Association of Head Mistresses (AHM; later called the Head Mistress's Association), see the last chapter of Sara Burstall's autobiography. Also see Reluctant Revolutionaries: A Century of Headmistresses. The archives of the AHM and contain notebooks with minutes from every annual conference. The Headmistress's Association and the Headmasters' Association joined together to become what is now called the Secondary Heads' Association. Since the reform of girls' and women's education in the late-nineteenth and

early-twentieth century was not parallel to the much longer tradition of boys' and men's education in Britain, headmistresses represented their own group of professionals distinct from headmasters. The schools they administered were usually single-sex, so obviously they were different -- and much newer -- institutions. (There were no headmistresses of single-sex boys' schools.) Until World War I, women were seen as unfit to preside over a school with male students, and until the widespread development of co-education in the 1960s, co-educational schools with female heads included primary, rural, and experimental schools.

[4] This recalls Winifred Holtby's novel South Riding, published in the same year as Hiley's text, in which headmistress Sarah Burton struggles with the difficult decision of getting rid of the ageing and scholarly but unloved science teacher. Hiley and Burton's rhetoric about the need to banish sentimentality in making such a difficult decision is strikingly similar.

[5] Before she became head of the new teacher training program at University College, London, and an inspector of schools, M.V. Hughes also was a pupil of Miss Buss. She takes an extremely different tone towards her in her memoir, A London Girl of the 1880s: upon meeting Miss Buss for the first time, she mistakes her for a cleaner (19); she writes witheringly about the "text-book-and-water-method" that placed all importance on the appearance of orderly business and none on actual learning (28). "Common sense and kind-heartedness often had to give way to some pettifogging rule," she writes (28). Ellen Jordan alerted me to Hughes's series of memoirs.

[6] In 1916, Fry left teaching temporarily to accept a post as an inspector in a munitions factory. It is here that she writes about experiencing managerialism up close. Rejecting it after a few months, she left to re-open her school. This is not to say Fry escaped the role of supervisor in her farm schools. On the contrary, she writes frequently about the tiresome necessity of supervising others' work. Her diaries chronicle daily preoccupations with hiring and supervising cooks and farm help.

[7] It is an interesting coincidence that both Fry and Manning devised their own original systems for teaching grammar -- not just lessonplans or methods but a whole new system. Fry's was published as a book. Fry and Manning both published children's books as well. Of the seven subjects in this chapter, only Fry and Manning were published authors aside from their autobiographies. Cleeve's identity is unknown so must be left out of this observation.

[8] Her first autobiography was published pseudonymously and chronicled the events leading up to her suicide attempt.

## Chapter Three

## Learning to be Modern Girls:

## Winifred Darch's School Stories

Of all of the twentieth-century school story authors, Winifred Darch's work is perhaps the one most concerned with the democratic possibilities of schooling for girls. More than most writers in the genre, she wrote about state-funded schools and their role in the continuing democratization of social institutions. She was also interested in school as a workplace for women. Darch's books connect conversations about teachers and education policy to representations of schoolgirls. As a career teacher herself, she was aware that professional "educationists" -- librarians and theorists as well as school administrators and teachers --played a role (or at least attempted to) in the success or failure of school story writers.

As with other examples of the genre, her books -- published by Oxford University Press's juvenile division -- targeted girl readers. Some seem to be pitched to a young teen-aged or preteen audience. However, equally important is the possibility of an actual readership that included adults. Rosemary Auchmuty and other scholars have documented the "astounding popularity" of the genre with adult readers as well as children ("Origins" 148); the several international, intergenerational fan clubs organized

around authors in the genre are proof of that. Similarly, Joseph McAleer has written about the intergenerational "cross-over" readership with regard to a related genre: girls' story papers (31). Consideration of Darch's prolific output in the context of a crossover readership illustrates her complex negotiation of the politics of professionalism, workplace justice, institutional authority, and the training of "modern girls."

The critical fate of Darch's most popular contemporary school-story writers has been well-documented by feminist scholars, most notably Rosemary Auchmuty (1992, 1999, 2000). Even bestselling school story fiction was often marginalized by the school establishment it represented (librarians, head teachers and teachers). Believing that these novels lacked artistic merit, literary critics also complained that they were out of touch socially, retrograde, and nostalgic for an insular world of class privilege for the daughters of the middle and upper-middle classes. For at least the last three decades, feminism, cultural studies and children's literature scholarship, have persuasively reframed the conversation about literary merit. Today, the girls' school story genre continues to support an active fan culture and readership across categories of age, class, nationality, gender, sexual orientation and other differences.

Darch stands in distinction to the most well-known, and many other, school story authors for two reasons. First, she wrote about the new girls' high schools that were created after the 1902 Education Act and that expanded in the first third of the twentieth century (Summerfield, Mitchell).[1] Second, she wrote several main characters who were scholarship recipients. Typically, needy students appeared as minor characters in fiction by other school story authors. Darch's more democratic subjects and settings distinguish her from many of the leading figures in the genre.

**"We Are the School": The New High Schools for Girls**

As Sheila Ray and others have observed, most girls' school stories written in the first half of the twentieth century centered on representations of boarding schools -- an environment that did not reflect the education experience of most readers and writers. A prime example of this bias toward representations of an atypically elite education experience might be Elinor Brent-Dyer's sixty-two-book-strong Chalet School series, which ran from 1925 to 1970.[2] The fantasy of class privilege does not, of course, mean that other aspects of the novels lack political and social valence. Many fan-critics provide sympathetic contextual readings of these books, as with Brent-Dyer's popular series, which remains in print and still supports international fan clubs (Mackie-Hunter, McClelland). So central is the boarding school setting to the school story genre that Beverly Lyon Clark's book-length genre study systematically excludes any representations of day schools, despite an otherwise remarkably inclusive approach which considers British and American, boys' and girls', and strictly "adult" novels which have a tenuous connection to the juvenile genre (such as Angela Thirkell's romance novel The Headmistress). As Darch's books demonstrate, stories set in day schools can be more intensely concerned with school life than boarding school stories, which commonly incorporate extra-generic elements of mystery, fantasy, and family stories (the three chief "intergenres" with the school story).

Nearly all of Darch's twenty-three novels are set in day schools. At least thirteen of them are set in high schools (as distinct from diverse and unregulated private schools, and girls' "public schools" -- the handful of institutions modeled on boys' public schools such as Eton).[3] As Sally Mitchell has written, "stories set in day schools have far greater

social interest" than boarding-school stories. Undoubtedly, this is because of their greater interest in class and social mobility. In some of Darch's novels, a character must leave her expensive private (day or boarding) school because of financial troubles, often involving the death or disappearance of a father. Initially the characters, who are also coping with other losses, resist the transition, sometimes giving vent to their snobbery. However, all of them -- except perhaps the most villainous and unredeemable -- discover that the new school has its benefits: games, student-run organizations, better facilities, professionalized academic rigor (welcome to "brainy" girls), and a meritocratic student-enforced code of conduct in place of meaningless top-down-imposed rules. They also discover the pleasures of widening their social sphere, if only because they make friends they otherwise would not have had the opportunity to meet as relative social equals.

Several qualities distinguished the new high schools from the large majority of girls' private schools -- whose roots were in the nineteenth-century "ornamental" acquisition of accomplishments -- which varied greatly in academic quality. Paradoxically, the new state-funded secondary sector fueled new growth in the private sector, as documented interestingly in Rosemary Manning's autobiography; this has been attributed to the reaction of parents to the idea of sending their daughters to school in a class-integrated environment. (Contemporary U.S. readers will recognize analogous patterns of middle-class "white flight" from integrated public schools that continues to this day.) Granted, this is a generalized view and risks being overly optimistic about high schools, which after all were not fully integrated except by tokenism, and the academic quality of which some adult writers have recalled with disdain. Nevertheless, some high school ideals include:

· preparation of a substantial number of girls for university study

· fostering a meritocratic and socially democratic environment

· providing academically rigorous instruction in science, math, classics, and other subjects previously reserved for middle-class and elite boys

· professionalization and rationalization of traditionally feminine subjects, like domestic science, modern languages, and (arguably) English literature

· professional training of teaching staff (trained in subjects and pedagogy)

· appropriation of elements of boys' public school traditions and ethos, like the prefect and house systems, organized athletics, and the corporate spirit exemplified by the school song

As for this last category, as one of Darch's characters explains to a newcomer to school, "The idea came from boarding-schools" (Honour 43). That is to say, the appropriations of the boys' public school ethos took place at different kinds of girls' schools: private, state-funded, boarding, day, and of course the girls' public schools themselves, fashioned in part after their much older counterparts.

A degree of class integration in the high schools, however modest, nevertheless represented an important perceived threat to upper- and professional class insularity, and Darch thematizes this thoroughly. In some cases she (probably unfairly) represents servants upholding this anti-integrationist mentality most staunchly. In her first novel, Chris and Some Others (1920), fifteen-year-old daughter of a retired army captain defends her high school against snobbish denigration. A young housekeeper auditioning for a job in Chris's house warns Chris's nurse, manager of the house: "The people who go there are not all that *high*, you know. . . . Mr. Barber, the greengrocer -- he's got a girl

there" (4). Illustrating the circular nature of the gossip economy, later in the novel a neighbor declaims, "I never felt I could send Dagmar to a school where she might sit next the greengrocer's daughter." This character inquires whether "the girls and governesses at the High School are all ladies? I have heard some people say that they are not sure." The heroine rebuts that "under-educated" gossips are less qualified to be called "ladies" than the teachers, invoking the more meritocratic usage of that term (117, 118). A similarly snobbish guardian in another novel is displeased with the failure of the High School to inculcate her charge with docile manners and regrets, "Your father suggested sending you to Cheltenham or Wycombe Abbey [girls' public schools]. I'm afraid I was wrong when I dissuaded him." (Cliff 222). The theme recurs in The New School and Hilary (1926), set immediately after the 1902 Education Act. The newly impoverished heroine, forced to leave her costly private school, asks her mother, "What does 'Secondary School' mean exactly?"

At first dismayed that she would be attending school with scholarship girls "like the children we see coming by the gate after twelve," she learns to adopt the new democratic mores before even showing up for the first day, admonishing her similarly-positioned cousin Marigold who complains about the school uniform hat: "'Only common girls wear them!' 'Girl . . . is a name common to both of us. I expect we're common girls, so we'll have to wear common hats'" (43). Sally Mitchell has observed that the designation "girl" is class-inclusive, as opposed to the term "young lady." In this case, Darch's heroine is at once assuming a new identity -- having more in "common" with girls less privileged than she had thought herself to be -- and reaffirming a continuing

"girl" identity regardless of her changed economic circumstances. The identity "girl" encompassed new opportunities and alliances.

Day schools "didn't count" as schools in the imagination of girls whose only experience of organized education was found in books. Wealthy, governess-educated Pleasance in The Upper Fifth in Command (1928) imagines, "if you are at a day-school you will have plenty of time to spare." "Not much!" corrects her new friend (27). Pleasance is then won over by the thought of "Cricket, lacrosse, swimming!" Other (less meritorious) privileged newcomers bring their sense of entitlement with them into the entrance examination room:

> Isn't this a horrible school? Nobody to look after you, or be pleased to see you or anything. Everybody just rushing about and knocking into you . . . You pay lots to go to St. Ursula's, so they do things properly" (Joan 56).

Snobbish and undeserving Chloris is eventually cast out for violating the universal schoolgirl ethic against "sneaking." (In this case, not simply cheating, but not owning up when one's actions unfairly get someone else in trouble.)

**'Learn to Be a Lady': Scholarship Girls**

Scholarship girls tend to approach their new schools differently than do their more-privileged counterparts. Of Darch's four main characters who are scholarship recipients, two are working class -- Heather, daughter of a washerwoman, and Margery, whose mother struggles to raise five children. The other two, like many of her characters, have fallen on harder times: Joan's family has recently lost her father, a small flour-mill owner -- described by a supporter as more "county" than the upstart newcomers who covet their property -- and Jean, a French war orphan, who fills a spot for a "girl of good birth,

willing to work for examinations [to] be accepted without fees at [a] first-class boarding school." (Lower, Jean 43) Among Jean's few possessions is a diamond necklace once owned by Marie Antoinette, a distant relation. Darch uses the class position of these two characters ("county" and distantly related to royalty) to underline the double standard that comes with the school's benevolence. Scholarship girls were held to a higher and more arbitrary code of moral conduct and academic achievement in addition to having to face more obstacles. This is especially true at Jean's new "potty little private school" -- a rare example of a private school in Darch (41).[4] The head admonishes Jean for accidentally denting a wall: "Listen to me, Jean. You are being received free of charge in an expensive school, and you've got to realize that this benefit brings with it obligations" (116).

However, Darch's two working class scholarship recipient heroines are more noteworthy because a much rarer type in fiction, as in reality. (Logically, there are far fewer working class women's memoirs of their schooldays.) Heather's widowed mother, who had been in service, takes in washing to pay for her uniform. Characteristic of Darch's working class women characters, they have a materialist and determinist understanding of class status that the narratives do not endorse. "Ladies are born, not made," she insists. As usual, fathers are absent, and mother figures fail to endorse their daughters' scholastic ambitions: "If only father had lived! He . . . had always jokingly said that if ever he became a station-master Heather should go to a High School and 'learn to be a lady'" (11). The heroine is fortunately singled out by her teacher to take the Annual Scholarship examination and is the first local girl to win, even though "it is hard for the country schools to compete with the town" (6). Her victory is not only in being

accepted to the High School but assimilating into the world of schoolgirls. By the end of the novel she is winning hockey matches and reciting "Play up! Play up, and play the game!" The ubiquitous line (the poem was written by a scholarship recipient of Rugby's preparatory school) refers to the "game" of Empire and manly battle -- as well as cricket; in this ethos, "domestic" endeavors like a match or a moral decision are an embattled war game. Darch's novel Margaret Plays the Game refers not to the heroine's athletics but to her reconciliation to a useful life as a secretary -- she accepts her fate with manly stoicism. Unlike her Victorian counterparts, becoming a proper schoolgirl now involved assuming qualities such as a stiff upper lip. Thus Heather's development involves transgressing class *and* gendered values.

The other working-class scholarship girl is the heroine of Darch's second-to-last novel, The Scholarship and Margery, published in 1938. Bullied out of her rightful place by a girl with nearly the same name as hers, Margery secretly takes a full-time babysitting job. In the end she confronts the identity thief and is warmly welcomed into school. This is I believe the shortest of Darch's books (ninety-four pages in the 1938 Oxford edition I've consulted) and is more of a simple morality tale than a novel. Nevertheless, the situations and feelings she represents are complex. The agony Margery feels at the prospect of showing up to school without a uniform -- the villainess has stolen her uniform voucher -- and her knowledge that she cannot complain to her mother about it, is memorable.

Interestingly, Heather at the High School was singled out for praise in Geoffrey Trease's anti-girls' school story polemic, in which he disparaged the genre's "low level of

writing" as opposed to boys' -- girls have no Kipling! He urged girls' school story authors to write about day schools as Darch did.

**"To take its place among English public schools": Elite School Models and the Classless Ideal**[5]

Darch's unusual decision to make scholarship girls the heroines of four of her novels reflects her commitment to more democratic schools. Reflecting the actual high schools' hybrid heritage -- state-funded like the by-then-defunct board schools, they also partly modeled themselves on some of the public school traditions, as we have seen -- Darch's democratic ideal incorporated most elements of that elite heritage. This ideal is most elaborately explored in one of her best novels, The New School and Hilary (1926). Darch dedicated this to the actual headmistress of the high school where Darch taught for thirty years (Sims 2006, 2000). It's easy to imagine that the admirable and charismatic fictional headmistress Miss Evans was based on the real-life counterpart in Darch's own teaching career, M.E. Hall. Miss Evans has high expectations for the brand-new school over which she presides: "'This school is going to take its place among English public schools' -- and Miss Evans's eyes positively flashed" (69). There is a sharp sense of the one-term-old school as an institution that has yet to be fully formed:

> "Last term . . . we had no examinations to work for, no prefects, very few rules. . . . We've our way to make, our traditions to form. People about here aren't quite sure what we shall turn out to be. I don't want this School to be a mere forcing-house, a cram-shop for the Civil Service, or even for the Universities. I want it to be a place where you are preparing to live" (51-52).

During the period in which The New School takes place, Mitchell observes that girls' culture was "occupied by change, moving erratically toward the modern world, self-consciously 'new' but still driven by powerful (and unexamined) old feelings" (22).

The "modern" desire to ignore social distinctions was combined with an all-too-present sense of them. This plays out in the story of a new teacher, Judith Wingfield, whose plot coexists with the girl-heroine's plot. Both have left private and costly St. Ursula's, Judith as a graduate, to join the new high school. The brand-new teacher is eager to "see what a school of this sort was like, a school for all classes of people, because I expect schools of the future will be so" (75).

She quickly discovers her own newfound class marginality in her status as a teacher. Able to pay the rates at the local tennis club, she's nonplussed that they won't have her. The (almost) last straw is the primitive level of the only accommodation she is able to secure in town:

> Judith had come to Uffington with a firm resolve that she was going to help break down the foolish barriers which still divided class from class. Still, mixing with all sorts of children and helping to raise their ideals was different from taking a bath in your landlady's kitchen! (33)

It's "different" because she saw herself "raising up" the poor, not being looked down on by the locals. Once again Darch takes on the theme of the aversion to any social proximity to high school teachers shared by many different social classes. Jeanne Peterson has most eloquently elaborated the middle-class Victorian anxiety about the governess's proximity to the family. I would argue that this fear of the social proximity of teachers may also have much to do with their class background -- some of them would

have been working class women who had trained at universities and, by the time of the novel's publication, may have been recipients of high school scholarships. Distaste for teachers may have been as culturally significant as the governess panic was in the nineteenth century. Like governesses, teachers were (and are) both potential role models and potential mother figures to other people's daughters. In some circles this social exclusion persisted well into the twentieth century. For instance, headmistress and author Rosemary Manning, whose career reached into the 1970s, wrote about being socially rebuffed because of her schoolteacher status by parents and other peers whom she wanted to befriend.

Unlike the heroine of Emma Frances Brooke's 1895 novel, Transition -- in which the newly impoverished clergyman's daughter, thrown into teaching alongside trained working-class women, becomes radicalized by the experience -- Darch's Wingfield does not experience class consciousness in a radical sense. Instead, the girls and the teachers continue to search for, invent, and affirm their new-old traditions. In the happy ending, the teacher and indeed the whole school find acceptance by the tennis club (they lend their rooms for end-of-year festivities), and Judith finds comfortable housing in the home of a student. The school has been accepted by the local elites and their institutions. As in the end of Heather at the High School, out on the hockey field, Hilary hums Harrow's football song "Forty Years On" -- an iconic school story moment that epitomizes the unresolved gender and class issues at the heart of girls' school culture.[6]

The conclusion to The New School encapsulates the sometimes uncomfortable relationship between "feminists and bureaucrats," to borrow Sheila Fletcher's title of her

book on the history of women's education reform. Hilary innocently asks her beloved headmistress who the founders of the school are.

> "I suppose, literally speaking, our founders are the County Education committee."
>
> "But Miss Evans -- you made me read that lesson out of the Apocrypha -- 'Let us now praise famous men,' to-day -- and you really don't mean the fat sort of people you see on committees are famous men?"
>
> " . . . But after all, Hilary, we are heirs of all the ages, aren't we? Can't our founders be all those famous men and women who've done things for education in the past - all those who first founded schools -- King Alfred -- King Henry -- Dean Colet and the rest?" (249)

This optimistic conclusion exemplifies some of the contradictions of the new-old ethos of girls' schools and girls' culture.

**Reading School**

The borrowed and invented traditions that characterized the girls' school ethos was in no small part achieved via print culture, both literary and popular. Not only did many girls and women experience girls' schools -- at least certain types -- solely through their reading experiences, Darch's novels also constructed the schoolgirl ethos by referring to girls' consumption of the genre. Many prolific school story authors had no experience with school or with the types of schools they fictionalized, but this was most definitely not the case for Darch.

The intertextuality of Darch's novels' per se is not what distinguishes them. As is characteristic of much children's literature, most school stories are intertextual and might

be said to engage in what have been called "reading games" with their readers. In countless school stories -- for adults as well as for children -- the characters read, think about, quote, and refer ironically to school stories. Joanna Lloyd's Audrey -- A New Girl even contains a disclaimer: "The names of any girls' school stories mentioned in this book are not, to the best of the author's belief, those of existing books." What distinguishes Darch's novels is the degree to which they make sense of their own and their peers' roles and identities in school via fictional representations. In her essay on intertextuality in children's literature, Claudia Nelson examines texts that "use devices that may seem considerably more elaborate than the more usual practice of employing a protagonist who is said to enjoy the consumption or creation of literature but showing this enjoyment from the outside" (223). From this vantage point, Darch's use of intertextuality -- characters read and talk about books and magazines -- is quite common. However, while they most definitely do not fit any postmodern criteria for metatextuality, her evocations of girls reading contain more significance than simply the promotion of literacy, the provision of a bookworm heroine, the salute to fellow practitioners of the genre, or the pleasures of readerly recognition. They testify to and participate in an economy of self- and institution-building in which school narratives were the local currency.

Newcomers to school are especially prone to rely on fiction as a sort of conduct book and key to mythologies. Heather at the High School (1924) opens on a scene of reading which foreshadows the bookish-but-liked heroine's future status. Distracted from tending the fire, she is absorbed in a school story paper -- the inexpensive weeklies popular with working- and middle-class girls, less officially sanctioned because of their

negative orientation towards school authority.[7] The paper provides a typical narrative, in which snobbish characters shun the new scholarship girl. One exclaims, "'Us friends with you! A washerwoman's daughter!" In the characteristic melodrama of the story papers, the bad girls throw a picture of the heroine's mother into the fire. The heroine of Darch's novel wonders,

> Was school-life really like that if one left the safe haven of the village school . . . ? . . . Heather felt that she would give anything to penetrate into that magic world of which her 'paper' professed to give her a glimpse, a word of 'form-captains,' 'gym-slips,' 'japes,' and 'persecutions' (10).

Her entrance into the school does not represent an ending in her use of the story papers but rather a beginning: schoolgirls themselves use the papers to map their world. Upon arriving at the high school to take the examination that will win her a scholarship there, she

> wanted to fit these latest arrivals on her horizon into the scheme of school as she imagined it. She pulled out the Schoolgirl's Chum from the capacious pocket in her petticoat and examined it carefully (10).

Darch's representation of girls' reliance on fiction to understand the new world of school that they were entering is persuasively realistic. Darch's imaginary school story magazine Schoolgirl's Chum is echoed in Joanna Lloyd's later use of the imaginary Schoolday Chums which her characters read. These are fictional counterparts to such girls' magazines as School Girls, Girl's Friend, School Friend, Schoolgirl's Own, and Schoolgirl's Weekly.

School story papers are also seen as keys with which to interpret teachers. In The New School, a student wonders about new English teacher Wingfield. "'Will she come down on things with a heavy hand? . . . as in Schoolgirl's Chum, you know.'" Then proceeds a conversation between this character and a snobbish one who claims that she is superior to the Chum both because she has outgrown it and because "all the common girls read it." It's one of many scenes in which the characters discuss their reading likes and dislikes and judge one another on this basis.

Elsewhere in the novels, characters rely on the more costly but still very popular school story books. In The Upper Fifth in Command (1928) a new girl says of her younger sister,

> She has been collecting all the school stories she can find, and I fully expect her to model her behaviour upon a sort of ideal, compounded of all the naughty girls she has met there (40).

Here Darch pokes fun at the didactic tradition of positive role models: the value of reading for girls as promoting a ladylike ideal. Modeling one's ideal on inappropriate or undesireable traits was something critics of the school story were worried about at the end of the nineteenth century. Stories might lead girls either to become naughty or, even worse in detractors' eyes, too brainy. At the same time, in Darch's novels, girls *did* "model [their] behavior upon a sort of ideal" found in fiction, and this was true in real life as well.[8] Whether or not this kind of modeling is borne out in British women's autobiography and other testimony, it may have operated on the level of a collective unconscious. School stories are not only about "how to be a girl" but also how to become a woman.

**Teachers: Models of Independence and Usefulness**

As Auchmuty has pointed out, the adult women represented in school stories are mostly teachers (1999). Unlike the inexpensive story papers marketed to a working class audience (though read more widely), which contained negative representations of teachers, Darch's books represent teachers not only sympathetically but with realism and psychological depth. Her representations exemplify her democratic orientation to school and the role of a school as a training ground for girls' active participation in democratic society. Darch's novels confront the myth of the underworked, overpaid woman teacher head-on with her description and narration of the embodied work of teachers. This widespread mistrust and resentment of women teachers figures in The New School when townspeople cast doubt on the results of the work conducted "by over-paid teachers at the expense of the poor ratepayer" (125).

In Darch's last novel, The New Girl at Graychurch (1939), heads are treated as a species of teacher on the subject of overwork (not usually the case in school narratives). A pupil says,

> I think it is awful never to be able to call your time your own. I shall get a job that begins and leaves off when it says it does each day, and if anybody keeps me late I shall go on strike. The worst of it is that nobody thinks a Head works hard. If you don't come to our scripture lesson dead on time . . . they suppose you were having a cup of tea and putting your feet up!" (174)

In Alison in a Fix, an internationally known education theorist replaces a beloved and experienced headmistress, only to give it up after a year of instituting ambitious reforms: "I had no idea, Alison, of the piles of office-work a headmistress has to do" (221).

As is common in some adult school fiction, some of the most viscerally represented scenes of overwork involve grading homework and exams.

> It is a bad habit to drink tea after your meals, but one to which people who have to teach in the afternoon are apt to succumb. It is also bad for you to correct exercises at this time, and nobody was doing it except Miss Burns, who never wasted a minute (Poppies 131).

Apparently this was a mistake Darch chalked up to the inexperienced and the compulsive. Another teacher remarks,

> Won't it be nice discussing plays and not exams with our coffee? My first term I got awful indigestion in exam week, and put it down to the fact that the marks got mixed up with my meals. (Graychurch 18)

Part of what girls learn at school is an appreciation of their teachers as well as some knowledge of what their teachers do and what an academically trained woman looks like -- different from the ogre of her detractors' imagination.

Sometimes, of course, this means girls want to follow in teachers' footsteps, at least in terms of continuing past secondary education. Echoing the widespread hostility to academic training for women, orphaned Chris's stodgy aunt tells her that it's

> "quite unnecessary for you to go to college . . . your father has left you an ample income to live as a gentlewoman."

> Before . . . Chris rose an awful picture of herself 'living as a gentlewoman' -- that meant . . . doing fancywork and going to At Homes.
>
> "But . . . I want to go to College. Why shouldn't I?"
>
> " . . . If you remain at the High School, you will go on with these useless subjects, and grow up a gauche, awkward woman" (Chris 179).

**"You're getting a regular orator": Schoolgirl Parliamentarians and Agitators**

In the headmistress's autobiographies from the 1920s and '30s, they say things like, "our girls will make useful committee women." The "committee woman" is a name for women who took an active part in public life, perhaps on the community level but maybe even on a national scene.[9] The phrase indicates someone who has taken on the voluntary responsibilities of citizenship. It also has the connotation of bureaucracy: women who participate in bureaucratic structures that had been dominated by men. Darch's novels are full of "committee-women"-in-training.

In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, published in 1961 but set in the 1930s and based on her own experience at school, Spark's narrator opposes "committee women" to progressive and feminist women. She tells us that the "the progressive spinsters of Edinburgh" were not

> committee women. They were not school teachers. The committee spinsters were less enterprising and not at all rebellious, they were sober churchgoers and quiet workers. . . . Those of Miss Brodie's kind were great talkers and feminists.

This definition does not exactly accord with Darch's representations, since the committee women and girls are also "great talkers and feminists."

In an early feminist reconsideration of the girls' school story, Gill Frith writes,

> There is no taboo on public speech: in innumerable school stories, girls hold and address a tense, packed meeting. The ructures and rewards of romance are replaced by the ructures and rewards of friendship, and pop stars by idealized head Girls. . . . Away from the family, girls are free; domestic tasks are invisibly performed. . . . what matters is to be in the team, in the play, etc . . . 'the group' itself has almost unlimited license. The institutions within the school . . . are initiated, organised, and controlled by the girls themselves. . . . teachers' presence is discreet and not infallible (123).

With this, she overturned decades of criticism that took issue with the girls' school story genre because of the stereotypically feminine roles for women and girls it purportedly endorses. Darch's heroines are by and large outspoken, independent-minded, creative, political in their realm, and unafraid of addressing a crowd. The novels advocate for girls' and women's participation in public life, not just to further one single agenda.

For example, in The Girls of Queen Elizabeth's (1932), the Head Prefect of the school, Laurel, is "not afraid of the sound of her own voice, nor was she scared that the idea of addressing the school" (29).[10] When the prefects are told that the crumbling old school, which has lost students to the new county high school, is in danger of closing, the students form into "two parties": one follows Laurel, who is determined to "fire every one

. . . to do *something*" to save the school or at least go down with "colours flying" (25). Her opponent, Louie, who is not loyal to the school, and whose crowd violates schoolgirl decorum by breaking rules not out of a sense of fun but rather "cold-bloodedly," is campaigning to resist Laurel's optimism. Louie gathers an audience before the official student meeting and tells them -- in slang which sounds more like an American gangster than a British schoolgirl -- that her adversary is

> Try[ing] to make us promise to be good little girlies till the end of July. For why? . . . I'll tell you why. It was just to save the prees [prefects] trouble. They're a lazy lot -- and some of them . . . are scared stiff of standing up to us when we choose to stick together. . . . If you start being milky and watery, the only result will be that we have a bad time and the prees a god one. As for Bessie's [Queen Elizabeth's school] -- it's in the soup (35).

Although Louie is a negative example, she is a revealing doppelganger of the heroine. This is a remarkable speech to emerge from the mouth of a fictional schoolgirl even by 1932, and it anticipates Ronald Searle's thuggish cartoon schoolgirls a decade later, as does the next event in the narrative. Outraged at the insults Louie hurls at the school at the end of her speech, a girl who belongs to what could be called the loyalist party, pushes Louie off of the vaulting horse on which she was perched, swings herself up, and wins over the crowd with her plan to save the school. What is at stake is not just the school's survival but the girls banding together to fight the authorities, who want to shut down their school.

Sometimes even "positive role models" must resort to rebellious measures. In Alison in a Fix (1938), students stage a "stay-in strike" to protest a perceived injustices committed by their inexperienced replacement teacher. In adult school novels, students often think of themselves as an overworked or oppressed proletariat in opposition to a tyrannical staff. In The Black Sheep of Rexborough: A Play of School Life in three Acts (1931), girls strike because of the unfair punishment of a popular girl. A house mistress who is hired to crack down on the rebellious girls says "Now are you going to help me run this house properly? Or are you going to continue your policy of Against the Government?" (49) In fact, the so-called longest running strike in British history involved schoolchildren who together with their working class parents protested the school board's firing of a head teacher and one other teacher. In support of their headmistress who had protested the unhygienic conditions of the school -- and her husband, who had fought for the rights of farm laborers -- most of the families withdrew and eventually created their own alternative school (Scobie).

Kim Reynolds has written that girls' fiction between 1880 and 1910 was "monoglossic: adult authority was not questioned." Darch began publishing a full decade after the period covered in Reynolds's study, and her characters -- like other school story characters of the interwar period and beyond -- question adult authority frequently. Covering a similar period to Reynolds (1880-1915), Sally Mitchell writes,

> Although these stories had little relation to most girls' reality, they spread school mores, the image of girls in groups, and the culture of schooling as an institutional separation of adolescents both from their families and from

> the world of paid labor. It was thus primarily in fiction that school became a privileged space for girls' interactions and ethics (74).

With the work of Gill Frith, Sally Mitchell, Rosemary Auchmuty, and the contributors to the Encyclopaedia of Girls' School Stories, there has been a resurgence of criticism of the genre, increasing scholars' awareness and respect for the large readership past and present of this body of literature. There is still much scholarship to be conducted investigating the importance of these reading practices.

Winifred Darch's books are heteroglossic, not monoglossic, texts. They are tales of rebellion. Scholars have made a distinction between the critical and rebellious tone of most adult school fiction written by women and school stories for girls. The writers of the "Adult School Fiction" essay in Sims and Clare's Encyclopaedia reference "Charlotte Brontë's swingeing attack in Jane Eyre [1847] on her old school . . . [which] is written in vitriol." They write, "'Look Back in Anger' would fit the majority of the serious novels mentioned here" (341). The stakes for rebellion are higher for schoolgirls, of course, than for the adult woman looking back. Darch's girl characters choose their battles carefully, since consequences might include expulsion -- exile from the "world of girls" back to the lonely domestic schoolroom or, for the scholarship girl, an abrupt unprepared entry into paid labor, or back home to help raise her siblings.

Darch did not construct a monolithic adult Authority under which girls had to succumb or against which they launched their "sit-in strikes." True, there are some fairly flat villains -- a grasping and hypocritical uncle in The Lower Fourth and Joan who resembles Pip's relatives in Great Expectations -- but the women characters who run and work in the school are not usually painted with such broad brushstrokes. They are

represented as fallible humans. If adult authority were a monster, then girls would have no choice but to never grow up. Indeed that is Gill Frith's insight about the appeal of school stories to her students, who were supposed to have grown out of them: they provided a fantasy of continuing girlhood, insulated from the pressures and stresses of young adulthood, like sexuality. In Darch's novels, girls become women. Sometimes the transformation occurs when recent graduates return to school as teachers (Judith in The New School and Prudence in The Lower Fourth). Whereas growing into adults can often be an extra-narrative event -- characters appear who have recently made the transition -- just plain growing up is always part of the plot: for girls, for young women, and for experienced and older women as well. Schoolgirl rebellion is part of Darch's narrative of development -- a marker not of childishness but of emerging grown-up-ness.

All of this rebelliousness takes place in the context of 1930s radical agitation, which has a shadowy presence in these texts. The figure of the striking worker as a trope for mistreated schoolgirl and schoolmistress alike recurs again and again in school fiction (for children and for adults) and memoir. The fact that Darch was apparently not a militant teacher unionist herself testifies to the way in which teachers and other workers' agitation resonated beyond those it directly involved. The theme of rebellion has been a near-universal feature of feminist movements, and feminism's interconnectedness with labor movements has been examined by scholars like Pat Thane, who have taught us that women workers' docility is often an inaccurate construction imposed in retrospect.

Similarly, there is more work to be done in understanding the rebellious tenor and the critical tendencies in women's writing for girls. At stake is the stereotype of the childish and "sexless" historical woman writer of children's books, marginalized as much

for her often unmarried status as for the content of her work. Also at stake is the strange polarization in constructions of the twentieth-century schoolgirl as alternately passive or barbaric. Darch's plots often animate a struggle between rebellious youth and authority, which brings about the growth of all parties involved. Often girls reconcile with a more just authority in the end -- an authority they have educated. What sticks in readers' minds is the tenor of rebelliousness and the questioning of authority in the first place. Seven decades after her original publication, Darch's books can certainly be viewed as historical artifacts. But her promotion of girls' agency through self-knowledge and public speaking remains relevant to readers today.

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[1] Historians have written extensively about the implications and impact of the 1902 Education Act and have debated, among other things, its reactionary status. I don't attempt to navigate any of that scholarship here.

[2] Auchmuty counts fifty-nine; my HarperCollins edition of The Chalet Girls in Camp lists sixty-two titles.

[3] This is based on my reading of nineteen of Darch's twenty-three novels.

[4] In her entry in The Encyclopaedia of Girls' School Stories, Sue Sims suggests that Darch"may have taken a post as unqualified Junior Mistress described so feelingly in Jean of the Fifth" before attending teacher training college. The feeling of her description refers to the plight of the unqualified and exploited young teacher.

[5] Gill Frith writes that in the school story, "to be in the same *form* is to be in the same *class*; to be part of the group is all that matters, and acceptance is presented as meritocratic, based both on 'proving yourself' as an individual and on sharing the 'common-sense' values of the group."

[6] Harrow redundantly lays claim to its own cultural capital on its website: "'Forty Years On' with its football allegory has been adopted by schools -- many of them girls' -- all over the world. Very few can know what they were actually singing about."

[7] See Mitchell's engaging and authoritative discussion.

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[8] It recalls Rachel Brownstein's Becoming a Heroine.

[9] See Regenia Gagnier's discussion of "company women," a designation she gives some Victorian and Edwardian middle-class women autobiographers.

[10] In Cicely Bassett: Patrol Leader, Mirth says, "They better have chosen me [for representative]. At least I'm not afraid of my own voice" (54).

## Chapter Four

## Schools and Rules:

## Nancy Spain's Lesbian Camp

Like many of the school novelists, Nancy Spain used her experience as a former student to poke fun at school traditions, as subject material for her humorous critique, and to gain credibility as an insider. She also used it to create a public persona in a way unlike the others. This insider credibility was very important in her role as celebrity-journalist: a journalist who both covered celebrity news and gossip and was herself a self-fashioned celebrity. Spain has not been given enough credit for pioneering this new role. She was certainly one of the most visible women of the postwar period.

Between 1945 and her untimely death in 1964, Nancy Spain was a print, radio and television "personality" (her own apt designation) who with her partner Joan Werner Laurie launched the woman's magazine She; made significant and regular contributions to a host of newspapers and magazines like the Daily Express, The Guardian, and Good Housekeeping and edited Books of Today; published several successful mystery novels, three autobiographies, and over a half-a-dozen other books of various genres; appeared regularly on BBC radio and television; and befriended famous people. An example of what Martha Gever refers to as lesbian self-fashioning in the media, Spain helped pioneer

celebrity gossip journalism and was not afraid to confront the literary and social establishment. She was probably the first multi-media celebrity in Britain.

Spain first used her Roedean experience in her book Thank You, Nelson, a memoir about her war work as a driver in the Wrens (Women's Royal Naval Service). The book received a rave review from A.A. Milne and launched her writing career. In a way parallel to the more globally recognized St. Trinian's comics,[1] in this first book and in her subsequent mystery novel set at school, Poison for Teacher, Spain exposed the militarist ethos of girls' public schools like Roedean -- an ethos that had been appropriated from the boys' schools. The St. Trinian's oeuvre rested on a simple conceit: British public schoolgirls are not feminine but barbaric. The twin theories for the widespread appeal of St. Trinian's are that it acted as a sort of release valve for both public horror of the violence of war as well as for the then-decades-old anxiety about the unladylikeness of girls' and women's reformed education. Just as, in boys' schools, sports were viewed as preparation for war -- as quasi-war, pre-war training, and at the very least in a reciprocal metaphoric relationship with war -- so were they treated in the girls' public schools, by Spain's and others' account. The incongruity of girls preparing for battle -- as in the world of St. Trinian's -- produced humor that had wide appeal.

The reason for the deep and lasting appeal of St. Trinian's was that it reflected real contradictions, tensions, and unsolved puzzles about exactly what girls were being educated to be. This was an old question but one that had new complexities in a post-suffrage era and with the expansion of women's paramilitary work in the Second World War. Women had become a new kind of fully enfranchised citizen -- not just mothers, wives, and sisters-in-Empire but quasi-soldiers and wartime administrators as well. The

St. Trinian's comics were drawn and written from the center of violent battle -- a POW camp. They depicted in some ways a loss of female innocence of battle -- an ideal that had sustained war ideologies for centuries. Out of these social changes emerged the caricature of the fighting, bullying, drinking, carousing, gambling, aggressive, unmotherly, brutish, coarse, manly St. Trinian's girl -- and woman.

In retrospect, this comic stereotype of (girlish) manliness just as significantly questioned the usefulness of warlike models of masculinity for boys and men. It exposed the construction of Empire-tough masculinity as "unnatural" for men as well as for anybody else: but also as humorous. Spain's Rodean persona, her comparison of her former headmistress to a prison warden she encountered in her war work, and her depiction of "Radcliff Hall" (fictionalized Roedean) and its beastly inhabitants ought to be seen as heirs to the St. Trinian's legacy. If it is true as Gillian Avery pointed out, that Roedean and St. Trinian's are the two girls' schools the average British person has heard of, then Nancy Spain is partly responsible for this fame.

**The Massification of Queer Literacy**

Since the average person had no exposure to a place like Roedean -- only a fraction of a fraction of girls were educated in public schools or elite boarding schools -- the folklore about the schools was a medium of public literacy about a segment of girls' education. Women novelists and memoirists like Spain had taken readers into the halls, playing fields, hiding places, offices, dormitories, baths, theaters, infirmaries, chapels, classrooms, and faculty lounges of (sometimes thinly disguised) Badminton, St. Paul's, Cheltenham Ladies' College, Roedean, and other schools. Through her novels and her other public presentations, Spain took part in a tradition of public literacy in which

ordinary citizens read and help shape fictions about elite institutions from which they were functionally excluded. Several things distinguish Spain's contribution to this tradition: a democratic ethos evidenced in an attempt to get her audience to laugh along with her at the institution; a queering of the school narrative in a camp (rather than tragic or simply burlesque) register; and most of all her unabashed use of her experience to construct a public persona. No other school novelist was a major personality like Spain. (Angela Lambert, a well-known writer for The Guardian who authored a memorable autobiographical school novel in the 1990s, doesn't come close.) In her day, Spain's fought-for media visibility promoted queer school literacy, in a camp register, to a national audience.

Indeed, Spain was a pioneer in one of the most significant media for twentieth-(even twenty-first)-century women's literacies: women's magazines. She and her partner, publishing scion Joan Werner Laurie, launched She (still in circulation, not to be confused with the GLBTQ American magazine of the same name). While not bastions of feminist critique or precursors to gay liberation, women's magazines were and are important locations of women's critical literacies. Women readers -- not to mention the writers and publishers, like Spain and Laurie -- did not uniformly and uncritically accept the mainstream values largely promoted by such organs as Good Housekeeping, for which Spain was the book review editor. The ethos of "modern," domestic-at-heart (if not in fact), heteronormative womanhood was not universally shared by writers or audiences. It was a kind of "normative game" that producers, advertisers, readers, writers, and others played at within the context of ever-increasing capitalization and

market segmentation of the media. (Whatever the state of underground and possibly queer-friendly publishing was, Spain was apparently not part of it.)

Spain's example also helps us see how mainstream dominant media could be a vehicle for critical queer literacies and visibilities as well. Allison Hennegan, editor of the Virago Lesbian Landmarks reissue of Spain's 1949 novel Poison for Teacher, memorably testified to Spain's impact on her lesbian audience:

> She appeared before the camera in well cut tweed jackets, good shirts with elegant cuff-links, and dashing cravats around her handsome neck. As such she was a glorious inspiration and much loved proof of the possible, a heartening sight for a host of dykes, baby or otherwise, myself included. . . . Spain brought thousands of lesbian viewers a sense of pure exhilaration and sheer relief (xv).

Laura Doan and others have written about the signification of lesbianism via dress and hairstyles, pointing to the 1920s-era "Eton crop" and masculine suit as both expressive of lesbianism but also a mode of dress acceptable enough in heterosexist society to not be censored (though mocked often enough). Spain's national visibility as a lesbian is an important and under-examined contribution to what some might call queer literacy.

Recently, composition and rhetoric critics as well as New Literacy scholars have begun to explore many aspects of queer literacy. Some scholars have engaged queer youth in participatory literacy research (Blackburn, De Castell and Jenson); others have promoted the importance of queer theory in social justice-oriented literacy research (Donelson and Rogers, Blackburn, De Castell and Jenson, Moita-Lopes). Regarding the social justice issue of same-sex spousal hiring practices in the academy, Gibson and

Meem write, "queer literacy is an acquired literacy of transformation, where the established rules of behavior and discourse are both challenged and transcended." At the same time, there have been calls to bring queer theory to bear on pedagogy in the field of rhetoric and composition. Even if as Peele has claimed, "the field of composition studies is heteronormative," many comp-rhet practitioners are doing what the literacy researchers have called for: introducing the idea of sexuality as discursively constructed and otherwise making their pedagogy take on a queer literacy mission. This is an important region of productivity and invention that is the foundation for the comparatively few published articles (so far) on queer literacy pedagogies.

A much larger subject of published academic writing, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, has been *camp*. Theorizations of camp have taken place under the rubric of queer theory and feminist studies, performance studies, and literary and cultural studies. Investigations into the significance and political valences of camp would be enriched with more attention to knowledge from Literacy Studies within the field of composition and rhetoric. In an important moment in the ongoing conversation about camp, Moe Meyer's "Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp," it figures as "a suppressed and denied oppositional critique embodied in the signifying practices that processually constitute queer identities," which "gains its political validity as an ontological critique (1,2). It is "the total body of queer identity performance practices," and "has for its purpose the production of queer social visibility." In other words, I would suggest, camp is a mode of queer literacy. For Meyer, interpretations of camp that "detach the signifying codes from their queer signified" are not camp at all but instead "non-queer" appropriations -- what he calls the "camp trace." He specifies Susan Sontag's Notes on Camp, published in

1964, as the first instance of such misreadings (5). Meyer's narrative is lapsarian, claiming that camp was stolen and passed off as straight. But camp has a complex history, including for a mass audience. Queer approaches to New Literacy Studies have enabled a more reciprocal understanding of meaning-making that would render Meyer's polemic less valid. A queer literacy studies approach might examine queer subjects' camp literacies in a dynamic relation to straight appropriations -- rather than as, in a sense, rhetorically or otherwise victimized by such appropriations. Queer literacy studies might place queer subjects' literacy at the center of inquiry without necessarily dismissing their impact beyond a self-enclosed queer world. More questions might arise beyond "But is it authentic?"

A subtle approach to strategically essentialist identity must surely be necessary when one considers camp practitioner Nancy Spain. She was not, in her professional life, out. Her biographer Rose Collis notes some of her friends' disappointment at her efforts to remain closeted. However, Spain and Laurie were a recognizable, public lesbian couple. As she herself once put it, "everyone in the world knows I'm queer." This should be read, I would say, as rhetorical truth-in-exaggeration: signifying a queer identity was hardly an uncomplicated feat, or one without consequences for her career. This spanned the postwar era until the years before the gay liberation movement.

Spain's mystery novels are virtuoso examples of camp which illuminate recent theoretical discussions of queer politics and representation, lesbian invisibility, the performativity of gender, comic detective fiction, and the girls' school story. "Camp" is a highly contested category. Generally speaking, camp -- including women's camp -- is a critical literacy practice that makes queerness and the constructedness of gender -- and by

extension other social constructions -- visible. It has the potential to be critical of the sex/gender system and heterosexist and class oppression and to bridge gaps between different constituencies. Camp-as-queer-literacy accomplishes its visibility project through distancing gestures on the part of the camp artist, whether the mode of the gesture be parody, masquerade, theatricality, or something else. Camp is intended to both produce pleasure for artist and audience and give vent to protest, rage or complaint. Camp's frivolity is fundamentally serious and historically grounded. Camp's historical origins in gay male culture inform camp but do not limit its implications to the culture of gay men. Camp has been appropriated by groups of all genders and orientations, often to homophilic but sometimes to homophobic effect, but the gender or sexual orientation of the artist or audience is not determinative of this political effect (i.e. queer people do not always produce homophilic camp). Camp is a sociopolitical literacy akin to other minority subjects' literacies (Royster, Duffy). Camp is a *rhetorical* literacy. Camp is above all a queer literacy that, while invented by queer people and most important to queer history, like all literacies is a process of meaning-making that engages outsiders.

I am choosing to call Nancy Spain's camp "lesbian camp" in particular not only because she was a lesbian but because the category "lesbian camp" has been especially marginalized and contested and deserves its own recovery project. There are three things in particular, at least, that Spain's lesbian camp accomplished that are of present-day relevance to the discourses of literacy studies, rhetoric and composition, queer theory, feminism, genre theory, and theories of reception and spectatorship. First, it breaks down barriers between constituencies -- subjects and audiences -- and, as Pamela Robertson say, "shows links between gay men and lesbians" -- and across sexual orientations --

"across cultural texts." This has a potential impact on bridging artificial divisions in theory and historiography. It paints a picture of lesbian cultural embeddedness in other traditions, one that might render a lesbian cultural past yet more visible and less separate: more historical, in short. Second, Spain's queer-literate acts of lesbian camp shed light on the pleasures of gendered genre fiction such as girls' school stories, inviting more subtle theorizing about and historicizing about the interrelated reading and writing practices of women (queer and not), and men (queer and not). Third, it has the potential to accomplish a class critique. However, rather than producing estrangement (as has been theorized about camp), Spain's camp is an attempt to produce and promote pleasure -- specifically, the pleasure of humor. Her novels are valuable artifacts of lesbian camp and self-consciously pop cultural texts: funny, insightful, masterfully intertextual. Spain's novels reappropriate stereotypes, literary and social conventions to comic, subversive, and pro-queer effect. Of these only Poison for Teacher has been reprinted since her death. Along with her other novels, Poison is an act of queer literacy, promoting queer visibility to a national audience and inviting audiences to interrogate social and sexual norms.

Poison for Teacher is an intertextual and self-conscious detective story set in a girls' school, with plenty of references to the genres of detective fiction, girls' school stories, and adult school fiction. It might even be called a lesbian detective story ahead of its time. Anna Wilson locates "strictly speaking the first" lesbian detective story in 1977, followed by a flourishing of the genre in the 1980s and '90s (251). Poison for Teacher as well as Spain's other detective novels might be seen as yet earlier examples of the subgenre. Her novels might also be categorized with the parodic cosy (domestic or

country-house) mystery; as DeMarr shows, by the 1950s, it is possible to say that even parodies of "cosies" were an established genre. Poison was the second novel to feature Spain's friend, revue actress and future camp icon Hermione Gingold, in the guise of detective Miriam Birdseye. Spain published five Birdseye novels between 1949 and 1951.

All three of these genres (lesbian detective stories; school stories for girls and school novels for women) are examples of queer literacies. Girls' school stories' and novels' thematization of same-sex relationships is one reason they were so important to readers as well as a target for unsympathetic critics. Thus queer literacy is a dynamic in which not all participants are equally "successful": people may interpret homophilic texts homophobically, as some critics have done.

Thanks to the endurance in Britain of such schoolgirl farces as Ronald Searle's St. Trinian's series (especially the movies -- American readers may recall Alistair Sims in drag as a headmistress), readers in Britain if not the United States may be most familiar with send-ups than other kinds of representations of schoolgirls. As Jan Montefiore puts it in a compelling survey of some farcical and parodic examples of schoolgirl representation (some queer, some questionably so), girls' school stories "have since the 1950s been the object of a camp cult of parody which has also become part of popular culture" (173). To most British and many American readers of earlier generations, girls' school stories were as familiar a genre as detective stories. Alongside the expansion of girls' single-sex education at the turn of the twentieth century, fictional accounts of these schools emerged. Often, authors had no first hand experience with the type of schools they represented. In this way, the "original" schoolgirl fictions were just as much a

product of imagination as the send-ups. The impact of girls' school stories was felt not just by their millions of readers: they were a popular target for critics' and librarians' venom (Auchmuty). Because of this, the genre gained notoriety beyond its actual readership.

By the 1940s, with a declining readership, publishers were putting pressure on girls' school story writers to enliven the genre with mystery/thriller elements (Sims). However, the mystery/thriller genre had been part of the girls' school story since its heyday in the 1920s and before. So prevalent were these elements that trace back to the gothic novel, that out of the 464 authors in Sims and Clare's Encyclopaedia of Girls' School Stories, ten percent wrote school stories which were also mystery/thrillers. Not only that, but a small percentage of school story authors also published "straight" mystery/thrillers -- including John Creasy, founder of the Crime Writer's Association in 1953.

The production and consumption of both genres are represented to great comic effect in Poison for Teacher. The entire book is an exploration of critical genre literacies. It's an example of how queer literacies can cast a critical light on other categories of difference (race, class, and age, for example). Spain's queer literacy is an example of critical genre literacy. In Poison, famous detective novelist Peter Bracewood-Smith, faced with declining sales, writes girls' school stories secretly; the local police inspector devours school stories covertly; while the schoolgirls themselves prefer reading Dorothy Sayers (or, in a pinch, one of Bracewood-Smith's formulaic detective pieces). When Birdseye/Gingold's sidekick Natasha asks the English teacher if she is enjoying the thriller she has brought to the dinner table, the teacher protests, "I don't know what you

mean by 'enjoy.' . . . It is Murder in the Cathedral, by T.S. Eliot." (Natasha, who had only glimpsed the first word of the title, "laugh[s] merrily") (27). Thus Spain pokes fun at the anxious intellectual's distinction between Literature and genre fiction.

In arguing for Spain's queer literacy -- specifically her lesbian-camp-as-queer-literacy -- it is important to navigate readers through the theoretical minefield of "lesbian camp." To call Spain's work "lesbian camp," and to call Spain herself *a* lesbian camp would be in the opinion of some critics a mistake. First of all, some would argue that "lesbian" and "gay" (as opposed to "queer") are labels which promote a bourgeois model of binary, essentialist, and biologically determined identity. In the second case, the use of camp to indicate a role is a practice with which some would take issue. The term "queer" can both create solidarity across various gender identities and communicate the performativity of gender. However, there is a useful "strategic essentialism" of the word "lesbian" to specify a more particular identity, even if one believes that identity is constituted through performance. "Lesbian camp" is an important label because it signifies a minority-within-a-minority discourse. In the case of Nancy Spain, since "lesbian" is not a label she adopted for herself in her published writing, one risks "speaking for" the subject or simply being inaccurate, but it also follows a practice of recognizing and labeling historical figures for whom the expectation of being openly gay -- open in the sense of in public and in one's profession -- is unreasonable. I would argue that this recognition of Spain's life's work as lesbian camp is an act of queer literacy.

Second, the designation "lesbian camp" has historically been contested. Pamela Robertson has recently tried to recuperate the feminist possibilities of women's camp. Affirming women's relationships to camp other than as objects, Robertson seeks to

> reclaim a female form of aestheticism, related to masquerade and rooted in burlesque, that articulates and subverts the 'image- and culture-making processes' to which women have traditionally been given access (9).

For Robertson, a foundational text in the history of defining camp is Esther Newton's 1972 Mother Camp: Female Impersonation in America. First published as an anthropology dissertation, Newton's book is an empirical study that documents -- using interviews, mostly -- a performative epistemology of gender. Newton offers several definitions of "camp," which can be "a system of humor," a role, even "a flip person who has declared emotional freedom." Newton writes:

> The three strong themes that seemed most recurrent and characteristic about camp seem to be incongruity, theatricality, and humor**.** All three are intimately related to the homosexual situation and strategy. Incongruity is the subject matter of camp, theatricality its style, and humor its strategy**. . . .** The homosexual "creates" the camp, by pointing out the incongruity or by devising it. . . . The camp inheres not in the person or thing itself but in the tension between that person or thing and the context or association. . . . If moral deviation is the locus of the perception of incongruity, it is more specifically role deviation and role manipulation that are at the core of the second property of camp, theatricality (105-107).

Reclaiming Nancy Spain's work as lesbian camp promotes queer literacy by reclaiming a marginalized queer mode of communication (since "lesbian camp" is even more marginalized than "camp").

Like Newton's ethnography, most discussions of camp historically have focused on the cultural production and reception of men. Acknowledgments of the possibility of women's camp are often mentioned in the form of an aside. In response to this absence, other critics have discussed some specific examples of women's camp and its implications, most famously Sue-Ellen Case's reading of camp as an alternative to repressive and "fatal realism." Still, most critics who do theorize lesbian camp take pains to qualify the relationship. Kate Davy objects to Case's interpretation, calling camp "the discourse of . . . male sexuality" and strenuously distinguishing the availability of camp to lesbians as opposed to gay men. Like Davy, Cynthia Morrill stresses camp's political limitations for lesbians. A good example of critics concerned with lesbian representation in popular visual media, Ruby Rich writes,

> A new kind of video surfaced, and with it emerged a contemporary lesbian sensibility . . . Their style is unlike almost anything that's come before. I would call it lesbian camp, but the species is, after all, better known for camping (19).

Rich's essay, originally published in 1992, is an interesting examination of images of lesbians and lesbianism in popular culture in the 1980's, and she is not primarily concerned with the theorization of camp, but the quotation serves as an apt example of the marginal theoretical status of camp in writing about lesbian representation. In Andrew Ross's essay "Uses of Camp," lesbian camp is a footnote for which two critics "have made a case." The project of critically recovering lesbian cultural production in the twentieth century at this point can and needs to move beyond pondering the "possibility"

of women's camp. While women's camp is a *fait accompli*, investigation of it has barely begun.

As an example of critics who seek to return the designation "camp" to its rightful gay male origins, Moe Meyer is skeptical of definitions of camp which are "confused and conflated with rhetorical and performative strategies such as irony, satire, burlesque, and travesty" (7). Since Nancy Spain's camp novels rely on at least two of the strategies Meyer names, what then are the stakes in labeling her work camp? While a critique of Sontag's earlier notion of camp as an undefinable and apolitical sensibility is certainly warranted, it does not follow that increasingly exclusive definitions of camp would promote queer visibility. Definitions of camp need to be able to assimilate circumstantial associations. Since camp epistemology is constituted by the "logic" of language play and association, rather than a discourse of perfect transparency in which all signs have stable referents, it follows that there ought to be something about camp left open to critical interpretation. The insistence on differentiating between homophobic parody and camp is important, all the more so because sometimes even the designation "homophobic" is not transparent, as Murray Healey's case study of British sitcoms has shown. In the much-needed reaction to the erasure of the queer in camp discourse, perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on an exclusive epistemology rather than one of shared communication. A queer literacy approach to camp (not just Spain's) enables this understanding while placing queer subjects, history, and modes of communication and cultural production at center stage.

Besides acknowledging lesbian camp's marginal status in theory -- as an aside, as a defensive assertion, or as an absence -- another way of contextualizing the marginal

position of lesbian camp is by way of the double invisibility of lesbian comedy. Regina Barecca, Eileen Gillooly, Margaret Stetz and others have demonstrated how women's comedy has historically been misunderstood and overlooked by critics and readers and can be read as a strategy of survival. Analogously, Regenia Gagnier has demonstrated how late-nineteenth century middle-class women autobiographers used comedy and humor to negotiate "schools and rules." (She constrasts this to working class women autobiographers, for whom "the rules" had more serious implications.) Similarly, the rhetorical strategies that constitute camp are already marginal, and they are additionally marginal when enacted by queer women. Likewise, it bears emphasizing that as cultural producers and consumers, queer women's participation in print culture has been doubly or multiply contested. The argument that women have deliberately used "low" or marginal registers in order to be overlooked and therefore paradoxically gain an audience or make it into print has interesting implications for Spain. As a queer media personality, Spain made the decision to write comic genre fiction -- a decision that arose out of her marginal position. Writing in a camp register allowed Spain to layer her texts with queer references, include openly homosexual characters who were not one-dimensional, and poke fun at conventions of both homosexual and straight culture. With Spain's example we can examine how she borrows on a tradition of women's critical literacies: their use of humor as part of a sociopolitical critique and strategy.

Spain's camp mystery novels are an important location of her social critique of domestic ideologies, including the sanctity of the family, marriage, heterosexuality, reproduction, and children. However, her critique did not begin and end with hetero-normative domesticity: she also challenged ideologies of class and class domination as

well as other more situational hierarchies. This reading of Nancy Spain is far from universally shared. For example, Alison Hennegan discusses how her longstanding appeal to feminist presses to reprint Spain's work was met with objections to Spain's alleged racism and classism. Both Hennegan and Rose Collis, whose very entertaining and thorough biography of Spain, A Trouser-Wearing Character is a significant study in twentieth-century queer identity, have answered this reaction with subtle readings of the representations of race and class and the use of stereotypes in Spain's work.

Spain's queerly literate use of camp accomplished many other critiques as well. Spain allowed her audience access to a critique of the elite institution of girls' public schools in what Eve Sedgwick calls the "democratizing gesture of camp." This notion of a democratizing camp challenges understandings of popular culture that place more importance on avant-gardist practitioners and an avant-garde audience, and returns the emphasis to the process of a producer forging a relationship to the audience, especially a mass audience. Spain accomplishes this not only with jokes and references but also through her engagement with stereotypes. Spain uses these stereotypes to both mock prejudice and celebrate difference. Rather than asking whether Spain's text are conservative or progressive, a better question to ask would be, *what are the uses of politically polyvalent texts*? In what ways is Nancy Spain's work significant in the context of postwar British pop culture as well as lesbian cultural production? In what ways are the political ambiguities of Spain's work reflective of lesbian cultural production (literary or otherwise), both in the postwar period and before? In what ways is lesbian camp potentially both hegemonic and liberatory? What are some of the effects of this contradiction, and how do readers and cultural producers grapple with it?

In a similar vein, many critics have associated camp with conservatism or internalized homophobia. Others associate the queer comic tradition in general, of which camp can be said to take part, with survivalist queer tactics -- politically regressive in the context of gay liberation. Still others have made the case for the misogyny inherent in both female impersonation and gay male camp. For Morrill and Davy and others, lesbian camp is regarded as suspect because of its origins in gay male culture. These approaches are in response to a tradition of optimism about camp that argue that it promotes queer visibility and takes a non-restrictive approach to the sexual orientation of the camp performer or speaker. This includes the writing of Richard Dyer, Philip Core, Caryl Flinn, Murray Healey, Robert Kiernan, and others. Kiernan writes,

> What camp has historically afforded its audiences -- its artists, too -- is an alternative to the morally correct laughter of satire, parody, and other shame-begetting forms of humor (16).

Following Richard Dyer's remarkable observation that stereotypes are not always repressive and sometimes function to resist bourgeois individualism, Murray Healy contests the "largely disputed assumption that all queer characters in popular comedy of the 1960s and 1970s functioned solely as figures of heterosexist containment." He asks: "If such comedy is so homophobically oppressive, why is it so successfully camp?" (242, 243)

In the case of Morrill's skepticism about the possibilities of lesbian camp given its gay male origins, if Spain's lesbian camp derives from gay male cultural practice, it is all the more appropriate in the context of her (often celebrated) friendships with gay men, her introduction of gay male characters in fiction, and the friendly allegiance between gay

men and lesbians which both her life and work seemed to promote. Further, Spain's borrowing in general is a feature of her writing: as Hennegan pithily observes, Spain was "never too proud to pilfer" (xii). This openness to outside influences mark the work as acts of queer literacy.

There are at least two rather paradoxical qualities to Spain's position and reputation. The first is that, although a renowned "pilfer[er]" and borrower, Spain had a reputation for "originality." The blandness of this adjective does not quite do justice to her work and reader reaction to it. Along with this was her simultaneous insider/outsider position. As a gossip columnist and as a professional personality, Spain was marginal vis-à-vis the literary world. However, she occupied this relatively marginal position at the same time as she orbited around and befriended authors such as Elizabeth Bowen and celebrities such as Marlene Dietrich. Spain had access to the institutions she critiqued. It is this insider/outside position that enabled her, in Newton's sense, "to camp" and thus to launch her social critique so effectively and humorously. New approaches to literacy have been preoccupied with just such negotiations of insider/outsider status.

Critics of camp have been concerned with the relationship of the camp artist to the audience. Sontag and Ross and others have emphasized the consumption of camp objects; Ross describes the production of camp as a kind of consumption in an observation about the recycling and recontextualizing of symbols of a no-longer-powerful Empire; more recently, Matthew Tinkcom has discussed camp as a process of production, both by "the camp" himself (or herself), as well as by the audience, as active epistemological participants. Nancy Spain, similarly, forged a relationship with her audience that bridged real differences in class and gender -- by allying them with her

critical perspective on girls' schools. The girls' school story authors before her had built an alliance between elite and non-elite audiences in their celebration of girls' schools. The difference was that Spain's girls' school camp allowed the audience to view the girls' school queerly: not to celebrate or denigrate but to appreciate the incongruity and theatricality and de-naturalize the school ethos built up by the juvenile fiction. If girls' schools were already locations of queer identity and representation, Spain promoted queer literacies of schooling beyond what any other writer had done up to that point.

**Poison for Teacher**

In Arthur Marshall's 1974 introduction to Spain's novel Minutes to Midnight (original title is Cinderella Goes to the Morgue), he recounted how they were invited by the BBC to reminisce about their school days. Spain had "a head-start on us by having been . . . at the famous Roedean. Nancy's descriptions of what she had endured at school in 1931 held us spellbound" (7). Poison for Teacher, with its fictionalized Roedean setting, is a continuation of the (based-on-Hermione-Gingold character) Birdseye book, Death Goes on Skis.

Poison for Teacher actively engages camp schoolgirl tradition best represented by Louis MacNeice, W.H. Auden, and Lord Berners, whose texts were not meant to be fully understood by the general public but only by a relatively private audience.[2] It also differentiated itself from that tradition considerably. Auden's and MacNeice's book, Letters from Iceland, is an account of real travels with Cambridge companions in which they are all represented as schoolgirls (and schoolmistresses); in this, the hilarity arises from episodes involving tent camping and other outdoor activities -- the joke being that the British schoolgirl was outdoorsy and athletic to a dangerous degree, in contrast to

effete schoolboys. Lord Berners's privately published The Girls of Radcliff Hall was also a "feminized" account of real events and relationships of schoolmates and masters at Eton, in which he manages to sustain a drippingly ironic faux-naïve tone throughout. The novel required a key for even its intended private audience: the recent Asphodel edition uses Cyril Connolly's personal "crib notes" written in his copy, approved by Berners himself, in order to render the jokes more available to the reading public. The key revealed the real-life (male) counterparts to the cast of (female) characters. While Berners, Auden, MacNeice, and Connolly's texts are important examples of queer literacy, they are more focused on in-group literacy than that of outsiders.

Unlike those men's texts, Spain's school mystery Poison for Teacher serves a more democratic, even pedagogical, function. It promotes queer literacy as a shared practice across insider and outsider groups, whether that's defined by sexual orientation, gender, or class. Encouraging all readers to join in the fun of camping up elite institutions, and doing so in a way which "conspires with" her audience and teaches them how to laugh at things they may not ordinarily have a standpoint from which to consider critically, represents a significant departure from earlier schoolgirl parody's inwardly focused -- not to say elitist -- heritage.[3]

Girls' school fiction and comic mystery novels are two genres that share many features. They tend to be intertextual, metatextual, and self-conscious. Both forms sometimes work to include outside audiences who are not familiar with their tropes or references. Both have examples of decadent or late forms of the genres which parody an earlier tradition. Additionally, Poison's intertextual references places it within a lesbian

literary tradition (Castle). Much of the intertextuality consists of passing jokes rather than long sustained references.

However, as usual, Spain's queer literate acts reach beyond the in-joke. There is a reflexiveness about fiction-writing and the gender politics of genre which runs through the novel as well as the rest of Spain's novels, and this is usually coincident with a humorous reflexiveness about gender. Of central importance is the fictional professional mystery novelist, Peter Bracewood-Smith, whose daughter attends "Radcliff Hall." He is a prime suspect for murder, directs the school play, and also secretly writes girls' school stories. His writing occupation is called up as an explanation for his unseemly appearance and behavior: he is unkempt, drinks too much, runs into debt and is a misanthrope. Throughout the book, references are made to the depravity of fiction-writing.

The incongruity -- of the manly author writing girls' school stories covertly -- cuts both ways, as usual in Spain's novels. The girls themselves, not innocent as expected, form incisive criticism of his mystery fiction, which along with Dorothy Sayers they find more interesting than the school stories that they are encouraged to read. For Bracewood-Smith, it is the writing of "innocent" school stories which he must hide in order to guard his more "respectable" position as a bestselling mystery novelist.

Since girls' school story-writing is supposed to be "a woman's job" (and often a spinster's job at that), performing this job brings about a crisis of masculinity for Bracewood-Smith, especially since it is his relative economic failure (despite prolific output) at his chief enterprise of mystery-authorship which requires him to write "in drag" in the first place. A better-guarded secret than his alcoholism, because more

shameful to him, is his pseudonymous authorship of all kinds of feminine reading material under pseudonyms such as "Mavis Chare": girls' school stories, romances, and stories for the women's magazines.

The covert way in which he authors these stories mirrors his semi-covert drinking: both are a vice. For hostile critics, the shame of school story authorship was both its femininity and its formulism. As Rosemary Auchmuty has shown, girls' school stories (but not boys') were ridiculed and repressed by critics and librarians -- to the extent that she holds them chiefly responsible for the genre's near-disappearance by the 1940s. And while mystery novels as a genre have never been immune to the complaint of formulism, they've never been convincingly dismissed in toto.

For many of Nancy Spain's characters, the performance of gender is both an ontology and a profession. This is the case for author Peter Bracewood-Smith as much as it is for the revue actress Miriam; her sidekick, ballerina Natasha; Roger the costume designer and music instructor with whom "young girls are perfectly safe"; even Inspector Tomkins. There are parallels between these characters: all of them entertain the public for a living: writer, teacher and inspector as well as actress and dancer. Part of Bracewood Smith's job as detective novelist is to perform a kind of masculinity -- butch authorship -- particularly for the all-female audiences who turn out for his lectures.

The comic exploration of the gendered politics of authorship and reading practices is part of Spain's larger queer literacy project in the novels: the positing of a performative, non-essential ontology of gender. The chief intertext of Poison is J. M. Barrie's 1902 play Quality Street, which deals with the theme of unmarried ladies driven

by economic circumstances into the teaching profession. The play opens with a Cranfordesque scene in which a lady reads a romance novel aloud to a knitting circle:

> Suddenly out of the darkness there emerged a *Man*.
>
> (*She says the last word tremulously but without looking up. The listeners knit more quickly*) (5, emphasis in original).

Like Spain's humor, Barrie's also relies on incongruity: the Victorian symbol of asexuality, the spinster, exciting herself with a racy novel that the audience ironically perceives as not-racy. Spain carries the play on gender stereotypes further and playfully engages with a performative ontology with her use of the 1902 text.

Set during the Napoleonic wars, Barrie's play is about two genteel ladies, Phoebe and Susan Throssel who, thrown into poverty and desperately disappointed in Phoebe's not receiving a marriage proposal from Valentine Brown, open a school in their home -- an occupation for which they are both ill-suited. Ten years later, Valentine Brown returns from war to find that years of toil have taken the bloom off of Miss Phoebe. To test his loyalty, Phoebe attempts to trick him by pretending to be her younger and prettier niece. Neither fooled nor offended by this act, Valentine declares his love and proposes to her after all, intoning that "'ladylikeness' . . . is a woman's most beautiful garment, and the casket which contains all the adorable qualities that go to the making of a perfect female" (105). It would be wrong to say Barrie is mocking Valentine's sentimentality.[4] However, Barrie makes great comic use of the ideology of ladylikeness. The humor arises when the "manly men" invade the female world of the drawing room: "Seargent, have you killed people?" Phoebe asks as she brushes the mud from her carpet that the recruiting officer has unwittingly left there. "Dozens, ma'am, dozens." The Throssel

sisters' attempt to exercise discipline over their charges fails, as their ladylikeness makes them unintimidating to the young men in their charge:

> PHOEBE. Say you are sorry, Arthur, and I won't punish you.
>
> (He bursts into tears.)
>
> ARTHUR. You promised to cane me, and now you are not going to do it.
>
> PHOEBE (incredulous) Do you wish to be caned?
>
> ARTHUR. (holding out his hand eagerly). If you please, Miss Phoebe (40).[5]

There is something both serious and comic in Barrie's comparison of the women's bravery in their scholastic battles with that of men fighting the war. Valentine Brown's gallant remark "How much more brave [than soldiers] are the ladies who keep a school" recalls the gravity with which the economic struggles of single women were treated, as in Gissing's The Odd Women, published ten years earlier. In Barrie's text, the schoolteacher is fundamentally the object of pathos. In Spain's text, the camp humor undercuts any residual pathos of the teacher's plight. Rather than "making fun" of teachers, Spain's camp rendered their situation absurd: mandatorily single, infantilized by the headmistress and by the expectation of total commitment to the school's rituals. Compared to the early-nineteenth-century setting of Barrie's play and the date of its publication (1902), by the mid-twentieth century, thanks to women teachers' struggles for pay parity with men, and the relative availability of other career paths so that teaching was no longer a default profession, the condition of the schoolmistress circa 1949 was not that bad.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of the non-teaching characters in the novel, the teaching life seemed "tragic," not literally but in a camp register of exaggeration. Of the

plight of the governess, Natasha observes in the first Birdseye novel, "It must be so awfully sad to be looking after children. It must be hell" (111). In Poison, when questioned as a murder suspect, author Peter Bracewood-Smith says, "Why should I *not* take the life of these unhappy school-teachers? . . . Mercifully to release them from their thralldom in this vile place" (266). This "tragic" life is treated in both a comic and a serious fashion.

Spain achieves this queerly literate camp perspective by way of the detective fiction genre, whose conventions -- especially its stylized representations of violence -- serve as her grammar. The obvious violence represented by a poisoned corpse, for example, allows for the exposure of the more covert and banal violence at work in the institution: social ostracism, bad working conditions, and social discipline, to which not just students but also teachers are subject. Miriam speculates that "Miss Lipscoomb was possibly killing off all the members of her staff so as not to pay their salaries"; Natasha "pointed out what bad economics that would be in the long run." Unscrupulous and underhanded headmistresses are prevalent in fiction about girls' schools[6]; as women who wielded authority, they were an easy target. A related trope was that of students and teachers at war. At "Radcliffe Hall," this is brought home with the "bestial" game of "Bally Netball" that pits women against girls. Headmistress Lipscoomb "pranced, flinging whole squads of prefects and leading girls to the ground. One of two of the younger ones were already severely bruised. . . . No one seemed to think it odd that the head mistress had gone berserk" (210).[7] The murders at Radcliffe Hall are not really more shocking than these everyday activities.

An important element of the novel's promotion of queer literacy is its interrogation of dominant constructions of childhood -- of "child-loving," to borrow Kincaid's phrase. The children are no less "bestial" than the warlike headmistress, especially at mealtime, where they eat with a "snarling and worrying sound" and show "flashing eyes and slavering lips." One of the most remarkable aspects of this novel (and her others) and one vector of its critique of domestic ideology is the humor arising from the depiction of children as anything but sweet and lovable. "I should charge double if that girl is in our classes," Miriam says when she meets Julia Bracewood-Smith, who has "a harsh adult laugh" and "a peculiarly adult sneer" (13, 15). Recognizing Birdseye instantly because she has seen all of her reviews, the schoolgirls exclaims, "If the Ivy could see you now!" (198) Once again, Spain employs the humor of incongruity. Overturning myths of childhood innocence and genre conventions, Miriam reminds Inspector Tomkins that "lots of children are homicidal" and should not be ruled out as suspects (40). While at first glance these "nasty" depictions may seem anti-child, Spain's withering critique of the myths of child-loving have potentially liberatory effects for children as well as those who care for them. Spain's critique of childhood myths is bound up with her critique of myths about sexuality and gender roles and is a key feature of her queer-literate acts.

The myths of childhood innocence and girlish femininity are interrelated with constructions of essential womanliness as well as assumptions of compulsory heterosexuality: a good example of this is the ideology of vocational motherhood. In the fictional worlds Spain creates, for example, motherhood is more often than not women's undoing. Rejecting an essentialist view of gender, the novels posit a performative

ontology instead. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the Birdseye/Gingold character. Tall, flamboyantly dressed, sexually attractive but not "beautiful," Birdseye is an icon of artifice and androgyny. She signifies femininity through carefully studied theatrical gestures and clothing. Readers have commented that the character seems like a man in drag; she is referred to in the last novel as a "hermaphrodite." Her mode of communication is a parody of femininity in its reliance on verbal and gestural emphasis to convey meaning.

Whether or not Hermione Gingold's role as Miriam Birdseye had any influence on Gingold's camp iconicity is hard to say; however, one publicity stunt a couple of years after her first appearance as Miriam Birdseye is an early indication of that possibility. She stood in the window of Foyle's bookstore in full schoolgirl costume -- a middle-aged woman by this time -- in a launch of Ronald Searle's and D.B. Wyndham Lewis's The Terror of St. Trinian's. Another much later anecdote about how others have used Gingold's camp image comes from Mother Camp, in which a performer does "an impression of Hermione Gingold, as she might address a graduating class . . . . He sings a pseudomoralistic song about the evils of dope, called 'Please, Stay off the Grass'" (92-93). The humor here as in much of the novels, again, is that of incongruity.

Birdseye's performative approach to gender and identity is literalized in her actorly approach to her profession of detective: at Radcliff Hall she must go undercover as an elocution teacher. The quintessential professional, she is in full control of her image and stays up all night preparing for her first elocution class:

> She had roughed out an astonishing little lecture . . . thought out gestures to accompany it, and . . . dressed the part . . . . in a splendid make-up that epitomized (Miriam thought) Enunciation and Controlled Breathing (43).

Alas, the students prove a tough crowd. In Vested Interests, Marjorie Garber discusses the hermeneutics of cross-dressing in detective fiction. It is interesting to consider the way Spain's narratives obviate detective fiction's revelatory moment which depends on an essentialist ontology. Birdseye *works as a woman* -- that is, as a kind of female female impersonator (sic). Her transformation is achieved not by cross-dressing. Rather, her teacher disguise reveals the performative nature of that role as akin to her own role as an actress. This performative reading is grounded in an awareness of the material conditions of teaching. Birdseye demonstrates a performative ontology of gender by equating it with her professional performances of acting and teaching. In this way, Birdseye fits Pamela Robertson's evocative description of feminist camp as "a sensibility that is particularly attuned to historically determined attitudes toward women and work" and "a working woman's strategy" (58).

The teaching act calls for a costume designed to make Miriam look as dowdy as possible (shapeless tweeds with ill-fitting cardigans instead of her chic overstated suits and furs). The notion of teaching as a transformation in which the female subject becomes dowdy is echoed in Quality Street's Phoebe Throssel (the character who loses her bloom as a result of the labor of teaching). Birdseye longs to play Phoebe, but the role belongs to Radcliff Hall's French teacher, who recounts the her own career's catalyst, a loss of youthful looks as a result of work: "I sat in a draught, and *then* I took my degree

because my face had gone all frozen and I was *useless* for frivolity and I became a teacher" (22).

By the end of the novel, the school play in the "not even fourth-rate provinces" has transformed itself -- thanks to the "outing" of Birdseye's identity -- into a theatrical event of grand proportions, complete with swarming reporters. Birdseye takes her elocution lesson and works it up into a monologue that packs West End theaters for many years. Birdseye's "public" is a kind of projection of Spain's own desire for an audience. As her three autobiographies attest, Spain was not innocent of self-promotion. Rose Collis quotes Tony Warren on this subject:

> With the books, she was trying to build a public -- a sophisticated public, ideally. She was trying to pinch Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford's public, in their more jolly moments (173).

This is a stark contrast to the audience of insiders imagined by the elite authors of schoolgirl farces like Auden, MacNeice, and Berners. (Byrne speculates that Berners did not even print one hundred copies of his novel, of which he located four extant copies in the 1990s.) The idea of building a popular audience base in writing about elite institutions (the other novels concern themselves with art school, filmmaking, cruises) is parallel to the girls' school novel genre, which often represented elite girls' schooling but whose audiences and writers were not for the most part products of such schools. Girls' school fiction may have often represented elite forms of girls' schooling; however, it engaged audiences in the broader concerns of feminism and girls' education (both elite and non-elite).

By using the allusive and associative conventions of camp, Spain worked to make her audience feel in the know -- even if they weren't. Specifically, she combined popular with obscure cultural references to homosexual authors or other figures, works in which gender plays a central part and other examples of either mystery novels or girls' school fiction. As he directs the play, Peter Bracewood-Smith hums "The Girl that I Marry," a humorously insipid song about the virtues of femininity ("Her nails will be polished"). Reference is made to Cyril Connolly, who figures prominently in drag in Lord Berners's The Girls of Radcliff Hall. Rather than producing a feeling of ignorance, or rather than the non-queer audience simply missing the jokes, I would venture that this made it possible for audiences to feel in the know even if they weren't always. Spain places a queer camp sensibility at the center; outsiders are encouraged to turn into insiders. If it is true, as Davy and Morrill have suggested, that lesbian camp is a register which borrows from homosexual male culture rather than affirming a separate lesbian identity, then perhaps lesbian camp also encourages a breaking down of barriers amongst its audience. Rather than shoring up a separate queer audience, it lets everyone in on the joke. Thus camp is a mode of queer literacy that recruits outsiders' participation.

Spain's democratic ethos, related to what people call her iconoclasm, was not popular with all of her critics, friends, and family.[8] Rose Collis shows how Spain pushed at the bounds of bourgeois rules of discretion in her journalism, especially her gossip column.[9] Her masculine dress challenged codes of decorum even for a London newspaperwoman. Her self-started career as a professional celebrity and multi-media journalist was a bit ahead of its time. For all of these reasons, Spain was herself -- like her fictional detective novelist Bracewood-Smith -- accused of bad taste.

The association of camp with "bad taste"--sometimes as an example of it and sometimes as a reappropriation or re-consumption of what is traditionally defined as bad taste -- is widespread in the commentary on camp. Too often, the category "taste" goes unquestioned, as if it were free of any ideological weight or class significance. It is certain that "taste" is a morally charged category, so that moral and sexual "deviancy" is frequently defined as "bad taste." For example, with regards to the dubiousness of the label "lesbian chic," Martha Gever writes, "Having been accustomed to the idea that lesbianism is inherently unfashionable and always in bad taste, it is easy to strike a cynical pose when told that we are suddenly in vogue" (25). Taste is one of the institutions Spain takes aim at, along with elite schooling and other modes of cultural production and consumption. Spain's interrogation of the tyrrany of good taste took many forms. Miriam Birdseye's camp role consists largely of her capacity to be an aesthetic-moral judge. She comments on the bad taste of others and redefines conventional notions of taste throughout the novels. She even communicates about it in shorthand, as in, "if she really *is* dead, I don't think it's in the best of T for us to stand around in groups *arguing* about it" (60).

It is instructive to witness readers' anger at Spain's alleged violations of taste, decorum, and sexual morality. In a survey of female detective characters, one critic writes about the Miriam Birdseye character that she is "limited and traditional" and accuses her of perpetuating "misogynistic stereotypes" (Klein 126). Like some of Spain's contemporaries (although perhaps for different reasons), she is dissatisfied:

> The reader waits in vain for Miriam to solve the case. Perhaps this expectation is too much to demand of someone who accepts a case by stating . . . "Isn't this fun?" (Voyage)[10]

Readers who insist on serious detectives will surely be put off by Miriam who "quite often find[s] things out by *mistake*" (Voyage 69, emphasis in original). Birdseye's detection successes are a result of people confiding in her irrationally -- signifying a traditionally feminine attribute of a passivity that inspires confidence. Birdseye's social attractiveness gains her entrée to social circles; she circulates between people and gathers evidence in passing, as a result of sociability. Neither Miriam Birdseye nor female detective characters in general have a monopoly the unmethodical detection practice of "find[ing] things out by mistake": as Keating writes, in the British tradition, many detective characters tend toward the amateurish. Much of the humor and hence the meaning of the text, he shows, is found in the dilatory and irrelevant activities and word play which take up narrative space: readers eager for ratiocination will indeed wait in vain.

Spain knew all about people's disapproval with breaking the detective plotting rules. She writes with tongue in cheek about her early novel-writing days:

> Looking back, I am sure all my misfortunes at that time arose from having been black-balled from the Detection Club.
>
> This splendid body of men and women meet once a year to praise each other in a vault near Westminster. They carry skulls about on cushions, they light candles and they intone a terrible oath which conjures the members on pain of diminishing sales and returns to stick to the rules of clues and foot-prints. [One] . .

> . member of the actual Committee of the Detection Club, delights in teasing me about this, calling me . . . 'Little Nothing Sacred.' (Millionaire 123)

Spain was unafraid to overturn gender, generic, and other quasi-sacred conventions.

Besides trampling on the codes of serious detective fiction, another act of queer critical literacy was Spain's representation of lesbianism in a comic register -- a comedy that was not satiric or parodic or otherwise "shame-begetting," to use Kiernan's phrase -- but camp. Spain's continual reference to the author of The Well of Loneliness in Poison was a way of connecting herself to a lesbian literary heritage but also distancing herself from Hall's tragic ethos. That Well was treated as a morally sacred text (for sympathetic audiences -- profane for homophobic ones, and thus equally important) is evidenced in a Wildean remark found in a letter from Carl Van Vechten to Gertrude Stein that he found Hall's novel "even funnier" than Berners's The Girls of Radcliffe Hall (Byrne 98). VanVechten's comment might point to an iconoclastic reading of Well as an outdated piece of sanctimoniousness which an emergent homophile movement would render obsolete. For Nancy Spain's part, her references were as much an homage as anything else: headmistress Lipscoomb looks "just like Stephen Gordon," as does Toddy Flaherty, the drinking, gambling, Eton-cropped girl in the first Birdseye book.

A brief comparison of representations of class in Hall's and Spain's novels may give a better understanding of their relationship to one another. Unlike Stephen Gordon's family's timeless estate, the buildings Miss Lipscoomb inherits from her brother are nearly crumbling, and their mortgage depends on the income from fee-paying students. Like the headmistress in The Belles of St. Trinian's, where all the trophies are in hock because of debt, Lipscoomb's hold on Radcliff Hall is tenuous. In contrast to Hall's tragic

ethos of the social isolation of a member of the landed classes, Spain creates a comic ethos of relative economic poverty. In all of her novels, itinerant professionals take center stage, literally and figuratively. The performative ontology the books posit is tied to a show-must-go-on, workingwoman's ethos that Spain exuded in her published writing. In her work, the relative poverty of girls' education and the struggles of unmarried schoolteachers is so tragic, it's funny.

Spain's work raises the question, what do we do with representations of race, class, gender and sexuality in the comic register? Radclyffe Hall's Well of Loneliness, published in 1928, relies on contemporary notions of sexual types and is full of eugenically-inspired references to the biological superiority of the landowning classes. In Spain's novels, landowning characters appear in the novels rarely. These are usually objects of fun, as evident in the names of Timothy and Percy Shelley in Cinderella Goes to the Morgue. While Radclyffe Hall evoked many of the views of racial superiority held by her class, Spain by contrast encouraged readers to mock the prejudices and snobbery of some of her characters. Not Wanted on Voyage, the last of the Birdseye mysteries, is an artful exploration of the implications of social artifice, with a hilarious literary scandal at the center of the plot. The other novels, particularly Cinderella, similarly explore the consequences of snobbery and pretence.

In contrast to the tradition of girls' school stories, which tended to celebrate the school ethos while centering on girl subjectivity, most adult school novels belonged to a critical tradition authored by ex-pupils, who continued to identify with student subjectivity and represent them as subject to (if not victims of) of a corrupt system -- a system that teachers were responsible for perpetuating. In contrast to both of these

traditions, Spain's camp of the girls' school centers on teachers and represents them as subject to the same arbitrary hierarchical system to which the girls are subject. Spain's camp is a materialist critique that exposes the economic underside of the school machinery. The novel suggests that the institution's existence is dependent upon the fee-paying parents' need to be convinced of the school's authentically upper middle class ethos. (The reason Lipscoomb acts so quickly in response to the school mischief is the risk of losing students to worried parents who will whisk them away on the first train.) As Gillian Avery points out, girls' public schools invented instant traditions in order to ape the relative ancientness of the boys' school originals; Roedean's crest and motto, invented in the late nineteenth-century, are no exception.[11] Spain seems to suggest that not only are the signifiers of an ancient, noble tradition a sham, but that the desire for those upper-middle-class signifiers is itself empty and unworthy. If girls' school stories were the "making of schoolgirls," in the sense of the construction of schoolgirl subjectivities,[12] Spain's camp performances were an unmaking -- and unmasking.

It would seem that Spain's lesbian-camp-as-queer-literacy had much more of an impact on British culture in general than these readings of her novels can begin to address. A study of Spain's camp sensibility that rendered class snobbery and xenophobia ridiculous might further a discussion of the politics of women's camp. A consideration of the contradiction between Spain's officially closeted status and her role as the most visible lesbian of the 1950s might provide a fruitful discussion of queer literacy and the politics queer visibility before the gay liberation movement. Considering Spain's voracious reappropriation of mainstream popular culture alongside her references to more obscure lesbian and gay texts might provide for a nuanced discussion of the

relationship between popular and elite culture in literate acts of camp. Thinking about whether Spain's camp of girls' schools is subversive might contribute to broader sociopolitical implications of queer literacy as potentially a class critique. Spain's camp constructions of femininity might bridge gaps between different theories of subjectivity in feminist and queer theories and redescribe those as literacy projects. An examination of Spain's heterosexual male characters, who tend to be either hypermasculine or effete, might promote queer literacy about midcentury constructions of masculinity, what relationship they have to camp, and what relationship there is to be recovered between heterosexual men and camp. Spain's autobiographical and fictional representation of friendships -- with gay men, straight men, lesbians, and straight women -- might teach us something about lesbian culture's relationality across genders and sexual orientations, and in turn lesbian camp's imbeddedness in the culture. At stake might be the perils and benefits of LGBQT histories and readings that emphasize acts of queer literacy, including connections with and relationality to heterosexual mainstream culture rather than separateness.

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[1] Ronald Searle's series of cartoons and eventually books and films dated from the publication of the first cartoon in 1941 to a Best of the Drawings edition introduced by Searle in 1992 and live on in British TV reruns of the films.

[2] Jan Montefiore discusses these texts in relation to other send-ups of the girls' school story, including female-authored texts like the 1980's play Daisy Pulls It Off, in her psychoanalytically-informed reading.

[3] I am borrowing the phrase from Bargainnier's observation that parodic detective fiction conspires with its audience, which is indebted to a Todorovian and Bakhtinian reading of the genre.

[4] For an interesting discussion of Barrie's endorsement of sentimentality which follows on Eve Sedgwick's very brief reading of Barrie in Epistemology of the Closet, see Andrew Nash's "'Trying to Be a Man': J.M. Barrie and Sentimental Masculinity."

[5] This comedy of unruliness or the failure of discipline is revisited elsewhere, as in Searle's The Terror of St. Trinian's, in which a teacher says of an unruly pupil, "Punished? Oh, yes. Certainly. Give her fifty lines, if she has no objection."

[6] See for example George Orwell's exploitative, conniving, and snobbish Miss Creevy; A.S. Byatt's Miss Crichton-Walker, who wickedly undermines a talented scholarship girl's confidence; Miss Jean Brodie's boss who "pumps" the students for the dirt on their favorite teacher in order to fire her; Angela Lambert's based-on-real-life Hon. Mrs. Henrietta Birmingham, who torments the working-class lesbian teacher and drives her to suicide; ex-headmistress Rosemary Manning's domineering and intimidating "Chief."

[7] Like many peculiarities in the book, this one was inspired by Spain's experience: not at Roedean but at a girls' day school she attended before that.

[8] See Collis's biography for several examples.

[9] On the one hand, the liberties she took in writing about her subjects resemble the chattiness of the memoirs of privileged women and aristocrats, giving off an ethos of informality and ownership. On the other hand, the emergence of gossip as a form of journalism, concerning the current activities of living persons circulated in the mass media (rather than memoirs of long-past antics circulated to a coterie audience), appealed to the widest audience rather than trying to flatter an elite one.

[10] Birdseye's characteristic expression belongs to a whole subgenre of detective fiction labeled "Whatfunity" (Bander).

[11] Boys' public schools are not immune from critique, just because they might be older and therefore more "authentic." See the Birdseye novel R in the Month, in which the provincial clerk envies a family's ability to send all their sons to Rugby; one son returns home fatally starved, another one violent and dissolute.

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