THE INTIMACY WHICH IS KNOWLEDGE:

FEMALE FRIENDSHIP IN THE NOVELS OF WOMEN WRITERS

GILLIAN FRITH

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, University of Warwick

December, 1988
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1. THE SECOND SELF: FEMALE FRIENDSHIP AND VICTORIAN DOMESTIC IDEOLOGY</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The Circle of Sisterhood</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. From Sentiment to Education: The Eighteenth-Century Background</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Twin Souls: Friendship in Victorian Conduct Manuals</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. 'The Signs of Things Signified': Life and Letters</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2. HALF SISTERS: THE MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. The Exchange Between Women</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Defining Difference: Mirrors, Letters and Mothers</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Corinne's Daughters: Half-Sisters and Foreign Friends</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3. THE LIMITS OF VARIATION: ELIZABETH GASKELL, GEORGE ELIOT AND CHARLOTTE BRONTÉ</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. From Margaret to Maggie: Gaskell and Eliot</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Shared Tastes: Jane Eyre</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Fellow-Slaves: Shirley</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. Eliza Lynn Linton: The 'Unwomanly Woman'...... 187
II. Feminism and Heroism.................................. 201
III. Behind High Walls: The School Story for Girls.............................................. 212
IV. 'Girton Girls' and 'Wild Women' in the 1890s.. 227

CHAPTER 5. THE STRANGE BRIGHT FRUITS:
FRIENDSHIP, KNOWLEDGE AND THE EROTIC
IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY NOVEL......................... 227
I. The Significant Anomaly:
   The Well of Loneliness.................................. 252
II. The Mother and the Other:
   Regiment of Women...................................... 278
III. Schools of Desire:
   Novels of the Gynaeceum................................ 304

CHAPTER 6. THE BACKWARD SEARCH:
THE CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST NOVEL....................... 337
I. Making History:
   The Contemporary Women's Movement..................... 337
II. Friendship as Rebirth:
   Female Friends and The Visitation....................... 347
III. Art and Friendship:
   The Quest for the Lost Precursor......................... 361

CONCLUSION............................................. 378
NOTES............................................... 381
BIBLIOGRAPHY.......................................... 406
ACNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to this thesis, with suggestions for reading, pertinent questions, and information. I am particularly indebted to the Coventry and Leamington Women's Reading Group, who listened to many of these ideas in their early stages, to Simon Clarke for indispensable help with the word processor, and to Paulina Palmer, who generously allowed me access to unpublished material. I would especially like to thank three people, whose various and complementary forms of support have been invaluable during the writing of this thesis: Terry Lovell, Simon Frith and my supervisor, John Goode. For their unfailing encouragement and advice, I am deeply grateful.

DECLARATION

Short portions of Chapters 3, 4 and 6 draw on material used in a thesis submitted in partial requirement for the degree of M.A. in English Literature (Warwick University, awarded July 1986) and in my article, 'The Time of Your Life: The Meaning of the School Story' (pp.113-136 in Language, Gender and Childhood, edited by C. Steedman, C. Urwin and V. Walkerdine, 1985). This material, which has been substantially revised and appears here in the context of a very different argument, comprises approximately thirty pages of the text which follows.
SUMMARY

The thesis offers a historical account of the representation of friendship in the novels of English women writers from the nineteenth century to the present. Questioning the prevalent understanding of the history of women's friendship in terms of a single major rupture, from nineteenth-century 'innocence' to twentieth-century 'guilt', the thesis identifies narrative configurations which recur throughout this period, and which define friendship as a formative learning experience integrally related to the acquisition of gendered identity. It concludes that there can be no final and 'perfect' representation of friendship, since the nature of the 'knowledge' shared has continually shifted in relation to changing understandings of femininity.

Chapter 1 identifies the origins and nature of the Victorian concept of the 'second self', in which the friend acts as the mirror of, and means of access to, an idealised female subjectivity. Chapter 2 analyses the ways in which this concept informs the narrative patterns and rituals in Victorian fictions of friendship. Chapter 3 offers a new reading of novels by Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, in which the conventions identified in Chapter 2 are adapted to question the existing boundaries of feminine identity. Chapter 4 examines the impact of changes in women's education upon the representation of friendship in turn-of-the-century feminist and anti-feminist novels, and in a new genre, the school story for girls. Chapter 5 shows that the scientific construct of lesbianism produced a new distinction between the 'healthy' and the 'unhealthy' relationship, but that the terms of this distinction were contested; in twentieth-century novels of the 'gynaeceum', the tradition continues, but is newly eroticised. Chapter 6 looks at friendship as 'revision' in recent English and American novels, in which earlier configurations are redeployed in the light of contemporary feminist concern to recuperate and re-imagine the past.
INTRODUCTION

Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs Ramsay's knee.

(Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse) 1

This thesis offers a history of the way in which English women writers in the past century and a half have written about women's friendships. My interest in this project was triggered by a paragraph in Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, in which Woolf comments on the absence of female friendship in literature:

All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends. There is an attempt at it in Diana of the Crossways. They are confidantes, of course, in Racine and the Greek tragedies. They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men. 2

Armed at the time with little more than a vague memory of Charlotte Brontë's Shirley, I set out on an extended quest to find out whether Woolf was right. My decision to focus exclusively upon women writers was made initially in the context of contemporary feminist concern to recover a lost tradition, by re-reading the novels by women which have found their way into the literary canon, and rediscovering texts which have long been forgotten. It was, then, a double quest for the 'lost' female friend: I wanted to know what women writers had said about women's friendship. There is
some empirical justification for distinguishing between male and female writers: women's friendship is, after all, a relationship from which men are excluded. On the other hand, some feminist critics, notably Nina Auerbach, Janet Todd and Janice Swanson, have fruitfully considered representations of women's friendship by male writers alongside fictions by women. In the course of my research, however, a further reason emerged for confining my focus to women writers. It became clear that the model of female friendship which has dominated women's fiction since the Victorian period has been one which offered women exceptional opportunities for exploring and questioning the boundaries of 'feminine' identity.

While the thesis covers a wide range of novels, it does not attempt to be comprehensive. I have focussed on what I found to be the dominant strand: the 'learning' friendship, the intimacy which offers access to a new 'knowledge'. The interconnection between friendship and knowledge appears at its most transparent in the many novels which, often set in all-female educational institutions, focus on a relationship between fellow-students or between teacher and pupil; here, as in other novels, the friends are drawn together by a desire for learning, a passion for poetry. But throughout the period I shall be considering, certain patterns and configurations recur, which define friendship as a 'learning' experience in a different way: as a process integrally related to the acquisition
of gendered identity. In most of the novels I shall be looking at, one or both of the friends is at the transitional point between girlhood and womanhood; the intimacy acts as an awakening, as a means of access to feminine identity, but it also serves, in many novels, as a base for testing out new possibilities, for working towards a revised 'knowledge' of what it means to be a woman. The patterns and devices which recur in women's fictions about friendship have their roots in the Victorian understanding of the 'second self', which I discuss in my first chapter. But their meaning is not constant, and my primary purpose in this thesis is to trace the ways in which the 'knowledge' offered by friendship has shifted in relation to changing ideas about education, sexuality and feminine identity.

In my quest for the lost female friend, I have not been alone. In the past decade, there have been a number of studies by feminist critics and historians which address, in whole or in part, the question of female bonding. My task has been greatly eased by their research; I have followed, as Charlotte Brontë puts it in Jane Eyre, 'in the path of knowledge they had trodden before me'. At the same time, I have not always agreed with the conclusions they have drawn, and in this introduction I want to outline the ways in which this study diverges from previously-trodden paths.

The thesis represents a new venture simply in its scope and the material it covers: many of the novels I shall be looking at have been little discussed, or not
discussed at all, within contemporary criticism. There is no comparable history of women's writing about friendship. Lesbian studies, like Jeannette Foster's pioneering *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (1956) and Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981), have been invaluable in charting the history of representations of lesbianism, but many of the novels they discuss are by men. Feminist historians have often drawn on women's novels as source-material, reading the novels as autobiography and as indicators of ideological shifts. Such readings can be sophisticated and illuminating, as in Martha Vicinus's *Independent Women* (1985) or Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's *Disorderly Conduct* (1985), but my concern is a different one: to recognise the novels as fictions, to identify the ways in which they do not simply reproduce the terms of real-life experience, but transform it.

While Foster and Faderman range impressively across four countries and as many centuries, literary studies have generally focussed on textual analysis of novels produced within specific periods. Janet Todd's *Women's Friendship in Literature* (1980) examines the eighteenth-century novel; Pauline Nestor's *Female Friendships and Communities* (1985) and Tess Cosslett's *Woman to Woman* (1988) both focus on the major women writers of the Victorian period. Nestor concentrates her attention on Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot; Cosslett usefully extends the net to include, also, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora*
Leigh, Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, and novels by Mrs Humphry Ward and Olive Schreiner. In the light of these two recent studies, my decision to include a separate chapter on Brontë, Eliot and Gaskell merits some justification. Nestor's starting-point is biographical; contrasting Gaskell's position within a network of women writers with the relative isolation of Brontë and Eliot, she argues that the differences in their representation of friendship derive from their particular relationships to the female community. Cosslett's book appeared after I had completed my research, and since her approach has more affinities with my own, I should like to discuss the points of convergence and divergence in our work in a little more detail.

The convergence is most evident in our analyses of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, in which we both discuss the part played by Lucy in Maggie's 'coming-out'. Cosslett emphasises, as I do, the importance of the 'exchange' between women in Victorian narratives, in which the 'coming together of two women' figures 'as a necessary stage in the heroine's maturation' and in the negotiation of an acceptable female identity. Yet in the case of the other text which we both consider in detail, Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*, we come to very different conclusions. Cosslett sees this novel as representing a radical break with Victorian convention, offering a unique celebration of a separate female world defined in opposition to the
world of men. My own interpretation of Shirley follows very different lines; I argue that Brontë's novel systematically reproduces the terms of the Victorian understanding of friendship, only, finally, to demonstrate the limitations of that understanding. There are, I think, two reasons why we interpret this novel so differently.

Firstly, I seek to demonstrate that if we place the narratives of major Victorian women writers in relation to the minor or less well-known texts of this period, rather than playing them simply against one another, a new understanding of their significance emerges. We can see that Brontë, Eliot and Gaskell were all drawing on a shared fictional discourse, but that in their more sophisticated narratives, the established conventions are used, in different ways, to question the limits of the existing concept of 'sisterhood'. Secondly, I believe Cosslett's argument to be premised on a misconception of the full significance which friendship held for Victorian women. Cosslett draws on Deborah Gorham's historical study, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal (1982) to argue that female friendship in this period worked as a means of socialising young women into a domestic environment. The picture she offers would seem to confirm Virginia Woolf's comment that women in the novel have generally been seen in relation to men; Cosslett sees the friendships in Victorian novels as facilitating agents, subordinate to the
dominant marital tie, which 'nearly always operate to assimilate one or both of the women into marriage'.

I believe that this argument greatly oversimplifies the picture we find in the Victorian novel, undervaluing the importance of the way in which female subjectivity is formed, not in relation to men, but in relation to the model presented by another woman. Also, Cosslett's analysis separates the question of gender from two issues which are, in the Victorian novel, equally central: the question of class, and the question of nationality. For, if we look at the advice books written by women in the nineteenth century, and at the letters exchanged between Victorian female friends, we find an understanding of female friendship which is both romantic and contradictory. The relationship does not act as a static endorsement of a passive femininity, nor simply as a 'stage' in the movement towards marriage, but as the means of access to a 'higher' form of womanhood. As I show in Chapter One, it is an understanding produced within the spaces of Victorian bourgeois ideology, and it reflects the demands of that ideology: the friend acts as the 'mirror' of an idealised self, and the work of friendship is to produce an 'improved' woman who will make an active contribution to the stability of her nation and class. The first major novel to give full expression to the relationship between friendship, self-improvement and the 'mission' of the bourgeois woman was Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* (1839), and it is, accordingly, with Martineau's novel
that I begin my investigation of friendship in the novel. In the separate female space of Maria's summerhouse, Maria and Margaret are drawn together, like so many later fictional friends, by the shared desire for knowledge and the shared learning of a new and difficult language.

The understanding of the friend as 'mirror' or 'second self' is central to the Victorian novel and continues to inform women's fiction throughout the period covered by this thesis. The persistence of this concept might seem to confirm the model of women's friendship put forward by Elizabeth Abel. Abel draws on Nancy Chodorow's psychoanalytic study of female development, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), which emphasises the importance of women's primary attachment to the mother, and the resultant difficulty of separation and individuation. But whereas Chodorow argues that the adult woman reproduces the maternal bond by transferring it to her own child, Abel suggests that, in a number of recent novels, we can see for the first time the real nature of the bonds between women. In these novels, according to Abel, psychic wholeness is achieved through identification with a female friend. Abel's argument that the psychological underpinnings of women's friendship depend on identification rather than complementarity is questioned by Judith Kegan Gardiner, who reconsiders the novels discussed by Abel to argue that the basic pattern is not one of two equal friends, but of two finely-differentiated women: the one more
valued, free but defeated, the other more stable and conventional. Gardiner also draws on Chodorow, but with a different emphasis: she argues that 'the intense ambivalence between mothers and daughters colors the emotional dynamics of all these relationships between women'.

In fact, the patterns identified by both Abel and Gardiner as characteristic of the late twentieth-century novel appear in many earlier novels by women writers, but I am far from seeing this as evidence of an essential pattern of female bonding. For while the identification with another woman often plays a central part in the heroine's extrication from the mother, it is also important that what the 'mother' signifies is different in different periods; in the course of the 1920s and 1930s, for example, we move from the smothering mother who stifles the life of the mind, to the unfeeling mother who represses the life of the body. The mother acts as the locus of specific constraints upon feminine identity, and I shall be arguing that we need to see the significance of this in historical terms, rather than as a transhistorical drama of the female psyche: in the movement from mother to friend, the heroine moves from the 'old' version of femininity towards the 'new'.

Within the friendship itself, there is in fact a continual interplay between identification and complementarity, although, as Gardiner comments, often 'one woman in each pair is more of a knower; the other
one is to be known', and it is generally the 'knower' who 'seeks the love of the other woman'. There is a suggestive similarity here to the model identified by Jackie Stacey in her illuminating recent analysis of the possibilities for the 'female gaze' offered by the Hollywood film. Stacey questions the way in which psychoanalytic theory situates desire between women as 'masculine', arguing that the rigid binary oppositions between 'masculine' and 'feminine', desire and identification, provide an inadequate basis for analysing the position of the female spectator. She suggests broadening the narrow existing definitions of the erotic to include 'fascination' between women. In a discussion of the relationships between women in two Hollywood films, Stacey argues that they depend upon a fascination which cannot be labelled simply as either identification or erotic desire. While the differences between the women are not eroded, the narrative is propelled by the desire of one woman to solve the riddle of the other's femininity: 'It is a desire to see, to know and to become more like an idealised feminine other'.

This is, precisely, the pattern which we shall find again and again in the novels of women writers. The significance of the 'gaze' is crystallised in what I shall be calling the 'mirror ritual', a pivotal moment in the movement towards feminine identity in which the heroine looks into the glass, often alongside her friend. But the significance of the mirror ritual also
shifts during the period covered by this thesis. In the mid-nineteenth-century novel, it is often a moment of simultaneous identification and separation, defining a difference between 'true' and 'false' femininity. In the late Victorian period, the 'New Woman' gazes into the glass alone, caught in an impossible transitional moment between 'old' and 'new' female identities. In the twentieth century, we find a new version of the mirror ritual. The heroine studies her body in the mirror alone, but sees it through the eyes of her friend; access to female sexuality is achieved through the model, and the gaze, of another woman.

The frequency with which the mirror ritual occurs suggests a correspondence with Lacanian psychoanalysis, in which the 'mirror phase' is a key moment in the movement towards subjectivity. Lacanian theory has been attractive for feminists because it opens up ways of seeing sexual difference as a socially inscribed division, rather than a pre-given entity, and because while it sees the acceptance of gendered identity as a necessary prerequisite for taking up a position within the social and symbolic order, it also emphasises that that position is a precarious and contradictory one. Since my concern here is with the implications of the Lacanian model for a feminist analysis, I shall be drawing on the ways in which it has been interpreted by feminist theorists, rather than on Jacques Lacan's own notoriously impenetrable writings.

In the 'mirror phase', as neatly summarised by Cora
Kaplan, the child misrecognises its own mirror image as 'an ideal whole - a counterpart, an Other, of the fragmented feeling being'. This perception of the image in the mirror as both self and other, as the same and different is the basis for the acquisition of subjectivity, but it is, Juliet Mitchell emphasises, inevitably a split subjectivity:

Lacan's human subject is not a 'divided self'... that in a different society could be made whole, but a self which is only actually and necessarily created within a split - a being that can only conceptualise itself when it is mirrored back to itself from the position of another's desire.

The mirror ritual in women's fiction likewise involves an interplay between self and other, wholeness and separation, and the conceptualisation of the self through the mirror of another's gaze. There are, however, certain crucial ways in which the mirror ritual differs from the Lacanian model. Whereas Lacan's mirror phase happens in infancy, the mirror ritual occurs much later, at the point of entry into adult femininity. It thus fuses two phases which, in the Lacanian model, happen separately: the splitting of the subject and access to gendered identity. Within Lacanian theory, the latter takes place after a further 'split': the child can only participate in language, and thus take up a position in society, by identifying itself as male or female. Kaplan emphasises the implications of this for women, and especially women writers:

the very condition of their accession to their own subjectivity, to the consciousness of a self which is both personal and public is their unwitting acceptance of the law which limits their speech. This condition places them in a special relation to
language which becomes theirs as a consequence of becoming human, and at the same time not theirs as a consequence of becoming female. 15

What is important about the mirror ritual in women's novels is that it involves two women, similar in some ways but different in others. It thus serves to question the apparent fixity of gender boundaries, opening up a space for exploring the possibility of a feminine identity which is not unitary. The 'split' is not between 'masculine' and 'feminine', but between two kinds of femininity. This point is underlined by the fact that in many of the novels I shall be considering, the idealised other is a woman who is wholly, or partly, foreign.

It is primarily for this reason that, until my final chapter, I have confined my focus to novels by English writers. For what became clear in the course of my research was that feminine identity was continually interlinked with national identity. 'English' understandings of friendship are often balanced against 'foreign' ones, and each generation of women writers has its own version of the 'foreign friend', who offers the heroine another 'language' and an alternative 'knowledge' of what it means to be a woman. The paradigm of the 'foreign friend' serves to open up and redefine the division between 'masculine' and 'feminine' language. The exchange of languages between the two friends lays claim to language as something that 'belongs' to women, and also posits the possibility of a
more flexible and varied 'female language' in which 'difference' is not restricted to gender polarities.

Like the mirror ritual, the significance of the 'foreign friend' shifts in relation to historical changes in the understanding of femininity. The particular form which her 'foreignness' takes signals, also, the influence upon the writer herself of her own 'foreign friends'. The Italian improvisatrices in the mid-nineteenth-century novel draw upon Mme de Staël's Corinne, the Russian teachers of the late Victorian period gesture towards the influence of the nineteenth-century Russian novel, and the sensuous French mentors of the twentieth-century interwar period reveal the debt of their creators to the fictions of Colette. Just as the interplay within the narrative between 'English' heroine and 'foreign' friend provides a space for exploring new possibilities for feminine identity, so too can we see the writers themselves negotiating between the possibilities offered by two kinds of narrative, accommodating 'foreign' ideas within 'English' fictional conventions.

In my final chapter, however, I move beyond these anglocentric confines to look at some recent American novels, in which we find an interesting new version of the 'foreign friend': the dead English woman writer. The story is framed as a biographical investigation, a quest for the 'truth' about the life of the artist-precursor, impelled by the desire to forge a link across time with the women of an earlier generation. This genre draws
together a number of themes which we will see in earlier English novels, but it also reflects one of the central concerns of contemporary feminism: the desire to disentangle from the webs of the past the lost heritage of woman's identity with woman.

Most recent feminist analysis of the history of women's friendships proceeds from what might be called the 'Golden Age' model, propounded most influentially by Lillian Faderman in *Surpassing the Love of Men*. The central argument here is that during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries passionate and intense friendships between women were both widespread and socially acceptable. This halcyon period came to an end, it is argued, when romantic friendships were redefined as 'lesbian' in numerous publications by sexologists which appeared from the 1880s onwards. The period from 1880 to 1920 is thus seen as the crucial period of transition; although historians have offered very diverse accounts of the timing and implications of this change, the picture which emerges is one of a complete break between the sensual, loving, innocent solidarity of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the repression or guilt experienced by twentieth-century women when romantic friendships came to be seen as potentially 'sexual' and therefore 'suspect'.

The problem with the 'Golden Age' model is that it does not match the picture we find in the novel. To look at the nineteenth-century novel in the hope of
finding a romantic and unqualified celebration of the bonds between women is to invite disappointment; from the late eighteenth century onwards, women's novels have often questioned the validity of romantic friendship, or fused the 'dangers' of friendship with the 'dangers' of feminism. The motif of the friend as a 'vampire' who drains the heroine's strength, which Faderman sees as specific in women's fiction to the period after the First World War, 17 in fact appears in many earlier novels. There is no simple 'break': rather, in the early twentieth century we find a flood of novels which explore the possibility of homoerotic attraction between women, and in which earlier patterns and conventions continue to appear. To some degree, this continuity may be attributed to the relative autonomy of the novel, but I shall be arguing also that to see the history of women's friendship in terms of a single major rupture is an oversimplification, and one which in fact underestimates the constant struggle which has beset women who have tried to find a 'place' for their friendships within the dominant ideology. I believe that we have to understand the history of women's friendship as a series of gradual, but partial, ideological shifts, and as a continuing process of negotiation.

The search for continuity also informs Adrienne Rich's definition of the 'lesbian continuum', which, Rich emphasises, includes 'a range - through each woman's life and throughout history - of
woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. According to this definition, most of the friendships in the novels I look at could be seen as lesbian relationships. The problem with the concept of the lesbian continuum is that it deprives us of a language with which to distinguish between the different kinds of desire which women have felt for one another, and flattens out the specific struggles of the women who have consciously adopted a lesbian identity; I have, therefore, not used the word lesbian until I reach the point when it became possible for women to do so.

The idea that we can uncover from the texts of the past the repressed evidence of a love and solidarity which mirrors contemporary images of sisterhood has an understandable attraction. It can, however, lead to a partial or distorted reading of the writings of women of earlier periods, and a failure to recognise their real importance, which rests precisely in the different meanings which 'sisterhood' has represented at different periods. We need to disentangle the concept of sisterhood, to see that it is not a unitary or transhistorical idea, and to recognise that the bonds between women cannot always be celebrated as potentially subversive, as mysteriously 'outside' ideology. The meaning of 'sisterhood' has continually been linked with specific understandings of what a woman is and should be; while apparently 'all-embracing', the dominant
The concept of sisterhood has at different times in fact privileged women of a specific race, class, marital status, or sexual orientation. For feminists, there is a continuing tension between the need for a solidarity based on what women share, and the need to recognise the differences among women, but we cannot resolve this tension by dissolving it in a misguided nostalgia, in the myth of a 'lost' elysium.

The concepts of the 'lesbian continuum' and the 'Golden Age' both reflect the predicament of late twentieth-century feminism. The present women's movement, appearing as it did after a quarter of a century of unprecedented and almost total silence, has been fuelled by a particular anger at the loss of women's heritage. As we have rediscovered earlier texts, found that much that we have struggled to articulate or uncover has been 'said before', reclaimed women's history and women's writing, it is not surprising that we have wanted to forge indissoluble links with the women of the past, and to emphasise those aspects of their experience which resemble our own. The idea that once, in another time, another place, women were able to form perfect and unconstrained relationships with one another is a powerful vision which has been a necessary and important inspiration. But it is a vision which needs to be placed where it belongs - not in a real historical past, but in the arena of the imaginary and the utopian: within the pages of the novel.
Just as women generally have constantly struggled to negotiate an identity for friendship against patriarchal attempts to defuse its subversive potential, so have women writers had to struggle to find a place for friendship within the novel. Twists and turns in the narrative, sudden plot shifts, confusions of identity, letters which go astray, double endings, all characterise the novels in which friendship plays an important part. Frequently the friendship story is distanced from the 'real' world; as Nina Auerbach comments, the separate female space offers 'dreams of a world beyond the normal'.²⁰ It may be set in a sealed world outside the fabric of the social order and only partially subject to its laws; it may be placed in the historical past, evoked as memory, or framed as a quest for an understanding of the past initiated by the death of the friend. These displacements help to create the fantasy of 'another time, another place', where friendship may be celebrated, but they also do something more. In 'another time, another place', laws can be reworked, stories rewritten, relationships reformulated: in the interplay of 'sameness' and 'difference' within the narrative, the novel can offer an imaginary version of gendered identity which escapes some of the constraints binding masculinity and femininity in the here and now.

'We need', Alison Light has said, 'an analysis of the ways in which literatures offer fantasised resolutions and refusals of dominant gender definitions,
together with an attention to literary texts as one of the central places in culture where such definitions are both formed and fought for.²¹ It is my hope that this thesis makes a contribution to such an analysis.
CHAPTER ONE

THE SECOND SELF:

FEMALE FRIENDSHIP AND VICTORIAN DOMESTIC IDEOLOGY

I. THE CIRCLE OF SISTERHOOD

And is this, then, too much to expect from the daughters of England - that woman should be true to woman? In the circle of her private friends, as well as from her own heart, she learns what constitutes the happiness and misery of woman, what is her weakness and what her need, what her bane and what her blessing. She learns to comprehend the deep mystery of that electric chain of feeling which ever vibrates through the heart of woman, and which man, with all his philosophy, can never understand. She learns that every touch of that chain is like the thrilling of a nerve; and she thus acquires a power peculiar to herself, of distinguishing exactly between the links which thrill with pleasure, and those which only thrill with pain.

Thus, while her sympathy and her tenderness for a chosen few is strengthened by the bond of friendship into which she has entered, though her confidence is still confined to them, a measure of the same sympathy and tenderness is extended to the whole sisterhood of her sex, until, in reality, she becomes what woman must ever be - in her noblest, purest, holiest character - the friend of woman.

(Sarah Stickney Ellis, The Daughters of England) 1

Sarah Stickney Ellis is best known as an extremely influential and conservative exponent of Victorian domestic ideology. During the 1830s and 1840s she produced a number of books addressed to girls and women, including The Daughters of England (1845), The Women of England (1839), and The Wives of England (1843). In these manuals, which were widely read throughout the nineteenth century, Ellis defined and advocated the doctrine of 'separate spheres', central to the Victorian understanding of middle-class womanhood, in which women's activities, needs and desires are firmly located within marriage and the domestic role.
To find such a rhapsody of sisterhood, such an euphoric celebration of women's friendship, in the work of such a writer, may seem at first to suggest an eccentric and hidden line of affinity with the women's movement. For it is a central tenet of contemporary feminism that for women to recognise what women share, to perceive that they are not isolated entities or rivals but allies and sisters, is the first step towards an understanding of their oppression. As Ann Oakley puts it, 'dissipating the hostility of women towards women is a crucial first move in any positive transformation of women's world'.

Yet to read Ellis's words as prefigurative feminism would be to read against the grain of the text. The affirmation of sisterhood that she offers serves not to prefigure resistance but to disperse it, in a willing and triumphant embrace of the 'bonds' of womanhood in all their connotations. The knowledge which women share and the sympathy they offer one another is here much more than a means of solace and support; it is the sign and source of a gendered identity which fuses the biological and the social. Only within the interlocked circle of women's intimacy can a woman have access to the secret knowledge of her sex, and only with the aid of that knowledge can she know herself. The price of sharing the mysteries and pleasures of her sex is the acknowledgement that there is no identity beyond gendered identity; to enter the circle, she must relinquish discrete and contrary desires, acknowledge
common weaknesses and needs, accept that there is no
distinction between 'what is peculiar to herself' and
what is peculiar to women as a sex. Ellis's urgent and
ardent advocation of sisterhood masks the masochism of
the central metaphor: within the chain which links and
binds and thrills, pleasure is distinguished from pain
only to melt into it. Yet if at one edge the passage
shades into masochism, at the other it shades into an
affirmation of power. Women's secret knowledge and the
love they share elevate and dignify them, turning the
chain of weakness and submission into a holy and mystic
bond from which men are for ever excluded. In Ellis's
ecstatic fusion, woman's 'sphere' is naturalised and
idealised. To love a woman is to love being a woman, in
all its vicissitudes.

The extract from The Women of England with which I
began this chapter is not unique, nor even exceptional.
As I shall show, its premises are characteristic of the
way in which friendship is represented in Victorian
conduct manuals addressed to girls and women. The
girlhood relationship, especially, is represented as a
vital formative experience, essential to the process of
learning to be a woman, and it occupies a central place
in the idealised version of femininity which the manuals
offer their readers. My purpose in this chapter is to
unravel the ideological relationship between friendship,
learning and access to femininity, which underpins
women's fictional representations of friendship not only
in the Victorian period, but far beyond it. I shall be
drawing primarily on the conduct manuals, which offer a particularly clear and transparent account of this ideology, but later I shall be looking also at the letters of Victorian women, to illustrate the influence of these ideas upon the real-life discourse of female friendship.

II. FROM SENTIMENT TO EDUCATION:
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

The account of the role and nature of friendship offered in Victorian conduct manuals is rooted in an understanding of femininity which was slowly developing from the late eighteenth century onwards, and which is mirrored in a shift in the fictional representation of friendship towards the end of the century. As Janet Todd has shown, many eighteenth-century novels, by men and women, depict 'sentimental' female friendships which are founded on the concept of 'sensibility'. They are tender and expressive relationships, characterised by intuitive sympathy and the spontaneous overflow of feeling, but they also exemplify female vulnerability: the friends blush, weep, faint and cling together against a hostile world. The conventions are exuberantly parodied in Jane Austen's early burlesque, 'Love and Freindship', which was written in 1790: 'She was all Sensibility and Feeling. We flew into each others arms and after having exchanged vows of mutual Freindship for the rest of our Lives, instantly unfolded to each other the most inward secrets of our Hearts.'
In Austen's mature writing, the effusive and impulsive friendship is consistently and more seriously questioned, and contrasted with the 'true' friendship, which is characterised by its scrupulous and delicate reserve. Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) reveal their falseness by their hyperbole; Eleanor Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* and Jane Fairfax in *Emma* (1816) signal their place as the heroine's 'true' friend by their exemplary reticence and discretion. Similar contrasts between the demonstrative 'false' friend and the restrained 'true' friend appear in Maria Edgeworth's epistolary novel *Leonora* (1806) and in her tale for young readers, 'Angelina; or, L'Amie Inconnue' (1801), to which I shall be returning later in this chapter. The representation of friendships in these narratives may be partly attributed to a general reaction against the cult of sensibility, which, Janet Todd shows, was being questioned by the end of the century by radicals and conservatives alike. But there is more at stake in the novels of Austen and Edgeworth than simply a reaction against the 'sentimental friendship'. The question is, more crucially, what part women should play in one another's lives, and there is a suggestive difference between the way in which Austen answers this question in *Emma* and in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).

In *Emma*, the movement of the narrative is towards marriage, and away from friendship. While it is clear throughout the novel that Jane Fairfax is Emma's
potential 'true' friend, the two women meet only briefly as friends, and are quickly parted. Emma's relationship with Harriet Smith is more fully explored, and is only finally relinquished when Emma, learning that Harriet is a tradesman's daughter, accepts the inevitability of its ending; the difference between the pliable, ignorant and adoring Harriet Smith and the cool, cultured and reserved Jane Fairfax is thus retrospectively defined as a difference of class. But alongside the question of class, which asks whether Harriet is an appropriate friend for Emma, there is another question: whether Emma is a suitable friend for Harriet. This in turn is part of a larger question posed by the novel, which is ultimately a question of gender: whether one woman can, or should, play a significant role in the development of another.

Emma's well-meaning but disastrously ill-judged efforts to act as Harriet's teacher and guide are paralleled by the cruder attempts of Mrs Elton, Jane's self-appointed patron, to intervene in the life of her protégée. Emma's own former governess, Mrs Weston, has been a loving friend, but a poor mentor: like Harriet, she has loved Emma too much, and too uncritically. Her task is taken over by Mr Knightley, who alone has the objectivity and tenacity to curb Emma's wilful and restless spirit - and who has, also, always known what was best for Harriet Smith. This is not to say that affection between women is invalidated in this novel, but the novel's final affirmation is that a woman's most
reliable mentor is a man. The conclusion of this novel, in which we see the chastened Emma disappearing into conjugal isolation with Mr Knightley, supported only by a small band of unidentified friends, contrasts strikingly with the ending of the more optimistic and ebullient *Pride and Prejudice*.

In this novel also, Elizabeth is 'weaned' away from an early, risky friendship with the plain but outspoken Charlotte Lucas, whose conscious and costly decision to marry for convenience rather than love separates her from Elizabeth. Charlotte is supplanted by the happily married and more conventional Mrs Gardiner, and by Elizabeth's sister Jane, whose ultimate 'good fortune' in her marriage comes close to Elizabeth's own. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the retention of these relationships is shown to be central to Elizabeth's happiness in her marriage, and, significantly, the entry into matrimony is paralleled by the onset of a new female friendship. In the final pages of the novel, we see Elizabeth taking over the guidance of her young sister-in-law, the shy and unformed Georgiana Darcy. Georgiana, we are invited to see, will blossom under the influence of Elizabeth's wit, spirit, resilience and intelligence. Marriage does not reduce the place of friendship, but signals the start of a new kind of relationship, as the 'completed' woman passes on the benefit of her experience to a young, impressionable female friend. The differences between *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* point us towards two very different ways
in which female friendship was represented in the
count books read by young women in the late eighteenth
century.

In James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765)
and John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*
(1774), the advice about friendship is framed within the
concept of feminine sensibility, and it illustrates the
double-edged implications of that concept. Both writers
emphasise the need for young women to curb any
uncomfortable and unfeminine leanings towards wit,
learning, wildness or a critical spirit. The ideal
friendship is one which inculcates and expresses
feminine softness, gratifying women's natural
sensitivity and responsiveness, and deliciously
exhibiting their tender solicitude. It also acts as a
confirmation of feminine weakness. Gregory's more
gentle advice, originally addressed to his motherless
daughters, emphasises that female friendship can provide
comfort and support for the suffering which women,
because of their dependent position, will inevitably
have to bear. The more stringent Fordyce presents
female friendship as, too often, competitive and
unreliable, reflecting women's natural pliability. He
offers a neat resolution, through which women's capacity
for friendship can be harnessed and used as a means of
self-correction. Fordyce argues that young women will
benefit most from friendships with older men, offering a
somewhat titillating picture of the way in which the
natural impulsiveness and levity of the young woman will
be chastened by her older and wiser friend, while he, in his declining years, will be rejuvenated by her teasing warmth and light-hearted vivacity.

In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft is strongly critical of the prominent place which the works of Gregory and Fordyce occupy in the libraries of young women. She frequently takes issue with their arguments and, although she herself paints a poor picture of women’s friendships, it is from a very different perspective, forming part of her sustained attack upon the cultivation of feminine ‘sensibility’. Condemning the excessive intimacy of boarding-school friendships and the indelicate, over-familiar discourse of older women, Wollstonecraft argues that women’s relationships reproduce the effects of an education which artificially nurtures women’s sensuality and romanticism at the expense of their reason. Until women’s minds are cultivated along the same lines as men’s, their relationships will continue to reflect and perpetuate their enforced dependence. The question posed here was to be central to Victorian conduct books, written by women far less radical than Wollstonecraft. How can women’s relationships nurture their strengths, and not their weaknesses? The answer given in the Victorian manuals draws, with some modifications, on the model proposed in Hester Chapone’s widely disseminated *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773).
Like James Fordyce, Chapone presents friendship as an essential source of self-correction, but in her model the young woman's mentor and friend is to be one of her own sex. Chapone's letters were written originally for the instruction of a favourite niece, and she advises her reader to choose an intelligent, cultured woman, some years older than herself, who will give the younger the benefit of her superior knowledge, taste and experience. Chapone was one of the circle of late eighteenth-century 'blue-stockings' and her advice reflects the important place which both romantic friendship and learning occupied within that circle. The intimacy and expressiveness of the 'sentimental' friendship was given a new inflection by the blue-stockings; it was interlinked with the sharing of intellectual pursuits, detachment from the world, and rigorous self-discipline. Their influence was encapsulated and disseminated through Sarah Scott's novel Millenium Hall (1762). Scott was herself the sister of a leading blue-stocking, Elizabeth Montagu, and her novel presents a utopian picture of a tranquil and secluded female community based on a shared commitment to philanthropy, the cultivation of the mind, and a rational and ordered way of life.

The story of the 'Ladies of Llangollen', the most celebrated real-life exponents of this ideal, suggests some tension between principle and practice, since their dramatic midnight 'elopement' in 1778 aroused strong opposition from their families. At the ages of
thirty-nine and twenty-three respectively, Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby were pursued, brought home, and forced to separate. After their second, successful, flight to a remote Welsh retreat, the friends spent their organised days along Millenium Hall lines. They followed a highly ambitious programme of reading, transcribing and learning foreign languages, punctuated by other 'rational satisfactions': gardening, walking, drawing, and, as their fame began to spread, the arrival of a succession of distinguished visitors - who saw them, as they saw themselves, as exemplars not only of romantic friendship but also of the fashion, inspired especially by Rousseau, for withdrawal from the vulgar world to a life of virtuous simplicity and dedication to the arts. Yet enthusiasm for the example set by the 'Ladies' was by no means universal. It was fiercely parodied by Maria Edgeworth in one of her Moral Tales for young readers, 'Angelina; or, L’Amie Inconnue' (1801). 12

'Angelina' conflates the 'bluestocking' friendship with the demand for equal rights. The sixteen-year-old heroine, neglected by her cold and worldly female guardian, is vulnerable to the influence of both. Deeply affected by a novel called 'The Woman of Genius', found in a circulating library, Angelina writes to the author, and receives a gratifyingly ardent response. The letters of 'Araminta', which contain every cliche in the book of sensibility, fill Angelina with a new sense of the oppressions of the enslaved female sex, and,
without ever having met her correspondent, she accepts her invitation to join her in 'Angelina Bower', 'a charming romantic cottage in South Wales' where 'she might pass her halcyon days in tranquil, elegant retirement' (p.227). Casting aside all notions of duty, Angelina runs away, and arrives at the cottage to find it damp, cramped, shabby, smoky and inhabited only by a slovenly servant. She sets off to find her kindred soul, and is plunged into a nightmare world of moral, linguistic and social confusion, in which the characters speak in a bewildering medley of Welsh, Scotch and Irish dialect, and broken French-English. The impossibility of communication and the disruption of social boundaries is further underlined by a galaxy of assumed names and concealed identities. Having finally tracked down 'Araminta' in the prosaic person of Rachael Hodges, Angelina discovers that her heroine is slatternly, vulgar, vain, loud-voiced, masculine in face and figure, and distinctly the worse for brandy. The disillusioned Angelina is finally rescued by her true mentor, a benign aristocratic aunt who (just as recommended in Chapone's letters) undertakes to cure her of sensibility and guide her gently towards good sense.

Edgeworth returned to the 'Ladies of Llangollen' theme in a much later novel, *Helen* (1834). In this novel, Esther Clarendon lives in romantic isolation, with her beloved and gentle-natured aunt, in the ancient Welsh castle of 'Llansillen', a place of melancholy pastoral grandeur renowned for its library and
conservatory. By the time Helen was written, the 'blue-stocking' romantic friendship was no longer an issue, and Edgeworth's representation of it is accordingly less ferocious. Although the author described her as an 'odious creature', Esther is a more sympathetic figure than 'Araminta'. Brusque, blunt, energetic, independent, fonder of dogs than dress, she is presented as a woman of solid but inflexible worth, whose preference for old English values and loathing for urban life are sincere but anachronistic. What is interesting is that this 'old-fashioned' femininity is linked not only with romantic friendship but, as in 'Angelina', with heavy overtones of masculinity.

Such connections also characterised public response to the real-life Ladies of Llangollen. In 1790, an article about them in the General Evening Post gave a distorted account of their appearances and lives, drawing a contrast between Eleanor's 'masculinity' and Sarah's 'femininity' which contained such strong innuendoes that the two friends considered legal action, only abandoning the idea when they were persuaded that they would not win. Here, as so often in later accounts of friendship, the exclusive attachment which exceeds the 'norm' is interpreted as a transgression of gender boundaries. The two women seem to have simultaneously accepted and parodied their 'transgression' in the style of dress which they adopted and retained throughout their lives: cropped and
powdered hair, beaver hats, neckcloths, riding habits with jackets cut in the masculine style. It was not 'men's dress', though it was often perceived as such by observers; some of its components had once been acceptable for women, but it was a consciously hybrid, and, like the particular form of romantic friendship which the two women exemplified, an increasingly anachronistic display of distance from the world.

The paradigm of friendship proposed by Hester Chapone draws on the spirit of the 'blue-stocking' friendship while accommodating it to the demands of 'Society'. She emphasises that friendship does not displace the 'highest' tie, the conjugal relationship, but rather prepares the young woman for it. Like Fordyce and Gregory, she sees it as the task of the young woman to be 'a useful and agreeable member of Society' (p. 3). Friendship is not a refusal of the world, but a vital means of preparing the young woman for her place in that world. The pupil-teacher relationship she proposes is represented as a romantic but serious learning experience, in which the elder guides the younger woman gently towards self-knowledge while offering her a model to emulate. The initial choice of friend is not a spontaneous overflow of feeling, but a judicious and discriminating choice which should be determined by the friend's capacity to reason as well as please. The ideal friend is a woman of principle, discernment and propriety, 'whose manners and style of life may polish her behaviour, refine her
sentiments, and give her consequence in the eye of the world (pp. 51-2).

While the chief benefit of the relationship is for the younger woman, for whom the satisfaction of friendship is both means and reward for becoming a 'rational creature', the older woman also gains pleasure from the teaching process, from 'winning the heart whilst she convinces the understanding' (p. 45). The movement towards a refined and cultivated femininity is represented as a reciprocal, continuous and linear process, in which the young woman will in her turn pass on the benefits of her learning, accomplishments and experience to those younger than herself.

**Letters on the Improvement of the Mind** was frequently republished well into the nineteenth century. Fordyce and Gregory's work was also available, but when the women writers of Victorian conduct books set out to define the nature and role of female friendship, it was upon Chapone's model that they drew, and it is not difficult to see why. Her picture of the pupil-mentor relationship - pleasurable yet serving the needs of society - validated women's friendship while dissociating it from both feminine weakness and feminist subversion. By positioning the 'learning' friendship within the mainstream of womanhood, as a gift passed on from one woman to another, she offered a way of retaining the 'blue-stocking' emphasis on shared self-culture, while extricating it from the taint of the eccentric and the 'hybrid'.
III. TWIN SOULS:
FRIENDSHIP IN VICTORIAN CONDUCT MANUALS

The idea that friendship is a 'learning' relationship is central to the Victorian conduct manuals at which I want to look in this section. Sarah Stickney Ellis's works were the best-known and most influential, but others which were published, and in some cases frequently republished, in this period include: Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff's Thoughts on Self-Culture (1850), Matilda Pullan's Maternal Counsels (1855), Dinah Mulock Craik's A Woman's Thoughts About Women (1858), Eliza Lynn Linton's Ourselves (1864), Elizabeth Sewell's Principles of Education (1865), Marianne Farningham's Girlhood (1869) and Charlotte M. Yonge's Womankind (1876).¹⁵ These manuals, which set out to advise women on how best to fulfil their 'natural' role, have in recent years been drawn upon by historians as an important source for our understanding of Victorian domestic ideology; as explicit propaganda, they offer a particularly transparent version of that ideology.

Yet despite their emphasis on the virtue of self-sacrifice and a woman's absolute subservience to her husband, the female authors of the manuals should not be seen simply as time-serving or deluded proponents of women's inferior status. Many of the writers exemplified in their own lives the contradictory position of the Victorian woman. They were not simply 'domestic beings'. Many were professional women who supported themselves and their families by their
earnings. Craik, Linton, Sewell and Yonge were successful novelists; I shall be returning to some of their novels in later chapters. Elizabeth Sewell ran a school for girls; Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff were active in the movement for improvements in women's education. The manuals are united in their opposition to an understanding of women as merely passive, frail and decorative creatures. Although the advice they give is often censorious, it is characterised by an urgent desire to find a positive role and identity for woman within a specific ideological understanding of her nature and sphere.

Most of the manuals contain a chapter, or at least an extensive section, giving guidance on the nature and conduct of friendship. The writers themselves were women of various political and religious affiliations, with different attitudes to the pressing contemporary questions of women's education and work. Yet the advice they give is remarkably homogeneous and consistent. As in Chapone's letters, it is the friendship made in the formative years between girlhood and womanhood which receives by far the most attention. In phrasing which often echoes Chapone's, they present that relationship as at once deeply romantic and deeply serious, as a discriminating choice of one who will act as confidante, conscience and mentor, assisting the other towards self-knowledge. There are, however, two significant ways in which the version of friendship they offer departs from Chapone's.
Firstly, while Chapone is concerned with the limited ranks of 'Society', the Victorian manuals are addressed, primarily and sometimes exclusively, to a middle-class audience. Whereas Chapone urges her niece to avoid, above all things, the debasement of intimacy with 'those of low birth and education' (p. 52), even the conservative Charlotte M. Yonge emphasises that 'if the two minds and souls really chime together' (p. 149) some inequity of class can even be beneficial. This advice should not be taken too literally; it is circumscribed by the constant insistence that girls should defer to parental approbation of their friends, by warnings against familiarity with servants, and by the emphasis on shared intellectual pursuits and tastes. What matters is that friendship is seen as 'transcending' class; equity of wealth and station matter less than equity of intellect, taste and integrity.

Secondly, Chapone presents 'equality of age, and exact similarity of disposition' (p. 43) as undesirable in the girlhood friendship; two young women exposed to the same dangers, she argues, are more likely to encourage each other's faults than supply each other's defects. Moral improvement can only be safely relied upon in a relationship with an older woman. By contrast, the Victorian manuals represent such relationships as rare: older women can be valuable confidantes and advisers, as may the girl's own mother, but the truest friendship is a relationship between equals:

What the girl wants is not a wise counsellor, but rather a play-fellow to share the ebullition of her
youthful spirits, and a kindred spirit who can look at the world from the same point of view, with hopes and fears, guesses and fancies, like her own. 16

The configuration of the girlhood friendship as the meeting of kindred souls, the search for a second self, is pervasive in the Victorian manuals. The ideal friend is a mirror-image in age, tastes, feelings, and, preferably, social circumstances; the ideal friendship is a sympathetic affinity based on shared emotions and experiences:

That friendship is likely to be the truest and most lasting which is formed between two persons of about equal ages and positions in life ... We would advise you to choose friends about your own age, who are passing through similar scenes, and whose feelings are about the same. 17

Many of the manual writers begin by justifying their advocation of friendships outside the family circle. They emphasise the primacy of natural ties, and acknowledge that it would seem most natural, most desirable, and certainly safest, to keep intimacy within the family circle, 'in a union the most sacred, and the most secure, which perhaps is ever found on earth ... the only intimacy in which everything can with propriety be told'. 18 The most perfect, complete and disinterested intimacy can only be found between two sisters: 'Child of the same parents, united by early association, by oneness of interest, by every tie of blood and sentiment of nature, a sister seems given especially to be a friend to a sister'. 19

There is a constantly expressed anxiety that the attractions of friendship may threaten the sacred
privacy and harmony of the family circle; girls are persistently warned to guard themselves against the temptation to break that privacy, to reveal family secrets, gossip about domestic upsets, neglect family duties. Nevertheless, the writers urge parents to overcome their doubts and anxieties and to encourage their daughters to make friends outside the family. While the romantic allure of friendship will inevitably conflict with the more mundane claims and duties of family life, friendship is essential for the formation of character, a necessary part of the 'discipline of life'. The double message delivered here is an important one, and needs to be related to the intricate ways in which the concept of the 'second self' both mirrors and buttresses the understanding of femininity within Victorian domestic ideology.

The lynchpin of that ideology is the concept of 'separate spheres' - the separation between the private, female world of home, and the public, male world of business - which emerged gradually from the later eighteenth century. As Catherine Hall has shown, its particular articulation within Victorian bourgeois ideology draws on ideas initially associated with a small reforming group of Evangelicals and most fully developed by Hester Chapone's friend Hannah More. Woman, because of her greater sympathy and susceptibility, was 'naturally' suited to deal with the affairs of the home and the heart. Woman's inherent simplicity, purity, and moral and physical vulnerability
placed her in special need of the protection and retirement of the home, but, once safely under that protection, her more sheltered life made her especially suited to religious and philanthropic duties. Paradoxically, then, while the separation of spheres limited the parameters of women's activity to the domestic role, it also led to an increased emphasis on the importance of women within those parameters. 21

By the 1830s and 1840s, these ideas had been adopted by the emergent industrial bourgeoisie, concerned to distinguish itself both from the new proletariat and from the landed gentry and aristocracy. Central to this self-definition is the cult of the bourgeois home and family, which provides a haven, a stable and private place, in a time of social change; this haven embodies the virtues which mark off the bourgeoisie from, and establish its superiority to, both the labouring poor and the wealthy aristocracy. The moral role of the middle-class woman was not seen simply as a passive contribution to domestic harmony; she was expected to play a positive part in preserving the stability of society, and also of nation, for the domestic virtues which women were called on to foster and exemplify were seen as the virtues on which the distinction and excellence of England as a nation depended.

Sarah Stickney Ellis's The Women of England is explicitly addressed to the middle-class woman. "A nation's moral wealth is in your keeping" (p. 18) she
tells her readers: for in England's 'unique and beautifully proportioned class system' it is the middle class which is 'the pillar of our nation's strength' (p.21) and it is upon the 'moral feelings and habits' of the middle-class woman that this pillar rests (p.14). It is women's task to preserve the home comforts and fireside virtues which are intrinsically English, and thus to maintain the social order, integrity and domestic peace of their native land.

There are clearly contradictions in this ideology which need to be identified here. The idea of 'separate spheres' depends on the assumption that social identity proceeds directly from biological identity. Woman's confinement to the private and domestic sphere is perceived as a true and inevitable expression of her natural qualities and needs. Yet, as the manual writers clearly recognise, many middle-class women did not in fact live up to the ideal propounded for them. There is a conflict, then, between the understanding of womanly virtue as 'natural', and the recognition that it may in fact be difficult to achieve.

In the manuals, this contradiction is displaced on to women's own nature. Woman, it is argued, is naturally contradictory, naturally torn between strength and weakness. Her special qualities - intuition, benevolence, self-sacrifice, integrity - are 'natural', but she is constantly beset by temptations rooted in her equally 'natural' frailties - weakness, shallowness, frivolity, the tendency to gossip. Twentieth-century
analyses of ideology often make the point that ideology offers the illusion of a harmonious and ordered subjectivity, masking the reality of a divided and precarious self. I would argue that this is an oversimplification. Domestic ideology, as it is articulated in these manuals, acknowledges, even foregrounds, woman's 'divided self': she is represented as 'chameleon-like', naturally fragmented and flexible, a mass of conflicting impulses who must constantly struggle to transcend her weaknesses and to re-form herself in the face of temptation. Her malleability is both a source of weakness and a source of strength, since adaptability is a quality vital for her domestic role:

she will be loved in proportion as she makes those around her happy, - as she studies their tastes and sympathises in their feelings. In social relations, adaptation is therefore the true secret of her influence ... She must, in a certain degree, be plastic herself if she would mould others. 23

In The Women of England, Sarah Stickney Ellis castigates those writers who perceive woman as a fragrant and lovely flower, but expect her also to take care of domestic drudgery. Rather, she should be instructed 'to lay aside all her natural caprice, her love of self-indulgence, her vanity, her indolence - in short, her very self' and to assume 'a new nature'(p.61). Ellis gives specific social reasons for this: in a time of uncertainty, of upheaval and social mobility, a woman living in a nation dependent on commercial resources needs to be able 'to sink gracefully, and without murmuring against providence,
into a lower grade of society'(p.28). The concept of 'adaptability' thus rationalises woman's total dependence on the financial and social status of a husband or father, but it has a further resonance. The emphasis on woman's flexible nature, on her constant struggle to achieve 'true' womanliness, offers the achievement of natural femininity as a dynamic process, an act of conscious choice. Woman is presented not as the quiescent victim of biology, but as a responsible free being, in control of her own identity.

The idea that 'true' femininity has to be achieved, and learnt, in itself provides the rationale for the manuals. There seems to have been no equivalent body of writing for men. In the early Victorian period, there were no institutions for women comparable to those in which men might learn masculinity: the public school, the university, the club, the shared public world of business and leisure. Although it became increasingly acceptable for girls to spend one or two years at a boarding-school, most of the formative years of girlhood were spent at home, with governesses who might themselves have received a sketchy and inadequate education, in a family which might not in practice exemplify the idealised place it occupied within domestic ideology. The manuals set out to fill the gap.

In doing so, they drew on the concept of 'self-improvement' central to Victorian ideology. Alongside the concept of separate spheres, the newly
self-conscious bourgeoisie also appropriated from Evangelicalism the idea that a dynamic and self-regulatory moral rectitude was essential to the individual and collective well-being. As guardians of the nation's morality and nurturers of its children, women were also expected to exemplify its values within their own sphere, and the Victorian manual writers constantly urge their readers to use their time in an ordered and disciplined way, to plan an intensive programme of self-culture and self-examination. Gossip and idleness are represented as a betrayal of womanhood itself. In conjunction with these admonitions, they offer a stirring picture of a new time for women, in which they will take up their true role as the moral regenerators of the nation and overcome their old reputation for weakness and frivolity.

Within Victorian domestic ideology, woman is at once powerful and powerless: powerful in her influence, in her 'active' contribution to the social order, yet confined to a subservient domestic role and excluded from direct contact with that order. The manuals rationalise this by emphasising woman's essentially 'spiritual' nature: uncontaminated by any direct contact with the material sources of wealth and power, woman is protected by her domestic role, but her 'real self' is not located or expressed primarily in the domestic. Friendship, as it is defined by the manual writers, offers both an expression of that 'higher self', and a means of achieving it.
All of the manual writers emphasise the romantic nature of the girlhood friendship. As Elizabeth Sewell comments, 'the romance of almost every young girl's nature is first drawn forth by some companion or friend' (II.135) and the course of the relationship is compared to that of a love-affair - ardent, intense, consuming. Yet while intensely romantic relationships in girlhood are seen as universal and natural, girls are simultaneously urged not to be sentimental, overdemonstrative or possessive in their relationships, and to be wary of rash, impulsive and 'foolish' attachments. 'Some girls are so easily won', comments Marianne Farningham,

the enthusiastic girl falls in love at first sight, goes into ecstasies of bliss, dreams about her all night, cannot rest without her all the following week. And then the ardour burns itself out; the assurances of undying affection are forgotten, and someone else takes the place of her who was so extravagantly loved, and is so unkindly forgotten. (p.56)

and Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff make a similar point in a manner which recalls the hasty intimacy of Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe in Jane Austen's

Northanger Abbey:

Much discredit also has been thrown upon female friendships by the rash and silly intimacies which have been allowed to usurp the name. Between girls of sixteen and seventeen, similarity of tastes and habits, enthusiasm for the same novels, the same sermons, or the same partners, is immediately taken for the sympathy of congenial souls, and they swear an eternal friendship upon a three days' or perhaps three hours' acquaintance. Young women are often not much wiser, and the natural result is a rupture as abrupt as the intimacy. (I.263-4)

While friendship is to be a constant source of pleasure, it is not to be founded on pleasure alone. As
Mrs Ellis tells the 'daughters of England', "the pleasure or amusement immediately derived from the society of an individual, is a dangerous and deceitful test by which to try the value of their friendship", and she recommends her readers to choose the one who, while "possibly less amusing at the time you converse together, yet leaves you raised above the common level of experience ... lifted out of the slavery of what is worldly or trifling, and made stronger in every generous purpose, and every laudable endeavour" (Daughters of England, pp.274-5).

True friendship, it is consistently argued, transcends the worldly and the material. It is "above the common level of experience", above the day-to-day details of domestic and social life. While the true friend offers an utterly trustworthy confidante to whom all secrets may be freely and fully confessed, the intimacy is not to be founded on trivia, on foolish outpourings, on gossip and scandal; it is a meeting of reflecting minds, founded on deep and serious discussion of spiritual and intellectual subjects, and on shared principles, ideals and aspirations. Unlike 'natural ties', it is an 'elective affinity', a 'distinguishing regard', which must be deserved, rather than accorded as of right: 'Friendship cannot exist between the high-minded and the base, between the earnest and the frivolous'; it must involve 'sympathy in real feeling, in the serious pursuits and objects of life, in the
thoughts and speculations which naturally spring up in reflecting minds'. 27

Friendship is thus represented as a continuous, dynamic and mutual process of self-improvement.

'Endeavour to let all your reunions have some improving tendency', 28 young readers are urged. The girl who flatters her friend, exaggerates her virtues or condones her faults is not worthy of the name; though loyal and discreet in public, in private she must be outspoken and vigilant in her criticism and correction. The sympathy and assistance of a friend strengthens the mind, 'while the fear of proving ourselves unworthy of a friend's regard, will even restrain us under temptations almost too strong for the sense of duty'. 29 The 'serious selection of a counsellor, confidante and better self, which every young girl wishes to find in her bosom companion 30 is the choice also of a better life, a truer and higher form of femininity. As The Girls' Own Paper advised its readers in 1882:

Our chosen friend must be one whose influence over us (and her influence will be great) must be for good. Not a perfect character - for that we should look in vain - but one who has a high ideal before her, and who will help to strengthen our aspirations after a better life as we should hope to strengthen hers. 31

The configuration of the friend as 'second self' or mirror image is thus not a simple or static process of reflection. What is reflected back through the mirror of friendship (the meeting of 'reflecting minds') is not the girl's whole self, but an idealised self stripped of her faults, follies and inadequacies. The sum of the
friendship is greater than its parts; the unworldly ideals and principles enshrined in it, the constant desire to prove worthy of a friend's esteem, lift the 'twin souls' out of the realm of womanly frailty and temptation into a sphere more angelic than earthly.

During the course of a lifetime, says Charlotte M. Yonge,

they may improve one another "as iron sharpeneth iron" and the higher light of the love of God may grow, as Dante says, "as light increases, by flashing back and back again the radiance of the sun from one mirror to another." (p.152)

Just as friendship 'transcends' the material, and is 'above' class, it also transcends the vicissitudes of time and place. Once formed, the true friendship is absolutely reliable, absolutely indissoluble. The tie formed 'amidst the opening hopes and glowing joys' of youth is 'often the last and best treasure of age':

No change of circumstances, no new ties will loosen or dissolve this. The friends may be separated for years, sea and land may lie between them, but they can still rest with unhesitating confidence in each other's affection. Long interruption of intercourse may force it to lie dormant, but as soon as the intercourse is renewed, it will spring up again warm and vigorous as ever, cheering the decline of life with the same true sympathy which gave double zest to the joys of youth.

The concept of the 'second self' clearly reflects the demands of Victorian ideology. The qualities which are represented as characteristic of the 'good' friendship - sympathy, tenderness, integrity, fidelity, self-discipline, the love which seeks to give rather than receive - are the qualities which the young woman is expected to bring to her future role as wife and mother. The relationship itself - romantic, idealistic,
yet discriminating - serves as a 'trial run' for marriage in a period in which opportunities for mingling with the opposite sex were severely limited. As a first, safe, foray outside the family circle, the girlhood friendship facilitates the movement from the familial home to the marital home; the choice of a friend which, once made, must and will last a lifetime, anticipates the vital choice of a marriage partner. As Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff emphasise, 'She must learn to choose her lover, and consequently her husband, as she would choose her friend, for those moral qualities that are the only solid basis of love' (I.271).

But, as the detailed attention paid to it in the manuals indicates, the girlhood friendship has an ideological importance which goes far beyond an anticipation of the marital relationship. As a central site of the formation of femininity, it straddles and helps to blur some of the crucial contradictions within Victorian domestic ideology. The configuration of the friend as both self and other helps to elide the slippery relationship within ideology between the 'natural' and the 'learnt', between what is mandatory and what is voluntarily achieved. The image of the two young women forming and reforming themselves in the mirror of the other, in a spontaneous and dynamic process of self-regulation, endorses both the understanding of woman as 'free' subject, in control of her own identity, and the understanding of that identity as inevitable and 'biological'; there is an ambiguity
between the activity of 'learning' and the process of having yourself reflected back in an idealised form. The discrepancy between a model of femininity which is at once 'universal' and specifically English and middle-class is dispersed in the understanding of friendship as 'above' class: differences between women are displaced on to a contrast between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving', and replaced by a hierarchy of sensibilities, in which the two young women are drawn together partly by what they share as women, but also by what distinguishes them from other women. Their intimacy is in itself a mark and validation of their superiority. The constant admonitions that the romantic allure of friendship must not conflict with the claims of the family mask the fact that this 'elective affinity' based on shared principles and ideals tacitly offers an alternative role-model to the less than ideal models which may in practice be offered by the girl's natural relations. In a sense, it scarcely matters whether the girl ever actually finds her kindred spirit. What the image of the second self offers is an abstract ideal, the possibility of a perfectible self which finds its expression and satisfaction 'above the common level of experience'.

Despite the warnings against overdemonstrativeness, the picture of friendship offered by the manuals is a deeply romantic one. It is a romanticism intricately inflected with idealism, narcissism, aspiration and the projection of desire; the desires expressed and
gratified within the relationship are the desires to love, and be, a 'better self'. The concept of the 'twin soul' offers a romantic expression of everything that is most positive for women within Victorian ideology, everything that identifies her as something more than a passive, domestic being. Yet the very importance invested in the relationship becomes a source of difficulty as the girl becomes a woman, since while domestic ideology demands that a woman has a 'mind and soul' beyond the domestic, it also locates her satisfactions and duties as, naturally and ideally, expressed and fulfilled entirely within marriage and family. Once the transitional and formative period of young womanhood is over, the primacy of 'natural ties' must be re-asserted. The ardent and intense relationship with a 'twin soul' is in excess of woman's 'natural' needs, and ultimately mirrors the marital relationship too closely in its intimacy and intensity. It must be reformulated, and the process is inevitably a contradictory one.

The manuals assert that the girlhood friendship, while vital and 'real' at the time, can be perceived through the lens of maturity as both a false preparation for marriage, and a false manifestation of friendship. It is, says Elizabeth Sewell, 'a little play of excitement and sorrow, jealousy and exactingness', though deeply romantic and absorbing 'for the time being'(II.135). As Eliza Lynn Linton puts it in Ourselves, schoolgirls are lovers, 'unconsciously
rehearsing for the real drama to come by-and-by and young women are rivals; only after 'these turbid waters have run themselves clear' can women become friends (p.80). The process of negotiation involved here needs to be illustrated at some length:

Probably there are few women who have not had some first friendship, as delicious and almost as passionate as first love. It may not last - it seldom does; but at the time it is one of the purest, most self-forgetful and self-denying attachments that the human heart can experience: with many, the nearest approximation to that feeling called love - I mean love in its highest form, apart from all selfishnesses and sensuousnesses - which in all their after-life they will ever know. This girlish friendship, however fleeting in its character, and romantic, even silly, in its manifestations, let us take heed how we make light of, lest we be mocking at things more sacred than we are aware.

And yet, it is not the real thing - not friendship, but rather a kind of foreshadowing of love; as jealous, as exacting, as unreasoning - as wildly happy and supremely miserable; ridiculously so to a looker-on, but to the parties concerned, as vivid and sincere as any after-passion into which the girl may fall; for the time being, perhaps long after, colouring all her world. Yet it is but a dream, to melt away like a dream when love appears; or if it then wishes to keep up its vitality at all, it must change its character, temper its exactions, resign its rights; in short, be buried and come to life again in a different form.

This extract from Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (pp.168-9) exemplifies in its sentiments, language and multiple contradictions the dual character of the girlhood friendship as it appears in the manuals. Simultaneously passionate and pure, false and sincere, selfless and possessive, fleeting and enduring, the relationship represents 'love in its highest form', yet is not love at all; neither 'true' love nor 'true' friendship, it ultimately exemplifies only woman's 'chameleon' nature, her ability to adapt
and re-form herself upon demand. Craik's picture of the re-shaped intimacy is consciously prosaic and deflatory.

When Laura and Matilda,

with a house to mind and a husband to fuss over, find themselves actually kissing the babies instead of one another - and managing to exist for a year without meeting, or a month without letter-writing, yet feel life no blank, and affection a reality still (pp.169-70)

- then their attachment has taken its true shape as friendship and will last to the end of their lives.

The place which this attachment is actually to occupy in the lives of adult women proves more difficult to define. It is most easily accommodated as a "consolation prize" for single women:

to see two women, whom Providence has denied nearer ties, by a wise substitution making the best of fate, loving, sustaining and comforting one another, with a tenderness often closer than that of sisters, because it has all the novelty of election which belongs to the conjugal tie itself - this, I say, is an honourable and lovely sight. 34

Life-long friendships! Yes, they are a precious gift, - often the dearest tie of single women. 35

For married women, friendship is represented as a relationship rooted partly in nostalgia, in shared memories of girlhood experience, and partly in the generalised sympathy and tenderness which all women, simply by being women, must share. The emphasis is on solace in adversity, on the comfort offered by a pure and disinterested affection during the painful moments on life's journey.

In the attempt to define a place for women's friendship within marriage, contradictions already implicit in the girlhood friendship become more marked.
Though rooted in what women share, friendship must nevertheless transcend the special interests women have in common. For grown women as for girls, friendship is founded on the need for a confidante, an intimate who knows the secrets of womanhood and can share all its joys and sorrows, but what can be spoken within that friendship is strictly circumscribed. Women are urged to avoid trivia, gossip, discussion of family secrets or domestic life, 'scandal or the baby and cook stories that are supposed to prevail over tea-tables'. Better perhaps, suggests Dinah Mulock Craik, that they do not speak at all:

Ay, above all things, what women need to learn in their friendships is the sanctity of silence - silence in outward demonstration, silence under wrong, silence with regard to the outside world, and often a delicate silence between one another. About the greatest virtue a friend can have, is to be able to hold her tongue. (p. 186)

Whereas the girlhood friendship mirrors marriage, the adult friendship is defined against it: marriage is a complete and self-contained union, requiring but 'the one'. The exclusive sentimental friendship which mirrors marriage too closely can be dangerous:

Friendship, which is narrowed up between two individuals, and confined to that number alone, is calculated only for the intercourse of married life, and seldom has been maintained with any degree of lasting benefit or satisfaction, even by the most romantic and affectionate of women. 37

It is the unmarried, the solitary, who are most prone to that sort of "sentimental" friendship with their own or the opposite sex which, though often most noble, unselfish, and true, is in some forms ludicrous, in others dangerous. For two women, past earliest girlhood, to be completely absorbed in one another, and make public demonstration of the fact, by caresses or quarrels, is so repugnant
to common sense, that where it ceases to be silly it becomes actually wrong. 38

Yet, despite these qualifications, the manuals strongly emphasise the validity and importance of friendship for the adult woman:

some of the sweetest experiences of a woman's life are those she has had from the love, the confidence, the faithful sisterhood of some dear "second self", whom no fear disturbs, and from whom no petty jealousy can sever her. 39

In asserting the value of these friendships, the writers often show a consciousness that they are arguing against the general 'grain'. While their account of friendship is clearly 'ideological', it seems to me that the female authors, many of whom had important friendships in their own lives, were struggling to find a valid role for friendship within an ideology in which it had no obvious place. They often refer to the conventionally-held belief that friendships between women are unreliable, rare, or even impossible; an article in the Saturday Review of 1864 gives some idea of what they were up against. The author argues that women's friendships are 'mere pretty bows of ribbon', lacking vitality or durability because women lack the divergence of character on which the strongest friendships are built:

Somehow, women do not differ from women as men differ from men. Amidst all their innumerable diversities there is an underlying resemblance, something which resists analysis and sets calculation at defiance, something which you can neither explain nor account for, and which you must be content to call "a woman's way of looking at things." 40
Since women, in failing to be men, lack all the qualities necessary for friendship, the author suggests that women should relinquish the attempt to be friends with one another and should concentrate on friendships with men.

The manuals, by contrast, are very doubtful about the desirability and practicability of 'platonic' friendships, for both girls and women. Women's friendships, they argue, turning the argument of the *Saturday Review* article on its head, can be a source of pleasure and strength *because* of the similarities between them. Women's 'new' capacity for friendship is presented as a sign of the 'new' kind of womanhood advocated by the manuals, as an expression of the highest and noblest possibilities in women's fragmented nature:

> It has been said that women are less capable of real friendship than men ...but this is because woman in her degraded state, uneducated and only her husband's foremost slave, was incapable of more than gossip and rivalry with her fellow-women. Friendship could not begin till woman was refined and elevated... 41

The manual writers thus create a 'place' for friendship within domestic ideology, but in that process the relationship takes on a very strange identity. It is at once vital and central, and tangential and oddly insubstantial. It is strongest as an abstract ideal, unchanging and indissoluble; like woman's own 'nature', it transcends the material world, but must nevertheless adapt itself to that world. Flexible and solid, real and unreal, it should exist and be maintained calm, free,
and clear, having neither rights nor jealousies; at once the firmest and most independent of human ties": 42

We may lose the friend - the friendship we never can or ought to lose. Actively, it may exist no more; but passively, it is just as binding as the first moment when we pledged it, as we believed, for ever. Its duties, like its delights, may have become a dead-letter; but none of its claims or confidences have we ever afterwards the smallest right to abjure or to break. 43

IV. 'THE SIGNS OF THINGS SIGNIFIED': LIFE AND LETTERS

Dinah Mulock Craik's image of the lost friendship as a 'dead letter' has a particular resonance. Many of the manuals give detailed guidance on writing letters to friends, though the advice inevitably has an ideological inflection related to the continuous process of self-improvement: self-indulgent letters full of secrets and trivia are bad, structured and informed exchanges of views on 'serious' subjects are good. All the same, the amount of space devoted to letters in the manuals is revealing. For many Victorian women, separated by 'natural ties', able to see each other only for occasional short visits, the letters were not simply an expression of friendship but in a real sense were the friendship.

Although nineteenth century ideology offered a powerful vision of sympathetic and lasting friendships, in practical terms the intimacies of both girls and women were closely circumscribed in the early Victorian period. For most women, financially dependent and limited as they were to their families and close neighbours, the search for a 'second self' was a matter
of chance more than judgement. In a poignant footnote to *Thoughts on Self-Culture*, Maria Grey and Emily Shirreff comment on the tensions that could result.

Grey and Shirreff, who were themselves sisters, observe that men often remark disparagingly on the want of harmony between female relations, without fully understanding the circumstances of women’s lives:

Men, however closely connected with each other, never spend their lives together as women of the same family often do. They have their different pursuits and friends and perfect independence of action, while women not only live under the same roof, but spend their days perhaps in the same room, depend on each other for their amusements, their daily exercise, and their domestic habits of every kind; and it is in these little things, from which there is no escape, that uncongenial tastes become most difficult to accommodate, and that tempers are exposed to a degree of irritation unknown to him who can escape from home annoyances by taking his independent ride or going to his club. 44

The concept of friendship as an ‘elective affinity’, a meeting of congenial and ‘superior’ minds, might provide an alluring alternative to such a picture, but the difficulties of achieving it were bluntly expressed by the feminist Mary Taylor:

‘It has been remarked that “the feminine soul is incapable of friendship.” It is a fact that they very seldom get it. The habit of choosing an associate for her good qualities, or attaching themselves to superior people, can never be theirs because their associates are chosen for them. Many a woman supplied with all manner of luxury dare not think of forming an intimacy with another of congenial mind, while she is bound to constant intercourse with numbers without reference to their qualifications. 45

For those who did find a friend of ‘congenial mind’, there were still constraints. Few women before the last quarter of the century could hope to set up
house with a friend; all-female households were still singular enough to invite comment at mid-century, and were generally made up of immediate kin. Letters, then, were the primary location of that free unburdening of the heart central to the Victorian understanding of friendship. Two life-long correspondences, the letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, and the letters of Geraldine Jewsbury to Jane Welsh Carlyle, give us an exceptional insight into the nineteenth century discourse of friendship. Both were relationships formed in adult life, rather than the years of girlhood. Yet the understanding of friendship which informs their letters corresponds closely to that offered in the manuals. Their letters illustrate the rewards offered by that understanding, and the ways in which it could provide a base for testing and redefining Victorian understandings of femininity, but they also illustrate the constraints experienced even by women of 'advanced' views.

Jewsbury and Jameson were both outside the 'mainstream' of womanhood. Anna Jameson was closely involved with the Langham Place circle which formed the nucleus of the emergent women's movement, and her books reflect her life-long interest in the nature and position of women. Jewsbury, while often caustic about 'emancipated women', herself had a reputation for 'strong-mindedness'; she exerted considerable influence as a reviewer and as a publisher's reader, and created a stir with her controversial depiction of sexuality in
her first novel, *Zoë* (1845). Of the four women, Jewsbury was the only one who never married, but Anna Jameson's marriage was short-lived; after four years, her husband moved to Canada while she remained in England. 48

Both correspondences are founded on a strong consciousness of shared femaleness; there is a continued fascination with women who have extended the boundaries of femininity - actresses, opera singers, and, especially, women writers. Anna Jameson tells Ottilie that she exults and rejoices over Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*: as the poet's friend and as a woman, she feels 'elevated by her genius as all women will feel themselves'. 49 As in the manuals, both women see their friend as an idealised self. Geraldine Jewsbury, half-teasingly, presents Jane as a saint and an archangel whose task it is to keep her out of evil. Anna Jameson recalled her first impressions of Ottilie in this way:

> she appeared to me by far the most poetical and genuine being, of my own sex, I ever knew in highly-cultivated life: one to whom no wrong could teach mistrust; no injury, bitterness; one to whom the common-place realities, the vulgar necessary cares of existence, were but too indifferent: - who was, in reality, all that other women try to appear, and betrayed, with a careless independence, what they most wish to conceal. 50

As in the manuals, both women see it as the task of a friend to offer criticism as well as praise, to chide as well as console: 'while you are worthy to be called my friend I must speak to you as I feel and think, and blame you, when I see you wrong'. 51 To some degree,
each attempts to make her friend a closer image of herself: Anna urges the tempestuous and unconventional Ottilie to be more gentle, more dignified, more attentive to her domestic duties, more careful of her reputation and place. When Jewsbury and Carlyle met, Jane was already immersed in her life’s task of maintaining the comfort and tranquillity of her husband Thomas Carlyle; Geraldine tries to persuade Jane to take up some employment, such as writing, more stimulating than her endless domestic tasks. But the more constant project of the letters, the central thread of their narrative, is the process by which each woman reflects back to her friend an idealised self-image.

Each takes up the threads of the other’s experience - self-doubt, depression, domestic and emotional crises - and transforms them, reflecting back a strong and unified self. Anna tells Ottilie: ‘I know you can be anything, - do anything within human power, with a sufficient motive. Then all that remains to know is, whether your love for me be really a sufficient motive?’ Geraldine offers Jane back to herself as a paragon of womanly virtue and self-sacrifice, a model of domesticity and order, brilliant, witty and universally loved. Anna Jameson’s letters work similarly at eroding Ottilie’s transgressions and highlighting her perfections, as the rhetorical inversions in this letter will illustrate:

You say you have no feeling left and a great deal more of such desperation. We will try. If it be true that in your heart there is no feeling for anything but yourself, no devotion, no noble and
good thoughts, no care for others, and no hope, no faith, no love, no friendship, no patience or humility, - then you are not meine herzverbundene Ottilie, I am not your Anna, and better we should never meet. But you are mistaken ... Your letter contradicts your words, and every line shows me how warm yet is the heart you think dead. 53

Both correspondences exemplify the eloquent intensity with which Victorian women could express their feelings for their friends. Anna continually tells Ottilie that her affection is the only real object of her life: "Without you, dearest Ottilie, I am only half myself". 54 "Always my first wish is to be near you, but it is true that sometimes I fear it too, for it is like being bound on a wheel of fire, which whirls me round with its restlessness and consumes me with its feverish glow". 55 Jewsbury often compares her feeling to those of a lover, telling her friend that she's infinitely more important than her new lover, "You come nearer to me; I don't feel towards you as if you were a woman". 56

Yet neither relationship fits a single paradigm. Jewsbury often addresses Jane as 'Dearest Child' but she also sees herself as Jane's daughter. Each woman plays out a number of different roles: mother, daughter, lover, mentor, co-worker, fellow-sufferer. The letters move across the whole spectrum of women's experience, domestic, emotional and intellectual, forming a narrative which shifts through a variety of tones and modes, by turns tender, ardent, bracing, admonitory, self-mocking.

For both women, the friendship provided a site for questioning the existing boundaries of 'sisterhood'.
Jewsbury's letters are full of ironic references to the 'Mrs. Ellis' school of femininity, juxtaposed with speculations about a future in which the old rules may be challenged and broken, when women will have the opportunities, presently limited to men, of developing their 'higher' faculties.

A 'Mrs. Ellis' woman is developed to the extreme of her little possibility; but I can see there is a precious mine of a species of womanhood yet undreamed of by the professors and essayists on female education, and I believe also that we belong to it. 57

She sees herself and her friend as 'indications of a development of womanhood which as yet is not recognised':

It has, so far, no ready-made channels to run in, but still we have looked, and tried, and found that the present rules for women will not hold us - that something better and stronger is needed... There are women to come after us, who will approach nearer the fulness of the measure of the stature of a woman's nature. I regard myself as a mere faint indication, a rudiment of the idea, of certain higher qualities and possibilities that lie in women, and all the eccentricities and mistakes and miseries and absurdities I have made are only the consequences of an imperfect formation, an immature growth. 58

The challenge to existing conventions took a more immediate and practical turn in the friendship of Anna Jameson and Ottilie von Goethe. When Ottilie, a widow with three children, became pregnant by an impecunious young student who refused to marry her, Anna went out to Germany, saw her through her pregnancy, and gave her endless practical, emotional and financial support until the child's death two years later. To a friend who doubted the wisdom of her action, she justified it in terms of sisterhood:
Am I then here to scribble and speak pretty words about women, and then, if I see a woman perishing at my feet morally and physically, not stretch out a hand to save a soul alive? And this for fear of shadow, of what the Madame K--s of this world might say of me? 59

Although the relationship offers a space for questioning some of the constraints upon women, it is nevertheless formed within contemporary understandings of womanhood. 60 Despite their resistance to the conventions of feminine behaviour, both Jewsbury and Jameson accepted the concept of 'separate spheres'. Tensions arise from the different points at which the friends place the boundaries of acceptable womanly behaviour: Anna Jameson was deeply and frequently distressed by Ottilie's turbulent love-affairs and their dominance over her life, by Ottilie's careless disregard for public opinion and society's laws. In the relationship between Jewsbury and Carlyle, it was Geraldine's lack of conformity that caused tensions:

Do you know, my love, that I have actually been resolving to try to be more conformable and more proper-behaved in my manners and conversation, in order to be more of a credit to you! If I am to be your friend I must, and ought to, be a more responsible and less whimsical person than I am! 61

The problematic relationship between confidentiality and expressiveness, evident in the conduct manuals, spills over even into the private and intimate space of the letter. Many nineteenth-century women destroyed their most intimate correspondence; Jameson and Jewsbury continually urge their friends to do so, and each carried out her half of the bargain. Only half of each correspondence survives. Jewsbury
devised elaborate plans for returning Jane's letters if she should die suddenly; in the event she destroyed them herself, one by one, on her death-bed. Though both relationships lasted throughout life, there were frequent rifts and tensions, often pivoting on the question of what could and should be said: one or other of the women has revealed too much, or too little. Anna Jameson is constantly justifying her failure to express her feelings as fully and freely as her friend desires, a difference which she rationalises as 'a difference of language, habits and associations and national nature'.

Jewsbury, by contrast, defended the strength of her feelings with characteristic irony but was still mocked by her friend, who observed that 'Such mad, lover-like jealousy on the part of one woman towards another it had never entered my heart to conceive'.

The most enduring and significant barrier, however, was simply the fact of physical separation. Both correspondences return continually to the frustrations caused by distance, by the lack of connection between their worlds, by their inability to offer anything more concrete than the sympathy of fellow-feeling. Yet both Jameson and Jewsbury accepted the primacy of 'natural ties' as inevitable. Anna Jameson saw it as her duty to spend a year visiting her separated husband in Canada, postponing a longplanned visit to her friend; her desire to be with Ottilie was continually deflected by family commitments. Geraldine Jewsbury told Jane:

If I had had many claims of what you call natural affection on me I could not have cared for you as I
do. At least, those of my friends in whom they are fully filled up are not those who are able to care for any beyond them. Their friends are unnecessary, they are never more than ‘the stranger that is within the gate,’ and this must account to you for what may seem like exaggeration in me. 64

As in the manuals, these various frustrations are rationalised by an understanding of friendship as ‘transcendent’, bound by neither time or place. When there is a departure from the ideal within the relationship, the discourse of the letters closes over it, redefining it to make it fit: no matter how great the changes in their lives, the differences or distance between them, the relationship itself will remain solid and constant. Geraldine Jewsbury tells Jane that, although the relationship has often caused her acute suffering, ‘I only say this to make you feel how utterly it is beyond your power to vex or estrange me permanently; as long as you are in this world the tie exists, with a strength that has been proved, and which is far beyond any control of your own’. 65

Although the letters continually return to the fantasy of a shared home, of living and working together, it is always recognised as a fantasy. The relationship offers, rather, a continuing source of strength and aspiration, an ideal to be held constant and worked towards, a solid point giving coherence to their fragmented lives. As Anna Jameson told Ottilie, ‘to doubt your affection for me, dear Ottilie, is to take away the earthly object of my life. - I cease to care what becomes of me, if I have not that thought always before me of living to help you to live’. 66
Like the novels I shall be discussing, the letters offer a means of imagining new possibilities, of testing the limits of gender boundaries. They draw on, but also extend, Victorian understandings of sisterhood. They are visionary documents, even though the shared dreams are inevitably partial and speculative; even though, as Geraldine Jewsbury puts it in a succinct prefiguration of structuralism, they are not 'the exact signs of the things signified':

I am tired to death of writing letters into space; the best of letters are fractions of fragments, and deceit one by pretending to do away with the inconvenience of absence - whereas one only writes, after a long separation, to oneself, instead of one's friend. Letters between people who have not seen each other for so long as we have, too, never are the exact signs of the things signified... I might just as well be writing a supposititious letter for a new edition of the 'Complete Letter-writer' from a lady to her female friend.
CHAPTER TWO

HALF SISTERS: THE MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY NOVEL

It is the fashion to deride woman's influence over woman, to laugh at female friendship, to look with scorn on all those who profess it; but perhaps the world at large little knows the effect of this influence - how often the unformed character of a young, timid and gentle girl may be influenced for good or evil by the power of an intimate female friend.

...Female friendship may be abused, may be but a name for gossip, letter writing, romance, nay worse, for absolute evil ... Our simple tale will prove the good. How consoling and how beautiful may be "woman's mission," even unto woman.

(Grace Aguilar, Woman's Friendship) 1

In this chapter, I shall be looking at a number of mid-nineteenth-century novels, many of them comparatively obscure. Since these texts are likely to be unfamiliar, some summary will be necessary to my purpose, which is to identify and interpret the characteristic patterns and rituals of Victorian fictional friendship. The framework established here will be important for two reasons. Firstly, as I shall show in the next chapter, an understanding of this larger picture leads us to a new reading of novels by major Victorian women writers. Secondly, by looking at forgotten novels alongside more familiar texts, we can locate the traditions of women's fictions about friendship. Some of the patterns and devices identified in this chapter will continue to appear throughout this thesis. The particular forms which they take in the Victorian novel are closely related to the concept of femininity advocated so zealously in the conduct manuals; in the hands of later writers, the conventions are modified and transformed in relation to changing
understandings of feminine identity, sexuality and potential.

The novels discussed in this chapter deal with the formative friendship: the friendship made in girlhood, or on the threshold between girlhood and womanhood. The novels, like the conduct books, represent the formation of female subjectivity as an active process, a continual struggle between strength and weakness, which friendship may help or hinder. Positive friendships 'elevate', distinguishing the two friends from the more trivial, more materialistic, more 'artificial' women about them: the true friends are more 'refined', more 'cultivated', and at the same time simpler, more 'natural': true organic women. Dangerous friendships, on the other hand, offer the risk that that organic identity will be lost, that the heroine will lose touch with her natural simplicity and will be brought down, assimilated into the 'false' version of femininity that her friend represents.

The understanding of friendship offered in the novels has its roots in ideology, then, but I want to demonstrate that it does not simply reproduce the terms of that ideology. Many of the rituals which recur in Victorian fiction have their origins in the experience of early girlhood. In this chapter and the next, I shall be saying a lot about dressing up, princesses and nursery tea, and I shall be taking these apparently trivial matters seriously, as the novels do. Within the narratives, shared female experiences are turned into
ritual moments of transformation and exchange between women, often signalling the heroine's access to womankind. Such moments of exchange, which often occupy a privileged place within the Victorian novel, may be interpreted as offering a fantasised transformation of the real circumstances of women's lives. Women's dependent and circumscribed position within patriarchy is turned into an illusion of control; female development is seen as something entirely within women's hands. Yet I want to emphasise that, although they may suggest a desire for change or a dream of resistance, these narrative devices can't simply or unproblematically be celebrated as 'subversive'. Their signification is flexible. They can be used in accommodatory ways which work ultimately to ratify the Victorian ideology of femininity; they can also be deployed in ways which stretch and test the limits of that ideology.

I. THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN WOMEN

Like the authors of the conduct manuals, Victorian women novelists find a 'place' for friendship by drawing on the urgent need for female self-formation. This is a theme central to Harriet Martineau's Deerbrook, first published in 1839. Deerbrook was a seminal text for Victorian women writers. Charlotte Brontë, in the guise of 'Currer Bell', wrote to Martineau to say that Deerbrook ranked with 'the writings that have really done him good, added to his stock of ideas, and
rectified his views of life'; on reading it, 'he' had 'tasted a new and keen pleasure'.³ (The metaphor is significant, as will be clear when we get to Jane Eyre.) Anna Jameson continually urged Ottilie von Goethe to read Martineau's novel, emphasising its 'Englishness' and adding on one occasion 'you must read it, tho it may tire you'.⁴ Her caution was warranted: Deerbrook is a compelling, exhausting and profoundly didactic novel. Yet its appeal for Victorian women is easily understood. Kathleen Tillotson locates it as the first serious novel of domestic provincial life since Jane Austen.⁵ For its female readers, Deerbrook touched a chord because it turned the bourgeois Englishwoman's 'mission' into high drama, representing her continuing personal struggle between strength and weakness as a matter of urgent social importance, vital to the stability and harmony of the community in which she lives. Martineau placed the question of female friendship at the heart of that drama.

The 'Deerbrook' of the novel's title is, on the surface, a neat and pretty village. Beneath that surface, Deerbrook is in fact a mess, a potential volcano of confused factions, petty rivalries, and unexamined prejudices, and the source of disharmony is primarily located in the narrow vision and self-absorption of the women in the village. The urgency of women's battle for self-control is given imaginative expression through a pair of contrasted sisters. Hester is beautiful, generous and courageous,
but these qualities are overshadowed by her inability to project beyond her own overpowering desire to possess, absolutely, those whom she loves. Her struggle is the more urgent since, during the course of the novel, she marries its hero, Edward Hope - a dissenting surgeon of radical views who represents 'hope' for the future. The novel's heroine is Hester's sister Margaret, who exemplifies the unselfconscious strength and quiet calm of the woman who has struggled against the desires of the self, and won. (The reader should be warned that in this chapter and the next there will be many Margarets, all of whom have a close affinity with the heroine of Deerbrook.)

At the start of the novel, the recently-orphaned sisters are totally reliant upon one another, sustained by 'the vision of a friendship which should be unearthly in its depth and freedom' (p.15). But when Margaret forms a close intimacy with another woman, Hester's possessiveness comes to the surface, erupting in repeated lacerating outbursts of jealousy which are succeeded by equally desperate bouts of self-recrimination. The disruptive effects of Hester's jealousy are juxtaposed with the tranquillity, harmony and unselfishness which characterises the relationship between Margaret and Maria.

The two friends are first drawn together by a shared desire for learning. Maria is a governess, crippled by a girlhood accident, impoverished, and lonely. Their meeting-place is the little summer-house
in which Maria teaches her pupils, where Margaret joins her friend in studying German; this paradigm, in which friendship is founded upon the learning of a 'new language', will recur again and again in women's fictional friendships. In this novel, the women's shared studies are identified with an ardent desire to explore the possibilities offered by a bright new world - to be a 'new' kind of woman - and with their readiness to engage with ideas dismissed by others as strange or obscure, to project, beyond themselves, and to use knowledge as a guide to feeling and action. Hester's exclusion from the friendship is her own decision, since she is invited to share their studies, but it is also inevitable; this is a 'self-improving' relationship, and at this point in the novel Hester doesn't, strictly speaking, have a self to improve.

The little haven of the summer-house is represented as a separate world, a space apart from the main events of the narrative, where the two friends not only study, but talk endlessly, in long, intimate, speculative conversations which exemplify the Victorian concept of the 'second self', the friendship based on shared aspirations and ideals. As the similarity of their names suggests, the two young women are very alike; both have endured, and come through, the struggle with the self which for Hester has only just begun. They share a disciplined integrity and a commitment to duty. Although Margaret doesn't realise it, they also share a lover. Throughout their close intimacy, Maria conceals
from her friend the fact that she is in love with Philip, the man Margaret eventually marries, and that she once had good reason to believe that their relationship would end in marriage. This plot-device - the story of the shared lover - is pervasive in the Victorian novel, and I want to look here at its general significance.

In most of the novels I shall be looking at, the two friends are in love with the same man. The rivalry is not discussed, nor does it undermine the strength of the relationship between the women. One friend simply suppresses her feelings, and cedes the man to the other. This may be seen simply as a reflection of the ideological understanding of friendship as 'transcendent', unaffected by changing circumstances and never in conflict with other ties. No doubt the prevalence of this paradigm also reflects the fact that, even when contained within the ideological framework of 'woman's mission', female friendship alone was not an 'acceptable' subject for the novel; the 'shared lover' story offers an easy way of accommodating female friendship within the story of courtship. But as it is represented in the novels, it has a further significance.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued persuasively that male bonding in literature is structured around the exchange of women: women act as symbolic property whose primary purpose is to cement men's relationships with men. As Kosofsky's sophisticated analysis
demonstrates, the traffic in women takes different shapes in different texts, but it is important that the underlying concept has a direct relationship with women's actual social position: Kosofsky is drawing on anthropological accounts of the structures which underpin marriage in patriarchal society. I want to argue that the novels offer a fantasised revision of this process, in which the sexual contract is transformed into a collusion and exchange between women. The unpreferred friend not only relinquishes her own claim on the man, but also helps to 'create' the other woman as future wife, a process often symbolically underscored in the text through the exchange of gifts or the arrangement of clothes. This is very clearly the case in Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, in the business of the two nosegays which arrive for the step-sisters on the evening of Molly's first ball (chosen, as Molly guesses but Cynthia does not, by Roger Hamley, the shared lover of this novel.) Cynthia immediately pulls her own nosegay apart, selecting flowers to turn into a little coronet for her step-sister; Molly, on the other hand, carries her nosegay exactly as it was sent. At the ball, Cynthia's spoilt bouquet fades rapidly, while Molly's carefully cherished flowers remain fresh. It is an intricate little moment which at once signals to the reader all the reasons why the simple and faithful Molly is the right wife for Roger and the restless and careless Cynthia is not, while turning that judgement
into a tribute to Cynthia's generous affection for Molly.

In the opening chapter of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Celia and Dorothea divide their mother's jewels. Dorothea immediately takes up the amethyst necklace which seems, at first, the finest of the jewels and fastens it around her sister's neck, where it fits very snugly. This anticipates her relinquishment of Sir James Chettam in Celia's favour, just as Dorothea's own more contradictory attitude to the jewels - at first renouncing them altogether and then keeping the best for herself - prefigures the character of her own two later marriages, to Casaubon and Will Ladislaw.

In *Wives and Daughters* and *Middlemarch*, as very often with the 'exchanged lover' ritual, the sense of complicity is created by narrative device, anticipating a relinquishment which only becomes explicit and voluntary later in the novel. In *Deerbrook*, the renunciation is much more conscious. Early in the novel, Philip leaves a book, inscribed as a gift, in one of the desks in Maria's schoolroom. Maria assumes for a moment that the pretty little volume is intended for her, and then recollects that the desk is the one used by Margaret during her visits to the schoolroom. She instantly subdues her own sickness of heart, and hands the book to Margaret with a smile, assuring her that the present is undoubtedly hers (pp. 59-65). It is a moment which works in the way I have indicated, to transform rivalry into voluntary exchange - Philip's gift becomes
Maria's gift - but it also indicates the wedge which Philip's action could have caused. The volume is in German, and is placed on top of Margaret's German exercises; the gift represents a potential appropriation and suppression of the women's shared language, instantly defused by Maria's action and absorbed into their discourse.

Because of the affection and identification between the friends, we are made painfully aware of the difference in their destinies. The summer-house has a different significance for each woman: for Margaret, surrounded by family and friends, actively involved in the turbulent dramas of village life, it is a peaceful and refreshing haven to which she can escape. For Maria, confined by her poverty and her handicap to a lonely life as an onlooker, Margaret's visits are brief bright intervals in a place of drudgery, where she carries out her monotonous and often unrewarding task of attempting to rectify in the children of Deerbrook the failures of their parents. Through this contrast, and also in their conversations, Martineau explores the narrowness of women's lives and the pressing need for more fulfilling and remunerative employment for bourgeois women. Yet the pessimistic realism of the novel's ending partly closes over the resonant sense of injustice which often pervades it. Margaret is about to be married; the friends must part. In a final meeting in the summer-house, Margaret deplores their separation and the contrast between her own happiness and Maria's
bleak future. Maria's reply carries all the weight of the novel's project: inequality and suffering are inevitable, and must be born; the less fortunate woman must find some kind of happiness in solitude, monotony, and submission to Providence.

The important point here is that everything we have seen between Maria and Margaret has led up to this moment; their whole relationship is founded on shared commitment to self-renunciation and duty. Margaret, we have to feel, would have said the same in Maria's place; life is unfair, and the good woman simply has to put up with it. Grace Aguilar's novel *Woman's Friendship* (1850) offers a much more optimistic and ingenuous version of the self-improving friendship, which will serve to illustrate some of the characteristic conventions of the mid-Victorian period. The novel begins with a conversation between the young country-bred heroine and her mother. Florence's natural grace, cultivated mind and intuitive refinement have aroused the interest of a wealthy aristocrat, Lady Ida. The counsel given by Florence's mother reproduces, almost to the word, the advice given in the Victorian conduct manuals. She herself, as an older woman and an invalid, cannot provide her daughter with the true companionship she needs; Florence must find a friend who can share her interests and aspirations, guide her development, provide correction and affectionate support. Although Lady Ida seems perfection itself, the difference in status makes the mother doubt whether the friendship is
really desirable. The novel proves her wrong. An idyllic intimacy develops, in which Florence finds to her utmost astonishment, that her thoughts were read by her new companion before she had shaped them into words; her tastes drawn forth irresistibly to meet with sympathy and improvement; her simple pleasures, both in books and nature, appreciated, encouraged, and so delightfully directed higher than she had ever ventured alone, that every hour spent in Lady Ida's society was productive of pleasures which she had never even imagined before. (p.17)

What Aguilar offers the reader is a simple and romantic Cinderella story, in which Lady Ida is both Prince Charming and fairy godmother. Florence is invited to her first ball, but is unable to go because she has nursed her invalid mother so devotedly that she has had no time to make a dress. At the last moment, she is whisked away at Lady Ida's contrivance and dressed for the ball in clothes provided by her friend. The graceful white robe, the tiny slipper, the delicate gloves fit so admirably, and accord so perfectly 'with her age and station' (p.42) that even Florence's nice sensitivities are satisfied. The crowning grace is a single white camellia, which 'gleamed like a star amid those jetty tresses so purely, so freshly beautiful, it seemed fit emblem of the gentle girl whom it adorned' (pp.42-3); her only ornament is a valuable yet simple Maltese cross, a gift from Lady Ida. It is a ceremony which celebrates Florence's moral and social 'elevation', the completion of her spiritual development, and the contribution of Lady Ida.

Florence's 'coming-out' is a typical, if conveniently transparent, example of what I shall be
calling the 'dressing up ritual'. Here, one friend, usually the one who, by virtue of age, class or worldly experience, has a more secure footing in the world of femininity, 'creates' her friend into a woman, often on the symbolic occasion of her first ball, by arranging her hair or dress. As Frances Power Cobbe noted in 1881, the problem about friendship is that, unlike marriage, it has no sanctifying ceremony. What we find in the Victorian novel is that the homely and ephemeral details of shared female experience are turned into ritual. The ordinary things girls do together - dressing up, exchanging flowers and little presents, posing in the mirror together - become symbolic moments which, within the narrative, confirm the process of shared self-formation and signal its completion.

The exchange of flowers is particularly pervasive in the novels of this period. The letters of George Eliot to her girlhood friends illustrate the place which the nineteenth-century 'Language of Flowers' could occupy in the adolescent relationship. Eliot signed her letters as 'Clematis', meaning 'Mental Beauty'; her friend Patty Jackson was Ivy, signifying Constancy, and her former governess Maria Lewis was Veronica, or Fidelity in Friendship. But by the age of twenty-two Eliot was ready to take up her own (albeit temporary) identity: 'May I call you Maria? I feel our friendship too serious a thing to endure an artificial name. And restore to me Mary Ann'. In general terms, then, the prevalence of flowers suggests the special yet transient
quality of the girlhood friendship, but the exchanges also draw specifically on conventional associations. 'Crowning' with camellias is the most common device: within the Language of Flowers, the white camellia signifies 'perfected Loveliness', the red camellia 'unpretending excellence'. Lady Ida's gift to Florence is a white camellia; in Wives and Daughters, the flowers which Cynthia draws out from her own nosegay to make into a coronet for Molly, selecting them as especially suited to Molly's peculiar charms, are red camellias. The exchange of flowers may have many other resonances. It may signify access to sexuality, especially when one woman, more sexually aware, 'passes on' her own sexuality to the other. When the flowers exchanged are exotic, 'hothouse' flowers, as they usually are, this suggests the special qualities that the friends share, as women who are both 'natural' and 'cultivated', organic and rare.

As I shall demonstrate later, these ritual moments could be deployed in intricate and ambiguous ways, but in Woman's Friendship the dressing up ritual acts simply as a celebration of Florence's access to womanhood and of the power of female friendship. Aguilar's novel is presented to the reader as polemic, as a plea for a more general recognition of the validity and importance of friendship between women. The love between Florence and Lady Ida survives Ida's marriage, a long period of separation, and a series of complicated misunderstandings. What Aguilar also painstakingly
demonstrates is that their affection is in no way in opposition to the social order or the claims of family ties. Florence’s self-effacing devotion to her family, and her humble deference to her friend’s superior social status are unwavering. Florence and Ida are drawn together because they are exemplary women: modest, self-sacrificing, loyal, refined, cultivated and unworldly. It is anything but a subversive text, and yet Aguilar gets into difficulties when she comes to the end of her novel. Florence’s long period of self-sacrifice has been rewarded with a title, a fortune, and re-union with Lady Ida. Aguilar makes it clear that she would like to end her novel there. She enters into a long debate with the reader, in which she argues that a single woman’s life can be rewarding and fulfilling, but she finally submits to her imagined reader’s demands, and suddenly produces a lover for Florence. She turns the novel back to the subject of friendship by narrative device: the lover is Lady Ida’s cousin, and the narrative ends with another version of the ‘exchanged lover’ ritual, in which Lady Ida formally hands over her friend to her cousin.

II. DEFINING DIFFERENCE: MIRRORS, LETTERS AND MOTHERS

So far, I have been looking at devices which work to affirm the solidarity of female bonding, and the positive part which friendship can play in the formation of female subjectivity. I want to look now at two motifs which express the other side of that process: the
problem of sisterhood, the fear that just as identification between women may 'elevate', it may also 'degrade', submerging difference, dissolving one woman into another. One important device, the 'mirror ritual', will appear, with modifications, throughout the period covered by this thesis. In this ritual, the two friends look in the mirror together, in a moment of shared self-recognition, of simultaneous identification and separation, which is a pivotal moment of access to femininity. In the Victorian novel, this moment often has an ambivalent resonance.

In Dinah Mulock Craik's *Olive* (1850), the girlhood friendship is presented as the conventional 'romantic rehearsal'. Captivated by Sara's beauty and easy charm, Olive falls passionately in love with her, opening her heart to the exciting new experience. But the relationship follows the pattern described in Craik's *A Woman's Thoughts About Women*: after a period of all-absorbing ardent identification, the 'romance' of friendship gradually shades into the girls' shared dreams of 'real' romance, and is thoroughly reformulated as a merely prefigurative experience. Olive learns that Sara is really ordinary and shallow; much later, after Sara's early death, she steps into her friend's shoes by marrying her widower. But the friendship effectively ends on the night of Olive's first ball. Rather improbably, the crippled young heroine has been entirely unaware of her 'deformity' until, dancing with her friend, she confronts their contrasted images in the
As they danced, she watched in the tall mirror Sara's graceful, floating image, and the little pale figure that moved beside her. There was a contrast! (p. 76). Seeing her shape as she never has before, suddenly conscious of her difference from 'normal' femininity, Olive is precipitated abruptly into adult life at the moment when she becomes separated from the false 'second self'.

The relationship between Molly and Cynthia in Wives and Daughters follows a similar, but more intricate, trajectory. The naive and susceptible Molly falls instantly in love with Cynthia's careless beauty and wayward grace. Gaskell simultaneously tells us that the infatuation is perfectly delightful, natural and universal, while warning us from the start that what is most lovable about Cynthia is also what is most faulty, and that the relationship is always potentially dangerous to Molly. Such 'exquisite power of adaptation', she tells us from the start, is perhaps 'incompatible with very high principle' (p. 254). This fragile balance is maintained throughout the novel. The relationship is an endless dressing-up ritual, in which Cynthia's perfect taste is lovingly deployed to transform awkward little Molly into her own mirror-image. Molly is associated with real flowers, Cynthia with artificial ones, which her nimble fingers are continually dismantling and rearranging into ornaments for Molly. As Molly grows to Cynthia's height, the identification between them becomes
stronger; the two have matching shawls, identical bonnets and bedrooms. As the relationship itself becomes closer, so does it become increasingly a source of anxiety: 'it was not the sunshiny rest of a placid lake, it was rather the glitter of a broken mirror, which confuses and bewilders' (p. 389). As Cynthia blooms, Molly becomes increasingly pale, drained, and overwrought. That the loving identification between the two spells disintegration for Molly is underlined in the mirror ritual, when Molly returns home from picking blackberries for her sister to find that Roger has proposed to Cynthia. Cynthia puts her arms around Molly and offers her mouth to be kissed:

Molly could not resist the action - the mute entreaty for a caress. But, in the moment before, she had caught reflections of the two faces in the glass; her own, red-eyed, pale, with lips dyed with blackberry juice, her curls tangled, her bonnet pulled awry, her gown torn - and contrasted it with Cynthia's brightness and bloom, and the trim elegance of her dress. (pp. 421-2)

Finally, the close resemblance between the pair embroils Molly in a scandal. When Molly helps Cynthia to recover letters written to a former lover, their identities become confused: following the codes of sisterhood, Molly does not challenge the rumours that she is involved in a secret love affair, and her good name is temporarily threatened.

The plot-device of the 'misaligned letter' appears in a number of Victorian novels. The heroine's letters are appropriated, destroyed or altered by another woman; or, alternatively, she is persuaded to assume responsibility for the transgressive correspondence of
her "second self". In Woman’s Friendship, Florence’s happiness, reputation and friendship with Lady Ida are almost destroyed by a malignant double with identical handwriting and an almost identical name. Flora Leslie destroys a letter from Florence to Lady Ida, substituting one which suggests that Florence’s character has been horribly transformed; she usurps Florence’s identity to conduct a scandalous clandestine correspondence with an army officer. In Woman’s Friendship, friendship triumphs over the machinations of the false second self; Lady Ida helps Florence to disentangle the assimilated identities and restore her good name.

In Maria Edgeworth’s Helen (1834), as in Gaskell’s Wives and Daughters, the problematic second self is also the heroine’s friend, and in this novel the device of the misaligned letter forms the central thread of the narrative. Helen, the orphaned heroine, comes to live with her recently married childhood friend, Cecilia. Cecilia’s husband, General Clarendon, is a rigidly patriarchal figure who expects unblemished perfection in his wife. Once again, the two women have identical handwriting, and Helen is beseeched by her friend to accept responsibility for a compromising packet of letters written by Cecilia during a girlhood flirtation. Spurred on by her own romantic notions of sisterhood and self-sacrifice, Helen agrees, and the rest of the novel traces the heroine’s downward spiral, as Cecilia repeatedly promises, and fails, to tell the
truth. The scandal snowballs, Helen is shunned by the world, separated from her lover, thrown out by the General; her bloom fades, her health breaks down, and she is on the edge of complete disintegration when Cecilia finally confesses.

Edgeworth was a writer whom Gaskell much admired, and with whom she corresponded for a number of years; she drew closely on Helen in writing Wives and Daughters. Both novels have a prototypical ‘organic’ heroine - simple, serious, truthful, unworldly - who is closely attached to a more brilliantly coloured, more sophisticated young woman who is warm, generous and fascinating but dangerously inclined to be economical with the truth. In both novels, the heroine is pressurised into becoming more and more like her pliable and ‘artificial’ friend; Cecilia insists that Helen wears clothes and jewellery identical to her own. The fallibility of both Cecilia and Cynthia is associated with French influence, which is seen as the source both of their rarefied taste and of their propensity to artifice. But more fundamentally, their faults are attributed to maternal neglect; Cynthia and Cecilia both have mothers whose early lack of interest has left them ‘outside the pale of duty and “oughts”’ (Wives and Daughters, p.261) and impelled by a compulsive need to please.

In ‘rewriting’ Helen, however, Gaskell made some significant revisions. As a mentor, mother and step-mother, Clare Gibson is, often comically but always
consistently, inadequate. This is not the case in *Helen*, in which Cecilia’s mother, Lady Davenant, plays a complicated double role. Lady Davenant is a formidable and powerful figure, the wife of a Whig politician whose own active involvement in public affairs has led to neglect the education of her daughter, leaving her vulnerable to the unreliable influence of governesses and foreign friends. With her daughter, then, she has failed, and knows it; she has not passed on to Cecilia her own uncompromising integrity. For Helen, on the other hand, Lady Davenant acts as a positive role-model, the true friend that Cecilia fails to be. Seeing that Helen is not just Cecilia’s ‘second self’ but her ‘better self’ (p. 187), she much prefers her to her own daughter. For Helen, Lady Davenant acts a firm, ironical but gentle guide and inspirational mentor:

>a strong ambition was excited in her mind to justify the high opinion her superior friend had formed of her. She determined to become all that she was believed to be; as the flame of a taper suddenly rises towards what is held over it, her spirit mounted towards the point to which her friend pointed. (p. 28)

When Cecilia finally repents, she is forgiven and formally reabsorbed into the sisterhood. Only the General remains obdurate, until, in the novel’s conclusion, the dying Lady Davenant, flanked by daughter and surrogate daughter, flings herself at the General’s feet and persuades him to accept his wife back. Mother’s neglect and daughter’s offence are expiated; the differences between the women dissolve into a shared, cross-generational, female identity.
Helen is a novel with at least one foot in the eighteenth century. It was Edgeworth's last novel, and she had ceased to be a 'literary lion' many years before; the exclusive concern with aristocratic life, and many of the characters, reflect the preoccupations of a much earlier period. Gaskell's representation of the relationship between 'kinship' and 'friendship' is more characteristic of the Victorian novel, though I wouldn't want to suggest that there's any other mother quite like Clare Gibson. The point here is that Molly and Cynthia are step-sisters. In many Victorian novels, the two friends are close kin; often, as in Wives and Daughters, they are 'sisters' and yet not sisters. The family relationship confirms their biological connection, their shared femininity, while allowing for difference between them, often expressed as an interplay between 'foreign' and 'English': 'Don't trouble yourself with trying to interpret a French girl's meaning' (p. 320) Cynthia tells Molly with characteristic self-mockery.

In my next section, I shall be looking at a number of mid-century novels in which the two women are half-sisters, but only one is fully English. But before I do so, I shall need to say a few general words about kinship.

The pages of novels by Victorian women are littered with dead relatives; mothers, fathers and brothers die, sometimes in rapid succession. They also fail; but they fail in different ways. The failure of brothers and fathers is primarily economic: brothers gamble and get
into debt, fathers die and leave the family affairs in disarray. Mothers, on the other hand, 'fail' physically or morally: either way, they are too weak to cope with the demands of the world. These various forms of 'failure' act partly as narrative device: they often work to precipitate the heroine involuntarily from the domestic to the public domain, where, against the grain of her own judgement and desire, she is forced to take up an independent life, to work for her living. There is, however, more to be said about mothers.

In the novels discussed in this chapter, as in most novels by Victorian women writers, there are three kinds of natural mothers. There is the mother who has already passed away, who exists only as a sweet but vague memory in the mind of the heroine; there is the fragile invalid, who comes to depend on the protection and support of her stronger daughter; and there is the inadequate mother, who initially fails to see her daughter's true worth, but comes eventually to recognise and rely upon her. In the last two cases, the mother often dies during the course of the novel, but before she does so their positions are reversed: the daughter becomes mother, the parent becomes child.

The pervasiveness of the death-scene, the emphasis on separation and restoration, the positive part sometimes played by surrogate mothers, have led some critics to interpret fictional relations between women in terms of a primary maternal bond. I want to suggest a different focus. I would argue that we need to
see the separation from the mother, not as a transhistorical drama of the female psyche, but as a fantasised historical drama, which reflects the contradictory understanding of the ideal woman as both 'new' and organic. The 'strong' woman replaces the 'weak', but is also her natural daughter. The 'surrogate' mother figure needs to be seen as precisely that: as a *surrogate*, and not a *replica*. The relationship places the heroine within the 'sisterhood', helps to form and validate her feminine identity, while separating her from those who have 'gone before'.

The point may be made more clearly by contrasting Victorian representations of friendship with those in the eighteenth-century novel, where the culminating moment of the relationship is often the one where the friendship bond dissolves into kinship. Janet Todd notes that 'certainly the intensest ecstasies in many sentimental novels occur not when the hero approaches, but when a long-lost sister is recognised in a dearest friend'. ¹⁶ But there is also another paradigm, exemplified in two very different eighteenth-century novels: Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel, *The Italian* (1797) and Sarah Scott's utopian *Millenium Hall* (1762). In Radcliffe's novel, the heroine is abducted to a monastery. Here she is strangely drawn towards one of the nuns, a woman whose seraphic piety and unworldliness is indicated first by her exquisite voice, and confirmed when the black veil which conceals her face is removed. The nun helps Ellena to escape, and when, after many
adventures, Ellena meets her friend again, the strong sympathetic attraction is explained: Olivia is Ellena's long-lost mother. Two of the friendships described in *Millenium Hall* follow a similar pattern: a powerful and inexplicable sudden attraction is finally confirmed and explained as the bond between mother and child. The point about this plot-device is that it presents femininity as a seamless and transhistorical process; there is no differentiation between friend and mother, parent and child.

The Victorian novels follow a different trajectory: the re-union of mother and child is not a simple act of restoration, but crucially suggests a shift in the understanding of femininity while keeping it within the arena of the 'natural'; the heroine is accepted back into the sisterhood without relinquishing her distinctness. It is fundamental to the Victorian representation of femininity that what we are being offered is a broken line, but not a broken mould.

III. CORINNE'S DAUGHTERS: HALF-SISTERS AND FOREIGN FRIENDS

The half-sisters paradigm appears in its most simply schematic form in Dinah Mulock Craik's *Olive*. Craik's novel, which had a long run of popularity, draws freely upon *Jane Eyre*. Olive and her half-sister Christal are (loosely, never explicitly) the fictive daughters of Mr. Rochester by Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason. Christal is the illegitimate daughter of a
ferocious and passionate Quadroon; Olive, the heroine and legitimate daughter, is a quiet, reserved young woman whose concealed depth of feeling and extraordinary visionary gift finds expression in her paintings. Unlike Jane Eyre, she takes her talent into the public sphere, achieving fame and fortune as an artist. She is also a hunchback.

Since women clearly can't be 'castrated', there seems to be no word to describe the way in which Victorian women writers persistently truncate the physiques of their creative women. The working-class singer Margaret in Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton (1848) is blind; the successful writer in Charlotte M. Yonge's The Clever Woman of the Family (1865) is confined to a wheelchair. It's a way of marking out the creative woman as 'different', rationalising her entry into the public domain by making her something less than a 'full' woman, but it also acts as a way of reducing and containing her 'phallic' threat to received notions of gendered identity. Just as, in Mary Barton, Margaret's sight is restored upon her marriage, so is Olive's handicap flexible: initially represented as a crippling deformity which repels even the heroine's mother, it later becomes more or less noticeable according to the demands of the plot, and, by the time Olive moves towards marriage, domesticity and the renunciation of her career, it has been modified to a barely visible defect in posture.
The contortions involved here illustrate the anxiety of women writers over the question of female creativity. It's not so much that creative production itself was the problem; by the mid nineteenth century women's writing had a long history, and the literary scene contained a number of highly competent professional women who, like Craik herself, handled their business affairs with confidence and were sometimes, like Harriet Martineau or Geraldine Jewsbury, in positions of considerable influence. The anxiety focusses on the implications of this for gendered identity: on the question of whether such a position somehow involved being less of a woman and more of a man. The reputation of George Sand stood as an admonitory example of the way in which 'transgressive' femininity, whether it was in the form of female 'genius' or 'irregular' sexuality, was most easily accommodated as a manifestation of bisexuality. Sand's novels were extremely widely read and discussed in the 1840s, but discussion of her work was often overshadowed by the relentless fascination with Sand's 'hermaphroditism', her cross-dressing, her cigars, the scandal of her extra-marital affairs, which, while largely heterosexual, somehow fed into the received framework of Sand's 'masculinity'.

For English women writers, the most important of Sand's novels was Consuelo, first published in 1842; Mary Taylor commented that it was worth taking the trouble of learning French simply to read it.
Consuelo combines genius with unblemished femininity. Reared on the streets of Florence, the waif with a golden voice grows up to be a celebrated prima donna while retaining her perfect simplicity and purity. Consuelo's distinguishing attributes - gleaming black hair, gypsy-like appearance, simple black dress - appear again and again in the heroines of Victorian women writers. But in Olive, Consuelo is split in half: the gipsy-like waif is the artist heroine's wicked half-sister.

Christal appears first as a ragged child with fierce black eyes, 'the very image of a half-tamed gipsy' (p. 149). When she re-enters the narrative after a spell in a French boarding-school, it is as a 'Frenchified' (p. 170) adult whose haughty elegance and artificial grace barely mask her real nature. Olive's rise towards selfless fame and virtuous domesticity is paralleled and disrupted by Christal's fall from repressed rebellious venom to demonic violence and uncontrolled sexuality: she tries to kill Olive, becomes a 'fallen' woman, goes mad, and ends up, bitter and humiliated, confined to the convent she has chosen as her 'spirit's grave' (p. 373).

The locking-up of the monstrous female clearly draws on Jane Eyre, and, like Bertha, Christal may be seen as expressing the resistance and rage that the text represses. Nor is this entirely a covert process: Craik points the finger at patriarchy and imperialism in the story of Christal's mother, who appears briefly in
the novel as a ravaged tigress, once an artist's model with the exotic beauty of an 'Eastern queen' (p. 147), who has been seduced and abandoned by Olive's father. She comes, as she tells Olive, from a country where there are thousands like herself, delicately-nurtured young girls 'whose mixed blood is too pure for slavery, too tainted for freedom. Lovely, accomplished, brought up delicately, they yet have no higher future than to be the white man's passing toy - cherished, wearied of, and spurned' (p. 150). Christal's wrecked life is similarly the offshoot of this casual seduction, but whereas Jane Eyre suggests an identification between Bertha and Jane, paralleling their entrapment, the narrative of Olive works to effect a clear separation between the heroine and her 'other', detaching Olive from the foreign, the exotic, the strange, and confirming her as, despite her transgressive talent, truly English and thus, truly feminine.

The interplay between 'foreign' and 'English' takes a more complex form in four other novels of this period, each of which depicts a relationship between a young English woman and a woman who is part-Italian. In Geraldine Jewsbury's The Half Sisters (1848) and Georgiana Fullerton's Grantley Manor (1847), the two women are half-sisters; in Elizabeth Sewell's Margaret Percival (1847) and Grace Aguilar's Woman's Friendship (1850), they are friends. The 'mother-text' of all four novels is clearly Mme de Staël's Corinne (1807), a novel whose influence on English women writers cannot be
overestimated. Although Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss failed to finish it, its general reception is captured more accurately in Geraldine Jewsbury’s The Half Sisters: ‘The first reading of “Corrinne” [sic] is an epoch a woman never forgets, and Alice never lifted her head till she had come to the last line in the last page of the volume….’(I.91).

Corinne is a celebration of the woman of genius who is also all woman. She is poet, singer, dancer, musician and writer, fluent in many languages, and, with her olive skin and dark hair, the loveliest woman in Rome. She is also sybil, prophetess, angel, visionary, queen and ordinary woman: passionate and pure, natural and sophisticated, faithful and free. She is, above all, a public performer, whose spontaneous improvisations express the deepest feelings and finest ideals of all who listen to her. She is first seen through the eyes of the English aristocrat who falls in love with her at the moment of her public triumph, when all of Rome has gathered at the Capitol to pay homage to her extraordinary achievements: poets compose in her honour, princes pay tribute, flowers fall, banners are waved and Corinne is crowned.

Corinne’s origins are obscure, though she is believed to be Italian; she is a woman who has created her own identity, who lives without ties, and has escaped her origins. Very late in the novel, it is revealed that she is in fact half-English, with an English half-sister whom her lover, Oswald Neville,
ultimately marries in deference to the wishes of his dead father, despite his passionate love for Corinne. Lucille, the half-sister, is an absolute contrast to her sister: she is pale and blonde, silent, child-like, private, and colourless. Although an 'angel' in her way, with her own aura of mystery, she is in fact, as de Staël makes clear, the repressed and subdued product of the English domestic ideal. The point is underlined by Corinne's account of the few miserable girlhood years she spent in Northumberland, in which all the warmth, imagination and spirit she had developed in Italy was almost crushed out of her by the narrow domestic code imposed by her English step-mother. The final part of Corinne is fairly unambiguously about the humiliation of Lucille. Corinne's gradual death from grief is a brilliantly orchestrated triumph, which demonstrates her dominance over her half-sister. Corinne, with whom Oswald is still deeply in love, takes over the education of Lucille's daughter and reforms the girl in her own image. Finally, she tells Lucille that if she is to make Oswald happy (all this is happening on Corinne's death-bed) she must become like her, be Corinne and Lucille in one.

Corinne entered deep into the consciousness of Victorian women writers, but it is never a simple question of influence. Rather, what we are dealing with is a protracted debate over national claims to 'true' femininity. In her discussion of Fanny Burney's The Wanderer (1814) Janet Todd notes that the heroine,
Juliet, has two contrasting friendships: one with Elinor, a woman deeply influenced by French and feminist sympathies, and the other with the gentle, amiable and feminine Aurora. Elinor disintegrates into madness; Juliet and Aurora are united in a rapturous sentimental friendship and ultimately prove to be half-sisters. 23

Maria Edgeworth also took up the cudgels on behalf of English domestic femininity in her epistolary novel Leonora (1806); in this novel, the French Olivia has been corrupted by French novels, German philosophy and fashionable talk about women of genius and women's rights; having, as a result, abandoned family, principle and duty in favour of sentiment, she attempts to steal the husband of her simple and trusting English friend. 24

Reading Corinne in 1808, Edgeworth professed herself 'dazzled with the genius & provoked by the absurdities', 25 and in Helen, Lady Davenant's addiction to power is directly attributed to the influence of Mme de Staël. In her youth, she tells Helen, she wanted to be the English Corinne, and her reading of de Staël's Sur La Revolution Francaise aroused in her a misguided determination to emulate the powerful ladies of France by intervening directly in public affairs, 'an ambition false in its objects, and unsuited to the manners, domestic habits and public virtue of our country'(p.69).

The English 'daughters of Corinne' published in the 1840s have a more intricate project. What we find in these novels is an attempt to interrogate de Staël's attack on English domestic ideology while negotiating a
place for some of Corinne's themes within that ideology; to bring about, in fact, the apparently impossible marriage between Deerbrook and Corinne. The proximity of their publication to the 'year of revolutions' may be noted, but in an important sense they are 'pre-revolutionary' novels; all were completed before 1848. Their project is not the pressing concern with gradualist social reform which characterised the English response to 1848, and which informs Charlotte Brontë's Shirley; nor, despite the Italian/English paradigm, are they concerned with actual events abroad. The issues they address are specific to the England of the mid 1840s.

It was a time, said Elizabeth Sewell, when 'everyone seemed waking up to a sense of unfulfilled duties'. It was a decade which saw the seeds of the middle-class women's movement, and the beginnings of the changes in women's education which were to be close to the heart of that movement. The dream of a women's college which was the subject of Tennyson's The Princess (1847) began to be realised in the founding of Queen's College for Women in 1848, and Bedford College in 1849; the foundations, during this decade, of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution and the first Anglican sisterhoods were among the apparently small steps which were to accelerate over the next half-century. The 'Corinne' novels of the 1840s all, in different ways, reflect the concept of the bourgeois woman's 'mission' advocated in the conduct manuals of the mid nineteenth
century, but their projects are by no means identical. Although each depends on an interplay between 'English and 'Italian', the attributes associated with 'Italianness' are different in each novel. What the novels have in common is that 'Italian' signifies 'Otherness'. The interplay between English and foreign offers a way of splitting the unitary female and acknowledging differences between women: joined at the root, they blossom in different ways. The interplay works, then, to test, and to some degree extend, the 'English' concept of femininity. But it's a circumscribed testing; the two women are finally united, and difference partly defused, by their shared English heritage.

Of the four novels, Geraldine Jewsbury's The Half Sisters follows the Corinne model most closely, validating the half-Italian 'woman of genius' (the illegitimate Bianca) over the legitimate daughter Alice, the subdued product of English bourgeois domesticity. Alice is docile, quiet, dreamy and delicate; her girlhood years are characterised by vague, restless yearnings, indicated in her ardent response to her first reading of Corinne. But Alice's incipient idealism and unformed artistic aspirations are stifled by her prosaic and domineering mother, who marries her off to a wealthy philistine ironmonger. Restricted to a life of listless domesticity and claustrophobic prosperity, Alice has a brief love affair, falls sick, and dies. Bianca, by contrast, is the natural woman, exuberantly uneducated,
passionate, courageous, and free. When she arrives in England with her frail, childlike mother, they are destitute and friendless. Bianca joins a circus and then goes on the stage to become an actress of genius, passionately committed to her art. Like Corinne, she has a miraculous ability to give form and expression to the unarticulated aspirations of her audience.

Jewsbury uses the *Corinne* story to make a full-frontal attack on the 'Mrs. Ellis\' school' of femininity she so often deplored in her letters to Jane Carlyle, and it is part of her argument that English bourgeois domesticity militates against friendship. Alice's sister-in-law, another oppressive figure who instructs the newly-married Alice in the proper behaviour of a bourgeois wife, tells her to forget her romantic illusions about love and friendship. Men, even husbands, are not to be trusted: on the other hand, she is not to have friendships with women outside the immediate family circle because 'there are always family secrets which ooze out to one's \'dear friends\'; they are confided in affection, and recollected in revenge, because, sooner or later, the best friends always quarrel...' (I.116)

The half-sisters themselves meet only briefly, but their relationship is set in contrast to such cold repressiveness. Unaware of their real relationship, they are drawn together by a strong inexplicable attraction. Bianca is down on her luck; Alice takes her in, feeds and clothes her. It is a fragile bond because
Alice has been so thoroughly indoctrinated that she is nervous about being friends with an actress. Bianca guesses that they are sisters, but keeps the 'family secret' to spare Alice embarrassment. Not wanting to lose her new friend, Alice at first tries to assimilate her into her own world, and finds her a job as a nursery governess. But when Bianca explains her consuming devotion to her art, Alice gives in. She finds lodgings for her friend, and decorates them in a secret labour of love, so that Bianca enters to find them full of flowers, pictures and books. This ritualistic moment, in which one friend prepares the other's room, creating a space from within which she can enter a new life, appears often in feminist-influenced novels of the late nineteenth century. But it is rare in this period, and its appearance in this novel compares with the way in which we can see Jewsbury, in her letters, groping towards new possibilities for women, while remaining at a distance from the women's movement. She hits on a new ritual, only to defuse it in the narrative's conclusion.

De Staël's Corinne cannot breathe in England; she can only flourish in the free air of Italy, even at the cost of relinquishing her English lover. In Jewsbury's novel, Bianca is absorbed into the English domestic world; she marries a wealthy English aristocrat, gives up the stage and directs her energies and talents to managing the household with magnificent dexterity. As reviewers noted at the time, it is an unsatisfactory and inconsistent ending, but it is necessary to
Jewsbury's project because she wants to show that England is redeemable; she twists the *Corinne* story in an attempt to show the possibility and desirability of reform from within. What England needs is an infusion of the 'illegitimate': the woman who can be passionate, creative and domesticated.

Georgiana Fullerton's *Grantley Manor* deploys the half-sisters paradigm for a very different purpose. In this story, both sisters are legitimate: the half-Italian Ginevra is the offspring of a second and deeply romantic marriage, and her arrival in England arouses confusion and jealousy in Margaret, her English half-sister. Again there is a shared lover, Edmund Neville, but in Fullerton's novel Edmund and Ginevra are secretly married before the narrative starts. This is suggested through the exchange ritual, long before Margaret or the reader are aware of the marriage: the half-sisters are winding wool together, when Ginevra loses her grasp of the red ball, which rolls across the room. Edmund picks it up and offers it to Margaret; she smiles and tells him to give it to Ginevra, who accepts it with a blush (I.278). The marriage is kept secret at Edmund's insistence, because of his father's rigid opposition to Roman Catholicism. Ginevra refuses to give up her religion, and many of the complications in the narrative revolve around her enforced silence and repressed suffering. Like Corinne, Ginevra is an improvisatrice and an actress of rare talent, but the
question of the 'woman of genius' is not the primary focus of this novel.

Fullerton wrote Grantley Manor when she was on the point of converting to Roman Catholicism. Her husband had been received into the Church several years before, and she herself seems to have delayed her decision only to spare the feelings of her father, a devout Anglican. Her purpose in Grantley Manor is not to validate the Roman over the English Church, but to plead for a tolerant recognition of difference and for a sympathetic understanding between the followers of the two churches. Her narrative is designed to effect a shift in her readers' understanding of Roman Catholicism, through a tightly controlled shift in their emotional response to the apparently contrasting half-sisters.

Fullerton touches only lightly on the question of religious difference between the sisters; the distinction between them, and the factors which separate them, are presented in terms of the 'known' and the 'unknown'. Margaret is transparent, guileless, frank, but inclined to hasty judgements and unconscious prejudices; Ginevra is seen through Margaret's eyes, as an object of mystery, a creature from another world, captivating yet strange, loving yet distant, foreign yet familiar. The reader is taken gradually through Margaret's jealousy and doubts, her fears that Ginevra's apparent affection, piety and purity are all false, but long before the truth is revealed, Fullerton has guided the reader to anticipate that, no matter how mysterious
and disturbing Ginevra may seem, she is really as pure
and true as Margaret herself.

Throughout the novel, the fictional conventions -
the half-sisters paradigm, the dressing-up ritual - are
used to draw the sisters together even when they are
apparently separate, and to accommodate difference while
emphasising their underlying bond. The English Margaret
is dark, the Italian Ginevra is fair; they study Italian
and English together, correcting one another's mistakes.

Flower imagery is especially profuse in this novel; the
two are Hyacinth and Forget-me-not, but more often the
conventional Lily and Rose. Ginevra daily weaves
hothouse flowers into wreaths for Margaret; she mixes
pink and white camellias and 'crowsns' her sister's head
while Margaret unconsciously plays with the beads of
Ginevra's rosary. Margaret wraps a furcoat around her
sister, looking 'like a damask rose by a lily'(I.249).

Even when they seem most divided, Margaret's desire for
her sister's love is frequently more powerful than her
doubts; the two are continually drawn together in
wordless reunions in which Ginevra tenderly plaits
Margaret's hair, or the sisters fall suddenly into one
another's arms and weep.

Fullerton is able to use the half-sisters story as
a vehicle for persuasion because she can rely on an
audience which will both respond to the conventions and
recognise the special importance of the girlhood
relationship. The narrative assumes a sympathetic
identification with Margaret's passionate desire to love
her unknown half-sister, and an unquestioning acceptance that their relationship can be intensely romantic and yet 'innocent'. Even so, the intensity invested in the relationship occasionally pushes against the confines of Fullerton's proselytising project. The novel contains several references to Coleridge's 'Christabel'. As Margaret's doubts about Ginevra increase, she begins to feel haunted by the poem, 'like a bad dream' (I.255) which disturbs her imagination until she feels as if she is under a spell, like a rose which withers and shrivels as the pale Ginevra blooms. She feels, like Christabel, 'as if she, too, had seen in that hour what no one else had seen, what no one else would ever believe, what she dared not describe, what she scarcely comprehended...' (II.32).

Lillian Faderman notes the prevalence of the 'lesbian-vampire' theme in twentieth-century novels in which one woman is presented as predator, draining the life and energy of her victim, while the other grows pale and drawn. This is clearly not Fullerton's intention in Grantley Manor; she wants us to see the strength of Margaret's jealousy, and the 'poison' of the relationship is located not in Ginevra, but in the gossip and prejudice which has distorted Margaret's judgement. In a sense, the novel offers a reversal of the vampire theme, in which the apparent predator is really the victim. Nevertheless, something of the strange unlocated eroticism of Coleridge's poem finds its way into this narrative, and is never fully
dispelled by the sentimental framework of the innocent sisterly bond. In Elizabeth Sewell's Margaret Percival, in which the 'trouble' of friendship is at the heart of the novel, the latent eroticism comes much closer to the conscious surface of the narrative.

Sewell's novel was published under the auspices of her brother William, a prominent member of the Oxford Movement who strongly opposed the slide towards Roman Catholicism. Distressed by the setback to the movement which followed Newman's conversion, he suggested the idea of the novel, which sets out to defuse the lure of the Catholic Church through the story of the temptations offered by a female friendship. (A safer analogy, the thinking clearly went, than a story of conventional romance.) In Sewell's novel, Margaret, the English Protestant heroine, is captivated by the ethereal beauty and exquisite refinement of a young widow, the Countess Novera. English by birth but Italian by upbringing and marriage, Beatrice Novera has vowed to devote her life and her fortune to furthering the cause of the Roman Catholic faith. Under the influence of her subtle Jesuit mentor, she tries to convert Margaret, whose long struggle to overcome her passionate love for Beatrice, and the increasing religious doubts fuelled by that passion, forms the central thread of the novel. Swayed at last by the arguments of her clergyman uncle (not the least interesting aspect of this novel is the amount of time and energy devoted by two austere and intellectual men to monitoring a relationship between two young
women) Margaret finally gives up the Countess and devotes her life to the needs of her family and her Church.

Margaret Percival was not a success. It was commercially much less successful than Sewell's earlier work; more pertinently, from the author's point of view, its effect was precisely the opposite of her intention. The novel's publication led to rumours that Sewell herself had converted to Roman Catholicism. Partly no doubt this was because the novel, in line with the Oxford Movement, placed much of the 'blame' on laxity and negligence within the English Church, but, more centrally, there is a tension between what we might call 'William's story' and 'Elizabeth's story'. The lengthy portions of the novel in which Margaret's uncle-mentor expounds the doctrine of the Apostolic Succession are quite awesomely tedious, even I think for a reader with a very special interest in mid-century debates within the English Church. But Sewell is clearly deeply involved in the story of Margaret and Beatrice, and the result is that the emotional claims of Margaret's passion for Beatrice far outweigh the intellectual arguments advanced elsewhere in the novel. For Beatrice is never 'exposed'; nor are we ever in any doubt that this is the one true love of Margaret's life. (There is no heterosexual love affair, for either woman, in this novel). In defining such a friendship as problematic, and insisting that it must be renounced, Sewell paradoxically gives us an exceptionally clear insight
into the ways in which the 'self-improving' friendship could be subversive.

Margaret Percival is set in the village of Deering, which, like the heroine's name, testifies to the strong influence of Martineau's Deerbrook. Sewell was a High Church conservative and Martineau on the radical wing of Unitarianism; the similarity in their account of women's destiny and role indicates the powerful appeal of the bourgeois woman's 'mission' to women of very different persuasions. As in Deerbrook, we are offered a self-improving friendship, based on shared learning, which distinguishes the friends from the other women around them. But the conflict between self-improvement and self-renunciation which Deerbrook smooths over is central to Margaret Percival, and the shared desire for learning is continually overlaid with submerged rebellion. Some women, Sewell tells us, can accept their confinement to the petty individualism of the domestic sphere:

But there are others, the gifted, the enthusiastic, the poetical, conscious of high intellectual powers, and believing themselves, perhaps justly, equal to men in all but physical strength, and sobriety of judgement, whose whole life is a struggle between the inferiority of their natural position and the cravings of an ardent, highly cultivated mind.(I.179)

Margaret is one of the 'others'; 'foreign-looking'(I.2), unappreciated by her conformist mother, frustrated by her insipid life of tedious duties, self-educated and precociously talented. Having delved alone into the mysteries of Dante, Margaret falls instantly in love with a Beatrice whose intellectual sympathies and
romantic idealism mirror her own most visionary desires. The friendship, initiated by the discovery of a shared language - Margaret speaks Italian - is mediated through volumes lent and returned, expressed through the exchange of literatures: the Countess talks to Margaret of Dante, Petrarch and Tasso, Margaret instructs her friend in the meaning of Shakespeare. Reading the books annotated by Beatrice, Margaret feels that "Through the medium of another's words, and by the power of the most eloquent language, she was learning to penetrate the depths of the Countess's heart" (I.378).

Here, then, we have an 'elevating' friendship, like Florence's with Lady Ida, but where Woman's Friendship offers friendship as romance, Margaret Percival draws on the resources of the Gothic. When Margaret first sees Beatrice, she seems strangely familiar. The resemblance is traced back to a painting of one of Beatrice's ancestors, Rachel de Lisle, by which Margaret was fascinated when, as a child, she used secretly to visit the desolate and decaying de Lisle ancestral home. The story behind the portrait is that Rachel converted to Protestantism; her autocratic mother forced her to recant by locking her up in a turret chamber until she agreed to relinquish her books. Released, Rachel became thin and pale, dwindled to a skeleton, and died. The 'dwindling' process is enacted in both friends; separation saps their vitality, drains their blood; each in turn becomes sick, pale, feverish and wretched and the Countess finally dies of consumption.
The 'vampire' theme seems clearly at work here; like Fullerton, Sewell quotes 'Christabel':

"To be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain"(II.157).

But it's an ambiguous process, since the madness proceeds not just from desire, but from the loss of the object of desire. Mad desire itself is displaced on to Margaret's rival, the Countess's young companion, Lucia. Passionately demonstrative and violently jealous, 'Italian in every thought and feeling'(I.169), Lucia destroys a letter from Margaret to Beatrice and brings about a long breach in their relationship. Lucia is out of control: she screams, sobs, pleads, trembles, staggers, and throws herself at the Countess's feet. Her Italian instability is contrasted with the other women's English reticence and control, although parallels in the narrative continually suggest that she is the 'other' of both Margaret and Beatrice. The Gothic theme culminates when, at the height of her struggle to overcome her feelings for Beatrice, Margaret dreams that she is Rachel de Lisle.

In the dream, Margaret is at first the pampered daughter of the de Lisles, living in luxury. The dream shifts, and she finds herself standing, guilty and desolate, in a dark, narrow-windowed turret, enclosed by green walls stained with damp. Next, she is in a dazzlingly bright and richly furnished hall, in which a crowd of retainers is subdued into silence by a haughty woman on a lofty throne. The austere face fades into the captivatingly lovely, yet still commanding, features
of the Countess: a moment of breathless expectation is followed by delicious music, and then by solemn chanting. Margaret is suddenly pulled back, as if by a strong arm; she rushes forward, is checked and commanded to kneel. Her spirit roused, she resists: a way suddenly opens through the crowd, and the Countess, 'radiant in beauty' (II.53) moves towards her and throws herself at Margaret's feet.

Even such a sketchy summary will, I hope, indicate the suggestive movement between submission and resistance, open and closed, confinement and release, which can only be described as erotic. What is most important, though, is the particular fusion of desires involved here: the attraction towards a woman (and, in the shift within the dream, towards being a woman) in a position of power, the interplay between imprisonment and escape, the longing for 'light'. These interlinked desires spill over in the dream, but they have been integral to the developing relationship between the women throughout the narrative. That is to say, the shared desire for knowledge and the rebellious impulse towards a wider life don't simply 'stand for' Margaret's longing for Beatrice; all are inextricably fused, just as the repression of the friendship coincides with the 'locking-up' of Margaret within domestic life, the relinquishment of her books, and the repression of her aspirations. In its volatile fusion of knowledge, resistance and desire, Margaret Percival anticipates by half a century precisely the conjuncture which, as we
shall see in later chapters, was to be denounced by turn-of-the-century patriarchy. In turning 'Newman' into 'Novera', Sewell prefigured the 'New Woman' debates of a much later era.

The significant point here is that the Countess is in a position of exceptional independence. She is able to offer Margaret an income, as a governess, and a home: the terrible temptation faced by Margaret is that she could go off to Italy with the Countess and live happily ever after. As Sewell commented in her later, even more troubled and contradictory, account of friendship in *Principles of Education*, it was not a position faced by many women at the time:

> Even when young persons, or persons of any age, belonging to different families, have formed so devoted a friendship that they cannot be happy apart, it is still only a misfortune. Circumstances do not generally allow of individuals separating themselves from their relations, and forming a home apart; and because of this, such exclusive affection awakens, in most cases, a tantalizing, dissatisfied feeling, and is likely to produce more unhappiness than happiness; and therefore it is to be guarded against, though it may not be condemned. But when romantic friendship puts itself forward as having a claim above those ties which God has formed by nature, it becomes the source of untold misery to all who are connected with it. 33

Beatrice is English in origin; her 'Italianness' is an overlay, acquired by marriage and conversion to Catholicism. At root, Margaret and Beatrice are one. Grace Aguilar's *Woman's Friendship* has a different version of this paradigm. In Aguilar's novel, it is the heroine who is part Italian, her mother having been seduced by an English lord. This is signalled to the reader early on by the fact that Florence, unlike the
rest of her family, has olive skin, jetty tresses, and dark eyes, and a mysterious attraction to all things Italian, but Florence only discovers it halfway through the novel, after which the narrative focusses on her quest, helped by Lady Ida, to trace her origins and prove her legitimacy.

What's odd about Woman's Friendship is that Florence's nationality seems extraneous to the novel; her 'half-Italian' identity has no clear signification. It doesn't, as it does in The Half Sisters, Grantley Manor or Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem Aurora Leigh (1857), denote a special affinity with the arts, nor does the novel in any way celebrate the passionate 'woman of genius'. Florence, unlike her supposed siblings, is not exceptionally gifted, and she enters a miserable period of employment as a governess solely in order to save her beautiful and talented 'sister' from the hazards of a public career as an opera singer. We don't have the interplay between the exotic and the familiar, the spontaneous and the restrained, which characterises the interplay between 'foreign' and 'Italian' in other novels; nor is there any suggestion of a religious difference between the two friends. Florence is, in fact, more English than the English, a truer and more 'organic' exponent of the English domestic ideal than most of the English women in the novel. The 'half-Italian' theme acts purely as a validation of the foreign, the different, the apparently strange, and I think Aguilar's attraction to the Corinne
story has to be related to the contradictory circumstances of her life.

Aguilar was Jewish, of Spanish descent. As the author of innocuous domestic stories (most published posthumously) she achieved enormous popularity which lasted throughout the century. In her own lifetime, however, she was known as the author of a number of scholarly works on the Jewish faith which attacked the formalism and traditionalism of modern Judaism. In *The Women of Israel* (1845) she set out to show that the ideal of women’s ‘mission’ claimed by Christianity was equally applicable to Jewish women, that they too had an active role to play in elevating Judaism by their superior conduct. She argued that spirituality and self-sacrifice were universal female attributes, and that the concept of female influence should not be rejected for its associations with Christianity. Shortly before her early death, she received a public accolade from the Jewish women of London as the first woman who had stood forth as the public advocate of the faith of Israel.

She achieved success as a novelist, impelled by the financial straits of her family, by suppressing her faith in her fiction. In her preface to *Home Influence* (1847), the only novel published in her lifetime, she reassured her readers that they need not be put off by her reputation as an exponent of the Hebraic creed. All the characters in her novel would be practising Christians, and would exemplify the virtues designated
as Christian. In *Woman's Friendship*, there is only one covert hint of her faith; Lady Ida's 'coming-out' present to Florence is a Maltese cross (a cross with double-branched expanding limbs). Florence is forced by her family's extreme poverty to sell the cross; later, its discovery serves to bring the two friends together after a long separation, and it is restored to her by Lady Ida.

*Woman's Friendship* has to be read as a private fantasy of acceptance without assimilation, in which the friendship of Lady Ida serves to assert the 'legitimacy' of Florence's particular fusion of English and 'foreign'. As with the other 'half-sisters' novels, it is a fragile project; the boundaries of 'English' femininity are pushed against, but finally close over the narrative. In helping to form Florence into a heroine, Lady Ida turns her into her own mirror-image.

In my next chapter, I want to look at novels by Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, in which the fictional conventions are used in more covert and intricate ways. All three novelists use the recognised devices of fictional friendship to question the accepted limits of feminine identity. In novels by Gaskell and Eliot they are deployed, not in the literal self-development of the heroine, but in the narrative *construction* of the heroine. In Brontë's novels, they work to offer a fantasised revision of the boundaries which divide the 'masculine' and the 'feminine'.
CHAPTER THREE
THE LIMITS OF VARIATION:

ELIZABETH GASKELL, GEORGE ELIOT AND CHARLOTTE BRONTË

I. FROM MARGARET TO MAGGIE: GASKELL AND ELIOT

Eliot and Gaskell may seem oddly-matched companions. As Pauline Nestor has amply demonstrated, Gaskell’s novels are full of celebrations of female bonding, often crossing generation and class; Nestor suggests that these relationships, founded on ‘shared maternal feelings’, offer a radical critique of ‘the social and sexual passivity to which women are inevitably subjected’.¹ Eliot, on the other hand, is notoriously bad on female friendship; as Gillian Beer comments, while women often ‘save’ other women in her novels, ‘what we scarcely find recorded is the easy, loving equality which finds delight in each other’s company for its own sake’.² Yet there are significant points of convergence between the two writers. What we don’t find, in either Gaskell or Eliot, is the shared ardent desire for knowledge, the self-improving relationship with a ‘second self’, which characterises the friendships in other novels of this period, including Charlotte Brontë’s. Both writers offer us, rather, relationships which ‘transcend’ difference, but their motive in doing so is not quite the same. Gaskell was more ‘comfortable’ (it’s a very Gaskell word)³ with the understanding of womanhood propounded in the Victorian conduct manuals: her concern was that it should be
extended to all women, saints and sinners, of whatever class. Eliot was more anxious about the desires and aspirations which that understanding suppressed: her representation of sisterhood was informed by the difficult need to widen, as she puts it in Middlemarch, the 'limits of variation': 'the indefiniteness remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than any one would imagine from the sameness of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse'.

The fundamental assumption of Victorian domestic ideology is that woman's character and role proceeds from her biological identity. Sisterhood is, therefore, all-embracing; the heart of a woman in a cottage, the manuals continually emphasise, is the same as the heart of a woman in a castle. It was, as Dinah Mulock Craik commented in A Woman's Thoughts About Women, not an argument that bourgeois women were very ready to apply: to say to these "ladies" that the "women" they employ are of the same feminine flesh and blood, would of course meet nominal assent. But to attempt to get them to carry that truth out practically - to own that they and their servants are of like passions and feelings, capable of similar elevation or deterioration of character, and amenable to the same moral laws - in fact, all "sisters" together, accountable both to themselves and to the other sex for the influence they mutually exercise over one another, would, I fear, be held simply ridiculous. "Sister" indeed! Certainly not, under any circumstances - except when Death, the great Leveller, having permanently interposed, we may safely, over a few spadefuls of earth, venture to acknowledge "our dear sister here departed".

Craik is not asking here for a revision of Victorian ideologies of femininity, nor is she imagining
a future in which class difference will be eroded. She
is simply demanding a less hypocritical and more logical
application of the Victorian understanding of
sisterhood. It was a demand which Gaskell endorsed.
Her novels insist that we include all women - the
prostitute, the 'fallen' woman, the 'forgotten'
spinner, the factory girl, the maid - under the
umbrella of sisterhood. Her ironic but affectionate
account of the community of 'Amazons' in Cranford asks
that what the manuals called 'a wise substitution'
should not be belittled. Through the cross-class
friendship in North and South, the friendship of two
working-class girls in Mary Barton, the many
relationships between mistress and maid, she
demonstrates that sisterly acts are not confined to the
bourgeoisie. Gaskell offers, then, an exceptionally
humane and tolerant version of 'sisterhood'; what she
doesn't do is to question the premise on which the
Victorian ideology of sisterhood is based, the
particular understanding of woman's 'heart' which
rationalised her position within patriarchal society.

Gaskell's desire to emphasise what women share can
lead her to suppress the material differences between
women in the interests of universality. Mary Barton
gives us a moving picture of two young working-class
friends sewing through the night together, but Gaskell
also makes it clear that this is not 'real' labour: both
women are working for free. Mary is lending her
seamstress friend a helping hand; Margaret knows that
her customers are too poor to pay. 'Labour' dissolves into 'philanthropy', mirroring the activities of bourgeois femininity. The novel also works against any sense of the specific oppressions of working-class women. When Mary's near-seduction by a 'gentleman' is revealed, Margaret responds coldly; which seems odd, since it doesn't accord well either with her gentle character or with the fact that Margaret, as her name and her beautiful singing voice clearly signal, is the novel's exemplary woman, the ideal to which Mary should aspire. It's not that the friendship founders; it's just that Gaskell's fragile project doesn't allow for too close an identification between the women at this point, in a novel in which questions of class and gender exploitation are continually raised, only to be reformulated as questions of individual responsibility and guilt. The shared oppression of working-class women dissolves into woman's timeless struggle between strength and weakness, and the need for the austere saint to forgive the repentant sinner. These comments may seem begrudging, since Gaskell's insistence that the 'sisterhood' must include women of all classes clearly represents a considerable advance on all those 'elevating' friendships with refined aristocratic ladies. My point is that we can't unproblematically celebrate these friendships as 'subversive', as somehow outside ideology or in direct resistance with it, although Gaskell stretches that ideology to its logical humanitarian limits.
More perfectly perhaps than any other Victorian novel, *North and South*\(^8\) applies and expounds upon the conduct-manual concept of woman's 'mission', in which woman's sympathy, tenderness and influence acts as the linch-pin of community harmony. Margaret Hale acts as an intermediary between North and South, masters and men, and her contact with young working-class women is crucial to this process. Through Bessy Higgins, especially, she gains an insight into the hunger, drudgery, frustration and pain of working-class life. Margaret's clothes are the primary means of contact here. When she goes out into the streets of Milton, factory girls touch her dress with boisterous but not unfriendly freedom: 'There was such a simple reliance on her womanly sympathy with their love of dress, and on her kindliness'\((p. 110)\). Bessy Higgins also touches her clothes with childish admiration for their fineness: 'Most fine folk tire my eyes out wi' their colours; but somehow yours rest me'\((p. 144)\). Though it might be argued that the soft texture of Margaret's dress is directly linked to the fluff which fills Bessy's lungs and causes her death, the narrative never makes this connection. The relationship is offered rather as a reciprocal process which 'transcends' difference, demonstrating that 'a' the good-doing' is not 'on the side of gentlefolk'\((p. 187)\), and as an active process of interaction and identification. This is symbolically underscored through the 'exchange' of gifts after Bessy's death: Bessy is buried in Margaret's night-cap,
Margaret takes away Bessy's little drinking-cup. In important ways, Bessy is Margaret's mirror-image: they are exactly of an age, and both are self-sacrificing, devout, earnest, and the mainstay of their doubting fathers.

This link through the father is characteristic of the friendships between young women in Gaskell's fiction. In *Wives and Daughters* Molly and Cynthia are united, not just by the step-sister relationship, but by their shared respect and love for Molly's father, who is the only man Cynthia will allow to judge her. Once the identification between Molly and Cynthia has been untangled, and it's clear that Cynthia is not Molly's 'second self', Cynthia is 'redeemed' by standing before Mr. Gibson 'like a chidden child to be admonished and forgiven'(p.601). It is Mr. Gibson, also, who provides the novel's final verdict on Cynthia: repudiating Roger's description of her as a 'false Duessa'(p.699) he replaces it with 'a very fascinating, faulty creature'(p.700). In *Mary Barton* Mary and Margaret are also structurally connected by their 'daughterly' role, a link given its clearest symbolic expression in the chapter where Margaret's grandfather poignantly recalls his early clumsy attempts to 'father' his orphaned grandchild. The episode ends with a shift in perspective - to show the golden-haired Mary, a vulnerable angel, asleep with her head on her father's knee (p.153).
In *North and South*, Margaret's friendship with Bessy is initiated by the exchange of a humble bouquet of wild flowers. But the exchange is mediated by Bessy’s father, who thanks Margaret on his daughter's behalf, and points the moral of the meeting: 'North and South has both met and made kind o' friends in this big smoky place' (p. 112). Their meetings continue to be monitored by the initially suspicious Higgins, but the success of the friendship effects a change in him, shifting his previously intransigent attitude towards the bourgeoisie. On the day Bessy dies, Margaret temporarily takes over her daughterly role, and this 'exchange' of fathers acts as an active catalyst for social reform. Margaret stops Higgins drinking by taking him to meet her own father, thus forging a link between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and setting into motion a snowballing process of interaction between class and class which will end with the 'conversion' of the autocratic industrialist, Thornton. Under the influence of Higgins, Thornton becomes a pioneering enthusiast for improved relations and closer contact between masters and men.

What Gaskell sets out to demonstrate in this novel is that if middle-class women are to play a positive part in preserving the stability of the community they must be something more than 'ladies'; they must be prepared to go beyond the drawing-room and out into the streets. An interesting version of the dressing-up ritual confirms that Margaret is, indeed, something more
than an ordinary lady. This transformation takes place entirely in the mind of Bessy, who is deeply concerned that Margaret should be suitably dressed for her forthcoming visit to the wealthy Thorntons. When Margaret reassures her by describing the white silk dress which she will wear, Bessy immediately connects the dress to a dream in which Margaret appeared to her as an angel of mercy. Through the lens of Bessy's dream, Margaret's dress is transformed into 'shining raiment', her dark hair into a halo:

Yo' r very face, - looking wi' yo' r clear steadfast eyes out o' th' darkness, wi' yo' r hair blown off from yo' r brow, and going out like rays round yo' r forehead, which was just as smooth and straight as it is now, - and yo' always came to give me strength, which I seemed to gather out o' yo' r deep comforting eyes - and yo' were drest in shining raiment - just as yo' r going to be drest. (pp. 200-1)

The dream 'dresses up' Margaret for her meeting with Thornton, anticipates their marriage and prefigures the role Margaret will play when she lends Thornton the money to put into practice his plans for social reform. In a number of ways, then, Bessy plays a significant part in the creation of Margaret as a heroine. This is also the role of Margaret's cousin Edith; but this relationship is a much more fragile and precarious business, since Edith also exemplifies everything from which Margaret must be separated. Their relationship has close affinities with the one between Maggie and Lucy in The Mill on the Floss. 10

What happens in both North and South and The Mill on the Floss is that the reigning 'princess' abdicates in favour of a new 'queen'. Both novels begin with a
relationship between two cousins, united by close affection, but sharply contrasted. The little, kitten-like princess is the pattern of conventional femininity: soft, sweet, submissive, cossetted, at one with her own image, perfectly at home in a drawing-room. Her taller, gipsy-like cousin is more restless, at odds with the constrictions of feminine discourse, out of place in the female indoor space. Both novels draw on motifs from Consuelo and Corinne - the gipsy, the simple black dress, the heavy black hair - to signal the heroine’s claim to the ‘throne’. Margaret Hale’s thick black hair is twisted and compressed into ‘massive coils, that encircled her head like a crown’ (p.212); Maggie’s shaggy mop is the source of her childhood trials, but as she blossoms she allows her mother to plait ‘the abundant black locks’ into a ‘coronet’ (p.388). In both novels also, through elaborate and extended versions of the dressing-up ritual, the ‘princess’ relinquishes her claim and shapes her cousin into a ‘queen’. Put in this way it sounds a childish sort of business, perhaps, but in both novels the continual references to queens and coronets serve a serious purpose: the relationship between the two friends acts as a way of extending the boundaries of acceptable bourgeois femininity and asserting the validity of a ‘new’ kind of heroine.

In the opening chapter of North and South, Edith is on the brink of marriage. The complete product of conventional femininity, lovely, indolent, affectionate,
indulged, she chatters on about wedding dresses, marriage ceremonies and tuning pianos. Margaret is on the point of revealing some of her own larger plans and visions, but 'Edith had rolled herself up into a soft ball of muslin and ribbon, and silken curls, and gone off into a peaceful little after-dinner nap'(p.35).

While her cousin sleeps, Margaret stands in for her to display the exotic Indian shawls lavished on Edith by her doting mother. (Corinne, it should be noted here, wore an Indian shawl during her triumphal procession to the Capitol.)

No one thought about it; but Margaret's tall, finely made figure, in the black silk dress which she was wearing... set off the long beautiful folds of the gorgeous shawls that would have half-smothered Edith. Margaret stood right under the chandelier, quite silent and passive, while her aunt adjusted the draperies. Occasionally, as she was turned round, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the chimney-piece, and smiled at her own appearance there - the familiar features in the usual garb of a princess.(p.39)

That Margaret is the true 'queen' and the proper recipient of the Indian shawls is emphasised at several points in the narrative. When she first meets Thornton, her future husband notes, over Margaret's plain dark gown, 'a large Indian shawl, which hung about her in long heavy folds, and which she wore as an empress wears her drapery'(p.99). What has happened to Edith's shawl is revealed in one of her characteristic letters, a blithe account of pleasure-filled days which is interspersed with hints that her marriage has proved less than idyllic.

I tried to wear my great beauty Indian shawl at a pic-nic ... but it was of no use. I was like
mamma's little dog Tiny with an elephant's trappings on; smothered, hidden, killed with my finery; so I made it into a capital carpet for us all to sit down upon. (p. 299)

At the end of the novel, the two women are together again. The earlier contrasts again come into play: Edith chatters on about dinner-parties, Margaret feels stifled by her life of eventless ease. Edith is shocked by Margaret's rambling habits, her incomprehensible desire to venture into wretched places not fit for ladies. She begs Margaret not to become a "strong-minded" woman (Victorian code-word for feminist) dressed in drab brown and rust. But in these final chapters the interplay between the two women is more intricate, since Edith acts also as Margaret's acolyte. When she helps Margaret to dress up for dinner, her affectionate admiration for her cousin testifies to Margaret's superiority, validating her 'difference': 'I wish I was as tall as a queen, and as brown as a gipsy, Margaret' (p. 521). But the part Edith plays here serves also to reabsorb Margaret within bourgeois femininity, dissolving her association with 'strong-mindedness'; she creates Margaret not only as heroine but also as future wife, transposing on to her some of her own sexuality and pliancy.

Rejecting the 'horrid blue flowers' Margaret's maid has chosen to go with her mistress's dress, Edith brings instead scarlet pomegranate blossoms, which bring vivid and sensual life to the figure in the 'dead gold-coloured gown' (p. 520): 'Those flowers a little lower, Dixon. They look glorious flames, Margaret, in
your black hair" (p. 521). Pomegranates are conventionally linked to marriage and fertility, but in the narrative the fiery blossoms serve specifically to signal the awakening of Margaret’s sexuality. Wearing the flowers, Margaret meets Thornton again after a long period of estrangement. In their earlier meetings, Thornton’s admiration for Margaret’s unabashed and simple directness has been counterposed with the barrier created between them by her coldness, hauteur and feminine defiance. The difference of class, the division between North and South, Margaret’s maidenly resistance to Thornton’s thoroughgoing masculinity, all dissolve into a single barrier manifested, in their first meeting, by Margaret’s failure to blush. Now, wearing Edith’s red flowers, Margaret becomes sexually self-aware; a vivid colour flashes into her cheeks and remains throughout the evening; she is unusually silent. In the following pages, Margaret’s blushes and downcast looks accumulate until, in the novel’s conclusion, ‘She slowly faced him, glowing with beautiful shame’ (p. 530).

‘Playing with shawls is very different work to drawing up settlements’ (p. 41), Henry Lennox warns Margaret in the first chapter of the novel, and the comment perhaps indicates a consciousness on Gaskell’s part that Margaret’s access to sexuality is founded on sexual submission, and that there may be a conflict between being a ‘queen’ and being a wife. The ‘settled’ Margaret is a modified Margaret. But Gaskell’s purpose
in these final chapters is clear enough; to shift the firm line between 'Madonna' and 'Magdalen' by offering us a heroine who is undoubtedly an 'angel' but also has a sexuality. The part played by Edith in this process works primarily at the level of narrative device; there is no dissolution of their separate identities. There is a similar covert process of exchange in George Eliot's Adam Bede. 12

In Adam Bede, the contrast is between two working women: the gentle Methodist preacher Dinah Morris, and the dairyworker Hetty Sorrel. As in many Victorian novels, the nature of the interplay between the two women is defined by their family relationship. They are kin, and yet not kin: they share an aunt, but are not blood relations. Explicitly, the story told is of the saving of a sinner by a saint. Hetty, Eliot tells us early on, has no 'shape for her expectations' because she has never read a novel (p.181). Easily seduced and quickly abandoned, she is convicted of the murder of her baby, but will not confront or admit what she has done. Dinah, visiting her in prison, gives her expectations a 'shape'; her loving and eloquent prayers finally reach Hetty's ears, and Hetty, in turn, finds a voice, repents, and confesses. But there is another, less explicit, process of transformation at work in the novel.

The narrative in Adam Bede continually brings the two women together, only to define the differences between them more precisely. While Dinah is mending the
household linen, Hetty is up to her sensuously dimpled elbows in soft pliable butter. When Hetty naughtily puts on Dinah’s clothes, Eliot emphasises the incongruity of Dinah’s high-crowned cap and gown against Hetty’s rosy cheeks and coquettish dark eyes. In the chapter ‘The Two Bed-Chambers’ the device of the mirror is used to emphasise their separation. On one side of the thin partition, Hetty is flirting by candlelight with her own image. Refusing the reflection offered by the old mirror on the wall, she is furtively dressing up alone, imitating a picture of a lady, turning herself into a scarlet woman with the aid of her own little scarlet mirror. Meanwhile, Dinah is looking out of the window, musing on the needs of the community she serves; she turns to the Bible for light on her task.

Throughout the novel, Hetty and Dinah are defined as pink flower and white, and contrasted as ‘lily’ and ‘rose’. Dinah’s pure pale face, ‘of a uniform transparent whiteness’ (p. 67) marked by ‘no blush, no tremulousness’ reflects her asexual modesty and ‘total absence of self-consciousness’ (p. 66). By contrast, Hetty the kitten (the image is used constantly) is all pinkness and vibrancy: her pink and white neckerchief, her rose-coloured ribbons, the pink rose she puts behind her ear, her frequent blushes of a ‘deep rose-colour’ (p. 127) signal her dangerously self-aware sexuality. When Dinah enters Hetty’s room, disrupting the mirror game, Hetty’s flushed cheeks, glistening eyes and bare arms are juxtaposed with Dinah’s concealing
white nightdress, her pale face full of subdued emotion 'almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned' (p. 204).

Towards the end of the novel, as Nina Auerbach has noted, these images are exchanged. Hetty, seen in court through Adam's eyes, looks like a pale version of her own 'corpse' (p. 477). In the prison, her pallor mirrors Dinah's. But after Hetty has been transported, out of the country and out of the novel, Dinah becomes progressively rosier and more tremulous. She is still described as a 'lily', but now she blushes, glows, hovers on the edge of tears, opens the window to let in the smell of roses; her flush, at first the pale colour of a 'monthly rose' (p. 522), has deepened by the time of Adam's proposal to a 'deep rose-colour' (p. 528). Hetty's sexuality is thus passed on to Dinah, though it is of course a revised sexuality, purged of Hetty's compromising vanity and frailty.

There is also a further exchange. Having given Hetty a voice, Dinah loses hers, when she gives up preaching and settles down to be a wife and mother. This seamless reformulation of Dinah into a domestic being is partly qualified: Seth Bede protests against Dinah's relinquishment of her public role, and it is presented as an inevitable part of a historical process (in general, the upwardly mobile agricultural worker needs the kind of wife that Dinah becomes; more specifically, Methodism did forbid women preachers in 1803.) Nevertheless, Dinah's accommodation in this
process is seen as voluntary. It doesn't conflict with her fundamental desires, which, like Margaret Hale's, have always been founded on self-renunciation and service to the community. In both cases, a new desire, sexuality, is simply superimposed on top of the old ones. In The Mill on the Floss, Eliot was following a very different trajectory, offering a heroine whose sexual and intellectual desires are in direct conflict with the 'community', and in whom the disjunction between past and present makes collision inevitable.

The Mill on the Floss demonstrates the necessity of separating fictional friendship from the real-life experience of the writer. Eliot's own girlhood friendships followed the conduct-book model. Her close relationship with her former teacher, Maria Lewis, was the ideal self-improving friendship; Maria recognised and fostered Eliot's special abilities and became a friend to whom she could 'unburthen every thought and difficulty'. 15 Eliot herself introduced a self-improving element into her friendship with the less intellectual Martha Jackson, suggesting, (just as the conduct manuals advised) that they should take assigned subjects for their letters and explore them objectively. 16 As a young woman, she had a number of close friends - Sara Hennell, Cara Bray - whose intellectual tastes and interests mirrored her own; she even, at one point, had her own Countess Novera. In 1849, she formed a close friendship with the Baronne de Ludwigsdorf, English by birth but resident in Vienna.
She was, according to Eliot’s description, a charming, highly educated, exquisitely feminine woman who petted her and confided in her:

She is a person of high culture according to the ordinary notions of what feminine culture should be. She speaks French and German perfectly, plays well, and has the most perfect polish of manner, the most thorough refinement both socially and morally... Her character is really remarkably destitute of animalism...17

The vocabulary is familiar. Yet none of this finds its way into The Mill on the Floss, generally accepted to be Eliot’s most autobiographical novel. Her reference to ‘ordinary notions’ in the above extract is indicative here; for The Mill on the Floss is most of all about shifting the ‘ordinary notions’ of femininity. The part played by friendship in this has similarities to Gaskell’s technique in North and South, but there are different issues at stake. Margaret Hale may be something ‘more’ than a lady, but she is never not a lady; the references to her ‘gipsy’ character are symbolic and fairly rudimentary. She is, also, ‘queen’ from the start; it’s just that her claim is not recognised. In turning ‘Margaret’ into ‘Maggie’, Eliot gave us a heroine in flagrant breach of the codes, a heroine who wears pink, runs away with her best friend’s lover, and longs for knowledge and freedom for its own sake. It’s not that Eliot condones all these things: Maggie is presented as a woman out of her time, for whom there can be no sense of home, and for whom the collision between the inward and the outward self can only end in catastrophe. But what Eliot also does in
the novel is to suggest that Maggie's recalcitrant desires are not in themselves illegitimate; through the relationship between Maggie and Lucy, she suggests that the boundaries of the feminine are not static, but could be stretched to include other possibilities. The delicate business involved here is one of displacing Lucy in favour of Maggie without invalidating Lucy, a process in which Lucy's complicity is essential.

The opening of The Mill on the Floss offers a much starker contrast between the two cousins than we get in North and South. It seems that the line between the princess and the gipsy, the 'rough, dark, overgrown puppy' and the 'white kitten' (p.117) is entirely intransigent, and it is as obvious to Maggie as it is to everyone else that the good and pretty little Lucy with her rosebud mouth and golden curls is the true princess:

Maggie always looked at Lucy with delight. She was fond of fancying a world where the people never got any larger than children of their own age, and she made the queen of it just like Lucy with a little crown on her head and a little sceptre in her hand... only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy's form. (p.117)

Maggie, with her turbulent desires, brown skin and dark hair, seems clearly not 'formed' to be queen of the drawing-room; she imagines that she can only be queen of the gipsies, with comically disastrous results. In these early chapters, as for much of the novel, Maggie is at odds with both her gender and her body. She chops off the hair which is later to be her crown, and sits crying before her own image in the glass. Lucy, on the other hand, with her 'natty completeness' (p.117) is at
one with her own perfect femininity: 'no accidents ever happened to her clothes, and she was never uncomfortable in them' (p. 146).

Maggie's later development takes place separately from Lucy; although they are at boarding-school together, we are told nothing about this period. The development of Maggie's inward life is initially a solitary journey through the promised land of masculine studies; reading Thomas à Kempis, she hears 'the voice of a brother' (p. 385) from the distant past whose strivings and desires mirror her own. This inward masculine identification is in conflict with her outward demeanour, which is becoming more feminine and submissive: despite the 'queenly head above her old frocks' (p. 388) and the 'jet crown' (p. 393) which now surmounts her 'tall figure, Maggie still steadfastly refuses to look in the glass. When she enters further into the intellectual life, tasting music, poetry and art in the company of the 'half feminine' (p. 431) Philip Wakem, the disjuncture continues: Maggie refuses her Aunt Glegg's offer of a pink dress as too pretty and showy for her.

When Lucy re-enters the novel in its final chapters, her task is to join the two halves together, reconciling the inward and the outward. As the daughter all women desire, the wife that any sensible man would choose, Lucy has her own feet firmly within femininity. Her love for her cousin affirms Maggie's place within the sisterhood. Lucy's awed appreciation for Maggie's
extraordinary gifts, her fascination with Maggie's 'witchcraft' and 'general uncanniness'(p.498), acts simultaneously to highlight Maggie's strangeness and to render the exotic familiar, validating Maggie's disturbing 'difference' and confirming her as, not hybrid, but fully feminine.

Throughout The Mill on the Floss, Eliot emphasises the close and unwavering affection between Maggie and Lucy. In the childhood chapters, the loyalty and devotion of little pink-and-white Lucy contrasts with the masculine inflexibility of the equally pink-and-white Tom. Eliot's comment that Lucy's unselfish love for Maggie is rare among women (p.477) is disturbing, but it's important that Eliot is making a double polemical point here. She is asserting the need for a loyalty between women which can accommodate even those who deviate from the norm, and she is also, at this point, exposing the limitations of Stephen, Lucy's fiance. Seeing Lucy as a pretty toy, choosing her precisely because he believes that she is unremarkable, Stephen (unlike Maggie) entirely fails to see what is most exceptional and most valuable about Lucy: her unquestioning love for another woman.

In her self-appointed role as fairy godmother, Lucy puts Maggie under a discipline of pleasure, and sets out to turn her 'from a drudge into a princess'(p.526). Eliot draws on all the resources of the dressing up ritual here: Lucy arranges Maggie in new clothes, and persuades other women to recognise her claim to them.
She coaxes Aunt Pullet to relinquish her black brocade dress for Maggie, dismissing her aunt's complaints that Maggie's arms are too large and the sleeves won't fit by insisting that Maggie's arms must be bare. She defuses, also, Mrs Tulliver's anxiety that her daughter's arms are too brown: 'A painter would think Maggie's complexion beautiful' (p. 493). As Ellen Moers has shown, the later description of Maggie's bare arm draws heavily on de Staël's account of Corinne at the Capitol: Lucy is exposing the arms of a heroine. Finally, she brings Maggie in harmony with her own image, when Maggie is taken before Lucy's cheval-glass, and made to look at the full length of her tall beauty, crowned by the night of her massy hair. Maggie had smiled at herself then, and for the moment had forgotten everything in the sense of her own beauty. (p. 555)

The transformation of Maggie is paralleled by a process of exchange analogous to the one in North and South. When Lucy enters the novel as an adult, she is still little and pink, but now her colours are more muted; she has light brown ringlets rather than golden curls. She is no longer a kitten, but, like the childhood Maggie, a puppy, identified with her own pet spaniel. Initially, she is still in harmony with her own image; after flirting with Stephen, she glances briefly, with satisfaction, at her own reflection in the glass. But as Lucy propels Maggie towards a unified self, she becomes disconnected from her own; as she effaces herself to fashion Maggie into a queen she becomes, less radically and completely than Edith, but nevertheless noticeably, submerged by her own clothes.
When we first see her reunited with Maggie, she is kneeling at Maggie's feet, having placed that dark lady in the large crimson velvet chair'(p.479). Maggie rises, and looks down on her 'slight aërial cousin, whose figure was quite subordinate to her faultless drapery of silk and crape'(p.480). Lucy tells Maggie that it is part of her 'witchery' that she looks best in shabby clothes: 'If I were to put anything shabby on, I should be quite unnoticeable - I should be a mere rag'(p.480). Telling Maggie that her butterfly brooch looks silly on her, Lucy takes off her own 'large jet brooch'(p.480) and pins it on Maggie, keeping the butterfly for herself. Having done so, she hesitates before her own reflection - and hurries to change the brooch for another.

Lucy thus forms Maggie into a queen at her own expense; she also delivers her cousin into the arms of her own lover. It is Lucy who manipulates the initial dramatic impact of 'this tall dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair'(p.484) by encouraging Stephen to expect a fat round-eyed blonde. She is continually displaying Maggie's special gifts to Stephen - her learning, her sewing, her piano-playing. In insisting that Maggie's beautiful arms should remain bare, she orchestrates the moment when Stephen, overcome by the eroticism of Maggie's dimpled arm, seizes it and kisses it. (Lucy herself is wearing an 'abundant dress of white crape',p.558). When Maggie and Stephen find themselves in the boat together, it is Lucy who has
innocently propelled them there. Lucy 'dresses' Maggie, but she also 'undresses' her; in the intimate confidential scene in Maggie's bedroom, Lucy in her 'ample white dressing-gown' (p. 495) coaxes Maggie into taking off her clothes, encourages her into her pink gown, watches her with a spaniel's affection as she unplaits her long black hair.

The Mill on the Floss has often been interpreted as a revenge fantasy. The trigger here is the moment when Maggie abandons her reading of Corinne because she foresees that the blonde girl will win all the love away from the dark heroine, and Philip suggests to her that 'perhaps you will avenge the dark women in your own person:- carry away all the love from your cousin Lucy' (p. 433). I think it's clear that Eliot doesn't want us to read the novel in this way; outright revenge is enacted very early on, when Maggie pushes 'poor little pink-and-white Lucy into the cow-trodden mud' (p. 164). We are asked to see the adult relationship as a much more complicated bond, like the one Eliot herself described to Sara Hennell and Cara Bray in 1858:

Cara, you and my own sister are the three women who are tied to my heart by a cord which can never be broken and which really pulls me continually. My love for you rests on a past which no future can reverse... 20

Maggie likewise declares that 'I desire no future that will break the ties of the past' (p. 564) and 'the real tie lies in the feelings and expectations we have raised in other minds' (p. 570). When she glides down the river with Stephen, memory is temporarily excluded, but Lucy's
image, like Philip’s, continually presses on her mind, and she returns. We are clearly meant to see Maggie’s predicament as impossible: born out of her time, she must either betray the ties of the past, or the claims of the future.

Yet I don’t think that those many readers who have felt that Lucy is somehow hard done by can be called ‘wrong’. The problem isn’t that dear little Lucy, who has never done anyone any harm, is punished; the whole point of the novel is that, in the kind of catastrophic collision which Maggie’s life represents, the innocent suffer. Lucy’s complicity simply adds to the tragic irony. I think the reader’s unease stems from the fact that Lucy has no subjectivity. She exists only as a ‘sweet face’ (p. 656), transparent, guileless, with nothing behind it. Virginia Woolf comments in A Room of One’s Own that women have generally served ‘as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size’. 21 That is exactly Lucy’s function in The Mill on the Floss. Just as, in childhood, Maggie always looked twice as dark beside Lucy, so later does little Lucy magnify the grander and fuller possibilities which Maggie represents. Representing a version of femininity - perfectly formed but small - which must give way to a ‘larger’ womanhood, Lucy acts as the midwife who delivers to the reader the heroine she cannot be herself.
In their final meeting, Lucy, still fragile and convalescent after the shock of the elopement, creeps out to embrace Maggie and forgive her. These are the last words exchanged between the pair:

"Maggie", she said in a low voice, that had the solemnity of confession in it, "you are better than I am. I can't..." (p.643)

Can't what? It's not clear. The sentence has to remain unfinished. Nor is it self-evident, in any logical sense, that Maggie is 'better' than Lucy. According to all the codes of sisterhood, Lucy has behaved consistently well, and Maggie distinctly badly. What matters at this point is that the reader should imaginatively assent to the general tenor of Lucy's words. We know that Maggie is 'better' than Lucy because Lucy herself has consistently told us so.

I have dwelt on this point at some length, not so much because I want to rap Eliot over the knuckles for 'exploiting' her own character, but because the pattern of friendship established here - exceptional woman and acolyte - is to be found in many later novels, especially in the feminist novels of the late nineteenth century. It is a troubling pattern because it is fundamentally hierarchical, but at the same time the logic behind it needs to be understood. Eliot told Emily Davies, the pioneering founder of Girton, that 'there lies just that kernel of truth in the vulgar alarm of men lest women should be "unsexed"'. 22 In her letters to Jane Carlyle, Geraldine Jewsbury developed the same point at greater length:
In short, whenever a woman gets to be a personage in any shape, it makes her hard and unwomanly in some point or other, and, as I tell you, I am bothered to explain how it is, or why it is, or how it should be otherwise. Because, if women chance to have genius, they have it, and must do something with it ... When women are 'incomprise' they are miserable, but when they are recognised - their specialty spoils them as women, and I cannot at all reconcile the contradictions into anything like a theory. 23

Jewsbury pinpoints the question which haunts so many of the novels I discuss in this thesis. How is it possible for a woman to have 'unfeminine' desires and follow 'unwomanly' pursuits without placing herself outside the boundaries of her gender? How far can those boundaries be stretched before they dissolve? Gaskell and Eliot may have been no more successful than Jewsbury in the struggle to resolve the contradictions into a 'theory', but they found a way of stretching the boundaries by drawing on the particular resources of fiction. They transformed the 'formative friendship' into narrative device, and used it to give the 'personage' a female shape.

II. SHARED TASTES: JANE EYRE

I am looking at Brontë separately from Eliot and Gaskell partly because, as I have suggested, her fictional friendships are more in the 'mainstream': in Jane Eyre and Shirley, we find self-improving relationships between young women of the bourgeoisie whose shared desire for learning and commitment to 'higher things' distinguishes them not only from women
of the classes above and below, but also from the more superficial and materialistic women of their own class.

There are two other reasons for looking at Brontë separately. Firstly, whereas Eliot and Gaskell draw on the Corinne/Consuelo model in creating a heroine with a sexuality, Brontë specifically refuses the 'Corinne' model of both heroinism and sexuality. In *Jane Eyre*, it is Blanche Ingram, Jane's aristocratic rival, who is Corinne from head to toe: olive complexion, brilliant black eyes, noble features, 'jetty mass' of raven-black hair, 'queen', 'crown' and all (p.189). Blanche resembles her autocratic mother, who wears 'a shawl turban of some gold-wrought Indian fabric' which 'invested her (I suppose she thought) with a truly imperial dignity' (p.201). In *Villette*, one of the many images of women which Lucy rejects is the painting of Cleopatra reclining on a sofa: to Lucy, this 'huge, dark-complexioned gipsy-queen' is simply 'butcher's meat'.

Secondly, I want to show that Brontë's novels follow a specific pattern, reworked in different ways in each novel, in which some of the characteristic codes of female friendship are transposed on to the love story. I don't mean by this that the heroines' lovers are to be seen as surrogate female friends; rather, that Brontë draws on the model of female friendship to suggest ways in which notions of gender can be shifted, and relations between men and women re-shaped and improved.
Most of the women in Jane Eyre are in one way or another Jane's 'other self', and her journey through the different houses in the novel involves a continuing process of identification with, and separation from, other women. But the most positive relationships in the novel, with Helen Burns and Miss Temple at Lowood, and Diana and Mary Rivers at Moor House, follow a common pattern. They are 'learning' relationships with women who are Jane's 'kin': all are impecunious, displaced women of the bourgeoisie, quiet, studious, principled, controlled. These relationships follow, then, the model defined in Deerbrook, a novel Brontë much admired: like the governess in Martineau's novel, Jane's teacher is called Maria. But Brontë's novel questions the self-renunciation Deerbrook sees as inevitable, and it's important here that although Lowood and Moor House are similar, they are not identical. Each of the houses in Jane Eyre draws on but also revises the ones that have gone before. Here, I want to trace this process of transformation, and to show how Brontë uses it to structure the revised relationship between Jane and Rochester at Ferndean. The novel draws to some degree on the usual conventions - the exchange of gifts, the dressing up ritual - but Brontë has her own device for defining Jane's female friendships. It is a device which takes up with disarming literalness the importance of shared 'taste' so often emphasised in the conduct manuals: throughout the novel, the process of nurturance
and learning which is going on in each relationship is identified precisely through the offering of food.

The nourishment which women offer to Jane is always of the same kind. It is nursery food, or perhaps drawing-room food: hot little cakes, slices of toast, fragrant cups of tea: warm, dainty, enticing food which stimulates and temporarily satisfies the appetite. But she can't always eat it. At Gateshead, surrounded by false kin, Jane is forced to eat by herself. In this house - the house of childhood, but more properly the house of pre-subjectivity - Jane is an unformed creature, a 'heterogeneous thing' (p. 47), all passion, without structure. She exists only in opposition: confronted by her own image in the Red Room mirror, she fails to recognise it and collapses in terror. After this trauma, the servant Bessie brings Jane a delicate tart placed on a long-coveted painted plate; Jane, in her hectic and tremulous state, is unable to eat it. This is an important double moment: what Jane craves and cannot have is not just the food of friendship, but also aesthetic gratification, an outlet for her half-formed creativity. At Gateshead, Bessie's intermittent kindness keeps Jane going, but the difference of class precludes identification; she brings Jane hot cakes, but her own taste is for Welsh rarebit and roast onions. But she does give Jane a vital piece of advice: 'You should be bolder' (p. 71). On the morning of her departure from Gateshead, Jane is unable to eat the bread-and-milk Bessie has prepared, but she takes some
nourishment with her. With Bessie's biscuits in her bag, Jane sets off for Lowood.

At Lowood, the house of learning to be a woman within patriarchy, the food offered has an ambiguous status. On the one hand, Miss Temple's determination to nourish her pupils, even at her own expense, contrasts with the oppressive and spartan regime administered by Mr Brocklehurst. Her bread and cheese wins hands down over his burnt porridge. That Miss Temple and Helen Burns, with their self-disciplined integrity, offer Jane a positive and necessary structure for her feelings, is never in doubt. At the same time, the substantiality of the nourishment they offer is questioned. When Jane and Helen visit Miss Temple's room, the steamy and scented tea she offers them arouses their appetites, but there isn't enough to eat. Refused more supplies by the Brocklehurst-minion-housekeeper, the headmistress supplies a 'seed-cake' from her own locked drawer, on which 'delicate fare' they feast liberally 'as on nectar and ambrosia' (p. 104). Lowood sows the 'seeds' of Jane's moral, intellectual and creative development - here Jane's longing for 'food' is channelled into art:

That night, on going to bed, I forgot to prepare in imagination the Barmecide supper, of hot roast potatoes, or white bread and new milk, with which I was wont to amuse my inward cravings. I feasted instead on the spectacle of ideal drawings, which I saw in the dark - all the work of my own hands; freely pencilled houses and trees, picturesque rocks and ruins, Cuyp-like groups of cattle, sweet paintings of butterflies hovering over unblown roses... (p. 106)

It is at Lowood that Jane creates the pictures which Rochester will later recognise as extraordinary.
But while the food offered at the school nourishes the mind, it only partly satisfies. Miss Temple's serenely refined propriety precludes 'deviation into the ardent, the excited, the eager' (p. 104). She shares with Helen Burns a capacity for self-suppression which is alien to Jane, who watches in wonder as, under Miss Temple's tutelage, Helen's singular powers are awakened: her cheeks glow, her eyes become radiant, talk flows freely and fully. But Jane is an observer here rather than a participant; she doesn't understand Latin, the language they share. Helen Burns gives Jane emotional nurturance, but her dreamy, self-mortifying stoicism is not a model for identification. When she comforts Jane after Brocklehurst's public humiliation, the two sit clasped in one another's arms, but Jane pushes away the coffee and bread Helen has brought with her: 'a drop or a crumb would have choked me' (p. 100). While Helen is fading slowly away Jane is scampering about with her other chosen comrade: she acknowledges that Helen offers her 'a taste of far higher things' (p. 109), but Jane also needs the more 'pungent' (p. 109) fare offered by the witty, original and thoroughly worldly Mary Ann.

After Miss Temple's marriage, Bessie's forgotten biscuits come into play. The apparently tranquil, disciplined and subdued Jane becomes restless, acts boldly and departs for Thornfield, the house of marriage and sexuality within patriarchy. She takes with her, not food, but the pearl brooch which Miss Temple gave her upon her marriage. Pearl-grey is Jane's colour
throughout the Thornfield section; it acts as a sign of concealed worth, identifying her difference from the showy plumage of the aristocratic women, but it also provides protection, marking her resistance to Rochester who, as marriage approaches, tries to bully her into relinquishing it for amethyst (associated with the sexually rapacious Blanche) and pink (worn by the doll-like Adèle).

Jane’s first night at Thornfield sees her being nourished again in Mrs Fairfax’s room, where the neat, mild, kindly little widow sits by the fire, cat on lap. She welcomes Jane into her snug, safe, domestic pool of tranquillity, suspended within the chill Gothic corridors of Thornfield, sends for refreshments, and feeds Jane with her own hands. It seems like a repetition of the fireside tea in Miss Temple’s room, but this scene is much more unsettling. Its placid cosiness is at too sharp a disjunction with its surroundings, and, thereby rendered strange, edges on the sinister. When I first read *Jane Eyre* in adolescence, I assumed that Mrs Fairfax would turn out to be the source of all the trouble, and was disappointed to find that I had misread the codes. Now, I don’t think I was so wrong. For whereas at Lowood Jane is shaped within a specific model of femininity, at Thornfield she is defining herself against other women, and the versions of marriage and sexuality they offer: the mad bestial Creole wife, the whole long line of Rochester’s “foreign” and “aristocratic” past mistresses
- French countesses and opera-singers, Italian signoras, German Gräfinnen - and the different forms of femininity represented by Blanche Ingram, variously dressed up in the novel as haughty English aristocrat, imprisoned bride and harem slave. Mrs Fairfax is the only woman whose circumstances - dependent yet not a servant - mirror Jane's own. As a thoroughly worthy bourgeois woman, she is in a sense Miss Temple's successor, but Mrs Fairfax is a more consistently ambivalent figure. She offers Jane what 'food' she will get at Thornfield, but while she protects Jane, she also checks her.

Jane's first, prefigurative, meeting with Rochester is illicit: it takes place outside the walls of the house, in a twilight world of spirits and goblins where masculine phallic power is vulnerable: Rochester, felled from his horse, becomes Jane's equal and dependent. For the second, formal meeting, inside the house, Jane is dressed up by Mrs Fairfax. At her insistence, Jane changes her frock, and puts on Miss Temple's little pearl brooch. Thus clad, she becomes her Lowood self: her rebellious desires are cloaked by 'the air of a little nonnette; quaint, quiet, grave and simple'(p.162). Yet it is a necessary defence, since Rochester's plans for Jane - marriage within Thornfield - don't offer real 'food' either: as Adèle points out, when he declares his plan to take Jane to live with him alone on the moon, 'She will have nothing to eat: you will starve her'(p.295) Mrs Fairfax thus plays a double role: she is a watchful guardian but also a powerless
guardian; she exemplifies the virtues, but also the limitations, of the English bourgeois 'housekeeper'. With her housewifely bunch of keys, she must know the secret of the captive wife, but she never lets on.

After her escape from marriage-as-entrapment, Jane arrives, starving and exhausted, at Marsh End/Moor House, the house of new learning and revised femininity. She looks through the low window at a scene which picks up on a number of earlier moments: two young women sitting snugly by the fire, learning a foreign language. One (like Mrs Fairfax) has a cat in her lap; the other has the 'massive head' (p. 358) of a dog resting on her knee, a description which recalls both Mr Rochester's dog Pilot and the head of Pilot's master. Diana feeds the famished Jane the bread-and-milk she could not swallow at Gateshead. Now, encouraged by the Rivers sisters, Jane eats, at first feebly, then eagerly, until, as at Lowood, masculine power attempts to counteract feminine nurturance, in the person of St John Rivers: 'restrain her ... she has had enough' (p. 363).

Moor House thus draws on the earlier houses in the novel but, in crucial ways, it also transforms them. As pale, grave, soberly clad young bourgeois women, forced by poverty into governessing for the unappreciative rich, Diana and Mary Rivers are Jane's mirror-images: the pseudo-kin of Gateshead are replaced by Jane's true kin. As dedicated and intelligent students, 'all delicacy and cultivation' (p. 358), they recall the life-style of Lowood. But unlike Miss
Temple, whose contempt for Brocklehurst was expressed only in the rigid cast of her features, Diana has a will as strong as her brother's. 'Handsome' and 'vigorous', she has the 'animal spirits', the 'affluence of life', the 'certainty of flow' (p. 377), present in Blanche Ingram but missing in Jane's temporary kin at Lowood. Helen Burns and Miss Temple shared an ancient language, Latin (the language of the Stoics). Here the language studied is German, 'this crabbed but glorious Deutsch' (p. 359). As in Deerbrook, the sisters' choice of language signifies the pursuit of the difficult, the new, the strange - but also something more: 'That is strong', says one of the sisters, 'I relish it' (p. 359). As at Lowood, Jane at first finds the 'unknown tongue' (p. 358) incomprehensible, but here she soon learns to relish the savour of a new, strong language.

After three days and nights of collapse, Jane is sufficiently resurrected to be served tea by the sisters in the parlour. Diana brings her a little freshly baked cake: 'I did not refuse it, for my appetite was awakened and keen' (p. 371). While St John interrogates Jane on her past, Diana deflects and parries his questions; Jane is, for the first time in the novel, in the presence of a spirited and outspoken woman who is also her 'sister'. 'I had now swallowed my tea. I was mightily refreshed by the beverage; as much so as a giant with wine; it gave new tone to my unstrung nerves' (p. 373). With the Rivers sisters, the new-made Jane receives a food 'of a kind now tasted by me for the first time - the pleasure
arriving from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments and principles (p. 376); she follows eagerly 'in the path of knowledge they had trodden before me' (p. 376). At Moor House, Jane is both pupil and teacher; she teaches the docile and assiduous Mary to paint, while Diana teaches her German. Here, the process of learning and the pupil-teacher identification are smooth and seamless:

I liked to learn of her; I saw the part of instructress pleased and suited her; that of scholar pleased and suited me no less. Our natures dovetailed; mutual affection - of the strongest kind - was the result. (p. 377)

The friendship also echoes and transforms Jane's relationship with Rochester at Thornfield:

Diana looked and spoke with a certain authority: she had a will, evidently. It was my nature to feel pleasure in yielding to an authority supported like hers, and to bend, where my conscience and self-respect permitted, to an active will. (p. 370)

Whereas at Thornfield Jane had to be continually watchful, continually protective of her own inclination towards submission, here submission involves no danger; sitting at Diana's feet, resting her head upon her knee, she can relax.

When Diana and Mary return to their dreary teaching posts, they leave Jane a small gift: a colour box, pencils and paper. In one sense this acts as a validation of Jane as artist (the English governess as visionary, as different a concept of the woman artist from Corinne as there could possibly be) but it also picks up on another continuing narrative thread. Throughout the novel, Jane draws portraits of other
women, as part of the continuing process of identification with, and separation from, forms of female identity. What Jane does with the sisters’ gift is to draw her final portrait, the one of Rosamond Oliver. The representation of Rosamond relates back to two of Jane’s previous ‘significant others’. When Rosamond arrives at Jane’s schoolroom, she is wearing a purple riding-habit and an Amazon’s cap of black velvet. At Lowood, Miss Temple wore a dress of ‘purple cloth, relieved by a sort of Spanish trimming of black velvet’ (p.79). At Thornfield, the ‘dark as a Spaniard’ (p.202) Blanche Ingram is first seen wearing a purple riding-habit, with her rich black ringlets gleaming above. (It could also be noted that Bertha Rochester has a purple face and black hair, but that may be stretching a point.) In other words, Rosamond echoes earlier female figures of power in Jane’s life, and what is being signalled through the portrait is partly completion, since the transparent, ingenuous and fervently admiring Rosamond represents no threat to Jane: ‘she can be ‘seen through’ and simply acknowledged as ‘different’. But Rosamond is important also in another way. In contrast to the sharp distinction between Miss Temple and Blanche Ingram, Rosamond blends lily and rose; she is coquettish, overindulged and not very bright, but she is also generous, loving, and, in her own way, delightful. (There are elements of the Lucy/Maggie relationship here.)
What happens at Moor House is that the codes of femininity are poured into a melting-pot, stirred, and re-allocated. Let’s take this sentence, from Jane’s first encounter with Blanche Ingram and her sister Mary: ‘Mary was too slim for her height, but Blanche was moulded like a Dian’. At Moor House, we meet a different Mary and a real ‘Diana’, and the figurative identification between ‘Blanche’ and ‘Diana’ is played out in another way: we find bits of Blanche and bits of Miss Temple poured into the mould of Diana Rivers, and transformed in the process. Through Diana, and also through Rosamond, Brontë plays about with the rigid judgemental antithesis of spiritual/repressed/good Bourgeois Woman and animal/expressive/bad Other while still locating the preferred feminine ideal within the class-specific figure of the governess. Jane’s acceptance of Rosamond as she is contrasts with St John’s inflexibility, just as her unrestrained susceptibility to Rosamond’s exquisite beauty is juxtaposed with his masochistic self-suppression. At Marsh End the ‘white marble’ image associated with Miss Temple at Lowood is used to define St John Rivers. In this house with a double name, the apparently fixed terms of feminine identity have shifted, but masculinity remains rigidly separate, intransigent as stone, in the person of St John.

In Jane Eyre, as in Deerbrook, masculine intrusion upon women’s friendship is represented as an invasion upon the women’s shared language. Here, the attempt is
successful. St John persuades Jane to give up studying German with Diana, and learn Hindustani instead. It is part of the process by which he forces her to 'disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent' (p. 424). Having relinquished the taste for a strong female language, Jane comes increasingly under St John's sway, forced to see the world in terms of his rigid dichotomies: labour versus love, sacrifice versus passion, submission versus fulfilment, brother versus husband, man versus woman.

The supernatural voice which saves Jane at the last minute projects her, and the novel, into a fantasised world beyond the social and the natural in which all these contraries, and more, can be reconciled.

The usual understanding of the Rochester of Ferndean as 'castrated' can be misleading. For while the drastic reformulation of Jane's and Rochester's circumstances at the end of Jane Eyre serves to reduce Rochester's 'phallic' power as an upper-class patriarch, it does not threaten his sexuality or erode his masculinity. The ending of Jane Eyre is about impossibilities; we are offered a blurring of gender boundaries, a fusion of equals, in which masculinity and femininity yet remain precise and distinct. The brooding shaggy-haired eagle of Ferndean is caged and truncated, but he is still an eagle; he's not at all like, for example, Eliot's 'feminised' men, Philip Wakem or even Will Ladislaw. The 'caging' of Rochester is the first stage in a symbolic process, in which he takes on
feminine 'dress' without relinquishing an iota of his masculinity. It was prefigured at Thornfield when Rochester dressed up as a gipsy woman to 'read' Jane; when he proposes to her a second time at Ferndean, he is wearing her pearl necklace under his clothes.

When the locked-up wife dies in the Thornfield fire, she takes with her Rochester's house, his right arm, and his sight. Each is replaced. Thornfield, the house of marriage and sexuality within patriarchy, is replaced by Ferndean, the house of marriage and sexuality beyond patriarchy. Rochester's 'right arm' is his equal and his wife. His sight is also restored, but it is, crucially, a revised and transformed vision. Rochester learns to re-read through Jane's eyes, to see the world through her gaze: 'He saw nature - he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf' (p.476). Rochester's re-education follows the 'path of knowledge' Jane has trodden before him.

The unpretentious grey manor of Ferndean is sharply contrasted to Thornfield, and its strange isolation signals to us that we are entering a world beyond the world, where laws can be revised. In this and in other details, Ferndean closely resembles Moor House. Both are lowbuilt, antique structures with latticed casements and mouldering walls; both are buried among trees, at the end of a long path. Jane arrives at both places in identical circumstances: on foot, at dusk, in pattering rain, unexpectedly. She enters, through a gate, a dark enclosed space where no flowers are cultivated. At
Ferndean, nursery tea is over; Jane bears Rochester only a half-spilt glass of water, but later she promises him hearty breakfasts, ham and eggs for a famished man. The 'food' of friendship is no longer seen as central; but the model of Moor House nevertheless feeds into the revised relationship between Rochester and Jane at Ferndean. With Rochester, as with Diana, Jane is now able to have a relationship in which she can submit without danger; she can be mistress and servant, governess and wife, just as at Moor House she was both pupil and teacher. The discourse of the Thornfield relationship - the continuing erotic interplay between submission and resistance, the talk of fairies and brownies - continues at Ferndean, but with a new element transposed on to it, which reproduces the discourse of the Moor House friendship: the meeting of 'congenial minds'. Here is Moor House:

Thought fitted thought: opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly. (p. 377)

...they were gay from morning till noon, and from noon till night. They could always talk; and their discourse, witty, pithy, original, had such charms for me, that I preferred listening to, and sharing in it, to doing anything else. (p. 420)

and here is Ferndean:

To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long; to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character - perfect concord is the result. (p. 476)

And here are Charlotte Brontë and Mary Taylor, re-united after a long separation, as observed by Ellen Nussey:
When I had certain information of Mary's arrival I set off with my youngest brother at 9 o'clock at night to see her, and there I found Charlotte Brontë also, both, were talking and talking with all their might in the garden, it was so dark when I joined them that we could distinguish nothing but figures approaching and so afraid were we each of saluting a wrong relationship that we constantly peered into each other's faces - then, all at once a 'bless you' burst forth in all the power of friendship and affection. 28

Jane Eyre does what only fiction can do: it exuberantly resolves impossible contradictions, offering us a fantastic other-world in which the sober bourgeois woman can also be passionate elf, where dependence melts into independence and self-sacrifice into self-fulfilment. Shirley takes up similar issues, but follows a very different trajectory. Here, the problems of the present are relocated not as 'fairytale' but as 'history', a displacement which has the opposite result from Jane Eyre. The early nineteenth century setting of Shirley serves only to sharpen the focus, offering us a relentlessly realistic appraisal of the position and prospects of women in the 1840s. 'Elf-land lies behind us, the shores of Reality rise in front'. 29

III. FELLOW-SLAVES: SHIRLEY

Shirley is a novel with a double project. On the one hand, Brontë illustrates the disjunction between the masculine and feminine worlds, offering, through a female friendship which perfectly reproduces the conduct-book formula, an apparently conventional assertion of 'woman's mission'. On the other hand, Brontë's contorted and fragmented narrative
systematically interrogates its own project, to question the limitations of Victorian understandings of 'sisterhood'.

In the first volume of *Shirley*, Brontë gives us a comprehensive and meticulous picture of a society in a state of flux and crisis, of which the frame-breaking activities of the Luddites are simply the most visible and violent manifestation. We begin with the curates, wrangling over trivial points of doctrine: whatever brings them together, 'it is not friendship: for whenever they meet they quarrel' (pp. 40-41). This ludicrous disharmony we later see extended more seriously to every area of social and personal life. The men of the bourgeoisie are at loggerheads over the war, divided by religion, politics and an ancient love rivalry. Class is set against class, and the division within the bourgeoisie is parallelled by divisions within the working class. The cause of the disharmony is identified as self-interest: the merchants who 'have no good feeling for any class but their own' (p. 184) have their archetype in the isolated individualism of Robert Moore, whose energy and initiative are counteracted by his casual lack of concern for the poor and unemployed.

Distress reached its climax. Endurance, overgoaded, stretched the hand of fraternity to sedition. The throes of a sort of moral earthquake were felt heaving under the hills of the northern counties. (p. 62)

The vocabulary evokes Mrs Ellis's words to the 'Women of England': 'A nation's moral wealth is in your keeping'. The brotherhood is in disarray; the
sisterhood must do its work, providing the restoration of fraternity through women's active moral intervention. It is this role which Caroline Helstone seeks to perform in the life of the man she loves, Robert Moore. Caroline urges Moore not to be so coldly and inflexibly ambitious, not to treat his workers as machines when he should want them to love him. She tries to educate him, gives him Coriolanus to read, to make him see his 'vicious, perverse points' (p.115); as he becomes absorbed in the play, she whispers 'There I see another glimpse of brotherhood in error' (p.117).

Until the arrival of Shirley Keeldar, Caroline's efforts are seen to fail because of the inability of all around her, men and women alike, to recognise the crucial role which women have to play. For her uncle Helstone, women are 'toys to play with' (p.138): 'He thought, so long as a woman was silent, nothing ailed her, and she wanted nothing... a wife could not be her husband's companion, much less his confidant, much less his stay' (p.82).

We are given a panorama of past and present marriages, each more or less disastrously mismatched. The women, failing to understand what their contribution should be, are almost as culpable as the men. Hortense Moore's rigid domesticity results in continuing conflict with her servant; Mrs Yorke, 'a woman of dark and dreary duties' (p.167), seeks to confine her husband to the home, sowing the seeds of further discord in their spirited children. Caroline, pushed by both Helstone
and Hortense into a sterile life of time-wasting duties, can see no way out. Her uncle ridicules her desire for work, and she herself sees the general wasteful undervaluation of 'old maids'. The only solution is marriage to Robert Moore, but Moore rejects marriage and love as superfluous, 'silly and utopian' (p. 180). Women ask for bread, and are given stones (p. 128); throughout the novel, men consume, carelessly and ungratefully, the food that women prepare. Moore goes a stage further: he keeps his own little supply of food at the mill, in order to be independent of the women-folk. It seems, then, that the dependent and therefore helpless Caroline is forced to resign herself to a life of seclusion, repression and silence.

It is against this background that we must see the arrival of the wealthy and independent 'Captain Keeldar'. Shirley's entry into the novel at the end of the first volume opens up new possibilities, and it is through her friendship with Caroline that Brontë explores the possibilities of, and limitations upon, women's public and private role. Their relationship stands in every way in contrast to the divided community around them, and as a model of the 'utopian' companionly marriage which Moore has rejected and Helstone derides. Shirley looks over the women of the neighbourhood with the eye of a Lord of the Manor seeking a wife, and chooses the diffident Caroline.

The choice is ritualised in their first meeting through the exchange of flowers. Shirley selects 'a
little bouquet of one brilliant and two or three delicate flowers, relieved by a spray of dark verdure' (p.212), ties it with silk from her workbox, and places it in Caroline's lap, regarding her 'with something of the aspect of a grave but gallant little cavalier' (p.212). The moment signals Shirley's 'rescue' of Caroline, the sudden brightening of her prospects; it heralds the unity of the brightly-coloured 'androgy nous' Shirley and the more muted 'feminine' Caroline, and indicates delicately the ways in which the relationship will mirror and play out courtship without actually usurping it. Importantly, it precisely recalls an earlier moment, when Caroline was studying in the house of Robert Moore. From under the wall outside his mill, Moore plucks a little bouquet of spring flowers and leaves, pilfers a thread of silk from his sister's workbasket, ties the flowers, and lays them on Caroline's desk (p.100). The juxtaposition has a double effect: Robert's humbler offering of snowdrops and crocuses is more 'natural', less of a game. On the other hand, Shirley's extravagant 'courting' of Caroline underlines Robert's failure to court, the way in which he continually arouses Caroline's expectations only to thwart them.

The united sisterhood of Caroline and Shirley contrasts sharply with the divided fraternity, offering, as in Jane Eyre, a model for men to follow. Shirley, the wealthy 'peacock', has the privileges of both woman and man; she is not excluded from the male world, she
can help Robert with his business affairs, win his heart, while Caroline, the dependent 'dove', can only sit over her lonely sewing and watch helplessly. Yet, it is emphasised, their friendship 'transcends' material difference, rivalry, self-interest. Throughout their long, intense conversations, the two women demonstrate the qualities which Brontë identifies elsewhere in the novel as fundamental to the restoration of social harmony: imagination, empathy, veneration, idealism, selflessness.

The friendship of Shirley and Caroline is an exemplary conduct-book friendship. It is an 'unequal' relationship in which Caroline nevertheless feels a 'safe sense of equality'(p.230); a discriminating regard founded on shared 'instinct of taste'(p.231):

'Caroline, she found, felt the value of the true ore, and knew the deception of the flashy dross. The minds of the two girls being toned in harmony, often chimed very sweetly together'(p.231). As twin souls, Shirley and Caroline set out to do exactly what the conduct-books recommended:

A circle of young female friends, who love and trust each other, who mutually agree to support the weak in their little community, to confirm the irresolute, to reclaim the erring, to soothe the irritable, and to solace the distressed; what a realization does this picture present of the brightest dreams of imagination, when we think what woman might be in this world to her own sex, and to the community at large!31

Shirley and Caroline embark upon putting the world to rights through philanthropy. Caroline helps Shirley to use her money, example and influence to do 'good
works' (p. 266) and prevent mischief. Together, they help the poor and give a sense of purpose to the empty lives of the 'old maids'. They harness the collective forces of the women and, taking the clergy in hand, manipulate their weaknesses and unite them. As a result, the distress of the unemployed poor is relieved and the attacks on mill and mansion appear to have ceased.

Their optimism seems justified as, hand in hand:

they sped through the fields, laughing as they went, and looking very much like a snow-white dove and gem-tinted bird of paradise joined in social flight. (p. 293)

Up to this point, the plot could have been devised by Sarah Stickney Ellis; and, in a sense, this could be said of the rest of the novel. Having done their bit, Shirley and Caroline realise that public affairs must rest in the hands of men. For Robert and Caroline, love finds a way and history lends a hand. They marry. The shared lover problem is dissolved: Robert splits like an amoeba and reproduces himself in the shape of his brother Louis. Shirley realises that love is more important than independence. They marry. The workers receive their jobs, their cottages and their Sunday school.

This may be a fair summary of the plot, but it clearly fails to do any kind of justice to the fractured and contradictory narrative of Shirley. For what the novel in fact offers is a protracted interrogation of the concept of 'sisterhood' propounded by the conduct manuals, reproducing its contradictions while demonstrating its cost. From the start of the
relationship between Shirley and Caroline, its apparent perfection and completeness is continually made strange. On the one hand, as at Moor House, we are offered a "talking" friendship, extraordinary in its vitality and intensity, in which the two women share every thought and feeling; on the other hand, the freedom of their discourse is persistently ruptured by odd moments of reticence and constraint. Shirley's mysterious unwillingness to open a note from Robert in Caroline's presence, and her even odder failure to reveal to Caroline her suspicion that her own governess is her friend's longed-for lost mother, remain unexplained. The friendship, it is implied, 'transcends' material difference, yet we are made continually aware of the contrast between Shirley's exuberant brilliance and Caroline's faded bloom and repressed pain. The friendship 'transcends' rivalry: Caroline tells her friend 'Love hurts us so, Shirley ... I am supported and soothed when you - that is, you only - are near, Shirley'(p.265); yet we are constantly reminded of the shadow which Robert Moore casts over their intimacy. As Shirley puts it,

He keeps intruding between you and me: without him we should be good friends, but that six feet of puppyhood makes a perpetually recurring eclipse of our friendship. Again and again he crosses and obscures the disk I want always to see clear: ever and anon he renders me to you a mere bore and nuisance.(p.264)

Shirley tells Caroline that 'If we were but left unmolested, I have that regard for you that I could bear you in my presence for ever, and not for the fraction of
a second do I ever wish to be rid of you' (p. 264); yet it frequently appears to the reader that Shirley's demeanour towards Moore, with whom she knows Caroline to be in love, is strangely and uncharacteristically coquettish.

Through these sharp juxtapositions, the codes of friendship are made to seem bizarre; the reader is bewildered by the continuous disjuncture between the friendship story and the story of courtship. The sense that the two narratives occupy separate spaces in the text is insistently reinforced by the image of the 'nunnery'. Before the arrival of Shirley, Caroline's lonely evening walks follow two paths: one is 'along the drear skirts of Stilbro' Moor', the other 'over the sunny stretch of Nunnely Common' (p. 201). The two friends have their first long conversation on Nunnely Common; as they look down on Nunnwood, in the depths of which is the ruins of a nunnery, Caroline tells Shirley: 'To penetrate into Nunnwood, Miss Keeldar, is to go far back into the dim days of eld' (p. 220) and the two young women make plans to spend a day alone there together, with sketch-books and reading-books, and two little baskets of provisions. At the end of the novel, Robert teases Caroline with his plans for the future: 'I will get an act for enclosing Nunnely Common, and parcelling it out into farms' (p. 598). Whereas, in Jane Eyre, the friendship narrative feeds into the courtship narrative, in Shirley they are in collision. Whereas, in Jane Eyre, we move towards a covert shifting of gender
boundaries, in Shirley the 'androgyne' of Captain Keeldar is explicitly foregrounded from the start, only to be gradually dismantled. At the same time, the shared visions of Shirley and Caroline are systematically undercut.

This process begins from precisely the moment when friendship's 'mission' seems to have been accomplished - when rich and poor, men and women, married and unmarried, unite in harmony for the school-feast. We are offered, first, an absurd mock-heroic account of a 'battle' between the 'priest-led and woman-officered company'(p.299) and the opposing procession of Dissenters, in which Captain Keeldar finds herself marshalling her forces with the aid of a parasol. Next, through two conversations with 'low persons', we are shown the limited effectiveness of their grand designs; William Farren tells them that feminine charity has simply exacerbated problems which only masculine assistance can solve; Joe Scott mocks their presumptuous aspirations, drawing attention to their superficial education and the fact that Shirley is only 'playing' at trade. Finally, after watching from the sidelines the real and bloody battle at Hollow's Mill, the two women themselves admit that they are ill-equipped to correct men's perceptions of women:

"To be sure: you could not write cleverly enough; you don't know enough; you are not learned, Shirley."

"God knows, I can't contradict you, Cary: I'm as ignorant as a stone. There's one comfort, however, you are not much better." (p.343)
The shift of tone here from the visionary rhetoric of their earlier conversations is striking, and prefigurative. The passionate shared talk of mermaid-temptresses, new Eves, woman-Titans, female Cowpers and Rousseaus, suddenly evaporates. This sudden admission of 'ignorance' seems to make no literal sense against all that has gone before, but it marks a crucial transitional point in the narrative. The recognition that the friends' shared knowledge has no public coinage prepares the ground for their 'master-pupil' marriages to men who speak French.

In Shirley, the interplay between foreign and English and the learning of a 'new' language, so often characteristic of the friendship story, are transposed on to the story of courtship. Robert and Louis Moore are half-English, half-Belgian; the language they speak is identified in the novel as the language of romance, and the language of resistance. (It is not 'pure' French, the language of revolution; inflected with the respectable Antwerpois background of the Moore brothers, the suggestion is of a sober romanticism, a modified resistance, more appropriate to the commercial English bourgeoisie.) Caroline loves to learn French from Robert, though she is stifled by the rigid teaching of his sister Hortense, and the exchange of languages is reciprocal; she also corrects his English. Shirley's final vision, of the woman whose humanity is married with genius, was written as a French 'devoir' for Louis, whose red underscorings she perceives as corrections,
but which, the novel suggests, in fact represent quite the opposite response. Brontë's authorial voice occasionally shifts into French, telling us that the English language has no adequate equivalent. Speaking to Robert in French, reciting 'La Jeune Captive', Caroline can give voice to her plight. The implication of all this is that the exchange of languages represents a 'new' kind of marriage relationship, a shared movement towards a revised knowledge. Yet the limitations of this 'exchange' are continually questioned in the final chapters of the novel.

After the revelation of their 'ignorance', the friendship between Shirley and Caroline recedes. The differences between them are first sharpened, and then progressively eroded. The reformulation of the friendship at this point, it should be said, is made necessary by Brontë's overall project. For while the friendship between Caroline and Shirley is initially represented as 'exemplary', it has finally to be accommodated into the fundamental premise of the novel, the 'solution' which Brontë offers to the problem of social disharmony. Voluntary submission to mastery is offered as the way to avoid revolution; if the masters will only learn benevolence, if the mastered will only learn veneration, hierarchy and liberty are compatible. As Helen Taylor has demonstrated, the novel offers cautious analogies between the plight of women and the plight of the working class while giving full expression only to the former; we might say also that, in drawing
these analogies, the novel becomes trapped in its own logic. If workers must submit, so must women. Thus we have the contradictory conversation in which Shirley both asserts the desirability of a gentle, companionate and equal marriage, and at the same time declares that 'a great, good, handsome man is the first of created things' and 'it degrades to stoop - it is glorious to look up' (p. 226). In terms of the novel's argument, Shirley's 'submission' is inevitable, but that is not to say that it is smooth.

Caroline's rediscovery of her lost mother signals her reabsorption into the mainstream of femininity. 33 Shirley, on the other hand, is increasingly identified with strangeness, originality, rare dreams and peculiar desires; as a poet without a voice. While Caroline's progression towards marriage is relatively smooth, Shirley's is a protracted and desperate struggle against the loss of her independence. Caroline now becomes an active agent in the 'feminisation' of Shirley. Earlier in the novel, we have twice seen Caroline fastening her careless and indolent friend into her clothes, doing up the 'hooks and eyes' of her dress (p. 292). Now, as marriage approaches, Shirley abdicates completely. It is Caroline who supervises the preparations for the wedding: 'She decided on the wreath, the veil, the dress to be worn at the altar: she chose various robes and fashions for more ordinary occasions, without much reference to the bride's opinion...' (p. 591) While Shirley is struggling against captivity, pining at being...
"fettered to a fixed day" and "bound with a vow" (p. 592),

Caroline is gloating over the taming of her friend:

"Whatever I am, Shirley is a bondswoman. Lioness! She has found her captor. Mistress she may be of all round her - but her own mistress she is not."

"So you exulted at recognising a fellow-slave in one so fair and imperial?"

"I did..." (p. 562)

The imagery here recalls one of Sarah Stickney Ellis's apocalyptic pleas for sisterhood in *The Daughters of England*:

What should we think of a community of slaves, who betrayed each other's interest? of a little band of ship-wrecked mariners upon a friendless shore, who were false to each other? of the inhabitants of a defenceless nation, who would not unite together in earnestness and good faith against a common enemy? We are accustomed to hear of the meanness of the powerful, when they forsake the weak; but there is a meanness of a lower grade - when the weak forsake each other.

No party, however, can be weak, which has truth for its element, and love for its bond of union. Women are only weak in their vanity, their selfishness, their falsehood to each other. In their integrity, their faithfulness, their devoted affection, they rise to an almost superhuman eminence; because they are strong in the elements of immaterial being, and powerful in a nature which is capable, when regenerated, of being shared with angels.

Ellis declares that women's loving sisterhood elevates slaves to the status of angels. Brontë's novel reverses this argument. Within the tight circle of sisterhood, visions of the superhuman evaporate: would-be woman-Titans are, after all, only fellow-slaves.

The wry conclusion of the novel, the self-mocking distancing of the final 'Winding-Up', the muted picture of the two Mrs Moores, sisters-in-marriage, admits the impossibility of merging the ideal and the real. The dreams shared by the friends are in excess of the
novel's economy, just as, the narrative suggests, the romantic and idealised image of the 'self-improving' friendship offered by the conduct manuals is in excess of the possibilities offered to women in the real world. The retreat, in the final paragraphs of the novel, from the immediate past into a nostalgic glimpse of a more harmonious distant past, takes us back into the world of Jane Eyre:

"What was the Hollow like then, Martha?"
"Different to what it is now; but I can tell of it clean different again: when there was neither mill, nor cot, nor hall, except Fieldhead, within two miles of it. I can tell, one summer-evening, fifty years syne, my mother coming running in just at the edge of dark, almost fleyed out of her wits, saying, she had seen a fairish (fairy) in Fieldhead Hollow; and that was the last fairish that ever was seen on this country side (though they've been heard within these forty years). A lonesome spot it was - and a bonnie spot - full of oak trees and nut trees. It is altered now." (p. 599)

Fairies at twilight evoke the elf-world of Jane Eyre. As does Fieldhead Hollow; for if the Hollow is the place where Robert, to Caroline's regret, builds a cinder-black highway and a chimney 'ambitious as the tower of Babel' (p. 599), it is also the place of Shirley's house, Fieldhead: an isolated mansion of irregular architecture, with grey and mossy walls, latticed windows and stone porch, set among trees...
Fieldhead is Moor House, and Ferndean: in Jane Eyre, the houses of fantasised revision. Shirley's conclusion, however, suggests that such fantasies take shape only as the stories women tell one another, as the strange dreams produced within a feminine discourse which cannot be integrated into the hard realities of the social.
Shortly after *Shirley* was published, Brontë received a letter from her close friend Mary Taylor:

I have seen some extracts from *Shirley* in which you talk of women working. And this first duty, this great necessity you seem to think that some women may indulge in — if they give up marriage and don’t make themselves too disagreeable to the other sex. You are a coward and a traitor. A woman who works is by that alone better than one who does not and a woman who does not happen to be rich and who still earns no money and who does not wish to do so, is guilty of a great fault — almost a crime — A dereliction of duty which leads rapidly and almost certainly to all manner of degradation. It is very wrong of you to plead for toleration for workers on the ground of their being in peculiar circumstances and few in number or singular in disposition. Work or degradation is the lot of all except the very small number born to wealth. 35

Taylor, the model for Rose Yorke in *Shirley*, was a lifelong feminist and radical. In a series of articles written for the *Victoria Magazine* in the 1860s, later published as *The First Duty of Women* (1870), she launched a sustained and blistering attack on the enforced parasitism of the bourgeois woman and the hollowness of the concept of female “self-improvement”. Woman’s ‘first duty’, she insisted, was work. This was the theme also of Taylor’s only novel, *Miss Miles*; although not published until 1890, the novel was substantially written in the 1850s, and was already well under way when *Shirley* was published. 36 Taylor’s novel follows the interlinked destinies of five women; it is notable for having a working-class heroine who is not a ‘fallen woman’ — the robust, resilient and outspoken Sarah Miles — and also for depicting female friendships which cross the boundaries of generation and class. It is also noticeable that Taylor’s representation of those
friendships differs markedly from other mid-nineteenth-century novels. She refuses to sentimentalise: relationships between the women, in their precarious movements towards independence, are often difficult and fragile. There are no exchanges of flowers; there is a grotesque version of the dressing-up ritual, in which the one young woman who fails to escape is transformed into a parody of a bride by her mother and sisters, anxious to marry her off. Amelia, too weak to break free of her family and take up the dress-making work which Sarah finds for her, goes into a decline, and dies. By the end of the novel, the other four have come to see that 'if we can't help ourselves we can help one another' (p. 409), and each has found work: Sarah becomes a singer, Dora a lecturer, and Maria and the elderly Miss Everard open a school for girls together.

Taylor was an endless source of fascination to Brontë, although the two women often disagreed. As Charlotte told Ellen Nussey, 'It is vain to limit a character like hers within ordinary boundaries - she will overstep them', but equally, Brontë's letters reveal her frequent qualms about Taylor's flagrant overstepping of those boundaries. In her final novel, Villette, Brontë also moves towards the conclusion that 'a woman who works is by that alone better than one who does not', but its terms are very different from those of Miss Miles. Whereas Taylor's novel emphasises the importance of female solidarity, Lucy's story is essentially a story of isolation. By the end of Miss
Miles, even the frail and formerly conservative Evelyn Everard is cheerfully acknowledging that she has become more like a man; Brontë's novel, by contrast, worries continually at the implications for female subjectivity of entry into the 'masculine' sphere. I believe these two points are connected. The striking contrast between the centrality of friendship in Shirley and its peripheral place in Villette has often been noted, and it is tempting to attribute the difference between the two novels to Brontë's isolation after the deaths of her two sisters. But as Linda Hunt has noted, Lucy is separated from other women by her mode of life, and the identity she chooses. Much of her isolation is voluntary: she is often drawn to other women, but resists them. Villette, in fact, represents a logical extension of the point Brontë had reached by the end of Shirley: that within the available understandings of sisterhood, two women can finally only mirror back to one another their shared dependence. In the slippery and elliptical narrative of her final novel, Brontë moves towards a fragile affirmation of a gendered identity outside the circle of sisterhood: she offers us a heroine without a mirror image.

Lucy Snowe's strength lies in her secrecy, her autonomy: she sees through the disguise of others, but her own disguise must not be penetrated. The doll-like Polly, the gentle Mrs Bretton, the butterfly Ginevra, the watchful Madame Beck, are observed, and held at a distance. Throughout the novel, Lucy encounters and
dissects images of other women: reflections in mirrors, paintings in art galleries, the figure of the phantom nun. But Lucy's own image is always blurred; on the rare occasions when she glances in a mirror, we catch only a glimpse of a spectral figure, faded, hollow-eyed. When Ginevra and Lucy stand at the mirror together, we see what Ginevra sees, her own self-gratifying reflection, but we don't see Lucy's image: Lucy doesn't look. When Mrs Bretton propels Lucy to the mirror in her new pink dress, Lucy turns away.

Lucy is defined in relation, and in resistance, not to a woman, but to a man. M. Paul is brother, lover, and other self:

we are alike - there is affinity. Do you see it, mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine - that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star.

(p.457)

I am not suggesting that Paul and Lucy's identities merge; the separateness of their genders, nationalities and creeds is continually emphasised. Rather, M. Paul holds up to Lucy the images of femininity against which she fights, but which also enable her to move beyond the available understandings of female subjectivity. In the art gallery, it is M. Paul who steers Lucy away from the picture of Cleopatra towards a vapid series of tableaux of female domesticity, but it is also M. Paul who perceives the passions so carefully concealed beneath Lucy's demure exterior: the would-be coquette, the repressed sauvage. It is M. Paul who insists that
Lucy acts a male part in the school play, a part which she plays in her own way, retaining her women's garb, and adding only the 'masculine' details of her own choice; it is a part which she temporarily relishes, but decides never to play again.

Lucy will not act like a man, but M. Paul can act like a woman. It is M. Paul who is Lucy's 'female friend'. The conventions which in other novels characterise women's friendship - the sharing of food, the exchange of gifts - are here played on to the relationship between lovers. It is M. Paul who brings Lucy coffee and cakes, leaves books and chocolate bonbons in her desk, wraps her in a shawl when she falls asleep at her work; it is M. Paul who, finally, creates a space from within which Lucy can be her own mistress, by giving her a school of her own and an exquisite little dolls' house which he fills with flowers and books. Here, as in *Jane Eyre*, the boundaries between love and friendship dissolve in the fantasy of the lover who thinks like a woman but remains a man.

Right at the end of the novel, however, Brontë covertly reintroduces the question of female friendship. With a legacy left to her by Miss Marchmont, to whom she once acted as companion, Lucy extends her school into the adjoining house. The legacy takes us back to a strange and surrealistic episode early in the novel, in which 'two hot, close rooms ... became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all' (p. 97). Maria Marchmont is Lucy's only positive
female role-model: Lucy's characteristically close study of her character offers her a woman truly original in the steadiness of her virtues ... the power of her passions ... the truth of her feelings' (p. 97). Miss Marchmont is, also, a single woman of independent means who has mourned the death of her fiancé for thirty years. She acts as the term of resistance to Lucy's most difficult and persistent female 'other', Madame Beck. Brontë's narrative returns continually to the fascination of Madame Beck, a woman in a position of power whose autonomy and watchfulness match Lucy's own. As Judith Newton has emphasised, she is 'dangerous' not so much for her 'French' deviousness, which Lucy can resist and control, as for the model of independent femininity which she represents: Madame Beck has achieved her position as mistress of her school and of her life at the cost of suppressing all heart, all feeling.

The house of Lucy's true 'mistress', Miss Marchmont, testifies to the compatibility of feeling and power; placed alongside that of Lucy's 'master', M. Paul, it testifies also to the validity of female friendship. Between them, the two houses hold in suspension the opposites which have seemed throughout the novel to be irreconcilable: dependence and independence, love and work, autonomy and friendship.

As Newton comments, the conclusion of *Villette* reorders the conventional priorities of fiction: 'the real history of Lucy Snowe ... begins not with an entry
onto the marriage mart but with an entry onto the labor market. But Brontë's ambivalent and evasive ending acknowledges the impossibility of imagining beyond this point of departure. Love and work meet and separate; Lucy's future, and her identity, remain enigmatic. 'Who are you, Miss Snowe?' asks Ginevra (p.392). The question is never answered. In Brontë's lovingly elaborate inventory of the contents of Lucy's perfect little house, only one detail is missing: unlike the many other domestic interiors described in the novel, this house has no mirror. Villette poses, but leaves open, the question which was to be central to both feminist and anti-feminist novels in the late nineteenth century: how is a woman to 'act like a man', to enter the public sphere, without relinquishing her femininity?
CHAPTER FOUR

A FOUNTAIN UNSEALED:

FEMINISM, ANTI-FEMINISM AND EDUCATION, 1880-1914

Girls,

Knowledge is now no more a fountain sealed. 1

The period I want to discuss in this chapter was characterised by significant changes in the opportunities available to women, which had important implications both for women's friendship and for women's writing. The rise of the women's movement led to a new understanding of the importance of female solidarity, well illustrated in one of the essays in The Duties of Women (1881) by the feminist Frances Power Cobbe. Cobbe envisages that, as a result of the women's movement, women will abandon their servile dependence upon men and develop their own 'esprit de corps'. They need to be taught from their earliest years that, while marriage may be a perfect ideal of friendship, it is not the only relationship in which the demands of women's hearts can be fulfilled:

There are, I suppose, some women (rather perhaps of the clinging order) whose natures could never find their complement or be quite satisfied, except in Marriage, and for these I can only wish - a good husband! But if I am not mistaken, there are a considerable number who are capable of being quite as completely satisfied by Friendship; and not a few whose dispositions are such that they are better suited for Friendship than for Marriage... who do not need to lean but to clasp hands along the journey of life. More and more, I expect, as time goes on, women who have not the blessing of sisters who can live with them, will form these life-long sisterly friendships with other women; and find in them the affection and the comradeship which will fill their hearts and cheer all their later years. 2
Cobbe's vision of the future draws on and subtly alters the understanding of friendship expressed in Victorian conduct manuals. Friendship is not a consolation for the single life, but a validation of celibacy as a positive choice; it is not a second-rate substitute for marriage, but a relationship with equivalent rights, duties and satisfactions. In the future, she suggests, women's relationships will both reflect and contribute to a new, stronger feminine identity: petty divisions and trivial companionships will be replaced by 'almost sacred friendships founded on the community of noble and disinterested aims' (p. 155).

The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the consolidation of some of those aims for which feminist pioneers had been working since the mid-century. The opening of new colleges for women, changes in secondary education for girls, and the corresponding expansion of working opportunities seemed to herald the dawning of a new era, and the establishment of new all-female institutions offered the middle-class woman, at least, unprecedented opportunities for forming friendships beyond the environs of the family home. One such institution deserves particular mention here, since many of the writers whose novels I shall be discussing in this chapter belonged to it. The Pioneer Club, founded by the heiress Mrs Massingberd in 1892, had its heyday in the eighteen-nineties. The club, which was committed
to the advancement of women's interests and the dissolution of distinctions of sex and class, aimed to bring together working and leisured women in the interests of universal sisterhood. The early years of the club were captured with characteristic lyricism by its indefatigable scribe, Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp:

Like the first dawning of all revolution... the young club over-flowed with generous impulses, noble longings, glorified dreams. Distinctions were abolished, numbers were adopted in place of names, so that titles and dignities had no place. To be a Pioneer was deemed distinction sufficient. A sweet freedom and pleasantness prevailed, the delightful atmosphere of which those who experienced it can never forget... All the members were drawn towards each other by one common purpose, all felt the great magnetic force, which, generating in a small but resolute band of thinkers and reformers, welds them into a mighty power.

The club provided a library, bedrooms, and spaces for women to meet, eat and work, but its central activity was the regular weekly debates, the titles of which reflect the heterogeneous concerns of late-nineteenth-century feminism. Subjects discussed included temperance, vivisection, women's suffrage, the existence of ghosts, the relationship between socialism and the women's movement, women in fiction, bicycling, the compatibility of marriage and career, hunting, factory work, rational dress, vegetarianism, and 'Is the New Woman a Myth?'

The last title is a revealing one, since the last two decades of the nineteenth century also saw the twin phenomena of the 'New Woman' novel and the feminist best-seller. In the 'New Woman' novel, feminine identity was problematised in new ways and 'taboo' areas of
women's experience - female sexuality, prostitution and venereal disease - were explored with an explicitness inconceivable in the early Victorian period. By no means all of the New Woman novels were feminist novels - some were by writers ambivalent about, or actively hostile to the women's movement - but the novels of Sarah Grand, Mona Caird and Lady Florence Dixie, all of whom were feminist activists and members of the Pioneer Club, fiercely attacked the double sexual standard, the oppression of women within marriage and the multiple constraints upon women's potential, and strongly endorsed feminist demands for equality, economic and personal autonomy and access to public life.

Yet when we look at the representation of friendship in the novels of this period, what we find is surprising. It would seem reasonable to expect that the changes I have outlined here would have led to distinctive changes in the representation of friendship in the novel and to a new celebration of female solidarity. The picture we find is in fact much more complicated. The 1880s and 1890s saw the emergence of a new genre, pioneered by women in sympathy with the women's movement, in which romantic friendship is both central and celebrated: the school and college story for girls. But in feminist novels addressed to the adult reader, friendship is rarely a motivating force: earlier rituals are adapted and modified in ways which often work to reduce the significance of friendship, which acts as a structuring device only sketchily integrated
into the central narrative. In the anti-feminist novel, by contrast, friendship is foregrounded.

If we are to interpret the various strands of this apparently paradoxical picture, two points need to be emphasised. Firstly, it needs to be reiterated that the representation of female friendship in fiction never simply 'reflects' real relations, but transforms them. It acts as the vehicle for the expression of specific fears and desires, both of which are not simply 'about' the nature and role of friendship itself, but are crucially related to shifting concepts of, and debates about, what constitutes gendered identity. Secondly, the attribution of feminist and anti-feminist alignment is not always easy in this period. This is partly a question of the particular nature of feminism in the late nineteenth century, but it is also the case that the line between 'feminist' and 'anti-feminist' arguments is often a thin one. In the novels of women in sympathy with, opposed to, or ambivalent about the women's movement the same questions recur, sometimes covertly, sometimes answered in contradictory ways. The work of anti-feminist women writers in this period merits more attention from feminists than it has so far received, since it is in their novels that questions which may be evaded or blurred by feminist sympathisers are most clearly, even crudely, posed. In three of Eliza Lynn Linton's novels, the dangers of the women's movement are conflated in the narrative with the dangers of women's friendship. Her attacks become increasingly
hysterical, but the nature of the attack also shifts between 1880 and 1898, focussing in each novel upon a new 'danger'. Her novels thus provide a particularly useful springboard for examining the ways in feminism and femininity were debated in the novels of this period, and the various, and intricate, ways in which friendship became implicated in those debates.

I. ELIZA LYNN LINTON: THE 'UNWOMANLY WOMAN'

Eliza Lynn Linton is a particularly paradoxical figure. Despite her persistent antagonism to the women's movement, she was by no means an advocate for a passive femininity confined to the private sphere. She was one of the earliest women in England to make a living as a salaried journalist. Born in a remote Cumberland vicarage in 1822, Linton perceived herself as a rebel and an oddity from childhood. After a protracted struggle to educate herself in the face of family opposition, she left home at the age of twenty-three, moved to London, and thereafter single-mindedly pursued her ambition to earn her own living, often a precarious one, from her writing.

In her early years, she met Robert Owen, became an enthusiastic convert to his views, and contributed to the English Republican, edited by the radical engraver W.J. Linton, whom she later married. As Barbara Taylor has shown, many Owenite socialists saw the struggle for women's equality and the struggle against class oppression as not only compatible, but interrelated.
Linton herself supported both divorce reform and the right of women to own their own property, perhaps as a result of her own short-lived marriage: she seems like an obvious candidate for the women's movement. Yet in her later years, she was notorious for her persistent and outspoken attacks upon that movement, initially in her 'Girl of the Period' essays, a series of immoderate attacks upon the emergent generation of 'New Women' which were published in the Saturday Review in the 1860s, and later in her fiction.

Although Linton was anti-feminist, she was by no means anti-woman. Most of her closest relationships were with her own sex, and George Layard, Linton’s biographer, describes the overwhelming and passionate infatuation which Linton developed at the age of seventeen for an elegant, sophisticated and cultured older woman. Layard’s evidence has to be approached with some caution, since he draws heavily on the evidence of Linton’s novel, The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland (1885). This curious work is transparently an autobiographical account of Linton’s own life, with one crucial difference: the narrator is a man. In transposing her own sex, Linton necessarily transposes that of her husband and other significant figures in her life; Layard simply reverses the sexes back again and calls the novel autobiography, but he is certain that the 'Mrs Dalrymple' with whom the young Christopher falls in love was, in fact, a woman, and since he both knew Linton and had the cooperation of her
favourite sister Lucy, it seems likely that he is right. There is a further strong reason for accepting Layard’s attribution.

The relationship between ‘Christopher’ and ‘Adeline Dalrymple’ mirrors both the concept of the girlhood friend as idealised ‘second self’ offered in Victorian conduct manuals, and the representation of the refined ‘foreign friend’ found in some of the mid-nineteenth-century novels discussed in my previous chapters. The exquisite, highly-educated Mrs Dalrymple is a fluent linguist, an exceptionally talented musician and artist who offers the lonely, misunderstood Christopher a mirror of ‘his’ barely-formed aspirations. Half-Polish, a woman of rare spirituality with ‘an almost feverish activity of mind, an almost dangerous energy of thought’(I.174), speaking English with ‘a certain Italianized lingering on the letters that was like a caress’(I.174), Mrs Dalrymple closely resembles the Countess Novera in Elizabeth Sewell’s Margaret Percival. This relationship likewise acts as a transfiguring, ecstatic and disturbing experience, opening up new areas of life, poetry, beauty, wisdom, offering access to the secret language of Nature and ‘the hidden meaning of things’(I.203). Christopher’s burning, feverish passion leads, like Margaret’s, to nameless dissatisfied yearnings which can only be alleviated by learning the marked passages in the books lent by the friend, passages which take on a new meaning and value when read ‘with her voice, her inflection
sounding in my ears’ (I.180). As with Margaret, the intensity of Christopher’s strange rapture is accompanied by a loss of self in the personality of the other and he becomes thin, pale and drained.

In Linton’s novel, though, the relationship is both more explicitly eroticised and more idealised. The overpowering emotions which in Margaret Percival are displaced into dreams or on to the ‘rival’ are here foregrounded. Waltzing with Mrs Dalrymple, his arm round her supple and stayless waist, Christopher is so overwhelmed by his emotions that he becomes too faint and giddy to continue. He is consumed by a raging jealousy for her husband and envies even her clothes, with which he develops a fetishistic obsession. He longs to ‘kneel to her, to kiss the hem of her garment, to make myself her footstool, her slave’ (I.195), and the relationship culminates when one night Mrs Dalrymple, drawn as if by some magnetic influence, meets Christopher in the garden and they sit hand in hand in the summer-house all night. At dawn, Mrs Dalrymple kisses Christopher on the forehead and eyes; kneeling at her feet, he thinks ‘that for a moment I died’ (I.209). The moment of ecstatic union is followed by an attack of brain-fever, during which Christopher is briefly soothed when Mrs Dalrymple comes to his bed-side and speaks ‘in what seemed to me a language I had once learned and now vainly tried to remember’ (I.210); her image becomes fused with those of his dead mother, the Divine Virgin,
the goddess Isis, and 'a confused dream of Diana and Endymion' (I.211).

Whereas, in Sewell's novel, the love between Margaret and Beatrice is framed as a 'temptation' which must be resisted, in Linton's narrative the relationship is consistently presented as consuming, but positive. Throughout the chapter in which she appears, Adeline Dalrymple is offered as saint, angel, living goddess, sybil, Madonna, as a woman who is 'beyond womanhood... the casket that embodied and enclosed the Divine' (I.201). Having played its part in Christopher's emotional and intellectual development, the 'love which had had no past and could have no future' (I.211) ends abruptly when the Dalrymples leave the neighbourhood. A period of lethargy and despair follows until Mrs Dalrymple re-emerges as the absent spirit which will inspire and guide Christopher throughout life: 'The consciousness of her was my universe, my inseparable second self - like another soul possessing me' (I.216). Helped by a gift from her, a volume of Shelley, Christopher recovers his energy and power, and resolves to leave home, support himself and live an independent life. His decision to devote his life to literature is inspired by the idea that this will be a means of communication with Mrs Dalrymple, and that some day his own work will 'make those beautiful eyes moist and stir that lofty soul with generous emotion' (I.221).

Clearly there are problems in taking Christopher Kirkland unproblematically as a disguised narrative of
female friendship. We cannot be sure how far the language used, the structuring of the relationship and its effect on the narrator, were affected by Linton’s adoption of a male persona. Linton herself told Rhoda Broughton (who confessed herself ‘burning with curiosity to know where fiction ended and reality began’) that Mrs Dalrymple was a study ‘partly true, partly evolved’. For Linton herself, the screen of a male persona in Christopher Kirkland may well have liberated the expression of taboo or repressed homoerotic emotions. What can be stated more firmly is that the adoption of that persona contributes within the narrative to a fantasised revision of heterosexual relations. For whether or not its origins are autobiographical, the relationship between Christopher and Adeline unquestionably draws closely on Victorian understandings of the nature and role of female friendship. In so far as it is fictionalised, it is a fiction firmly within the conventions described in my previous chapters. In the complex process of ‘inversion’ which takes place in this novel, Linton not only ‘masculinises’ her own experience but also ‘feminises’ her hero, whose self-formation follows the traditional path of feminine development through the union with an idealised ‘second self’. Christopher’s perfect spiritual, intellectual and emotional communion with Adeline Dalrymple is contrasted with the behaviour of Adeline’s husband, an ‘effeminate’, hashish-smoking dandy who neglects his wife and disappears for days on end; separated from
Christopher, Adeline becomes a confirmed invalid while her dilettante husband devotes himself to mesmerism, opium and poetry. Paradoxically then, the more 'manly' man, the 'true' lover and 'real' writer is the one whose psychic formation is female.

Despite the difficulties it presents, Christopher Kirkland merits discussion as a curious interim text in a continuously shifting picture. It anticipates many of the twentieth-century novels which I shall be discussing in my next chapter, in which we will also find the intense and sensuous shared pursuit of knowledge, the surrender of the self which is both rapturous and insane, the secret meeting in the garden; we will again see the friend who holds the key to the mysteries of a 'new' and strange language, and who facilitates the young woman's entry into the life of the artist. In these later narratives, as in Linton's novel, the ingredients of the Victorian concept of friendship are given an explicitly erotic inflection, but without the device of the male persona: in the twentieth century, it is the young woman's passion for her teacher or fellow student which takes centre stage. For our purposes in this chapter, however, what is most notable about Christopher Kirkland is the way in which it contrasts with Linton's representation of the passionate friendship in her anti-feminist novels.

Perdita Winstanley, the heroine of The Rebel of the Family (1880)\textsuperscript{13} is, like Linton herself and many an earlier nineteenth-century heroine, the odd one out in
her family, the indigestible sandwich placed between cool, elegant, rigidly dutiful Thomasina and pretty, cossetted, kittenish Little Eva. The sole purpose of their widowed mother, trapped in a position of desperate genteel poverty, is to manoeuvre a successful marriage for her daughters. Perdita represents a poor investment: she is freckled, awkward, untidy, wears glasses, and compounds her own isolation by her refusal to dissemble or compromise. She is also, to the embarrassment and confusion of her family, an ardent republican whose one desire is to earn her own living. When Perdita meets the militant female supremacist Bell Blount, then, she is a ripe candidate for the women’s movement, powerfully drawn towards the friendship offered by a woman who sees her aspirations as neither ridiculous nor demeaning, and inflamed and disturbed by the seductive vision of joining ‘a secret sect working beneath the surface of society’ (I.66) in which her rebellious ambitions would not only be ratified, but shared.

Bell Blount is a quite extraordinary figure: a handsome, bold, dramatic woman with artificially whitened hair, she wears eccentric and garish clothes, smokes cigars, drinks brandy, energetically denounces all men as cowards and animals, and lives with her ‘little wife’ Connie in a state of neglect and disorder which has ‘a queer hybrid look, as if tenanted by men who owned some of the furniture of women and not all of their own’ (I.273). Their ‘marriage’ is represented as a
perverse attempt to ape the manners and behaviour of men; it is interrogated on the grounds that, in excluding men, it fails to be a 'real' marriage and yet reproduces all the most oppressive aspects of heterosexual relations and dependencies. The mouse-like Connie, economically dependent on Bell, acts as 'lady's-maid, milliner, housekeeper, amanuensis, panegyrist in public, flatterer and slave in private'(I.77); Bell exploits her services and brings home other women. The relationship is thus used to puncture Bell's eloquent advocation of 'the only life worthy of a rational woman - a life of self-support, of independence, of friendship with her own sex and men, who are our enemies, discarded and thrown overboard!'(I.79).

The relationship between Connie and Bell is not explicitly defined as sexual (it seems fair to say that if it had been, the novel would never have been published), but heavy hints are liberally scattered throughout the novel to alert the 'knowing' reader that Bell's relationships with women are 'unnatural'. Bell's ardour makes the ingenuous Perdita blush, though she scarcely knows why; when Bell pets, caresses and kisses her, Perdita feels 'half attracted and half repelled - fascinated by the woman's mental power and revolted by something too vague to name yet too real to ignore' (II.51). As we have seen, the pillorying of the 'passionate friendship', as a weapon in the anti-feminist artillery, has a long history, and Bell
Blount is, in many respects, an eighteenth-century figure: robust, fantastical, offered to the reader as a bizarre product of the intrinsic freakishness of feminism. Bell is not a real woman: she is defined, variously, as artificial, mannish, hybrid, unsexed, a walking rainbow; she is a belle without the feminising ending. Her portrait has close affinities with earlier hatchet jobs upon feminists and their friendships, especially the smoking, drinking, dishevelled 'Araminta' in Maria Edgeworth's 'Angelina; or, L'Amie Inconnue', which I discussed in Chapter One. (Bell's full name is Arabella.)

But whereas Angelina is 'rescued' from Araminta by a more appropriate female mentor, Perdita has no female role-model. She is torn, rather, between the tantalising allure of Bell's 'sisterhood' and her contrasting friendship with the gentle but narrowly domesticated woman who ultimately becomes her mother-in-law. Each woman mirrors some of Perdita's aspirations, but not all of them. The extrication of Perdita from her association with the 'hybrid' Bell thus has an important structural function within the narrative; it serves to define her as a 'real' woman despite her apparent difference from the 'feminine' women around her. The particular terms of this extrication are important for Linton's project.

Perdita is 'rescued' from Bell by marriage, but marriage in itself is not offered as a counter to Bell's arguments; the constricting and distorting effects of
the bourgeois marriage market are consistently exposed and rejected throughout the novel. It is Perdita’s decision to ‘marry down’ that matters in this novel. Her marriage to a humble chemist validates Perdita’s republican sympathies and her independent spirit, and is contrasted with the miserable liaisons contracted by her two sisters. The marriage is made in conscious opposition, not only to the wishes of her family, but also to the views of Bell Blount, a ‘strong conservative’ who dismisses Perdita’s democratic ideals as a diversion:

"We must respect social degrees as we find them. It is such a mistake when people push a wholesome principle into an absurdity; and the Emancipation of Woman does not include democratic equality or communistic mishmash in any form! (III.35)"

Bell’s rhetoric about egalitarian sisterhood is thus seen to be fully exposed, and in this novel the exposure is an exuberant performance. Linton is sufficiently confident of her own project to acknowledge that Bell’s particular form of female supremacism doesn’t represent the entire movement; when Bell takes Perdita to a women’s rights meeting, the speakers are represented as a motley and disparate crew, united only by their absurdity and discursiveness. Linton clearly enjoys herself, setting up her skittles and knocking them down with zest. Bell, her ‘marriage’, and her feminism are all represented as a transparent and ludicrous deviation from the ideal which Perdita represents in herself and finally achieves in her marriage, and Perdita herself is
never seriously 'tempted' by Bell's blandishments.

Feminism is a dangerous joke, but nevertheless a joke.

When Linton returned to her battle with feminism in two later novels, The One Too Many (1894) and In Haste and at Leisure (1895), the context had changed. As the women's movement gained ground, her attacks not only became increasingly venomous but also shifted markedly in their terms. The 'dangers' represented in these later novels reflect the particular climate of the 1890s; they need to be considered in relation to debates specific to that decade, and I shall be returning to them later in this chapter. What is most noticeable in these later novels is Linton's loss of confidence in the viability of the 'womanly-yet-unwomanly' model she had presented in Perdita: the woman who can be independent and rebellious and yet define herself in opposition to the women's movement. In In Haste and at Leisure the only woman to be endorsed by the narrative is a paragon of traditional, passive Victorian femininity. Linton's embitterment at what she saw to be the disastrous impact of feminism led her to lose faith both in her earlier republicanism and in her own sex. As she said in a letter to her sister written shortly before her death in 1898:

I hate women as a race, Lucy. I think we are demons. Individually we are all right, but as a race we are monkeyish, cruel, irresponsible, superficial. 14

Linton's continuing opposition to the women's movement is perhaps most easily understood as the
familiar case of the successful career woman who, having struggled at considerable personal cost to achieve a place in a predominantly male world, sees other, younger women rocking the boat by claiming similar, and further, 'privileges', not as a prize to be struggled for, but as a right. But it is also, perhaps more crucially, a question of her identification as a woman. Linton's adoption of a masculine persona in her autobiography suggests the anomalies she felt in her own position. Even as a self-confessedly turbulent and ungovernable child she was enraged by any suggestion that she was 'unwomanly'. In later life, she was a meticulously neat and 'domesticated' woman, known even to mend the tablecloths in her hotel rooms. Linton exemplifies, in fact, the dilemma of the woman who, having in her own life moved so close to the edge of what is acceptable as 'womanly', feels the need to defend her womanliness at all costs. Her awareness of the precarious position that she occupies, as a woman in a man's world, leads her to fear the removal of all boundaries between male and female: if those qualities which define women as superior to men are rejected and invalidated, what does a woman become but a smaller, physically weaker version of the male? Linton's radicalism, half-hearted or unsystematic as it often appears, led her to reject the available understanding of 'woman' as the enshrinement of bourgeois values. Yet she also rejected the emergent alternative ideology of feminism, on the grounds that it reduced women by defeminising them. A young
correspondent who wrote to ask whether Linton was a member of the Pioneer club received a firm response:

By no means. Mrs. -- I know slightly. Don't become an up-to-date girl. I am sure you are very sweet and ingenuous now, but if you join the advanced school you will lose all your intrinsic charm. Do you think I want you to be yea-nay little pinafore misses? No! but I want you to have ... all the sweet womanly virtues, which make woman half divine, and the true antiseptic of society. You don't find these qualities in the Heavenly Twins, Yellow Asters, and all the new women who set themselves to blaspheme nature and God and good. 15

The question was not as disingenuous as it might seem. Linton has more in common with the 'Pioneers' than she is here willing to admit. The feminist heroines in the novels of this period are also represented as 'half divine, and the true antiseptic of society'. Clever, visionary, impulsive, rebellious but idealistic, strong-willed yet delicately formed, they have the qualities of George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver inflected with the hyperaesthetic sensitivity and nervous susceptibility associated with the 'New Woman'. Often surrounded by female relatives and mentors who seek to constrain her within a confining female role, the late Victorian feminist heroine is defined in resistance to other women and is yet utterly 'feminine'. She has close affinities to Perdita and is created in conscious opposition to the caricature of feminism represented by Bell Blount. Even so, some of the questions raised by that caricature remain pertinent. Unlike Bell Blount, the feminist heroine is sincere in her commitment to female solidarity, but the version of sisterhood offered in the feminist novel is often
problematic, in ways which are partly produced by the polemical purpose of the novelist, but which are also related to the particular nature of late Victorian feminism.

II. FEMINISM AND HEROINISM

Unlike the 'masculine' Bell Blount, the feminist heroine is all woman, but Linton's characterisation of Bell as 'hybrid' and 'artificial' points to one of the problems in the feminist argument. Mainstream feminists of this period challenged the limitations of Victorian domestic ideology by demanding a change in behaviour, particularly male behaviour, without challenging the fundamental premises about gendered identity upon which that ideology was based. As Martha Vicinus succinctly puts it, they 'did not reject the Victorian myths, but reinterpreted them'. Feminists were strongly influenced by the eugenics movement, which appeared to offer a privileged role to women as mothers of the future race. Their claim for a redefinition of women's position and role rested on the familiar assertion of female moral superiority; they demanded an active rather than a passive role because of the social contribution which women could make by virtue of their special propensity for purity, self-sacrifice, sensitivity and sympathy. New qualities - intellect, leadership, sexuality - are superimposed over old ones, but without confronting the question of whether such changes
necessitated a drastic shift in the accepted boundaries of gendered identity. 17

The 'New Woman' of the late Victorian novel is offered to the reader as a woman born out of her time, mysterious even to herself; she is a 'stage' in the evolutionary process, containing within herself the seeds of the future along with the residue of the past. A woman without role models, her struggle towards self-realisation is almost inevitably solitary and often doomed to failure. Such a conception inevitably conflicts with the feminist emphasis on the urgent need for female solidarity, and the solution propounded by some feminist novelists is that of the feminist 'superwoman', who is able to encompass fields previously limited to men without relinquishing any of her 'natural' femininity. Committed to sisterhood while outside the mainstream of that sisterhood, she is a natural leader, surrounded by adoring female followers. In this new version of the 'idealised self', the superwoman represents what other women want to be, but remains at a distance from them.

Most feminist novelists are silent, or noticeably uneasy, on the subject of passionate friendship. The smear tactics deployed by Eliza Lynn Linton in her representation of Bell Blount may help to explain this ambivalence; the 1880s also saw the publication of novels by male writers which laid into question women's romantic attachments, notably Henry James's The Bostonians and George Moore's A Drama in Muslin, both
published in 1886. In *The Bostonians*, feminist Olive Chancellor’s love for the young Verena is depicted with Jamesian ambiguity rather than direct hostility, but Cecilia’s idealising passion for Alice in *A Drama in Muslin* is presented as the obsessive and morbid product of Cecilia’s physical deformity and her resultant neurotic antipathy to men. A mixture of defensiveness and the fact that feminism’s primary targets lay elsewhere goes some way towards accounting for the lack of novels in which two women set up home together and friendship acts, as Frances Power Cobbe had suggested it could, as an alternative to marriage. The feminist ‘New Woman’ wants to be married; her problem is finding the right man. Notably though, where feminist writers question the romantic friendship, they do so on different terms from the novels mentioned above.

*The Cleverest Woman in England* (1898), by L.T. Meade, an active member of the Pioneer Club, is a transparent and simple version of the feminist heroine as superwoman, which is clearly aimed at the popular market. The noble and beautiful Dagmar Ollofson, an idealised blend of the Swedish feminist Ellen Key and the writer Mona Caird, is the most independent woman in London, the most forward in the woman’s movement and the leading light of the ‘Forward’ women’s club. To the distress of her friends, she marries an anti-feminist newspaper editor, but she continues to devote her life to the cause of women. She divides the house in half, uses her half to offer a refuge to ‘fallen women’, gives
lectures on women's suffrage, and writes sensational articles on the Woman Question which are the work of a Woman of Genius. Dagmar has a large and adoring following among her own sex, but she herself is strongly opposed to expressions of affection, especially from women. Dagmar repeatedly rebukes Imogen, her most devoted young friend and admirer, for her desire to caress and kneel to her, telling her that these are sentimental and 'effeminate' exhibitions of weakness.

"It is not necessary for our love, that we should speak of it every five minutes."
"You used not to mind," said Imogen.
"I always minded; I always thought it a sign of weakness, but it comforted you, and I allowed you to do what comforted you. Now I want to strengthen you, to make you brave, to help you to prepare for your great future." (p. 117)

Meade's story reverses Linton's representation in *The Rebel of the Family* of the passionate friendship as a simulation of masculinity. Dagmar's bracing resistance to Imogen's caresses is interlinked with her desire to wean Imogen from morphia, used as an antidote for her insomnia; both are forms of indulgence, seen as an expression of an outmoded feminine identity: dependent, somnolent, clinging, and soft. As we have seen, the Victorian conduct manuals consistently celebrated the romantic friendships of young women as a means of access to a 'higher' but nevertheless limited feminine identity. When that identity is being questioned, but only partly questioned - when there is a confusion about how women are to change, to enter 'masculine' preserves and still remain women - there will inevitably also be a confusion about the 'place' of
women’s friendship, in life and in the novel. The old rituals will not do, but the form of new ones is not yet clear. As we shall see later, Meade’s rejection of romantic and expressive relationships in The Cleverest Woman in England stands in marked contrast to the way in which friendship is depicted in her stories for girls, but the model which she follows here is to be found in many feminist novels of this period, in which the acolyte’s fervent admiration serves to confirm the exceptional qualities of the heroine, but the acolyte herself is kept at a discreet distance. It is fundamentally the pattern established in George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss and modified in Olive Schreiner’s pioneering The Story Of An African Farm (1883).¹⁹

In Schreiner’s novel, as in Eliot’s, the strange rebellious aspirations of the heroine are validated through the faithful devotion of her more conformist cousin, who recognises her claim to be ‘queen’. As in The Mill On The Floss, the lover is ‘exchanged’ between the two cousins; like Lucy, Em praises Lyndall’s beauty to her fiance, relinquishes him for Lyndall’s sake, and has him returned to her on Lyndall’s death. The devoted Em tells Gregory that ‘When my cousin comes to-morrow you will see a beautiful woman ... She is like a little queen: her shoulders are so upright, and her head looks as though it ought to have a little crown upon it’ (p.181); Lyndall in her turn tells Gregory that Em is ‘better’ than she. But in Schreiner’s novel, the relationship between the cousins is far less integral to
the narrative. Where Eliot's narrative offers an intricate interplay between Maggie and Lucy, Em's role is minimal. Whereas Eliot attempts (if she ultimately fails) to stretch the limits of feminine identity so that it will include Maggie without invalidating Lucy, Em is transparently a cruder, more earth-bound, more primeval version of femininity than Lyndall, who is established as the 'princess' from the start of the novel. Em's slowness and solidity, her red face and large hands, all serve to heighten the reader's consciousness of Lyndall's quick intelligence and delicate beauty, but Em herself plays no part in Lyndall's recognition of herself as 'queen'.

This part is reserved for Gregory, who is 'feminised' towards the end of the novel by becoming a surrogate female friend. We find here more explicitly the process covertly at work in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and Eliza Lynn Linton's *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*, in which the rituals of female friendship contribute to a revision of masculine identity. In Villette, Lucy resists M. Paul's attempt to dress her in masculine clothing; in Schreiner's novel, the process is reversed when Gregory dresses up in women's clothes and nurses Lyndall to her death. The clothes Gregory wears belonged to Em's mother; when he first experiments with dressing-up and recognises his new 'mild gentleness' (p. 246) in the mirror, he is wearing a large brown 'kappje' - the garment worn by Em in an early chapter of the novel. In this guise,
Gregory ministers to Lyndall, brings her tea and toast, tenderly rubs her swollen foot, and finally dresses her "like dressing a small doll"(p.281) before holding up the curtain so that Lyndall can see her own face in the glass: "Such a queenly little figure in its pink and white. Such a transparent little face, refined by suffering into an almost angel-like beauty"(p.281). If the novel revises masculinity, it also displaces the female friend from her part in the self-formation of the heroine. Eliot's Lucy facilitates Maggie's ascendance by effacing herself; in Schreiner's novel it is the male, stripped of the signifiers of masculine power, who initiates the self-recognition of the queen. But if Gregory raises the curtain, he does not share in the mirror ritual. Unlike the mid-nineteenth-century heroine, the 'New Woman' looks into the glass alone, in a schizophrenic communion with her own image. As Lyndall lies dying, she holds a mirror to her face: the white face on the pillow looks at the white face in the glass, which now fails to say, as it has said before, "we are together; we will fight, you and I"(pp.283-4). There is a similar image of dislocation in Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman,* in which Mary, having rejected her married lover in the interests of sisterhood, is reproached by her own mirror image for destroying her last chance of pleasure; Mary's sense of 'dual individuality' (p.262) encapsulates the position of the 'New Woman', poised between past and future, seeking a new feminine identity without a model to follow. At
the end of the novel, Mary is left facing a grim and solitary future.

The destinies of the heroines of both *The Story of an African Farm* and *The Story of a Modern Woman* support Gail Cunningham's comment that 'the New Woman fiction as a whole gives the impression that large numbers of women are struggling in determined solitude to achieve an end which, because they are alone against society, is pre-ordained to be unattainable'. The representation of friendship is subordinated to the novelists' primary purpose, which is to shake their reader into an awareness of the frustration, waste and misery produced by women's social position. In the early chapters of Dixon's novel, Mary has a promising friendship with a wealthy feminist, but the friendship is abruptly curtailed by Alison's death, which paves the way for the living death which Mary faces at the end of the novel. As in other novels, the relationship between two women of contrasting circumstances but similar destinies follows the model of Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* but is deployed to serve a more explicitly polemical purpose. Whether the friendship is between rich and poor, as in Dixon's novel and Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899), or between the successful, single writer and the unhappily-married would-be artist, as in Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), the supportive but fragile relationship between 'fortunate' and 'unfortunate' serves to demonstrate that all women are victims, powerless to help one another.
Not all feminist novels offer such a depressing conclusion. Florence Dixie's utopian fantasy *Gloriana* (1890) and Sarah Grand's apocalyptic *The Beth Book* (1897) both have happy endings. Both also closely follow the heroine/acolyte model identified earlier, focusing on the 'exceptional woman' who is a natural leader of her sex by virtue of her superior intellect, vision and powers of endurance. *The Beth Book* contains the chief concerns, even clichés, of the feminist novel in the 1890s, in that it seeks both to document women's oppression and to present a positive solution in which the heroine achieves personal and economic independence. Beth is first seen in the context of a repressive family who seek to stifle her spirit and deny her an adequate education; she escapes them by marrying a man who proves to be both adulterous and degenerate. Beth suffers in silence, becomes a successful writer, leaves her husband, and finally discovers her real vocation as a teacher of genius and leader of women. Her progress is punctuated by a series of friendships, but each is checked almost as soon as it emerges. Beth's early relationships are with working-class girls, particularly servants, culminating in a remarkable scene on a beach in which a group of working-class girls join Beth bathing, admire the superior colour and texture of her body, and enlist in her society for 'The Secret Service of Humanity', in which, Beth says, 'we're going to make the world just like heaven' (p.272). The society almost immediately
vanishes from the novel, and is replaced by several brief alliances with middle-class girls, who are attracted by Beth's special gifts as a storyteller. After her marriage, Beth remains isolated until she is taken up by a group of aristocratic and cultured feminists who recognise her exceptional qualities, one of whom provides her with a room in which to finish her novel. When Beth leaves her husband and is reduced to penury, however, she makes no contact with her new friends and overcomes her difficulties alone.

Beth is offered to the reader as one who has strange - even supernatural - powers, who sees 'the vision and the dream' (p. 391), and each friendship confirms and consolidates her position as an 'aristocrat' among feminists. While Grand's novel gestures towards affirming the 'moral superiority' of women, it in fact affirms only the moral superiority of Beth; her female friends and relatives are passive followers, shadowy idealised figures, or repressive and inadequate mentors whom Beth must use all her powers to resist. Grand urges the need for unity and equality among women, but Beth's progress is essentially an individual movement towards privacy and autonomy. At the end of the novel, she withdraws from public life altogether, finds a man who is worthy of her, and moves to a cottage in the country, realising that her desire is 'not to live in the world, however, or to be of it, but to work for it' (p. 519).
The eponymous heroine of Lady Florence Dixie's *Gloriana*, by contrast, remains fully at the centre of public life. Gloriana makes up her mind at the age of twelve to lead her sex out of slavery. Disguised as 'Hector D'Estrange', she goes to Eton, wins every possible sporting and intellectual accolade, and (still disguised as a man) becomes Prime Minister at the age of twenty-one. Having revealed her true sex, she leads a women's army into revolution and a future of glorious equality and social harmony. As in *The Beth Book*, class and economic difference is subsumed under the unifying concept of 'woman'; friendship is expressed only as passive or self-sacrificing support for the idealised heroine, and, in the case of Gloriana, a ready willingness to die for her.

While it might be said that the representation of 'sisterhood' in these novels reflects Dixie's aristocratic lineage and prefigures Sarah Grand's future destiny as Tory Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, it is nevertheless the case that those feminist novels which make a more concerted and sensitive attempt to confront the question of class difference also reveal signs of strain. Relationships with working-class women are almost invariably limited to 'rescue work': the traditions of feminine philanthropy are extended to the 'saving' of prostitutes, or those on the edge of prostitution. By extension, 'women of a lower class' comes to mean 'fallen women', and despite their emphasis on the importance of transcending class boundaries,
feminist narratives often suggest that to go down among the 'other' women is to risk contamination, disease and death. In *The Cleverest Woman in England* superheroine Dagmar dies of smallpox caught from one of the women she has 'saved'; in *The Story of a Modern Woman* Alison dies after visiting a 'fallen woman' in hospital. The dangers of moving beyond the safe limits of middle-class femininity are signalled by the fact that, before her death, Alison's feet become grossly swollen. In *The Story of an African Farm*, the one physical sign of Lyndall's imminent death is the swelling of one of her tiny feet. The significance of this is prefigured earlier in the novel:

> We fit our sphere as a Chinese woman's foot fits her shoe, exactly, as though God had made both — and yet He knows nothing of either. In some of us the shaping to our end has been quite completed. The parts we are not to use have been quite atrophied, and have even dropped off; but in others, and we are not less to be pitied, they have been weakened and left. We wear the bandages, but our limbs have not grown to them; we know that we are compressed, and chafe against them. (p. 189)

For women with delicate little feet, 'breaking bounds' is dangerous.

**III. BEHIND HIGH WALLS:**

**THE SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STORY FOR GIRLS**

The large gardens at the back of the house were alive with gay young voices, and the light summer dresses of the girls fluttered in and out of the shrubberies. Merry groups stood chatting together in the wide open space called the play-ground, and through the shady green alleys pairs of "bosom friends" walked arm-in-arm, "talking secrets," as the little ones were wont to say. In those long and close conversations, how much good and evil seed was sown; how many a weak mind received its
impressions from a stronger companion, and cherished them even unto the end of life!
(Sarah Doudney, Monksbury College, 1878) 24

In this section, I want to look at a genre of popular fiction in which the expanding opportunities for women are much more unproblematically and optimistically celebrated: the school and college stories for girls which proliferated in the late nineteenth century. The girls' boarding-school appears of course in earlier fictions by women: one of the earliest stories addressed specifically to girls, Sarah Fielding's The Governess (1749), is set in a seminary for young ladies. The influence of the Lowood episode in Jane Eyre is also noticeable in a number of the novels I shall be discussing, but it was in the 1880s and 1890s that stories of school and college life became established as a coherent and highly stylised genre. Transparent and artless as they are, these stories merit careful consideration. The school story became in this period, as it remains, a central component in girls' reading; its conventions are part of the consciousness of women writers, yet its influence upon the female literary tradition has been little discussed. 25 Many of the conventions still prevalent appear in the novels of the 1880s and 1890s. What is particularly interesting about these early stories is that they are clearly feminist in their impulse, although it is a feminism specifically of its period: a feminism which emphasises social purity, women's moral superiority, and the importance of self-sacrifice and religious devotion.
The stories became popular during a period of intensive expansion in schools and colleges for women, and they reflect the energy, and the hopes, which the nineteenth-century women's movement invested in effecting those changes. Two of the most popular pioneers in this genre, Sarah Doudney and L.T. Meade, were active members of the Pioneer Club, and Meade's college stories, especially, offer a simple and euphoric celebration of new horizons for womanhood. Through the tomboyish twin heroines of The Girls of St. Wode's (1898), with their close-cropped hair and shabby serge dresses, their determination to earn a useful living rather than marry, Meade offers an affectionate portrayal of embryonic New Women for whom a college education is the passport to a life of liberty. It is important, however, that these stories reached an audience far beyond the handful of girls who had any real hopes of a college education, just as boarding-school stories are read now by girls who have no chance, and often no desire, to attend such schools in real life. The school story has always been a medium for fantasy; L.T. Meade herself never went to university, and Angela Brazil, the enormously popular author of twentieth-century school stories, wrote about the school she wished she had attended. It is the particular nature of that fantasy, and the central part played in it by friendship, that I want to explore here.

The world of the school and college is a world apart. The ivy-clad mansion behind high walls, often
situated on the site of an ancient monastery or nunnery, offers a safe space between the domestic and public worlds. This sealed-off institution, with its own codes, traditions and language, provides a tranquil and cloistered oasis in which the young woman can breathe and develop, free from the pressures both of the family and of the outside world. It is a version of pastoral, closely resembling 'Arcadia' as it is defined by Peter Marinelli:

a middle country of the imagination, half-way between a past perfection and a present imperfection, a state of Becoming rather than Being, where an individual's potencies for the arts of life and love and poetry are explored and tested. It points two ways therefore, backward into the past and forward into a possible future. 29

Turn-of-the-century stories for girls offer a very particular form of pastoral, however, which looks not to an idealised past, but to an idealised future. The time at college is represented as a period of paradise in which intellectual development and romantic friendships are blissfully allowable, but it is also seen as, crucially, a period of preparation for a life in which the young pioneer will fulfil her obligation to pass on her knowledge and improve the lives of other women. For Carol in Alice Stronach's A Newnham Friendship (1901), Newnham is an enchanted world:

a garden where she had had only to put forth her hand to gather what flowers she would - knowledge and friendship, sympathy and quiet time for thought ... She who had had these three glorious years must go forth strong to help those on the other side, those who had never had even a glimpse of the enchanted world inside those high hedges. She would help to break down those hedges, to get for other women and girls the privileges that she herself had had. (pp. 204-5)
Competition and personal ambition are heavily underplayed; scholarships are relinquished, prizes are sometimes contested but rarely awarded. The pleasure of learning for its own sake is always balanced by an emphasis on its usefulness, on the necessary relationship between the knowledge acquired in the college and its currency in the outside world, and the college stories often show their young heroines moving on to settlement work in the East End of London. The intensely romantic friendships which characterise these novels are closely linked with the joys of learning. There are many idealised teachers who have consciously chosen to abjure marriage in order to commit themselves and their lives to the girls in their care, and for whom their pupils feel a strongly romantic affection, such as Miss Thornhill in Sarah Doudney’s *When We Were Girls Together* (1886):

That mouth always seemed to Jennet the loveliest that she had ever seen; the smile that haunted the full, red lips was indescribably dreamy and sweet. To her, Una Thornhill, with her deep blue eyes and creamy skin, had the looks of an enchantress, and "The Enchantress" was the name by which she called her in thought, little guessing that by this very name Miss Thornhill had been really known in other days. ...The peculiar charm of eyes and smile which had "enchanted" many world-worn men and women, now won the heart of the most unimpressionable schoolgirls, and achieved more conquests over stubborn wills than Miss Sand could ever boast of having gained. (pp.161-2)

L.T. Meade's *The Girls of Merton College* (1911), clearly inspired by Girton, shows such a relationship from the teacher’s point of view. Jocelyn Silence, the college principal, is (remarkably but symbolically) the first girl to have been born into the 'House of Silence'
for a couple of hundred years. Noble-looking, with soldierly bearing and 'eyes like the softest brown velvet' (p. 45), she has been inspired by Dorothea Beale to devote her life to the education of girls. The chapter which describes her first meeting with Katherine, the brilliant scholarship-girl heroine, is highly emotional and ritualistic:

Miss Silence felt a sort of tingling coming down to the very tips of her fingers as she considered what this girl might do for the college, for the life there, for women generally. She trembled with pure pleasure at the thought of seeing her. (p. 45)

Katherine's role as acolyte is underscored when she receives a ceremonial kiss and serves her 'Head Mistress' with tea: 'I am hungry', says Miss Silence, 'be sure you serve me well' (p. 48).

In a fascinating analysis of the adolescent 'crush' in real-life girls' schools at the turn of the century, Martha Vicinus locates the nature of the pervasive 'rave' - an intense and erotically charged crush on an older and more experienced student or teacher - within a historical conjuncture specific to the late nineteenth century: 'Boarding-school life during a period when women were pioneering new public roles and professional occupations especially encouraged an idealized love for an older, publicly successful woman'. Vicinus relates the character of the raves to the particular nature of the schools in which they flourished: the later nineteenth-century saw a shift away from small, family-style schools which mirrored and nurtured the values of the private, domestic world, to
larger, more formal institutions founded on a publicly-oriented ethos of service, discipline and corporate values. She argues that the 'rave' depended on a conjunction of distance and desire: for the schoolgirls eager to prove themselves worthy of the new institutions, the very nonfulfilment of the crush was itself a central source of satisfaction; pleasure was deepened by distance and the conscious suppression of desire. Shared love was based on a shared ideal of service, self-control and mutual spiritual growth.

Vicinus's analysis is supported by L.T. Meade's remarkable tale for young readers, *The Hill-Top Girl* (1906). In this novel, demure professor's daughter Jasmine Primrose meets and falls instantly in love with wild, reckless, elf-like Maggie Massereene. The friendship is forbidden by Jasmine's father, but the two girls are so romantically infatuated with one another that they continue to meet illicitly. Upon discovery, they are not separated, but sent away to school together to have their friendship tested. Meade's Howgate Manor is clearly modelled on Charlotte Brontë's Lowood School, but it takes the spartan regime of that institution much further. Set in a remote and dreary part of Yorkshire, it is administered by a cold, severe headmistress who believes in deprivation, absolute obedience, and rigorous punishment. The final chapters of the story are full of images of discipline: the friendship survives, but the rebellious impulses of the girls are battered, bruised, bridled and curbed. They learn to
endure, to conquer through submission, and, finally, to love both the school and its headmistress, and to see that in its discipline lies its charm and its power.

The Hill-Top Girl is an extreme example; other school stories of this period, including Meade's own Betty, A Schoolgirl (1894) and A World of Girls (1886), emphasise the way in which youthful excess is controlled by love and example, alongside strong will. But in all cases, relationships between women - whether between teacher and pupil, or student and student - are framed firmly within the concept of the 'self-improving' friendship which we have seen in the novel from Deerbrook onwards, now given a new inflection in the context of women's changing opportunities. The paradigmatic friendship in these stories is between the shy, proud, industrious scholarship-girl who is destined for teaching and spinsterhood, and the romantically fascinating, wilful heiress who is destined for marriage. (The 'wilful' friend is often named Maggie; in this paradigm, Jane Eyre meets and befriends Maggie Tulliver). Their discovery of shared literary and intellectual tastes (often orchestrated by the college principal) initiates a romantic friendship in which each 'improves' the other; as in the mid-nineteenth century novel, the grooming process is ritualised by scenes in which one girl lovingly brushes another's hair, or helps her to choose more becoming clothes. The relationship draws, then, on long-established traditions, but there is also a shift taking place here. The aspirations
embodied in the relationship move beyond the mirroring process which offers access to an already-given, unitary understanding of 'ideal' femininity. The romantic relationship between the two contrasted girls validates a concept of woman's nature and destiny as, within clearly specified limits, plural. Friendship itself becomes a dynamic process, linked with access to a wider knowledge which is both a source of satisfaction in itself and vitally related to access to the public sphere.

As Isabel Quigly has shown, the big emotional scenes in boys' school stories of this period often take place in chapel; the setting, Quigly suggests, gives love between boys 'ecclesiastical approval, the almost matrimonial blessing of a solemn occasion, a beautiful location, stained glass, organ music, fine singing, and a mixture, familiar to the readers of the time, of exotic feelings, reassuringly respectable even when most overwrought'. Similar scenes appear in many stories of female college life, even as late as Rosamond Lehmann's Dusty Answer (1927); in L.T. Meade's A Sweet Girl Graduate (1891), Mrs George de Horne Vaizey's A College Girl (1913), and Alice Stronach's A Newnham Friendship, it is on a visit to King's College Chapel, or its transparent fictional equivalent, that the friendship is initiated or finally sealed. The young women are drawn together by the candles, the dim light, the sweet voices of the boy choristers 'linking the past and the present, the old and the new'.

In girls'
stories, however, this moment has a meaning beyond the religious ratification of powerful emotion. Set in the chapel of a men's college, it celebrates the movement of the friends across the forbidden threshold, acting as a mystical ritual which ratifies their shared entry into a world previously closed to women.

The friendships in these stories represent also a movement beyond the private and isolated space exemplified by the Deerbrook summer-house, in which the two friends are set apart from other women; the recurrent rituals in the school and college stories dwell on the importance of the female community, and the way in which friendship facilitates entry into that community. In a number of novels, one girl, already established in college life, lights the fire in the room of the shy and weary new arrival (it's worth mentioning that passionate attachments between girls were regularly described as 'flames' in this period). The fire, giving colour and warmth to the previously unwelcoming room, ignites a spark which is fuelled when the two young women discover their 'shared tastes'; the quieter girl begins to glow with animation under the magnetic influence of her friend. The rooms where these exchanges take place are meticulously described, and, from novel to novel, their details are invariably the same.

The college rooms and schoolgirl studies are filled with 'artistic' and 'recherché' treasures and knick-knacks: exquisitely worked table-cloths, soft silk
cushions, oddly-devised Japanese tea-cups, artistically-painted stools, quaint screens, rocking-chairs, bright little cocoa-pots, tiny brass kettles and books bound in old morocco. They are Arts and Crafts drawing-rooms in miniature, dolls' houses furnished by Liberty's and decorated by the Pre-Raphaelites; prints by Burne-Jones, Watts and Rossetti are mandatory, as are picturesque friezes painted by the girls themselves. The decoration of these rooms is sometimes a source of tension; the proud scholarship-girl heroine of A Sweet Girl Graduate lacks the money for the conventional accoutrements, and leaves her room bare; the scholarly Belle Acheson in The Girls of St. Wode's, who has vowed to dedicate her life to founding an academic 'nunnery' for women along the lines of the college in Tennyson's The Princess, denounces 'taste' as a 'device of the Evil One for wasting time'(p.48), and keeps her surroundings spartan. Self-indulgence is questioned, but the loving way in which the narratives linger over the details of the rooms belies this. The rooms themselves are central to the delicately-balanced fantasy which the stories offer their readers. The 'frauds in furniture' which characterise the college room - the bed which turns into a sofa, the wash-stand which becomes a flower-stand by day - suggest the contortions involved in maintaining a balance between 'new' and 'old' femininity. These cosy nests are at once utterly 'feminine' and conventionally domesticated, and yet also a statement of the refractory
desire for privacy, autonomy and escape. The 'quaint' and 'recherche' furnishings suggest that each room is individual, the spontaneous creation of its occupant, but since the rooms are essentially identical, they also signal membership of the female community of 'shared tastes'.

The ubiquity of the Pre-Raphaelite lithograph merits some comment, not only because it appears so often in these early novels of college life, but because we will continue to meet the woman with the Rossetti mouth, the girl dressed in pre-Raphaelite green, in many later novels, including those addressed to a much more sophisticated adult audience. In simple terms, the image of the pre-Raphaelite woman has an obvious appeal for the late-nineteenth-century would-be 'pioneer': in her flowing dress, freed of tight-lacing, with her abundant untramelled hair, she represents a model which is 'feminine' yet liberated from some of the constrictions of an earlier Victorian femininity. But there is more to be said about her, though we need an art historian to elucidate the codes more fully. I think her appeal lies also in the mixed messages, the delicate suspension of opposites, which she offers - as in the finely-modelled 'Rossetti mouth', which is sensuously large but also hypersensitive and 'pure'. The characteristic 'Pre-Paphaelite woman' is vulnerable in her physical fragility, yet powerful in her self-containment, in her refusal to meet the observer's gaze: her eyes are fixed, rather, on some dream, some
memory, some secret, which the gazer can sense but not fully share. Shari Benstock notes that Natalie Barney, the wealthy American heiress who dominated the emergent lesbian subculture in early twentieth-century Paris, and who consciously set out to create an ambience within which lesbian eroticism could be freed from the associations of 'morbidity' and 'decadence', was especially drawn to women who embodied the Pre-Raphaelite female aesthetic. Benstock relates Barney's attraction to this image to the 'androgyny' of the lithe-limbed and small-breasted Pre-Raphaelite woman, and to the enigma of gender in paintings in which lover and beloved offer mirror images of one another; she suggests that Barney's own writing consciously recuperated and eroticised an image generated initially by male fears of female power. We could add also that even the 'unrecuperated' Pre-Raphaelite woman offers a further possibility of 'doubling' when the viewer is a woman. To the female gaze, the enigmatic Pre-Raphaelite woman evokes not castration but desire, eliciting simultaneously a homoerotic fascination with the lovely but unattainable 'other', and a romantic identification with a projected, mystically idealised 'self'.

This mixture of identification and desire is central to the representation of friendship in the college stories. Seen through the gaze of her friend, the 'strong-minded' heroine seems alluringly enigmatic and yet potentially knowable, and the link between the two forges a link between 'past' and 'future'
femininity, ratifying the heroine's fusion of the strange and the familiar, the delicate and the strong, the wild and the tame:

Betty gave herself up to the pleasure of watching Carol as she moved about the room ... There was something peculiarly fascinating in the way Carol Martin walked, and the charm was not altogether due to the graceful figure and the perfect poise of the shapely head, but owed something to the air of buoyant vivacity that seemed to radiate from her. Looking at her, one thought instinctively of Atalanta or Nausicaa, or some fleet-footed creature of the forest ... It was the face of a leader - of one who would influence rather than be influenced by those around her. Yet withal it was a womanly and very lovable face. (A Newnham Friendship, p.15)

Likewise, in A Sweet Girl Graduate, Priscilla is fascinated by the way in which Maggie's face continually changes colour, moving from ivory white to a rosy suffusion, and by 'the full gaze of lovely eyes, brown like a nut, soft and deep as the thick pile of velvet, and yet with a latent flash and glow in them which gave them a red, half-wild gleam now and then' (p.21).

The stories discussed here offer the young reader a heady fantasy of a world in which new possibilities for women are validated, without breaking the 'line' of feminine identity, but that is not to say that tensions are entirely absent. Isabel Quigly notes that in boys' school stories, crime is represented by 'caddishness', drinking, gambling and fraud. In girls' school stories, bad behaviour takes a different form, analogous to that of the 'misaligned letter' discussed in Chapter Two. In the stories of this period, as in school stories throughout the twentieth century, the commonest offence is the purloining of the heroine's creativity:
poems, essays, caricatures, stories, are regularly appropriated, imitated or distorted by jealous co-students. It is a device which is no doubt rooted in anxiety about public competition between women, but, like the misaligned letter, it also suggests a continuing fear of collapse into a unitary feminine identity. Closer to the surface of the novels, however, is the careful process of negotiation involved in asserting the validity of advanced education for women.

The tight-rope walked here is cheerfully ritualised in the hockey match in Vaizey's A College Girl, in which 'Personal Charm' is pitted against 'Moral Worth', the organisers having rejected 'Possible Brides' versus 'Probable Spinsters' as over-inflammatory. The most rebellious (and idealised) characters in the college stories are always represented as 'Possible Brides', and they invariably, finally, marry the Perfect Man: Senior Wrangler and benevolent landowner. In A College Girl, Darsie joins a select secret society of female students organised to save male undergraduates from drifting into vice. College education, it is continually suggested, produces women whose influence will ensure the continuing strength of the nation.

The world of the school and the college is a noticeably British world; 'foreign friends' are barely in evidence, represented only by the wild Irish girl or the visionary Scottish dreamer. As in earlier novels, 'subversion' is French; the inadequate 'Mam'selle' who features in so many later school stories makes an
appearance in Meade's *Betty, a Schoolgirl*: Mademoiselle consistently breaks the codes of the English school and leads her pupils illicitly beyond the safe boundaries of its walls. While the school itself offers a safe haven, the girl who ventures beyond its bounds falls and injures herself, loses her way, discovers troublesome and undesirable secrets. The boundaries of 'safe' knowledge are also suggested by another recurrent device, in which a false 'friend' offers the heroine a French novel, which inflames and disturbs her imagination. In the utopian world of the school story, however, the question of 'dangerous knowledge' appears only sketchily and intermittently; in novels of the period addressed to the adult reader, this issue is central.

IV. 'GIRTON GIRLS' AND 'WILD WOMEN' IN THE 1890s

"What is the 'Woman's Movement'?" asked Rose. "You're in it now," he told her. "Miss Quayle's school is part of it. Girton is part of it. So are Art Schools and Ibsen and games for girls. It's the movement in which you women are going to find yourselves, in which you are discovering, as Nora says, that before all else you are human beings with a right to live as you choose."

"I'm sure I shall never find myself," she answered disconsolately. "I'm all in a muddle."

(Netta Syrett, *Rose Cottingham*) 36

In this section, I shall be looking at the ways in which women's access to new areas of knowledge informed the representation of friendship in the adult novels of the 1890s. I shall be focussing primarily on the fashionable phenomenon of the 'Girton Girl', but I want to look first at two novels which draw on the
conventional device of the 'foreign friend' to offer a more complex, and more ambivalent, version of the teacher-pupil relationship than we find in the school stories of this period.

Lanoë Falconer's Mademoiselle Ixe, the story of a Russian woman revolutionary, was a runaway best-seller on its publication in 1890. Reviews of this brief, enigmatic novel by an unknown author - it is really no more than an extended short story - were almost unanimous in their praise.37 Falconer's tightly controlled narrative traces the disruptive entry of a new governess, 'Mademoiselle Ixe', into the pastoral dream world of an English village. A fluent linguist and exceptionally gifted pianist, the governess in her shabby black dress recalls the 'improvisatrices' of the mid nineteenth century, but takes further their qualities of elusiveness and flexibility. The composed, deferential and mysterious Mademoiselle Ixe deflects all attempts to ascertain her origins, her nationality, her religious and political beliefs, dexterously mirroring back to each questioner her own prejudices and desires. She plays to each the tune she wants to hear; only Evelyn, the eldest daughter of the household, is allowed to hear the restless, tormented music of Eastern Europe which hints at the governess's real identity and preoccupations. After listening to this strange new 'tongue' (p. 22), the soft, kitten-like, utterly ordinary English Evelyn looks at her own tranquil life with transformed eyes.
Evelyn becomes romantically fascinated, even obsessed, with the governess, who responds warmly, yet distantly. The novel offers a new version of the 'coming-out' process: on the night of her first ball, having glanced with some satisfaction at her rosebud-like mirror image, Evelyn is precipitated into the knowledge of a darker and more difficult world beyond her own 'most favoured and exceptional experience' (p. 173). At the ball, the governess shoots (but fails to kill) the Russian count whose repellent, animal-like features place him as the representative of Russian ruling-class tyranny. Evelyn helps her friend (now identified as a Russian Nihilist) to escape, and the story ends with a letter smuggled to Evelyn from a Russian prison. The letter, written apparently in blood in a strange foreign hand, is signed simply 'x'.

The true name of the governess is never revealed. She is 'ixe' and 'x', the unknown quantity, the shifting signifier, in two languages. Her 'nihilism' is symbolic rather than functional; her concern is with alleviating the oppression of her people, rather than with changing the social order. Her 'changeful' (p. 151) face indicates her 'nothingness', combining masculine and feminine, but in disjuncture rather than fusion. There is, Falconer tells us, a strange clash between the upper and lower part of the face, between the thick, black, curiously-angled eyebrows, and the sweet, calm, beautifully-moulded mouth. The governess's face is broad and clumsily formed, her skin thick and
lustreless, but under the magnetic glow of her "self-forgetful passion" (p. 138) it becomes transfigured: mild, benignant, Madonna-like. As in earlier novels, the interplay between 'English' and 'foreign' allows the writer to interrogate the existing boundaries of gendered identity. Mademoiselle Ixe's 'hybrid' nature, licensed by her nationality and her self-sacrificing dedication to a noble cause in a safely distant place, places in question the divisions between masculine and feminine; the tender relationship between Evelyn and the governess challenges the polarisation of the 'hybrid' and the 'feminine'.

In *Appassionata* (1893), by Pioneer Club member Elsa D'Esterre Keeling, the representation of the Russian teacher-friend takes a different form. The naive and piquant Selma, studying music in Paris, becomes so infatuated with her Russian piano-teacher that she puts off, year after year, her impending marriage to a Russian count. The reader gradually realises that the charming and sophisticated Madame Goudounow is manipulating her pupil's affections, teaching by 'sorcery' (p. 206), and the narrative contains the familiar allusions to Coleridge's 'Christabel'. Madame Goudounow is impelled by rivalry: she was herself on the point of marrying the Count when, discovering her determination to perform in public, he rejected her. Selma herself finally marries the Count, gives up her friend and her ambitions, and moves to Russia, where she is miserable and bored. When Madame Goudounow arrives
in the country to give a public recital, she persuades her former pupil to perform in her place. The Count sees his wife playing ecstatically to a public audience, is immediately struck blind, and breaks off all contact with her.

The *Bookman* review, which praised the novel for its sensitivity, also noted that its message was distinctly contradictory, and indeed it is. Selma and her repressive husband are ultimately re-united, but precariously, and at the cost of Selma's earlier wit and vitality. The emotional centre of the novel is in the relationship between two hypersensitive and gifted women; as in many later novels, the 'false' friendship provides a frame from within which a powerful attraction between women can be explored. Unlike *Mademoiselle Ixe*, Keeling's novel appears to have had little impact, but it has a particular interest because of the device which is used to delineate the teacher's 'falseness'.

In Russia, Madame Goudounow meets Selma with her arm bandaged. Her story of a damaged arm is a ruse, devised to trick Selma into taking her place on the public platform, but the narrative dwells on the contact which the 'wound' necessitates between the two women, and the way in which the teacher flinches at Selma's loving touch. The friend with the 'bandaged arm' appears in many twentieth-century novels. Like the 'swollen foot' motif mentioned earlier, this device suggests the constraints upon women's access to public life, but with more specific connotations of thwarted
creativity: it is the writing arm, the painting arm, or, as in *Appassionata*, the piano-playing arm which is 'wounded'. The 'bandaged arm' is especially interesting because it appears often in novels in which the possibility of sexual attraction between women is hinted at, but not confronted. A psychoanalytic analysis might point to the metaphorical analogies with castration, but I think a simpler, more literal interpretation is in fact preferable: the bandaged arm denotes the truncated embrace, the physical reaching-out which the narrative suggests, but represses.

All this is covert. Explicitly, the friendship with the captivating but cynical Madame Goudounow is represented as not only false, but dangerous, as is first indicated when the teacher takes her pupil to a café chantant. Deeply disturbed by the spectacle of innocent-faced girls performing in scanty costumes, Selma tells her friend: "'You have taken the childhood out of me - have made me a woman at sixteen. Why should I know of this wickedness?'" (p. 71). The issue of 'dangerous knowledge' is central to many other novels of the 1890s. Before we look at the various forms which it takes, we need to consider the ways in which women's entry into higher education was being debated in the late nineteenth century.

Public debate on this subject took on a new and animated form during the course of the 1880s, a decade which saw a dramatic increase both in the numbers of women's colleges and in the number of schools for girls
which provided a type of education, emphasising discipline, homework and preparation for exams, which had previously been accessible only to boys. The expansion in women's higher education was especially contentious. Though the number of college-educated women was small, and limited to a specific social class, their symbolic importance was far more wide-reaching. Many of the pioneer college graduates never married, and these single, educated career-women presented a challenge both to the traditional masculinity of the public and professional worlds, and to the established notions of gender difference which confined middle-class women, at least, to the home and to the domestic role.

Earlier opposition had centred on the innate differences between men and women: women were naturally intellectually inferior because they lacked stamina and their brains weighed less. Those few who were capable of intellectual attainment were physiologically abnormal; they were not in some vague way that was never made fully explicit, real women. But once sufficient women had successfully completed a college education to cast doubt on the idea of innate inferiority, and when imperialist ideology demanded that intelligent middle class women must marry and rear children to guarantee the future of the race, the grounds for opposition shifted. The medical profession entered the debate in force, and it was widely argued in the 1880s that mental fatigue threatened women's reproductive system. All women were congenitally unsuited to the professions and
to higher education because of the dangers of overpressure during menstruation, but the risks were especially great during puberty, in the years between fifteen and twenty when a regular pattern of menstruation was being established - the very years when girls were being encouraged to enter for examinations. Intellectual strain at this time, it was argued, could damage not only the body, producing amenorrhoea, chlorosis, reduced child-bearing, and even sterility, but also the mind, leading to nervousness, mental breakdown and the destruction of sensuality: 'Unsexed it might be wrong to call the educated woman, but she will be more or less sexless. And the human race will have lost those who should have been her sons'.

Some of the impact of this debate can be traced in the college stories for girls, which continually emphasise the 'healthiness' of their heroines, and the importance of combining work and play. In Annie Edwardes's anti-feminist A Girton Girl (1885), would-be Girton Girl Marjorie tells her friend that 'Babies I bar':

"I am not sure that I would go so far as to injure one," said Marjorie, stealing a glance at her companion's shocked face; "but I feel that they are safest kept out of my sight. I tell the mothers so."

The threat is of course not taken seriously. Marjorie never gets to Girton; she gives up her ambitions and marries her tutor instead. But when Eliza Lynn Linton renewed her attack on the women's movement in The One Too Many (1894), now turning her attention from the
sapphist female supremacist to the fashionable problem of the Girton Girl, she focussed on the damage posed by higher education to the fragile balance of female sexuality.

In The One Too Many the debilitating effects of higher education are represented schematically though a quartet of college friends: man-hating Carrie, man-loving Julia, masculine Effie and feminine Laura. The intimate moments of the four are framed to reveal the iniquitous effects of their education: in Effie's den, which bears a noticeable resemblance to the rooms shared by Bell and Connie in The Rebel of the Family, the girls drink, smoke, swear, talk slang, and discuss men and marriage with the freedom and irreverence of four young boys. The novel traces the effect of the quartet upon the unhappily-married Moira, the gentle and domesticated product of Victorian ideology, whose friendship with the 'Girton Girls' ultimately leads her to suicide. The One Too Many is a profoundly contradictory novel; as the Athenaeum reviewer observed at the time, the reader 'can hardly fail to rise from a perusal of the story without an impression that, in the view of the writer, it is wiser to revolt than submit'. The traditionally feminine Moira is represented as weak and woolly-headed; in so far as the novel has a heroine, it is the brusque, independent and mannish Effie, the 'natural leader' of the group who believes that women are equal to men, studies anatomy and carpentry rather than painting and needlework, reads
Baudelaire, Zola and Maupassant, and goes slum-visiting alone. Effie fuses the 'hybrid' nature of Bell Blount with the republicanism of Perdita; she too marries into a lower social class, to the dismay of her feminist friends. But this union is represented as, like Effie herself, 'topsey-turvy' rather than ideal; her policeman lover has little sympathy with her insurgent ideas, and Effie herself enjoys the difference in social status because it allows her to keep the whip-hand. Nevertheless, Linton's point is that Effie's 'hybrid' nature enables her alone to withstand the effect of her education. All of the young female graduates know more of the 'darker secrets of life' than is fitting; the phrase is exhaustively reiterated throughout the novel, and it is this, rather than unnatural ambition or unfeminine learning in itself, that is the real 'danger' of higher education. Only Effie's strong constitution can cope with such knowledge. Her 'masculine' vices are balanced by 'masculine' virtues; she is energetic, comradely, practical, fearless and loyal. She is given an ironic and qualified affirmation as the freakish, twisted product of a new era, 'rising strong and sturdy from the more delicate, more fragrant aeries r (I.207).

It is the quintessentially feminine Laura, Effie's closest friend, who suffers most from her excessive 'knowledge'. The graceful and lovely Laura has had her instincts stunted, her mind made warped and morbid, by the education which has taught her to despise men, marriage and maternity. She is languid, neurotic,
‘anti-erotic’ and faddish, a vegetarian who lives on stimulants, deeply disillusioned with the world and repelled by the men and women in it. Love is a dream; marriage, she says, would kill her - let the race die out. For the feminine woman, premature knowledge leads to premature death: Laura, the neurasthenic ‘New Woman’ will commit suicide by poison, her mind unbalanced by ‘misdirected and excessive study’ and ‘too early initiation into the darker secrets of humanity’ (III.262); Moira, the ‘old’ ideal of womanhood, drowns herself under the influence of Laura’s dreamy and persuasive nihilism.

The differences between The Rebel of the Family and The One Too Many reflect the changes which had taken place since 1880. With the expansion of higher education for women and the increasing impact of the women’s movement, feminism could no longer be regarded as a comic deviation, confined to a handful of eccentric women possessed with the desire to ape the behaviour of men. It is not just a question of increasing numbers; the women’s movement had not developed in the way that Linton had anticipated in The Rebel of the Family. Feminist writers were not arguing openly for a rejection of marriage in favour of female friendship, nor that women should live and act like men. Rather, most had skirted these delicate issues by emphasising the femininity and isolation of the New Woman, and arguing for an improvement in the institution of marriage. Linton, like the medical patriarchy, takes on the
women's movement on its own ground when she argues that
the New Woman, vulnerable in her very femininity, is
unfit for marriage and motherhood. Access to
'knowledge' has implications beyond mere learning; it
becomes a dark and sinister current subverting the
natural divide between female and male, private and
public, innocence and sin, and threatening the survival
of the race. All women, especially the most feminine,
are threatened; womanliness itself is at risk.

It is hard now to believe that anyone could have
taken The One Too Many seriously, but when it was
published in The Lady's Pictorial it provoked a lengthy
and heated correspondence. The One Too Many touched a
nerve because it presented an exaggerated version of
concerns which were central to many other 'New Women'
novels of the 1890s - often centring, as in Ménie Muriel
Dowie's Gallia (1895), Lucas Cleeve's The Woman Who
Wouldn't (1895) and Iota's A Yellow Aster (1894), upon
the figure of the 'Girton Girl'. What becomes clear
when we look at these novels is that, in a period when
women writers were beginning to explore and assert the
nature of female sexuality, the argument that too much
'knowledge' rendered women sexless produced profound
anxiety. What is also interesting is that it is
particularly difficult to 'place' these novels as
feminist or anti-feminist. Cleeve's novel is explicitly
anti-feminist; Iota's certainly seems so now, but on its
publication was seen as yet another subversive New Woman
fiction; Dowie was a Pioneer Club member and an intrepid
adventurer and explorer. Yet the novels are almost identical in their representation of the heroine, the effects of her education, and her destiny.

Cleeve's Opalia, Dowie's Gallia and Iota's Gwen are all brilliant, beautiful, highly-educated, hypersensitive New Women. Like Linton's Laura, they know too much; their extensive reading has given them premature access to the facts of sexuality. Puberty precipitates an anguished struggle against femininity; they become overfastidious, morbidly introspective, incapable of love, and filled with revulsion against sexuality. Marriage is no solution: the heroine remains frigid, and pregnancy brings only repugnance. The change in A Yellow Aster and The Woman Who Wouldn't comes when the heroine gives birth to a child; the narrative suddenly becomes infused with a rich sensuality as the heroine brims over with womanly love and completeness. Dowie's novel is less euphoric, but Gallia likewise decides to marry for motherhood rather than love, in the interests of improving the race.

While, explicitly, sexlessness is the problem and motherhood the means of access to sexuality, what these novels in fact express and confirm is female resistance to sexuality. Sex is the sacrifice, masculine coarseness and unreliability the inevitable cross that women have to bear, motherhood the compensation:

After a night of anguish, when her firstborn was placed in her arms and Alan stooped to kiss her, she realised that all the degradation, all the expiation, all the suffering was wiped out, and that, in His infinite pity for the horrors of
womanhood, God had provided a compensating joy, the exquisite, incomparable joy of maternity. And Opalia rejoiced that He had. (The Woman Who Wouldn’t, p. 225)

The influence of eugenics is strongly present in these novels. The frigidity of the ‘Girton Girl’ causes her pain, but is nevertheless a sign of her superiority and the vital contribution which she will make to the race. While she herself will suffer, the nation will be the finer for her offspring, and her sexlessness is seen as a necessary corrective to the self-indulgence which threatens to subvert the stamina of the British male: as Gwen’s husband tells his friend, who has been ‘battening on French books’ and ‘making a beast of himself’:

It’s a good deal of a question of nationality... Englishmen, as a rule, can’t do complete work while they’re mudlarking; French fellows often can, just as no decent, bourgeois John Bull has it in him to write tons of magnificent filth on a sort of principle. (A Yellow Aster, p. 215)

Like other New Women, the ‘Girton Girl’ is isolated by the anomalous place which she occupies between past and future, her transitional position in the evolutionary process. She too is at a disjuncture with her own image: Gwen, considering her own reflection in A Yellow Aster, thinks ‘I look so very sound and complete, and yet I am rotten at the core - a sort of Dead Sea apple’(p.135). The Girton Girl’s sense of her own oddity isolates her from other women, whose simmering sexuality she finds incomprehensible. Each heroine has access to a sympathetic ‘natural’ woman, but these relationships are rudimentary, serving partly to indicate that the heroine is, potentially, part of the
sisterhood, and partly to highlight her difference from it.

In Rhoda Broughton's anti-feminist *Dear Faustina* (1897), 48 the dangers of sexual knowledge are directly linked with the passionate friendship. Althea's life is doubly disrupted by the women's movement. Her widowed mother suddenly announces that she is tired of sacrificing herself to 'the clogging, petty impediments of domestic life' (pp. 19-20) and intends to devote her life to the Cause. The resultant break-up of the family home precipitates Althea into the clutches of feminist separatist Faustina, whose trick is to seduce her delicately-nurtured young followers with flattery, torrid words and passionate embraces before initiating them into the facts of life and plunging into the degrading 'rescue work' to which she is committed. As Linton had done in *The Rebel of the Family*, Broughton uses the spectre of the 'passionate friendship' as a vehicle for debating the terms of women's entry into the public world. Althea is finally 'rescued' from Faustina by a male lover who establishes her in a women's settlement house, where she teaches needlework to factory girls. The novel doesn't invalidate her desire to work with the 'underprivileged', but it draws the line at contact with prostitutes.

Although Faustina clearly has affinities with Linton's Bell Blount, the codes used to expose her are noticeably different. Faustina, despite her short hair, is represented as neither 'hybrid' nor 'masculine' -
unlike Althea's mother who, with her masculine haircut and dress, is identified with 'the female "Old Guard" ...of the army of advance', readily spotted by their 'wildly cropped grizzled hair and super-manly coats and waistcoats' (p.164). The code-word used to define Faustina is 'sallow'. The sallow friend appears again in Mrs Humphry Ward's anti-feminist Delia Blanchflower (1915), in which the dangerous friend is a teacher and militant suffragette, and in a number of later novels. The language of the 'suspect' friendship has become inflected with the discourse of eugenics: the dusky flushes and dim dark blushes which frequently tinge Faustina's handsome olive cheeks signal her deviant femininity not as 'masculine', but as an aberration from the pure line of the race.

When Linton herself returned to the fray with In Haste and at Leisure (1895), separatist feminists and their passionate friendships were no longer her chief focus of concern, nor was she much interested now in 'sexless', 'hybrid' or 'masculine' women. Like Broughton, Linton presents them as the absurd, and probably preferable, 'old guard'. Her focus of attention in this novel is the 'sexualised' New Woman. Dear Faustina is a temperate and light-hearted piece in comparison with In Haste And At Leisure, which is undiluted, humourless anti-feminist polemic, with barely a trace of Linton's earlier republicanism. The novel declares the desperate need for a return to the old social order, in the face of the threat posited by the
women's movement, as exemplified in the novel by the transformation of Phoebe Barrington from child-bride to feminist monster. Phoebe marries too young, leaves her husband and gives birth to a child, but her feelings for it are far from maternal. She is 'ripe for every kind of moral revolt and every kind of conventional insurgency' (I.67):

What she would be eventually depended on the influences under which she might come now in the forming-time of her character. It depended on others more than herself whether such power as she had should be given to work evil, or be consecrated to good. (I.67-8)

What Phoebe becomes is a militant feminist of the most advanced kind, and she does so under the influence of the four leading members of the 'Excelsior' club, which I take to be a scurrilous portrait of the Pioneer; some of the members of this club, says Linton unkindly, write 'halting, erotic poetry' and 'ungrammatical novels' (I.77). Their beliefs and behaviour are in many respects familiar from Linton's earlier novels: they are united over the diabolical and degrading nature of men, marriage and maternity, and the rights of women to 'usurp' the offices and behaviour of men. They are also committed to 'the initiation of unmarried girls into all the secrets of life and vice' (I.70); under their guidance Phoebe learns to smoke, drink, swear, sing bawdy songs, play billiards, and discuss the shameful mysteries of life, all with a sense of sinful pleasure. She becomes one of the club's elite, and finally the star speaker at their public meetings; her unsuspecting
husband returns to find his flowerlike bride transformed into a corrupt and flamboyant moral virago.

'Friendship' in this novel is scarcely an issue. Power struggles, political differences and sexual rivalry finally split the club apart; relations between women are uniformly treacherous. There is one woman in the club, the Honourable Constance Casey, who anticipates later stereotypes of lesbian identity. Masculine in speech, figure and dress, fearless, self-possessed, cold as ice to men, Constance wears her short hair in a side-parting and prefers the company of women, though she is not convinced of their superiority:

She thought the major part of them ridiculous little cats; but pleasant little cats too, and creatures whom she liked to make purr pleasantly. ... She admired them personally; morally and intellectually she despised them beyond all measure. (I.80)

Passionate friendship is only a side-issue in this novel, however. Constance is a 'type', another weapon in the anti-feminist arsenal, but she is a marginal figure. Linton's focus of concern of this novel is not the 'mannish' or 'hybrid' woman, but the womanly woman who apes the manners and privileges of men. The danger posed by the women's movement is no longer the erosion of sexuality, but the nurturing and flaunting of sexuality. The members of the Excelsior were utterly unlike the earlier type of the strong-minded female - that epicene pioneer who abjured beauty, softness, and every kind of feminine grace, creating opposition by her very appearance and setting on edge the teeth of her hearers by the rasping quality of her voice. She had been of the Shrieking Sisterhood. The Excelsiorites were Wild Women who had seen the errors committed by their predecessors.(I.71)
Constance's predilections are exceptional. Most of the members of the club are young, married women with children, who pride themselves on their womanliness and cultivate the feminine arts of dress, beauty, elocution and grace of gesture. Within the club, they flirt with one another to keep their hands in; outside it, they flirt unashamedly with men. They are 'perverse' partly because they cultivate the appearance of femininity while claiming the privileges and vices of men, but also because they exploit their feminine sexuality to gain access to public life and political power. All of the women are expert public speakers. Under their influence, Phoebe learns to dye her hair and paint her face. Her education is seen to be complete when she stands on a public platform wearing a flesh-coloured plunging silken gown which fits her like a second skin, her dyed gold hair glistening, her sensuous mouth glowing like a burning red pomegranate flower. Thus shamelessly exposed, Phoebe expounds with brazen magnetism the doctrines of the women's movement.

Linton's crudely schematic distinction between the old 'Shrieking Sisterhood' and the new 'Wild Women' points to real generational differences in the feminist novels of the 1890s. Alongside the feminist bestsellers of the Pioneer Club group, the decade saw the emergence of a younger, more 'bohemian' circle of women writers, like Ella D'Arcy, Charlotte Mew, Evelyn Sharp and Netta Syrett, who were contributors to The Yellow Book and to John Lane's 'Keynotes' series. For this second
generation of New Women, the earnest commitment of the pioneers to womanly self-sacrifice and all-female institutions seemed at best a joke, and at worst repressive. Evelyn Sharp's *The Making of a Schoolgirl* (1897) is a very funny debunking of the 'priggishness' of the early school stories, which affectionately parodies the established conventions: romantic friendship, idolised teachers and dizzy enjoyment of learning. In the fiction of Sharp's friend Netta Syrett, the all-female institutions established by the pioneers are more seriously challenged.

In her novels written in the 1890s, Syrett represents the women's college as an institution worthy in its intentions, but stultifying in its effects. According to Syrett, the problem with the all-female college is not that it gives women too much knowledge, but that it gives them too little. Her heroines reject Girton and Newnham in favour of 'life': Bridget in *Nobody's Fault* (1896) and Christine in *The Tree of Life* (1897) go to teacher-training college instead, but are rapidly disillusioned by the narrowness and austerity of college life. Bridget finds the monotonous life of a teacher made distinctly drearier by the company of conscientious, immature women whose idea of fun is all-female shop-talk and nostalgic reminiscences of Girton: she herself wishes an epidemic of men would break out. Nevertheless, these novels have close affinities with other texts of this period: Christine's education makes her frigid, and it is on the birth of
her child that she becomes 'a woman'; Bridget is a typical feminist heroine, whose exceptional qualities are eclipsed by an unhappy marriage, and who sacrifices her chances of true love to nurse her sick mother. It is in the later *Rose Cottingham* (1915) that we find the clearest signs of things to come.

*Rose Cottingham* is effectively a rewriting of the earlier *Nobody's Fault*. Both novels are set in the 1880s; Bridget is a publican's daughter and Rose a child of the wealthy bourgeoisie, but their characters, histories and friendships are almost identical. Each, at boarding-school, becomes passionately infatuated with a girl called Helen, the beautiful and cultured daughter of a respected professor. Through Helen, the heroine gains access to the select circles of 'progressive' literary London. At first bewildered by this new world of Morris curtains, artistic dress, Rossetti pictures, socialist meetings and Ibsen plays, she is ultimately established as a significant figure on the bohemian literary scene when, supported by Helen's constant encouragement, she writes a best-selling novel. There are, however, significant differences between *Nobody's Fault* and *Rose Cottingham*.

The Helen of *Nobody's Fault* is a tender, womanly figure whose role is primarily supportive. The Helen of *Rose Cottingham* is considerably more complex: fiercely and contemptuously intellectual, aloof, and enigmatic. Like Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*, which is clearly an influence, she plays a double role; she 'raises' Rose by
singling her out and offering her access to a positive feminine identity, but at the same time she is not a perfect role-model. But whereas, in *Jane Eyre*, the two girls are brought together by their headmistress, in Syrett’s novel they are united in resistance to her. Their friendship is disapproved of by Miss Quayle, a redoubtable pioneer who has almost single-handedly transformed the face of girls’ education, and whose own school is a factory for academic success which, Syrett emphasises, can be profoundly damaging for highly-strung girls such as Rose. Helen’s contempt for the codes of the school is an essential support, but Rose has also to define herself in resistance to Helen, whose celebration of intellect over emotion is questioned. The process by which the two are ultimately drawn back together is circuitous, but important.

In *Rose Cottingham*, the heroine knows that her novel, despite its ecstatic reception, is ‘false’, since it has not told the truth about female sexuality. This may be seen as a comment upon the earlier *Nobody’s Fault*, in which the constraints upon female desire are emphasised, but female sexuality itself is not explored. Syrett’s wish to open up the question of sexuality leads her to a new version of the mirror ritual, which will appear in many later novels. In this version, the heroine examines her body alone, but ‘recognises’ it through the eyes of her absent friend, whose imagined gaze helps to form and ratify the heroine’s entry into sexuality.
At the age of fourteen, Rose's sexual curiosity is aroused, and her furtive attempts to seek elucidation are met by a fellow-pupil with unhealthy-looking 'pig-like' (p. 150) eyes whose distorted account of the facts of life fills Rose with revulsion and sends her sexual development into abeyance. After she leaves school, Helen sends her a volume of Swinburne's poems, which suddenly 'kindle a flame' (p. 279) in Rose, plunging her into a ferment of sexual restlessness and confused desires. The gift triggers a mirror scene which contains and extends many of the nineteenth-century versions of this ritual: the fusion of lily and 'Rose', the 'crowning' by the more 'feminine' friend, the interplay between red and white which here recalls, especially, the 'Red Room' scene in Jane Eyre. Elaine Showalter has suggested that Jane's encounter with her own image in this room of starkly contrasted colours is a covert representation of the menarche, the moment of entry into feminine identity and sexuality. In Syrett's version, this process is much more explicit.

Alone in her bedroom, Rose replaces her dark, figure-concealing clothes with a dress of a soft yet vivid red and a star-shaped hair ornament, a gift from her more conventional sister Lucy. With a candle in each hand, Rose studies her transformed reflection - the white face above the crimson gown - with a mixture of pleasure and despair, and then rapidly strips off all of her clothes. She now stares triumphantly at the white body, finely textured as a lily, which stands in the
middle of the crimson circle made by the fallen dress.
The moment of positive acceptance - in which the body is
separated from 'redness', from danger, and yet
recognised as sexual - is quickly followed by shame.
Rose feels that she must be different from other girls,
who are either innocent and good or piggishly prurient,
until she remembers Helen:

whose very name conjured up all there was of
refinement and delicacy. Helen, with her face
clear-cut as a cameo, her graceful movements, her
whole fastidious personality. And yet in some
perverse fashion it was Helen who seemed nearer to
her in her shame and self-abhorrence... (p.287)

The absent Helen's ratification of Rose's entry
into sexuality is only partial, since at this point Rose
believes that Helen is interested only in books and art,
and not in sex. A further transformation takes place
when Helen gives up her intellectual ambitions in favour
of parties and flirtations, and the terms of its
representation are also significant:

Which was the real Helen? she wondered. The
graceful, fashionable woman of the world as shown
in the photograph, or the intellectual, rather
disdainful girl she remembered? Or was there a
"real" Helen at all? If people were very complex -
and Helen was certainly that - there might perhaps
be no fixed personality, but merely a succession of
phases? (p.357)

The differences between Nobody's Fault and Rose
Cottingham are indicative of the changes which had taken
place between 1896 and 1915. The 'hot-house' world of
the boarding-school, the interconnection between
friendship and access to sexuality, and the
understanding of feminine identity as a series of
'unfixed' phases, will all be central to the
representation of friendship in the twentieth-century novel.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE STRANGE BRIGHT FRUITS:
FRIENDSHIP, KNOWLEDGE AND THE EROTIC
IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY NOVEL

I. THE SIGNIFICANT ANOMALY: THE WELL OF LONELINESS

Up to this point, I have consciously avoided using the word 'lesbian' in this thesis. For if, in the Victorian novel, the language used sometimes suggests a covert or displaced eroticism, or points to an awareness that there may be a sexual element in women's relationships, that sexuality is never explicitly acknowledged, nor are the lines between the erotic and the non-erotic precisely defined. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has usefully suggested that the history of women's relationships is best understood in terms of a spectrum, within which nineteenth-century women had considerably more license, in the physical and emotional expression of their feelings, than has been available to women in the twentieth century. We might extend the image to say that Victorian friendships contained a number of overlapping spectra, within which there is considerable flexibility, but each of which nevertheless has a recognised edge beyond which the relationship becomes 'transgressive'. Within a single relationship the two friends may play out and exchange a variety of different roles, but equally, there are a number of social and emotional codes which act to constrain the relationship, a variety of points beyond which the friendship becomes
'suspect'. But the issue here is one of degree, rather than a fixed division; what we don't find, in the Victorian novel, is a concept of lesbianism as a specific and discrete sexual identity.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, however, sexual relations between women became the focus of intensive investigation in a steady flood of publications on homosexuality, 'inversion' and 'the third sex'. The sexologists clearly did not 'invent' lesbianism. There was already a long literary tradition of voyeuristic male fantasies of sexual encounters between women: in the nineteenth-century French novel, especially, these fantasies often depict an exotic underworld of shadows, cushions, perfumes and flowers. The sexologists themselves often refer to these texts, and the notion of lesbian 'decadence' sometimes sits uneasily alongside a biological model of homosexuality. Nevertheless, it is the biological model which is paramount. Smith-Rosenberg has demonstrated persuasively that nineteenth-century sexology is best understood as part of a Darwinian project to contain the ragged edges of the socially disorderly, by providing a scientific classification of various forms of 'deviance' within a precise taxonomical system of 'aberrant' forms of sexuality. As Smith-Rosenberg emphasises, the model of lesbianism produced by this fusion of the sexual and the social looks like a wholesale attack on the 'New Woman'. In both sympathetic and unsympathetic accounts of inversion, it is continually emphasised that
lesbianism is "spreading" under the influence of the women's movement. In his influential *Sexual Inversion*, Havelock Ellis argues that only a small number of women are "congenital inverts"; their destiny is biologically fixed, and therefore unalterable. But he also argues that there are a number of women who, while not "true" inverts, could in certain circumstances be susceptible to their influence:

The modern movement of emancipation - the movement to obtain the same rights and duties as men, the same freedom and responsibility, the same education and the same work - must be regarded as, on the whole, a wholesome and inevitable movement. But it carries with it certain disadvantages ... having been taught independence of men and disdain for the old theory which placed women in the moated grange of the home to sigh for a man who never comes, a tendency develops for women to carry this independence still farther and to find love where they find work. These unquestionable influences of modern movements cannot directly cause sexual inversion, but they develop the germs of it, and they probably cause a spurious imitation. This spurious imitation is due to the fact that the congenital anomaly occurs with special frequency in women of high intelligence who, voluntarily or involuntarily, influence others. 5

Ellis's image of "the moated grange" has a particular resonance. From the accounts given by the sexologists, it seems that any woman who moves beyond the circumscribed space of passive domesticity is a likely "invert". While "women of high intelligence who influence others" are the most "suspect", so are opera singers, actresses, prostitutes, ballet dancers, lacemakers, painters, seamstresses and writers. Any woman who envies masculine freedom, admires the achievements of other women, or longs to go to college, must question her own sexuality. It begins to seem as
if any close contact between women is 'abnormal', as manifested most bizarrely in Krafft-Ebing's comment in *Psychopathia Sexualis* that 'Suspicion may always be turned towards homosexuality when one reads in the advertisement columns of the daily papers: "Wanted, by a lady, a lady friend and companion"'. Women were effectively being offered a choice between the 'moated grange' and Radclyffe Hall's 'well of loneliness'.

Nevertheless, I am unhappy with what I shall call the 'Golden Age' approach to the history of women's friendships, propounded most fully and influentially by Lillian Faderman. Faderman's argument is that the theories of the sexologists were the single decisive factor in putting an end to a period of free, innocent and romantic intimacy between women which had lasted for more than a century. Following the impact of the sexologists, these friendships became suspect; women's understanding of lesbianism in literature and life was, until the emergence of the contemporary women's movement, the distorted product of internalised notions of lesbian deviance.

The 'Golden Age' approach has been questioned on several grounds. Joan Nestle has argued forcefully for a recognition of the validity of 'pre-feminist' lesbian identity, and some historians have emphasised also that the impact of the sexologists was double-edged: for those with the courage and opportunity to accept the marginal identity of the 'deviant', the sexologists ultimately provided a framework within which to
articulate their desires. Nevertheless, most feminist historians have followed Faderman's account of a radical shift from nineteenth-century 'innocence' to twentieth-century 'guilt'. It is argued that, following a 'delayed reaction' (datings differ, but the impact of the sexologists is generally placed around the period of the First World War), women became aware that their relationships could be 'sexual' and the old romantic friendship disappeared. This argument seems to me questionable on historical grounds. It is by no means clear that nineteenth-century women were unaware that their relationships could be sexual. Some of the Victorian novels we have considered in earlier chapters strongly suggest such an awareness, and the recently decoded diaries of Anne Lister, who conducted her sexual affairs with women with gusto and found no lack of response, suggest that among the English upper classes in the early nineteenth century sexual relationships between women were by no means uncommon.

But for our purposes here, the real problem with the 'Golden Age' theory is that it simply does not match with what we find in the twentieth-century novel. On the contrary, the first half of the twentieth century saw an unprecedented spate of novels which examined passionate and romantic relationships between women, and in which the possibility of a sexual element in those relationships is explored and acknowledged. In this chapter, I shall be looking primarily at two novels: Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), in which
lesbianism is explicitly defined against the 'tradition' of female friendship, and Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women* (1917), which both problematised that tradition, and opened up a space from within which its conventions could be modified and newly eroticised.

I believe that what we are dealing with in this period is a shift - but not a complete shift - from the delicate and flexible spectrum of women's private discourse to a male-dominated 'scientific' discourse. The sexologists provided a new mode of thinking about women's relationships which drew on medical metaphors: authority was being taken out of women's hands, but while women took on that new mode of 'knowledge', they also revised it. In the novel, the representation of lesbianism does not simply reproduce the model offered by sexology; the old themes, traditions and devices do not disappear, but are deployed in new ways which partly mirror, partly interrogate 'scientific' understandings of relations between women.

If we look at the detailed case histories and autobiographical accounts in Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion*, what is most noticeable is their failure to correspond to the rigid classifications devised by the sexologists to contain them. 11 There are 'masculine' women and 'feminine' women, married women and single women, women who have sex with women and women whose desires are consciously suppressed or channelled towards the 'spiritual'; there are women who feel guilty or
confused, and women who appear entirely uninhibited about their sexual desires. They are remarkable precisely for their diversity; the attempts of the sexologists to offer a coherent classification of female homosexuality seem like a desperate attempt to impose order where there is none, and what matters is the particular framework within which disorder is contained.

The organic model offered by the sexologists depends on a masculine/feminine polarity: the invert represents a freakish inversion of natural biological gender difference. But while the dominant model of the 'extreme' invert is of a woman who is masculine in every detail except for her genital organs, the very variety of the case histories undercuts it. It is argued, therefore, that inversion is characterised by psychic, if not physical masculinity. Attempts to find an organic basis for this result in Krafft-Ebing's comment that even the most 'feminine' inverts have a masculine formation of the larynx, and Havelock Ellis's argument that female inverts are unusual in having hair on the legs. Even Edward Carpenter's polemical plea for the 'Uning', The Intermediate Sex, draws on a masculine/feminine, mind/body dichotomy: his 'superior' female 'Uning' combines the 'masculine' qualities of idealism, originality, courage, intellect and leadership with a 'thoroughly feminine' grace and roundness of form. In the sexologists' seamless argument, any deviation from passive femininity is a disruption of
natural biological norms and a potential indication of inversion.

There is clearly a contradiction between the biological model and the notion that lesbianism is 'spreading', and here a different kind of medical analogy comes into play, exemplified in Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion*. While Ellis himself refutes Krafft-Ebing's concept of lesbianism as functional degeneracy, linked to hereditary disease, his own language nevertheless draws constantly on disease imagery. The unwholesome places which inculcate the 'symptoms' of inversion are particularly those identified with the women's movement: girls' schools, women's clubs and colleges. But Ellis's field goes far beyond the college-educated New Woman: any confined spaces where women work closely together are conducive to spreading the 'germs' of 'abnormality'; any close contact between women, it would seem, can be contaminating.

In the shift from women's private discourse to scientific public discourse, a line between the 'healthy' and the 'unhealthy' is being drawn across a previously fluid and open-ended spectrum. Women now had to negotiate a distinction between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal', the 'healthy' and the 'unhealthy,' but, as we shall see, the terms of that distinction are continually shifting, and continually being debated. We are not dealing with a single definitive break, but
with a series of gradual, incomplete and *contested* shifts.

Paradoxically, it seems, the novel which offered the most sympathetic account of lesbian identity was the one which most closely reproduced the biologist model. Stephen Gordon, the heroine of Radclyffe Hall's The Well of Loneliness, is the classic 'congenital invert', and the introduction to the first edition of the novel was, appropriately, written by Havelock Ellis. Stephen’s inversion is identified by her father from birth, and follows the pattern defined by the sexologists: tall, narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered and physically strong, impatient with girlish pastimes. Stephen excels at 'masculine' pursuits and falls in love with 'feminine' women.

It is a fascinating but problematic text, and in recent years The Well of Loneliness has been much discussed by feminist critics. As the concerns of feminist criticism have shifted, so has the novel’s reputation: earlier dismissals of The Well as an exemplification of the false consciousness and 'lesbian self-hatred' precipitated by the theories of the sexologists have been questioned in a number of sophisticated re-readings, which emphasise that Hall's text covertly interrogates its own apparently seamless endorsement of 'congenitalism'. This continuing process of revision is an essential part of the contemporary feminist project, and I shall be returning
to this issue in my next chapter, but my purpose here is a rather different one. I want to examine the strangely anomalous place which *The Well of Loneliness* occupies in the tradition which I have been tracing in this thesis, as the novel which became, in the popular imagination, the novel of lesbian identity, but which was, also, the novel which no one was officially allowed to read.

Hall herself was able to present the story of Stephen Gordon with poignancy and conviction because she herself identified with the concept of the 'masculine' lesbian; she saw herself as the classic congenital invert. But the novel is not autobiographical; Stephen's story has affinities to Hall's, but it is not Hall's. We find, in *The Well of Loneliness*, nothing of the complicated and traumatic triangular relationship between Hall and her two lovers, Mabel Batten and Una Troubridge. Stephen's family life is very different from Hall's own; while Stephen is born into an absolutely conventional upper-class English home, the product of the conventional 'happy marriage', Hall herself was deserted by her rakish father at an early age, and lived with her mother and step-father in an atmosphere which was, by all accounts, not only bohemian but distinctly turbulent. As Vera Brittain commented in an otherwise approving review, one problem with Hall's novel is that it endorses the notion that female creativity, intellect and rebellion are 'abnormal': the female artist, writer, musician, the effective and dedicated teacher, are all 'inverts', and while Stephen
herself is a successful writer, her lover Mary is a gentle and domesticated being. Hall's life-long lover Una Troubridge, by contrast, was an artist and translator in her own right.

What is also clear, from the many photographs of the couple which exist, and which were widely circulated when the novel was prosecuted for obscenity, is that Hall and Troubridge, in their public identity, did not simply reproduce the masculine/feminine polarity. Their 'cross-dressing' plays, teasingly, with the terms of that polarity; Una wears a monocle, shifts between 'masculine' and 'feminine' dress; their tailored suits are played against flowing capes and flamboyant hats, and they took to buying their clothes at a theatrical costumiers. Their mode of dress, then, approximates to Joan Nestle's description of butch/femme relationships in the 1950s, which, she argues, 'were complex erotic statements, not phoney heterosexual replicas'; they were characterised by a specifically lesbian language of gesture and dress which acted as a conscious statement of rebellion and autonomy.17

In her novel, Hall smoothes over some of the complexity of her own experience, offering, as Sonja Ruehl has noted, a concept of inversion which is in many ways more rigid than the one offered by the sexologists.18 What's important here is that Hall's novel is an extremely carefully framed, precisely balanced and tactical deployment of medico-psychological theories, in which she systematically disentangles
lesbian identity from its subversive and problematic connotations.

Alison Hennegan has pointed to the resonance of the word 'husbandry' in the novel: Stephen is potentially the perfect English gentleman, noble, patriotic, faithful and selfless; granted her rightful inheritance, she would be the ideal landowner and model husband. 'Britishness' is as important as masculinity here. Stephen and Mary, like their closest counterparts, the Scottish Jamie and Barbara, are always out of place in the shadowy exotic underworld of lesbian Paris; all four long for the freer and healthier air of their native land, and the words 'exile' and 'protection' echo through the final chapters of the novel. Neither Jamie nor Stephen can carry out, in Paris, their desire and need to protect their vulnerable feminine lovers: the undernourished Barbara dies, and Mary is on the verge of disintegration when, in a supreme act of self-sacrifice, Stephen arranges her marriage to a man who can offer her security in an English home. Hall consistently extricates lesbianism from its associations with exoticism, feminism, foreignness, predatoriness, racial impurity and disease: given the chance to flourish outside the 'unnatural' world forced upon her by social marginalisation, Stephen would be a credit to patriarchal society. Paradoxically, the point at which the representation of lesbian identity in The Well of Loneliness most verges on the 'subversive' is the aspect
which has most troubled feminist critics: Hall's celebration of Stephen's masculinity.

This celebration does not simply reproduce the terms offered by the sexologists. As Lillian Faderman has emphasised, Hall's commitment to the biologist model makes sense as a challenge to Freudian theory, which, shifting the emphasis from the 'congenital' to the 'acquired', suggested that inversion could be cured by hypnosis. Given the choice between representing lesbianism as free choice (and therefore culpable), as the product of childhood trauma (and therefore curable) or as congenital (and therefore the freakish but blameless product of God's design) the latter clearly provided the most effective base for a plea for recognition of lesbian existence.

Freud himself, however, emphasised the difficulty of 'curing' inversion. In his early work, he did not discount the possibility of a congenital predisposition, and he retained the idea of gender-crossing: active female homosexuals, unlike male homosexuals, generally exhibited the physical and emotional characteristics of the opposite sex. Absolute or 'extreme' inverts, whose tendencies were fixed from an early age, would be resistant to later influence. In a sense then, Hall's representation of Stephen also follows the Freudian model: her masculinity is nurtured by her father, who gives her a man's name and, for her own future protection, encourages her to follow the pursuits normally reserved for men. Stephen's inversion is both
environmental' and 'congenital', doubly 'extreme' and doubly resistant to 'cure'. Where Stephen differs from the lesbian of medico-psychological discourse is in the particular nature of her 'masculinity'.

Throughout the novel, Hall separates Stephen from 'normal' female development, and emphasises her identification with her father, not only through their close companionship during his life, but also in a number of symbolic moments after his death. Whereas, in other inter-war novels, access to knowledge of sexuality comes from another woman, sometimes in a moment of terrifying identification with and separation from the mother, Stephen's moment of entry to an understanding of her true nature is brought about when she visits her father's study after his death and discovers, in a locked drawer of his desk, papers and books which include the writings of Krafft-Ebing. Her sudden precipitation into knowledge of her sexuality initiates an increasing physical and emotional identification with her father, but it is also a moment of separation from the father. She learns of her idolised father's betrayal, his failure to pass on to her the knowledge he has so carefully stored; she learns, simultaneously, of her maleness, and of the impossibility of ever becoming a 'true' man.

Jean Radford has suggested that The Well of Loneliness may be read as an 'inverted romance', which draws on, but also revises the conventions of heterosexual romance. I think we might develop this
argument in a rather different direction, and say that The Well of Loneliness is 'in love' with masculinity. Not, importantly, with maleness; all of the 'real' men in the novel are in some way inadequate, as are all heterosexual marriages. What the novel celebrates is the masculinity of the female invert, and, specifically, Stephen's masculinity. The narrative dwells, lovingly, on Stephen's hunting and fencing prowess, on the muscular strength of her body, and, especially, her clothes. The consummation of Stephen and Mary's love-affair is symbolically affirmed when the admiring Mary is allowed access to Stephen's wardrobe, and the narrative, like Mary, lingers over its contents.

There is an interesting parallel moment to this in one of the stories in Jean Rhys's The Left Bank (1927). In 'Illusion', the 'feminine' narrator unlocks the solid wardrobe of the sensible, 'gentlemanly' and apparently unimaginative Miss Bruce, to discover the secret fantasies concealed behind her 'square and solid' clothes (p.142). Inside the wardrobe is 'a glow of colour, a riot of soft silks' (p.142): exquisite dresses, cosmetics, scents, carnival costumes and masks. The cost of masculine identification is the suppression of the pleasures of femininity: beauty, frivolity, desire. In The Well of Loneliness, by contrast, the open wardrobe confirms the seamless relationship between Stephen's masculine identification and female body. The neat suits hanging from 'heavy mahogany shoulders' (p.324), the crêpe de Chine pyjamas,
the heavy silk masculine underwear and hand-knitted silk stockings, all 'belong' to a woman but combine the sensuous richness of fantasy with the solidity of masculinity. The perfection of the 'fit' is confirmed when Mary's instinctive desire to mend the stockings is frustrated: Stephen is served, 'as are certain men, with a great deal of nicety and care by the servants' (p. 325). There are no holes.

The point here is that Hall is turning the dominant understanding of lesbian identity on its head. Accounts of female inversion, whether medical or psychological, consistently emphasised that the 'extreme' female invert combined masculine virtues with masculine vices. Even Edward Carpenter shows distinct distaste for the extreme female 'Urnings', whose masculine energy and creativity are, he suggests, counter-balanced by equally masculine coarseness, aggression and sensuality. Stephen, by contrast, is exemplary in her refinement, sensitivity and chivalry. Unlike earlier women writers, who had constantly sought to incorporate 'masculine' qualities within their heroines without compromising their feminine identity, Hall makes the outrageous suggestion that a woman can be the 'better' man. Far from showing Stephen as a man 'trapped' in a woman's body, she offers, wickedly, a perfected and idealised masculinity which is only realised in the person of the female invert. In doing so, it's possible that she underestimated masculine _amour-propre_; it may well have fuelled some of the extreme vitriol of the attacks upon
The Well of Loneliness, notably James Douglas's article in the Sunday Express, which led to the prosecution and suppression of the novel.26

The fate of The Well of Loneliness may be compared with that of A.T. Fitzroy's Despised and Rejected (1918),27 one of the few sympathetic accounts of inversion to predate Hall's. Fitzroy's novel was also suppressed, but for its unpatriotic endorsement of conscientious objection, rather than for its sympathetic treatment of homosexuality. Fitzroy's novel juxtaposes the lives of two inverts, a man and a young woman. She follows Edward Carpenter's model of the characteristic, rather than 'extreme', Urning as one who fuses the best of masculine and feminine qualities: both Dennis and Antoinette are exceptional in their brilliant vitality, sensivity, altruism and creativity. But while Dennis ultimately finds love with another man, Antoinette's only 'inverted' relationship with a woman is so cautiously represented that it is barely distinguishable from a schoolgirl crush. Antoinette falls passionately in love with an older woman, attracted by her mysterious reserve, only to find that Hester's charm and 'hidden depths' (p. 47) are the product of her own imagination. The 'brief magical passion' (p. 93) is represented as facilitating, though 'false'; it moves Antoinette beyond 'her fruitless search in the world of masculinity' and accords with 'the dictates of her inmost nature' (p. 69). But that 'nature' is also blurred; in her representation of Antoinette, Fitzroy hovers between inversion and
bisexuality. Whereas Dennis is aware of his ‘abnormality’ from early adolescence, Antoinette sees nothing unusual in her passions for women until Dennis explains her nature to her; in response, as it were, she falls hopelessly in love with him.

Hall, by contrast, systematically disentangles Stephen’s relationships with other women from the codes of female friendship. When the publishers of *The Well of Loneliness* were prosecuted for obscenity, the defence counsel attempted to argue that the relationship between Stephen and her lover Mary was simply a ‘normal’ friendship. Hall was furious; in a dramatic scene during the lunch hour, she insisted that the counsel retract his statement during the afternoon session, which he accordingly did. As Hall well knew, the retraction may well have tipped the balance against the novel, but to win on those terms would have been a negation of her entire purpose in writing the novel, which was to argue for the specificity of lesbian identity.

Stephen has no ‘normal’ female friendships. During her girlhood, Stephen not only feels alienated from other girls, but oppressed by the triviality of their conversation and their preoccupation with female physical development. Consistently also, the conventional exchanges which in earlier novels serve to confirm the identification between the two friends are used in Hall’s novel to assert Stephen’s separate, masculine identity. When Stephen buys a pearl ring for
her first lover, Angela Crossley, she does so, by
care, in the shop where her father bought her mother's
wedding ring. The identification with the father is
confirmed by the jeweller who, without knowing Stephen,
instantly perceives the resemblance.

The 'bandaged arm' motif, which appears in many
inter-war novels, also makes an appearance in The Well
of Loneliness. Stephen meets her first love, Angela
Crossley, when Angela is bitten during a dogfight;
Stephen rescues her and watches protectively as the arm
is bandaged by a chemist. I have suggested that this
device acts as an expression of repressed homoeroticism;
Hall's use of it points to the question that she cannot
confront directly in the novel, the nature of the
sexuality of the 'feminine' woman who is drawn to the
'masculine' invert. More explicitly, it also serves to
initiate a duel between two 'men'; on their return to
the house, Angela's husband glowers at the arm, blaming
Stephen for the wound, and a long period of rivalry
begins. Stephen's own 'wound' takes a different form.
Her face is severely scarred when she serves during the
war in an ambulance unit; the scar, as is often noted,
is 'the mark of Cain', the physical sign of Stephen's
deviance, but it also mirrors the masculine duelling
scar, the mark of soldierly fortitude.

Stephen's final 'duel' ends with a revised version
of the 'exchanged lover' ritual. The transfer of Mary
to her male lover is entirely orchestrated by Stephen,
who, having led Mary to believe that Stephen has been
unfaithful to her, arranges for Martin to stand by and pick up the pieces. Martin himself, successively Stephen’s friend, suitor, and rival, is also in many ways her other self; his face, like Stephen’s, is scarred by a war wound. Whereas in other novels the male lover is tacitly exchanged between two women, in this novel Mary is exchanged between two ‘men’. The rituals which in other novels work to emphasise the identification between women here confirm their difference; the reader, like Mary, is positioned to see Stephen not as idealised self, but as idealised other.

As Hall herself was perfectly aware, _The Well_ was not the final word on lesbian identity; as has often been noted, Stephen’s own acceptance of patriarchal models is questioned towards the end of the novel by Valérie Seymour, who was modelled on Natalie Barney. Barney, whom Hall knew well, was the dominant figure in Parisian lesbian subculture, well-established by the turn of the century as the ‘mecca’ of lesbianism. Barney and her lover Renée Vivien created a ‘woman-identified’ lesbian culture, defined in conscious opposition to the heterosexual model, reclaiming an eclectic group of heroic female figures and celebrating feminine wisdom, lesbian sexuality and infidelity. The terms of this culture are entirely opposite to the ones offered by _The Well_, in which eroticism and physical desire are tactically played down in favour of romance. Vivien herself turned the fictional tradition of lesbian exoticism into a lifestyle; her half-lit flat with its
heavy perfumes, rich textures, strange objects and exotic foods is hauntingly described in Colette’s *The Pure and The Impure*, which also offers a panorama of lesbian lifestyles in early twentieth-century Paris. Colette’s account, which ranges from the rakishly masculine ‘La Chevalière’ and the cheerfully bisexual Amalia to Colette’s own preferred model of female lovers as compassionate mirrors of one another’s femininity, clearly demonstrates that there was, in this period, no unitary model of lesbian identity.

Ultimately, what mattered most about *The Well of Loneliness* was not that it was written, but that it was suppressed. It was by no means the first novel to address the question of lesbianism, and the fundamental reasons for its suppression were made clear by the presiding magistrate, Sir Chartres Biron: Hall’s novel was obscene not just because it pleaded for toleration, but because it represented lesbians as alluring and admirable women whose ‘unnatural vices’ gave them ‘extraordinary rest, contentment and pleasure; and not only that, but it is actually put forward that it improves their mental balance and capacity’. Biron saw, as some later critics have failed to see, that beneath all the references to sterility, barrenness, the mark of Cain, and lesbian damnation, Hall’s novel persistently argues that, in different conditions, a lesbian life could be a happy one. The forces that militate against the love of Stephen and Mary are all social ones: ostracism, exile, and ignorance. Hall’s
novel argues that the lesbian is not 'doomed' or 'damned' by her own nature, but by the society within which she lives. All the more ironic, then, that the novel has been seen as an example of 'lesbian self-hatred'; its impetus is all in the opposite direction.

Sonja Ruehl has argued persuasively that The Well of Loneliness should be seen in terms of Foucault's concept of 'reverse discourse', in which power is reclaimed from the definers by the defined, who at first adopt, and then revise, the dominant definitions. 30 Hall's novel, Ruehl argues, opened up a space from which lesbians could speak with authority about their sexuality, and challenge her account from within. In terms of real life, this may well have been the case. Although the novel was not republished in England until 1948, and was not available in paperback until 1962, it was available in the United States, where the ban on the novel was reversed at the appeal, and it continued to be circulated privately in England. But in terms of the history of the novel, the case was otherwise. Through no fault of Hall's own, the publication of The Well of Loneliness simultaneously opened, and closed, the debate. Many women, both lesbian and heterosexual, expressed their gratitude to Hall for opening up a previously taboo subject; at least one senior school mistress urged her entire staff to read it. 31 But equally, a number of lesbian and bisexual writers were deeply dissatisfied with Hall's representation of
lesbian identity. Both Vita Sackville-West, who saw herself as a 'dual personality', and Violet Trefusis expressed their intention of writing a reply, but these novels were never written. 32 The suppression of The Well of Loneliness silenced any possible response. For, if a novel which apparently offered such a minimal challenge to patriarchal values was unacceptable, then no novel which offered a positive affirmation of lesbian identity - and certainly no novel which attempted a more open-ended or explicitly subversive version of that identity - could hope to succeed. The Well of Loneliness became the lesbian novel, a monolithic anomaly in the history of English fiction, uninterrogatable because officially unreadable.

After 1928, the lesbian novel went underground. The suppression of The Well of Loneliness gave rise to a spate of 'now you see it, now you don't' novels, including Ivy Compton-Burnett's More Women Than Men (1933), Nancy Spain's 'Birdseye et Cie' murder mysteries (which include the 1949 Poison for Teacher, teasingly set in a boarding-school called Radcliffe Hall), and Mary Renault's The Friendly Young Ladies (1944). These novels ingeniously employ the resources of fictional narrative to manipulate the responses of the 'knowing' reader. Following the codes - the narrow-hipped, boyish heroine and her more 'feminine friend, the shared bed, the passionate embrace, the 'camp' jokes - the reader is lured into a comfortable assessment of the central relationship as 'lesbian', only to be teased and tripped
up by a narrative which forces her to question her own response. The sudden intrusion of flirtations with men, the revelation of secret marriages and illegitimate children, disrupt the reader’s confidence in her own interpretation and suggest that it was, after all, merely the product of her own indelicate imagination.

These novels deflect censorship by making the question of sexual identity into a game, and no doubt they played their own part in breaking down that censorship, as comedy often does, by making the 'unacceptable' acceptable. The difficulty with the 'now you see it, now you don't' novel is that the trick precludes any detailed exploration of intimacy between women. Since the real nature of the relationship must remain ambiguous, the reader is placed outside it, offered only tantalising and contradictory glimpses of a 'secret' which is hinted at, but never fully revealed.

Mary Renault’s The Friendly Young Ladies is particularly interesting, since it was conceived as a 'reply' to The Well of Loneliness. In Renault’s novel, the 'now you see it, now you don’t' process serves not only to deflect possible suspicion that the novel is offering an unqualified endorsement of lesbian sexuality, but also to question the fixity of the line between masculine and feminine, lesbian and heterosexual. The androgynous Leo is seen initially through the eyes of her unsophisticated sister Elsie, after an eight year separation. Elsie sees, from behind, 'a slim, dark-haired youth in a fisherman’s
jersey' (p. 55) who wears his hair 'rather effeminately long' (p. 57); only when the boy turns round does Elsie recognise her sister. When Elsie goes to stay on the houseboat which Leo shares with the lovely, feminine but mysterious Helen, she is relieved by the willingness of the friends to share a bedroom, since it releases a room for her to occupy, but puzzled by the uninhabited feel of 'Helen's' room. But the reader's satisfyingly superior assessment of this 'butch-femme' relationship is continually disrupted. Helen's sexuality remains enigmatic: it is fortunate, we hear her telling Leo, that they are never attracted to the same men. Leo herself flirts, equally successfully, with both women and men; she shifts, at will, from masculine to feminine modes, from trousers and sweaters to make-up and dresses. At the end of the novel, after a protracted struggle, she marries Joe, her closest friend.

As Renault herself later admitted, it is an unsatisfactory ending, but not, as my summary might suggest, simply because Leo finally relinquishes her ambiguous sexual identity in favour of heterosexuality. Leo's relationship with Joe is fundamentally homosexual. Joe is her comrade, the only person with whom she can share her intellectual interests, who mirrors and understands her own aspirations. Like Stephen in The Well of Loneliness, Leo's primary identification is with masculinity. But whereas Hall suggests that the woman can be the 'better' man, Leo's marriage to Joe confirms her position as a 'lesser' male. Joe's novels are
Stephen's heroic scar is on the cheek; Leo's is in the region of the groin, an appendix scar which makes a "deep, puckered" (p. 74) dent in her creamy-brown body.

Renault's representation of Leo mirrors a shift from earlier notions of the 'man in a woman's body' to an understanding of the lesbian as a 'castrated' male, exemplified in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. 35 But it echoes, also, a recurrent theme in women's writing about friendship, evident for example in Mary Coleridge's *The Shadow on the Wall* (1904) and Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer* (1927), in which the homosexual relationship between men, the complete but enigmatic comradely intimacy from which women are inevitably excluded, is the frustrating locus of impossible desire.

In the rest of this chapter, I shall be following a different thread. While the lesbian novel went underground, the twentieth century has seen a steady flood of what Elaine Marks has usefully called novels of the 'gynaeceum': 36 novels about teacher-pupil relationships, schoolgirl and college friendships. In these novels, passion is not suppressed, but, on the contrary, given a voice; the fictional conventions and rituals of the nineteenth-century friendship are alive and well, but increasingly eroticised. The means by which a 'space' is created for the erotic depend on a distinction between the 'healthy' and the 'unhealthy' relationship: the lesbian becomes 'the other' in a number of different ways, the site of various and
shifting fears and desires. But against the 'closed road' of lesbianism, the novels define a model of female sexuality which is not seen in terms of masculine and feminine polarities, but achieved through identification with another woman.

As Freud himself noted, the transferral of object-choice to the opposite sex is not accomplished 'without a certain amount of fumbling'. We might say that in this period, despite the sexologists, women continued to 'fumble'. While generally accepting that 'normal' sexuality meant heterosexuality, they nevertheless hung on, obstinately, to their attachments to their own sex.

2. THE MOTHER AND THE OTHER: REGIMENT OF WOMEN.

Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion* includes a separate appendix on 'The School-Friendships of Girls' in which he comments on the prevalence of the 'flame' within the single-sex school. In this enclosed atmosphere,

A sentiment which under other conditions would never have gone beyond ordinary friendship may thus become a "flame", and even a "flame" of markedly sexual character. Under these influences boys and girls feel the purest and simplest sentiments in a hyperesthetic manner. The girls here studied have lost an exact conception of the simple manifestations of friendship, and think they are giving evidence of exquisite sensibility and true friendship by loving a companion to madness; friendship in them has become a passion.

The language here is noticeably contradictory; the concept of 'hyperestheticism' masks Ellis's own inability to decide whether the flame is real or a
fiction, sexual or pure, good or bad. Its very prevalence precludes the possibility of seeing the flame as an indication of 'congenital inversion' or even 'spurious imitation'; it occupies an ambiguous space somewhere between the normal and the abnormal. Ellis himself describes it as a 'a love-fiction, a play of sexual love' (p.373) produced by a mixture of incipient sexuality, the natural altruism of young females, and the special environment of the single-sex school. He warns that the flame marks the beginning of a 'morbid fetishism' (p.374), but proceeds to draw extensively on the expertise of a female adviser, who argues that the basis of the flame is spiritual rather than sexual: 'a sort of uplifting of the whole soul with an intense desire to lead a very good life' (p.377), which, kept within safe limits, at this stage in life may do more good than harm. She suggests that the flame is linked to ignorance of sexual matters, often discussed by girls who share a 'rave'. Like Freud in his early analysis of female hysteria, Dora (1905), she links the 'flame' to the sharing of sexual secrets: the secrets the girls share are the secrets of heterosexuality, but the sharing of this knowledge is interpreted as homoerotic. Freud, however, is much less ambivalent about characterising adolescent friendships as 'homosexual':

It has long been known and often been pointed out that at the age of puberty boys and girls show clear signs, even in normal cases, of the existence of an affection for people of their own sex. A romantic and sentimental friendship with one of her school friends, accompanied by vows, kisses, promises of eternal correspondence, and all the sensibility of jealousy, is the common precursor of
a girl's first serious passion for a man. Thenceforward, in favourable circumstances, the homosexual current of feeling often runs completely dry. 39

As in the Victorian conduct-manuals, the girlhood friendship occupies a special and privileged place, but it is now seen as a 'stage' in the girl's sexual, as well as spiritual, development. The passionate friendship is permissible not because, as is sometimes suggested, it is seen as 'innocent' of sexuality, but because that sexuality is not seen as, in normal circumstances, determining.

If we look at the way in which the girlhood friendship was discussed in twentieth-century advice books by women which address the question of female development, two points are immediately noticeable. One is that there is an increasing recognition that the relationship contains a component of sexuality; during the inter-war period, the shared exploration of sexual 'secrets' and the expression of newly awakening sexual feelings come to be seen as normal aspects of the girlhood relationship. The second is that authority passes from the hands of women teachers and 'informed amateurs' to female doctors and psychologists. Female development is pathologised; the progress of the girlhood friendship is increasingly related to the girl's physiological, as well as moral and emotional, development. Yet while the language and models used are increasingly informed by psychoanalysis, they by no means displace the language and models of the Victorian conduct manuals. The 'unhealthy' relationship is
physiologically and psychically damaging, but in the 'healthy' relationship, the ardent identification with the idealised self makes a positive contribution to the girl's access to sexuality.

In turn of the century manuals, the advice given to girls essentially replicates that given fifty years earlier. Warnings against excessive friendships appear with a little more urgency: girls are warned not to indulge in sentimental adulation or daydreaming about their friends, since 'brooding over the thought of her weakens your fibre more than being with her', but the magnetic attraction towards a twin soul is still represented as a vital formative experience, founded on 'oneness in the highest things', shared self-correction, and 'the culture of the noblest qualities of the human soul'. Simultaneously, however, a new note appears in progressive thinking, which focusses on the 'morbid' intimacies produced in the 'unwholesome' atmosphere of the single-sex school. But while the language used suggests that there is a sexuality somewhere in these attachments, it is not precisely located: the problem is identified, rather, as sexual ignorance and the repression of sexuality; the 'cure' is better sex-education, more contact between the sexes, and co-educational schooling.

It is not until the inter-war period that we find what amounts to a 'moral panic' about the girlhood friendship. In a range of pedagogical and psychological texts, the girlhood 'crush' comes under urgent and
intensive scrutiny, which focusses on the 'morbid' attachment which a girl may develop for one of her female teachers. The terms in which concern is expressed depend on an understanding of female adolescence as a make-or-break period, characterised by hypersensitivity and emotional, physical and psychological instability. The 'crush' is dangerous because the girl is too young to cope with the passions involved; the teacher is dangerous because she may use her position of power to play with the girl's emotions, causing her unnecessary and protracted suffering which drains her strength and deflects her attention from her work. Many of these commentators refer in detail to Clemence Dane's novel, *Regiment of Women* (1917), in which the spinster-teacher is the central figure. But before we turn to Dane's novel, I want to look at a slightly earlier representation of the 'spinster-teacher', Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Delia Blanchflower* (1915).

In *Delia Blanchflower*, the heroine's infatuation with her tutor, the brilliant, Girton-educated, man-hating Gertrude, draws her into the arsonist wing of the militant suffrage movement, to which Gertrude is committed. Ward's theme clearly has close affinities with the anti-feminist novels discussed in my last chapter; her heyday as a novelist was in the Victorian period, and she was in her sixties when she wrote this novel. The familiar codes of 'vampirism' are at work; by the end of the novel, Delia is frail and drained from
emotion and lack of sleep, and Gertrude's formerly fastidious and composed features show 'pathetic signs of some disintegrating and venomous influence ... something ugly and feverish had been, as it were, laid bare' (p. 356). But whereas the predatory Sapphic feminists in the novels of Linton and Broughton were distinguished by their flamboyant demonstrativeness, Gertrude's emotions are repressed; it is she who ends the friendship, freeing Delia to be 'saved' by marriage. At their final meeting, Delia's arm is bandaged after a fray at a suffrage demonstration; Gertrude's face softens for a moment as she glances at the arm, but, regaining her rigid self-control, she dismisses her friend for ever. As Delia's bandaged arm signals, she has struggled with her feelings for Gertrude, but is still deeply bound to her. The abnormality of Gertrude - 'that strange, modern thing', the woman in whom 'the normal instincts of sex' have been 'distorted and embittered' (p. 256) - is represented as the refusal of love.

Ward's narrative looks back nostalgically to 'that first year of adoration, of long-continued emotion, - mind and heart growing and blossoming together' when Gertrude 'had not only aroused her pupil's intelligence; she had taught a motherless girl what the love of women may be for each other' (pp. 219-20). Gertrude likewise recalls, wistfully, the pleasures of that earlier period, 'the strangeness ... of finding herself adored, of feeling that young loveliness, that young
intelligence, all yielding softness in her own strong hands' (p. 257). Neither Gertrude's emotions here, nor Delia's adoration of her tutor, are seen as 'perverse'; on the contrary, Ward makes it clear that in other circumstances, the ardent intellectual awakening and disciplined energy which Gertrude offers could have proved positive. Gertrude's perversity is that she has abused her position as substitute mother; feminism, according to Ward, has disrupted, exploited and misused the traditions of an earlier period in which the identification and affection between women would draw both towards a 'higher' femininity.

The repressed 'spinster-teacher' is central also to Clemence Dane's *Regiment of Women*. Set in a girls' high school, the novel traces the destructive effect of Clare Hartill, a brilliant and inspiring but also ruthlessly egocentric teacher, upon two younger women. The precociously gifted schoolgirl Louise becomes infatuated with Clare, who 'discovers' her, encourages her and stretches her to her intellectual limits. When Clare withdraws her affection, Louise becomes unbalanced through overwork and overstrain, and finally kills herself. Clare's other 'victim' is a young teacher, whose intense friendship with Clare becomes the central focus of her life. Like Louise, Alwynne grows thin, pale, nervous and finally breaks down; she is 'rescued' only by marriage to the sensible and thoroughly dependable Roger.
Regiment of Women is generally accepted to be the first English novel to have lesbianism at the centre of the narrative. It has also been identified by some historians as the text which marks a 'break' in the history of women's friendships, signalling the destructive impact of the sexologists; Lillian Faderman describes it as 'the most noxious of the lesbian vampire novels', establishing a lesbian-teacher-feminist-vampire image which was to persist for decades. I think Faderman is right to identify the novel as a key transitional text, but I shall be arguing here that it is a much more ambiguous text than Faderman's comments suggest, and that its impact was double-edged. On the one hand, the novel anticipated and indeed helped to fuel the 'moral panic' about the spinster-teacher in the inter-war period; on the other hand, it set into motion a new phase in novels of the 'gynaeceum' in which the girlhood 'flame' is not repudiated, but increasingly explored and eroticised. I don't want to suggest that Regiment of Women is open to the kind of recuperation which has recently taken place with The Well of Loneliness, but I think it may be seen, like Hall's novel, in terms of 'reverse discourse': problematic in itself, it nevertheless opened up a space from within which women could claim the authority to speak, and to revise available definitions of relations between women. Since, unlike Hall's novel, Regiment of Women was not suppressed, the process of revision was immediate, and open.
Regiment of Women was Dane's first novel. It was extremely widely read, and the praise which greeted its publication immediately established her as a writer to be taken seriously. Walter Myers' claims for the novel as 'a personalised narrative more intricate than Miss Richardson's', with a psychological complexity 'not dreamed of by George Eliot or Meredith', seem distinctly exaggerated now; it is an uneven novel, but it is nevertheless extraordinarily compelling and disturbing. It is also profoundly contradictory, and Dane's life points us towards some of the contradictions. She was a regular contributor to the feminist journal Time and Tide, a member of the Six Point Group, and a significant figure for younger writers like Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby. She may well have been lesbian herself; certainly, she moved in 'Sapphic' circles in the 1920s, and, when a film version of The Well of Loneliness was proposed, it was Dane who was invited to write the script. Her novel is not simply anti-lesbian, anti-feminist propaganda. What we find in Regiment of Women is a meeting of different discourses, a fusion of old and new concerns, all of which, in this novel, become focussed upon the figure of the spinster-teacher.

Clare is never explicitly identified as lesbian. Like Gertrude in Delia Blanchflower, she is sallow-skinned, physically underdeveloped, a woman whose emotions and sexuality are repressed. In this novel, the device of the bandaged arm signals the difference
between Alwynne's generous and impulsive warmth and Clare's fastidious coolness: when Clare's cook cuts her hand, it is Alwynne who willingly improvises a sling, while Clare's distaste for Bagot's 'un appetizing hand' (p. 20) is unconcealed. But unlike Gertrude, whose repression of self-gratification is complete, Clare is consistently represented as 'hybrid'. The terms at work here are not ones of gender; Clare, 'an exquisite needlewoman' (p. 91), is never identified with masculinity. The warring opposites in her nature are the impulses towards self-indulgence and towards self-control. She is epicurean and ascetic, theatrical and reserved, a woman of 'feverish friendships and sudden ruptures' (p. 22) whose 'intellectualized sensuality' (p. 182) combines 'the temper of a Calvinist with the tastes of a Renascence bishop' (p. 65). Whereas Gertrude's self-suppression is attributed to her fanatical commitment to the cause of women's suffrage, Clare is never associated with feminism; it is Alwynne who is interested in women's suffrage, and the only active feminist in the novel is a jolly, level-headed visiting teacher. Clare's 'perversity' is located, rather, in her personal desire for power.

There is one important way in which Clare corresponds to the image of the lesbian as defined by sexology: she is a woman of high intelligence who is in a position to influence others. The perversity of Clare's emotional influence is interlinked throughout the novel with her intellectual dominance. Louise's
feverish passion for Clare expresses itself in feverish overwork; both Alwynne and Louise are lured with books, captivated by conversations about literature and philosophy, seduced by poetry. Clare's particular 'perversion' is to arouse adulation, play with it, and then renounce it.

There is however, another kind of 'unhealthiness' at work in the novel, which is located in the highly-charged, febrile atmosphere of the single-sex school, in which Clare is the dominant figure. Dane follows the progressive line: when Alwynne visits, with Roger, a co-educational school, she is impressed by the easy way in which the children mix, the sense of space and room to grow; the all-female school in which minds and bodies are congested like 'a tray of unthinned seedlings' (p. 248) is, by contrast, a hothouse which artificially overstimulates girls' intellects and emotions. Like Clare herself, the school comes to represent both the 'unnatural' arousal of love, and the frustration of love.

The narrative of Regiment of Women is impelled by a claustrophobic and cumulative sense of fear. Initially unlocated, the fear is passed in turn from one woman to another. Its presence is first felt during a lesson on Browning's Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came. Browning’s poem, with its cripple whose directions lead to a path which is both right and wrong, its journey through sterile and barren land to the Dark Tower which is both the object of the quest and the place of terror,
provides motifs which are central to the novel. The narrative plays continually with the words 'childe' and 'child'. Clare's melodic reading of Louise's essay on the poem (itself inspired by Clare's teaching) is questioned by Louise, who communicates her own reading of the poem in a haunting recital which fills Clare, momentarily, with an intolerable, uncanny sense of despair. The fear later finds a home within Louise, when she acts the part of Arthur in Shakespeare's King John, the school play chosen and directed by Clare. This role, which Louise acts 'in an ecstasy of terror'(p.149), is also that of a 'child' in a tower, a child who is most afraid of the keeper he has come to love. Louise's reading is questioned by Clare, whose flippant dismissal of her efforts is the final straw for the demoralised child, who makes her own last journey to the Dark Tower. Mimicking the part she has just played, she escapes 'Miss Hartill, and all the terrors'(p.175) by jumping from an attic window to her death.

Thereafter, the fear passes briefly to Clare, but is deflected on to Alwynne, who takes on herself the blame for Louise's death. Lost in a dark wood, picking hyacinths for Clare, Alwynne is overcome by a hysterical, obsessive panic, the source of which she is unable to locate. She is saved by Roger, but the 'cure' is not completed until Alwynne's final visit to Clare's flat, where she finally 'sees through' Clare and identifies the oppressiveness as emanating from within the flat itself. When Alwynne loses her fear, it is
passed at last to Clare, its source; she sits in her dark flat and imagines that a puddle of rain is the blood of Louise. Having confronted her guilt, she confronts the sterile isolation of her future. Fear of Clare becomes Clare's fear; the unspecified terror experienced by Louise and Alwynne makes sense only as fear of what they saw in Clare, the mirror of their own future. Louise, who is too much like Clare, escapes through death; Alwynne is reabsorbed into the social framework, but for Clare there is no reabsorption. In choosing work, power and independence, Clare has denied herself the possibility of sexuality and love. She is trapped, finally, in her own childless Dark Tower of 'work and loneliness - loneliness and work' (p.345).

We have here, then, a new kind of 'exchange' between women. Many of the concerns which motivate it are not new: the manipulative teacher, the 'consuming' passion, the implications of excess 'knowledge' for female sexuality, the conflict between love and work, have all been seen before. The particular form which they take in Regiment of Women may be related to the pressures upon women during the First World War; Dane wrote the novel after her own health had broken down after an over-zealous involvement in war-work, which could, as Vera Brittain's Testament of Youth shows, be a strange and draining experience for the middle-class woman fresh from the security and leisure of the servant-run bourgeois home. Images of war pervade the novel: in the absence of men, under the rule of women,
there ensues a battle for the soul. Clare is a 'mistress of tactics' who delights in 'personal war' (p. 31); Louise is compared to a shell-shocked soldier, Alwynne's escape from Clare to a retreat from battle. There is a continuing nostalgic impulse towards pastoral security. Alwynne escapes from Clare's 'hot-house' to Roger's 'greenhouse'; in her eyes, Clare is 'a cathedral', while the green-fingered Roger is a 'country cottage' (p. 298). But there are also other concerns at work in this novel, which can be seen clearly if we look at the way in which the 'spinster-teacher' was discussed in the educational and psychological commentaries mentioned earlier.

What's important here is that while these accounts are clearly informed by an awareness of lesbianism, they do not focus directly on this issue. While the teacher herself may be, consciously or unconsciously, 'perverted' or 'abnormal', the girl's passionate desire for her is not seen as 'unnatural'. The issue is framed, rather, in terms of motherhood: the teacher may abuse her powerful position as substitute mother to arouse excessive and premature emotions which upset the delicate psychic and physiological balance of her vulnerable captive audience.

The emphasis on the mother partly mirrors a shift within psychoanalytic theory. In Freud's *Dora*, the patient's mother is a shadowy figure, mentioned only briefly and dismissively. Dora's hostility to her is assumed, just as Freud assumed initially that girls
would inevitably acquire "a hostile relation to their own sex which influences their object-choice decisively in what is regarded as the normal direction". In his later work, partly influenced by the work of women analysts, Freud came to see this process as much more problematic. Rejecting his earlier assumption that the girl's development paralleled that of the boy, Freud now emphasised the vital importance, for girls, of the pre-Oedipal stage of exclusive attachment to the mother, and the consequent difficulty of transferring the object-choice from one sex to the other. In the circuitous normal path towards femininity, the turning away from the mother, accompanied by the relinquishment of the "masculinity complex", formed an essential, and often protracted, stage; failure to complete this process could prevent "a true change-over towards men".

The full implications of this can be seen in Helene Deutsch's *Psychology of Women*, in which the passionate ardent identification with a "second self" or "ego-ideal", now clearly identified as "homosexual", is seen as a mandatory, "masculine" stage in the process of becoming detached from the mother. Such relationships, says Deutsch, may be distinguished by "an even higher degree of intensity than is ever achieved by heterosexual longing". But it's a circular process: having given up her mother for her friend, the girl must in turn give up her friend to become and forgive her mother, just as she must give up her clitoris for her
vagina, and her masculine activity for feminine passivity. Friendship is now not just a 'stage' but an **anomalous** stage; formative of, but also at odds with, achieved feminine identity. By the end of the 1930s, the idea that intense same-sex friendships were a necessary 'stage' which must be relinquished if transfer to the opposite sex was to be achieved had become 'common-sense', but in the commentaries we are looking at here there is a very different emphasis. Even in Mary Chadwick's heavily Freudian and widely-disseminated *Adolescent Girlhood*, the girl's desires are not perceived as 'masculine', nor is it suggested that friendship and the ideals enshrined in it must be relinquished. What matters is whether the relationship itself nurtures, or truncates, the girl's physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development.

It is made clear that the problem is not in the 'crush' itself, but in the object of the crush, and the way in which she responds to the girl's adoration. There is a 'good' teacher and a 'bad' teacher, a good 'mother' and a bad 'mother', a 'healthy' relationship and an 'unhealthy' relationship. If the teacher is egocentric and unmaternal, the relationship will have disastrous consequences, but if she is a maternal, protective, balanced woman who responds with sensitivity and appreciation to the girl's affections, heroine worship can be positive and beneficial. The good teacher, says Mary Scharlieb, 'in a **wise**, absorbing friendship takes all the incense, flowers, and songs in
so motherly ... a manner that the reaction on the junior
is all to the good':

In this way possessive, absorbing, obsessive friendships or adorations may be transmuted from sentimental follies, dangerous alike to worshipper and worshipped, into instruments of tremendous uplift and sublimation. Where the choice of friends has been wise, the warmth and depth of the friendship will enable each to supplement the deficiency or weakness of the other, and may provide them both with exactly the object of love, devotion and appreciation which each nature was craving. 56

The language here and in other commentaries is noticeably and significantly close to the language of the Victorian conduct manuals. Interwar commentators constantly describe friendship as the choice of an ideal self which, if the choice is right, 'releases our higher energies, and is an uplifting force'. 57

Importantly, however, the 'good' teacher is not seen as a replica of the mother; her attraction is precisely that she is different from the mother. Mary Chadwick's account of the characteristic older friend has interesting echoes of Hester Chapone's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: she will be a woman of intellect, sophistication and experience, possibly an artist or musician, whose ideals, ethics, politics, artistic and literary tastes, the younger will copy, with positive or negative results. 58 As Dane herself put it in an essay in The Women's Side:

A mistress opens the gates of knowledge, gives the young mind a glimpse of all the wonderful things that there are in the world, and therefore she herself becomes to that young mind the most brilliant and adorable mixture of angel and encyclopaedia that ever existed. 59
This power, says Dane, she may use or abuse. In the words of Phyllis Blanchard, the teacher needs to inspire 'the correct use of the ability to dream'.

The positive formative qualities of the romantic friendship have thus been problematised by the concept of lesbianism, but they have not been eradicated. Implicit in these accounts is the idea that the 'good' teacher facilitates the movement towards heterosexuality. What's significant for our purposes, as will be clear in my next section, is that this movement is achieved through the model of another woman, and that the relationship acts, not as a confirmation of a static and passive femininity, but as an opening up, an enriching and stimulating intellectual, as well as emotional, experience.

In Regiment of Women, all three central figures are motherless. Clare has no family ties, and rejects all manifestations of them: Christmas, birthdays, presents. Louise, estranged from her unimaginative step-mother, takes refuge in the memory of her dead natural mother; the books her mother left become her natural companions, and seem to her to contain her mother's spirit. It is likewise through books that Louise is drawn to Clare, who, interested in Louise's precocious abilities, uncharacteristically demonstrates the occasional maternal impulse. These Louise misinterprets as the 'true' Clare: she becomes obsessed with the idea that Clare not only looks like her dead mother, but is in fact her reincarnation. On the day of her scholarship
examination, Louise's overstressed mind incoherently fuses her two 'mothers':

With patient deliberation she strove to disentangle the two personalities, that combined and divided and blurred into one. There was Mother - and the Other - one was shape and one was shadow - but which was real? There was Mother - and the Other - who was Mother? No, who was - who was - The Other - was not Mother - but if not, who? - who? - who? - (p.145)

Alwynne's passion for Clare diverts her affection away from her 'true' surrogate mother, her devoted Aunt Elsbeth, towards a fantasised maternal Clare. Initially, she loves Clare 'with the secure and fearless affection of a daughter for a newly-discovered and adorable young mother' (p.66). Hurrying to their final meeting, she is still envisaging 'an imaginary Clare - a Clare beleaguered, with barriers down, a Clare with wide maternal arms, enclosing, comforting, sufficing... ' (p.325). Clare, 'unmaternal to the core' (p.29), refuses to play her part. Alwynne, on the other hand, is always a potential mother. Constantly described as 'maternal' and 'big', she is a flexible and encouraging teacher, sympathetic with the less able, concerned about Louise's decline. It is Alwynne, finally, who carries Louise's body, looking like 'a young mother' (p.179). Clare overloads Louise's mind with 'richer and richer food' (p.32); Alwynne, with echoes of Jane Eyre, nurtures her with 'new-baked, shining cakes' (p.171). Had Louise only directed her infatuation towards Alwynne, all would have been well.

There is, however, a double movement going on in the novel. The reader is always aware that, had Clare
herself been different, the power she exerts could have been positive, and not negative. Like Stephen Gordon, though in a different way, Clare refuses the codes of female friendship. Alwynne and Louise bring gifts and flowers; Clare rejects them. At their last meeting, Alwynne is bearing an armful of lilacs and a carefully worked 'trousseau' of lace: it is Clare's refusal to accept these gifts which causes the veil to fall, finally, from Alwynne's eyes. It is Alwynne who displays a healthy emotionalism, an inclination towards warm hugs and butterfly kisses; Clare's rare kisses are impulses 'regretted as soon as gratified' (p.76).

Louise and Alwynne have chosen the wrong object, but Alwynne's devotion to Clare is, in itself, 'an impulse of the freshest, sweetest hero-worship' (p.29). Her final 'defection' from Clare's ranks into domesticity necessitates a rapid deconstruction of her character and a repudiation of everything which had previously been important to her in her relationship with Clare: books, travel, paintings, intense conversations through the night. The Clare desired by Louise and Alwynne is not only an 'imaginary' maternal Clare, but also a real Clare, who has the power to take them into new worlds of knowledge. For the lonely and intellectually starved Louise, says Dane,

In her knowledge, her enthusiasms, her delicate intuition and her keen intellectual sympathy, she must have seemed the embodiment of all dreams, the fulfilment of every longing, the ideal made flesh. A wanderer in an alien land, homesick, hungry, for whom, after weary days, a queen descends from her throne, speaking his language, supplying his unvoiced wants, might feel something of the adoring
gratitude that possessed Louise. She rejoiced in Clare as a vault-bred flower in sunlight. (p.45)

Clare herself exerts a hypnotic fascination over the narrative, as over her fictional victims. Dane keeps returning to Clare’s subtlety, her irony, her cynical charm, as if endlessly attempting, and failing, to erode her attraction and her power. The narrative shifts continuously, uneasily, between attraction and abhorrence, between the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal’, the healthy and the unhealthy. Paradoxically, in exploring in full the ‘danger’ that Clare represents, Dane gives unprecedented expression to the power and intensity of the girlhood passion, and to the possibilities that, had matters been otherwise, Clare’s friendship might have offered.

In later novels of the interwar period, the splitting of the ‘healthy’ and the ‘unhealthy’ takes a different form. In Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway (1925), the governess Miss Kilman seems like a grotesque and pathetic caricature of lesbian identity as defined by sexology, with her frustrated intellectual ambitions, her hatred of men, her ungendered mackintosh, her enormous hands and blundering body. The war between Miss Kilman and the exquisitely feminine Mrs Dalloway overtly follows the Freudian path: through her attachment to her mother’s opposite, Elizabeth is extricated from being Clarissa’s ‘my Elizabeth’ (p.44), develops an independent ego, escapes from Miss Kilman, and is finally restored to her father. At the party,
Richard suddenly recognises 'his' Elizabeth (p.172), newly self-possessed in her pink frock: 'he could not help telling her. He had looked at her, he said, and he had wondered, who is that lovely girl? and it was his daughter!' (p.172).

But while the novel displaces on to Miss Kilman all the messy and inadmissible loose edges of 'feminine' identity, it simultaneously questions the validity of that 'split'. There is a continuing sub-thread which insists on an identification between Miss Kilman in her green mackintosh and Clarissa in her green dress. They are drawn together in the language they use to express their frustrated desire to possess Elizabeth: each sees her as 'oriental' and 'inscrutable'. Each recognises in the other the jealousy and rage which divide them, but which, Clarissa thinks, 'with another throw of the dice' (p.13), might have been love. Miss Kilman, plunging through the department store like an unwieldy battleship, is hopelessly at odds with her large and clumsy body; Clarissa, drifting through the sea of her drawing-room, is equally dissociated from her physical self. Miss Kilman propels Clarissa from her nun-like withdrawal from the world, back into the tangibility of feeling: 'Kilman her enemy. That was satisfying; that was real ... She hated her; she loved her' (p.155).

In two other novels of this period, Naomi Royde-Smith's The Tortoiseshell Cat (1925) and Rosamond Lehmann's Dusty Answer (1927) the interplay between identification and separation takes a different
form, in which the representation of the lesbian seductress draws freely on the codes of lesbian exoticism. In her fine analysis of the representation of lesbian sexuality in the novels of French male writers, Isabelle de Courtivron argues that the narrator’s position in these novels is that of the hypnotised voyeur, for whom the voluptuous, lethargic female bodies, in a state of almost drugged stupor, enclosed in spaces which ‘exude an almost intangible thickness, an all-pervasive sensuality’, represent both the forbidden and the desired. The nature of these fantasies, she suggests, may provide a space for expressing repressed desire for another man, but often seem to point to ‘the wish to be a woman’; the narrator desires her status as a fully eroticised body.

In both *The Tortoiseshell Cat* and *Dusty Answer*, the lesbian woman is likewise the object of hypnotised fascination with the sensuous and the strange. In *The Tortoiseshell Cat*, the half-Dutch Victoria Vanderleyden, known as V.V., is Gillian’s would-be seducer. V.V.’s dark room is a place of heady incense, rich hangings, disturbing colours: her hair has the sweet, heavy scent of geranium leaves and fresh Virginia cigarette smoke. Similar codes are at work in *Dusty Answer*, in which Judith’s passionate college friendship is disrupted when Jennifer becomes involved with the lesbian Geraldine: ‘White lips. black curling lashes, broad cheek-bones, Egyptian lips - the heaviness, the thick waxen texture of the whole face: Judith saw them all with an aching
and terrible intensity, her eyes clinging to the head bowed above her hand. She should have smelt like a gardenia' (p. 164).

But in these novels, the hypnotised narrator, unlike the male voyeur, is not excluded by her gender from the alluring and forbidden. Lesbianism is represented rather as a fascinating but closed road which the heroine herself cannot follow, but in the exploration of the troubling enticement of that road, the lesbian body becomes not only the site of repressed fear, but also the means of access to the secret places of female desire; the language of the 'idealised self' is mapped on to the language of lesbian exoticism. Thus, in The Tortoiseshell Cat Gillian feels, on looking at 'V.V.' (or, 'Vice Versa'?),

a thrill of recognition so strange, so new to her experience that the shock of it took away all sense of any other consideration, that she beheld in the flesh the very image of a perfection wrought by her own imaginings in the secret places of her dreaming mind. This was not a beautiful creature for all the world to see and gaze at, it was the figure - unique of its kind - for which the shrine of her spirit had stood empty and waiting till now. (p. 145)

In Dusty Answer, the codes of 'Christabel' are put into play: Geraldine's name is the name of Coleridge's vampire, and her hothouse skin, hidden eyes and masklike face all suggest the unnatural predator. Jennifer, like so many victims before her, becomes ill and neurasthenic. But for the excluded Judith, the allure of Geraldine's disturbing combination of the coarsely masculine and the magnificently feminine is never quite defused. As in Mrs Dalloway, the boundaries between
fascination and repulsion, jealousy and love, beauty and ugliness, shift and disappear:

In spite of all, she was beautiful: her person held an appalling fascination. She was beautiful, beautiful. You would never be able to forget her face, her form. You would see it and dream of it with desire: as if she could satisfy something, some hunger, if she would. But she was not for you. The secret of her magnetism, her rareness must be for ever beyond reach; but not beyond imagination. ... And now, in the end, you wanted to implore her to stay, to let herself be known, to let you love her. Yes, to let you love her. It was not true that you must hate your enemies. What was all this hatred and jealousy? Something so terrifyingly near to love, you dared not contemplate it. You could love her in a moment, passionately, for her voice, her eyes, her remarkably white hands, for loving Jennifer - anything. (pp.171-2)

In the three novels I have been discussing here, lesbian 'otherness' acts in different ways as the locus of repressed or clandestine fears and desires. But there's also another 'doubling' process at work. In each novel, the lesbian 'other' acts as the extreme term against which the 'healthy' yet sensuous friendship can be defined. Miss Kilman's consuming obsession with Elizabeth, externalised in the moment when she stuffs herself with a chocolate éclair, is juxtaposed with Clarissa's memories of her 'disinterested' (p.32) and yet passionate girlhood friendship with Sally Seton. In Dusty Answer, especially, the language used to describe the relationship between Judith and Jennifer is infinitely more erotic than Hall's representation of lesbian love in The Well of Loneliness. A space is created for the idyllically sensuous and yet 'healthy' relationship by playing it against both the 'real' lesbian relationship between Jennifer and Geraldine, and
also the studious 'vampire-bat' Mabel (p.117), whose sallow, greasy skin, lank hair, and flushed and hungry gleam all confirm the 'unhealthiness' of her advances to Judith. In *The Tortoiseshell Cat*, V.V. is finally exposed as nothing but a body: nothing lies behind her haunting physical charm. The ill-educated V.V. is contrasted with the subtle and intelligent Jane Bird, whose schoolgirl crush on Gillian develops into a 'normal' friendship.

In each novel, there are elements of the good mother/bad mother dichotomy; predatory lesbian possessiveness is contrasted with the more open-ended, maternal nurturing of the 'true' friendship. But the central terms of the distinction belong to an older tradition. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Sally has an abandonment 'commoner in foreigners than in Englishwomen' (p.31) and claims to have French blood in her veins: she introduces Clarissa, not only to the secrets of sexuality, but to Shelley, William Morris, and all night conversations 'about life, how they were to reform the world' (p.31). In *Dusty Answer*, Jennifer is identified with Italy: for Judith, she represents 'the quickening of imagination, the lyrical impulse' (p.173), and as the two become progressively more immersed in their heady shared saturation in 'beauty', Jennifer comes to embody 'all poetry' (p.173) to her friend. In *The Tortoiseshell Cat*, Jane's infatuation with Gillian reaches its peak during a French lesson: the narrative dwells on Gillian's pleasure at taking her pupil into the 'enchanted
country' of French literature (p.28), and on the way in which the exchange of 'gleaming syllables' (p.27) produces mounting excitement, flushed cheeks and tears. The codes at work here are familiar ones: the literary awakening, the foreign friend, the exchange of languages, the idealised self.

III. SCHOOLS OF DESIRE: NOVELS OF THE GYNAECEUM

During the interwar period, two parallel and contrasting movements took place in the novel. In school stories written for girls, there is a noticeable shift away from passionate friendships towards more 'comradely' relationships, modelled on the ethos of the boys' public school. Around the period of the First World War, there are some signs of tension in the extremely popular school stories of Angela Brazil; Brazil often emphasises that the 'tone' of her fictional schools is against 'sentimental' friendships, and in Loyal to the School (1921) the school is taken over by a new headmistress, whose dismissal of sentimental displays of affection as 'early Victorian' is attributed to the fact that, during the war, she had taken the place of a junior master in a boys' public school. Her idea that 'girls should exhibit their feelings as little as their brothers' is, however, fiercely opposed by the girls themselves:

"I never heard such nonsense in all my life."
"Mayn't take each other's arms indeed."
"What would happen if I kissed anybody?"
"Oh, you'd get reported!"
"Kissing's called 'unhealthy', if you please."
"Oh, indeed, is it? I thought 'Any time was kissing time!'"
"Don't tell Miss Ormerod so, that's all." 65

Brazil herself likewise acknowledges the idea of the 'unhealthy' relationship only to dismiss it; her schoolgirls continue to fall in love with teachers with Rossetti mouths and to conduct their 'red-hot' friendships with 'kindred souls' at 'white-hot' heat. At times, indeed, it is hard to believe that Brazil isn't teasing the reader; in Loyal to the School, schoolgirl Lesbia is adored by the boyish Regina, who gazes at her idol with such soulful eyes that the other girls christen her 'Lesbia's shadow' (p.156). In For the School Colours (1918), young Avelyn becomes infatuated with the middle-aged poet Lesbia Carrington, known to her as 'The Lavender Lady': 'It was not a mere mild liking, but a sudden, romantic, absolute falling in love ... For a whole week, Avelyn, terribly in love, lived in a mystic world in which the Lavender Lady, robed in the glory of the purple night and stars, was as the central sun, and she herself revolved like a planet round her orbit'. 66 Smith-Rosenberg has noted that the lesbian 'Lavender Lady' is a stock figure in male literature of the 1920s, 67 but on the evidence of Brazil's biographer, it has to be assumed that Brazil's novels are entirely unselfconscious: she seems to have had little sense of humour, and to have taken 'The Works' very seriously indeed. 68

Later school stories, however, show a decisive shift towards a more 'boyish' supportiveness, indicated
in Dorita Fairlie Bruce’s popular ‘Dimsie’ stories of
the 1920s. In *Dimsie Moves Up* (1921), the girls form an
‘Anti-Soppist’ society, the rules of which forbid its
members to give flowers to teachers or seniors, to sleep
with a senior’s hair ribbon under her pillow, or ‘to
kiss anyone at all during the term, unless absolutely
obliged to’. In the modern school story, friendships
between girls remain extremely important, but their
nature reflects the way in which the school story has
turned inward. The years at school are a period of
carnival, unrelated to the outside world; friendships
are no longer romantic love affairs, central to the
girls’ moral and intellectual formation, but static
mirrors which find their most perfect expression in the
pervasive figures of the ‘twins’. In novels addressed
to adult readers, however, matters took a very different
course.

In early December, 1919, Una Troubridge read
*Regiment of Women* aloud to Radclyffe Hall. On Boxing
Day, Hall began work on a long-delayed new novel, *The
Unlit Lamp* (1924), on which she worked in an intensive
burst of inspiration for five days. The idea for the
novel had been brewing in Hall’s mind for some time: on
seeing, in a hotel, an elderly maiden daughter fussing
over her demanding mother, she commented ‘Isn’t it
ghastly to see these unmarried daughters who are just
unpaid servants and the old people sucking the very life
out of them like octopi!’ and declared her intention of
writing a novel called *Octopi*. The theme of the stifling mother is central to many interwar novels: May Sinclair's *Mary Olivier* (1919) and *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922), F.M. Mayor's *The Third Miss Symons* (1913) and Winifred Holtby's *The Crowded Street* (1924) all address the plight of the unmarried daughter trapped in the claustrophobic embrace of the middle-class family. But I think there can be no doubt that the shape which Hall's novel finally took was triggered by her reading of *Regiment of Women*. The *Unlit Lamp* is in some ways a 'trial run' for *The Well of Loneliness*; the colt-like Joan, with her cropped hair and collars and ties, her gruff voice and lean and strong body, is like a half-formed version of Stephen Gordon. But in striking contrast to *The Well of Loneliness*, the teacher-pupil relationship which becomes the centre of Joan's life, her potential escape-route from the smothering mother, is entirely within the 'traditions' of fictional friendship.

Hall's novel shifts the good mother/bad mother dichotomy of *Regiment of Women*, redefining the terms of the 'healthy' and the 'unhealthy'. In *The Unlit Lamp*, it is Joan's delicate, dovelike, loving mother who is 'little short of a vampire' (p.169), and by whose possessiveness Joan is finally consumed and drained dry, the 'blood sucked' (p.132) out of her. Joan's 'morbid' involvement with her mother is consistently played against the alternative relationship offered by her tutor, Elizabeth: under the exhilarating stimulus of
Elizabeth's teaching, Joan becomes intellectually and physically stronger, suppler, more vital. Elizabeth is both teacher and second self:

the perfect companion ... who liked what you liked, enjoying all sorts of little things, finding fun at the identical moment when you were wanting to laugh; in fact who thought your own thoughts ... who could descend with grace to your level or unobtrusively drag you up to hers. (p.202)

Unable finally to break the mother bond, Joan gives up the chance to live with Elizabeth and go to Cambridge: she is, Hall emphasises, a woman born out of her time, who is reduced, finally, to a mindless 'burnt sacrifice' (p.118). The image is underlined in the narrative through the device of the bandaged arm: Elizabeth's finely-modelled hands are badly burnt when she attempts to save a woman who is on fire. As in other novels, the wound works to bring the two friends together and to signal the repression of powerful emotions; Hall's narrative dwells continually on the moments when Joan silently kisses or clasps Elizabeth's scarred and puckered hands. But in The Unlit Lamp the wound serves also to define a distinction between two kinds of love: the 'firm clasp of friendship' (p.302) is continually juxtaposed with the mother's painfully stifling embraces, and the burning of Elizabeth's hands anticipates the destruction of the 'healthy' relationship in favour of the 'unhealthy'.

The demure, dovelike and overpowering mother is central also to Winifred Holtby's The Crowded Street (1924), which is unusual among interwar novels in taking friendship beyond the girlhood 'stage'. Muriel
Hammond's first friendship follows the conventional model: as a shy and gauche schoolgirl, she falls in love with the dazzlingly confident, half-French Clare Duquesne. Like Clare Hartill in *Regiment of Women*, Clare Duquesne 'usurps' the place of the mother, but in a much more positive way: she is the first person in Muriel's life to challenge her mother's dominance, and cheerfully breaks the rigid rules of the Hammond household. In fact Holtby's Clare, with her 'French' sophistication, careless charm, and brilliant vitality, has her closest affinities with the daughter of a much earlier fictional 'Clare': Cynthia Kirkpatrick, Molly's step-sister in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*. Initially, indeed, *The Crowded Street* appears to be closely following the pattern of Gaskell's novel. The shared lover becomes besotted with the fascinating and capricious friend, and Molly/Muriel loses Roger/Godfrey to Cynthia/Clare; in both novels, an impulsive engagement follows, only to be broken when the friend declines to settle down into sober domesticity. But at this point, Holtby's narrative takes a different turn. Although Gaskell died before the final chapter of *Wives and Daughters* could be completed, it is clear that Roger has seen the error of his ways and will marry Molly. Holtby rewrites, so to speak, the missing chapter: Muriel turns Godfrey down.

In *Wives and Daughters*, Molly's friendship with Cynthia acts as a troubling but enabling stage in the movement towards adult femininity. Muriel's passion for
Clare is a 'trial run' in a different way; she moves on, not to marriage, but to another friendship, with the feminist Delia. The pivotal moment in Muriel's relationship with Clare comes when Muriel suppresses her characteristic timidity in her desire to follow her agile and fearless friend up a steep rock. The terrified Muriel loses her grip; Clare holds out a hand, and Muriel brieflly overcomes her fear of falling, not by repressing it, but by learning from Clare, for the first time, that it is possible to recognise it and laugh at it. After Clare's departure, Muriel is reabsorbed under the mother's wing: she is 'rescued' from the stultifying life of the unmarried daughter by Delia, who holds out a hand in a more enduring and decisive way by installing Muriel in her London flat as companion and helper. In this relationship, there is no suggestion of repressed desire; rather, the friendship acts as a validation of an active and fulfilling celibate life for women. Under Delia's influence, Muriel finally masters her fear of falling, and discovers that she has a mind and an identity of her own; her refusal of Godfrey signals her release, not only from the dominance of the mother, but from reproducing in her own life the restricted terms of her mother's existence.

It is a theme shared with another novel of this period which in other ways could not be more different: Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). For Lily Briscoe, Mrs Ramsay is both friend and 'mother'. 'Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs Ramsay
one? (pp.50-1) Lily asks herself, and the novel moves towards the assertion that if Lily is to survive as an artist the answer is no: she can love Mrs Ramsay without needing to become her. Throughout the novel, Mrs Ramsay is identified with a triangular shadow; this motif first appears in Lily’s painting, in which it represents also the seamless union of mother and child. After Mrs Ramsay’s death, Lily is temporarily released from the pressure of her love; she can paint as she likes and ‘never marry anybody’ (p.163). But as the memory of that love reshapes itself in Lily’s mind, so too does the figure of Mrs Ramsay revive to cast a triangular shadow over the steps where Lily paints. Only at the end of the novel is Lily finally released from the haunting power of Mrs Ramsay’s image and the rhapsody of womanly self-surrender which she embodies. ‘She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred’ (pp.191-2). Suddenly seeing it clear, Lily draws a line across the centre: a line which signals completion, self-definition and separation.

In another novel published in the same year as To the Lighthouse, however, the mother/friend has a suggestively different significance. In Elizabeth Bowen’s The Hotel, the androgynous young Sydney’s ardent adoration for the poised and exquisitely feminine Mrs Kerr is sympathetically explored, but is seen to be misplaced; the bosomless Mrs Kerr is ineluctably unmaternal, incapable of responding to the intensity of Sydney’s love. In a number of novels written in the
late 1920s and 1930s, the passionate friendship with a teacher or fellow-student supplants and compensates for the failure of the unresponsive mother. In Dorothy Bussy's *Olivia*\(^74\) (published anonymously in 1949 but completed by 1933) Olivia's mother is a woman who has 'the most singular faculty of keeping experience at bay' (p.13), who provides her children with a home 'rich in intellectual influences', but entirely lacking in 'the sensual element' (p.14). Olivia's passion for her schoolteacher, Mlle Julie, is both an aesthetic awakening and a liberation of the senses. Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer* likewise contrasts the cool and distant mother with the warm and sensuous friend. There is a shift going on here from the smothering mother to the mother who fails to feel, from the mother who stifles the life of the mind to the mother who represses the responses of the body. As in earlier novels, what is at issue is not simply the mother-daughter bond, but the displacement of one notion of femininity in favour of another.

The decade which followed the ending of the first world war was one of dramatic changes for women. In the symbolic year of 1928, when full suffrage was finally achieved, it must have seemed reasonable for Ray Strachey to say that 'the main fight is over, and the main victory is won. With education, enfranchisement, and legal equality all conceded, the future of women lies in their own hands'.\(^75\) For the more privileged middle-class woman at least, it must have seemed as if
'the strange bright fruits of art and knowledge' were falling at last from the trees. The phrase comes from Virginia Woolf's essay on George Eliot, in which Woolf comments that for Eliot, as for her heroines, the burden and the complexity of womanhood were not enough; she must reach beyond the sanctuary and pluck for herself the strange bright fruits of art and knowledge. Clasping them as few women have ever clasped them, she would not renounce her own inheritance - the difference of view, the difference of standard - nor accept an inappropriate reward. 76

The image appears again, suggestively, in one of Woolf's stories, 'A Woman's College from Outside' (1926):

She had been talking, while the others played, to Alice Avery, about Bamborough Castle; the colour of the sands at evening; upon which Alice said she would write and settle the day, in August, and stooping, kissed her, at least touched her head with her hand, and Angela, positively unable to sit still, like one possessed of a wind-lashed sea in her heart, roamed up and down the room (the witness of such a scene) throwing her arms out to relieve this excitement, this astonishment at the incredible stooping of the miraculous tree with the golden fruit at its summit - hadn't it dropped into her arms? She held it glowing to her breast, a thing not to be touched, thought of, or spoken about, but left to glow there ... after the dark churning of myriad ages here was light at the end of the tunnel; life; the world.77

In this heady fusion, access to two forbidden fruits - knowledge and the sensual life - is gained simultaneously through the touch of another woman. It is a moment characteristic of what I am calling the 'gynaeceum' friendship - the 'learning' relationship with a teacher or fellow-student - in the fictions of the interwar period. In a fascinating discussion of French gynaeceum fictions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Elaine Marks notes that the relationship often serves as an 'awakening': the younger
girl is sleeping beauty, the elder acts as good or bad fairy. 78 The particular form taken by this 'awakening' in English interwar fiction reflects the fact that women now had a new 'bright fruit': sexuality.

During the 1920s, female sexuality was discussed with unprecedented explicitness, but, as Jeffrey Weeks has shown, the impact of this public discussion was double-edged. 79 The importance and pleasures of conjugal sexuality for women were being discussed with a new openness; on the other hand, women were now expected to be sexual beings, within the norms of heterosexual marriage. As Winifred Holtby wryly commented in 1934, spinsterhood and frustration had become synonymous terms, fitting together 'like an egg and egg-cup'. 80 What we find in the fictions of the interwar period is that women writers deployed and extended the conventions of the 'learning' friendship to explore, on their own terms, the nature of the new 'bright fruit'.

From the late 1920s, the gynaeceum friendship, the intimacy particular to the time before sexual identity has been fully formed, becomes openly inflected with sexuality. The bandaged arm makes an occasional appearance; in Antonia White's novel of convent school life, *Frost in May* (1933), 81 Clare places her perfectly healthy arm in a sling to attract the attention of the beautiful Rosario. But more often, arms are, so to speak, unwrapped: in Dorothy Bussy's *Olivia*, Mlle Julie's hands are Olivia's 'possession' (p. 65), which she covers with kisses, spending her days 'in a kind of
maze, dreaming of those hands, those kisses' (p. 61); in
*Dusty Answer*, Jennifer nibbles Judith's arm with a
'strange and breath-taking' passion (p. 177). The physical
expression of sexuality goes no further than this, but
the language used is heavy with sensuality.

Like the college stories written for young women at
the turn of the century, interwar gynaeceum fictions are
versions of pastoral. Within the sealed, all-female
world, the 'flame' is nurtured by long conversations in
lush landscapes over balmy summer days, and by intimate
evenings in shadowy rooms lit by candles and the glow of
the fire. There are frequent references to secret and
enclosed gardens, and the friend is constantly
associated with richly coloured flowers and rounded,
glowing fruits, as in Judith's first sight of Jennifer
in *Dusty Answer*: 'Then the face came round suddenly, all
curves, the wide mouth laughing, warm-coloured ... It
made you think of warm fruit, - peaches and nectarines
mellowed in the sun' (p. 110). Many are 'pastoral' novels
in another sense, that of the old tradition that
pastoral is the appropriate form for a writer's first,
experimental excursion into the literary life. *Dusty
Answer*, *The Tortoiseshell Cat*, *The Hotel* and *Frost in
May* were all first novels by young women; although
*Olivia* was not finally published until Bussy was in her
eighties, it too was a first novel.

Marion Shaw has identified two dominant trends in
women's fiction between the wars, which, she suggests,
mirror a split in this period between 'old' feminism,
which prioritised the struggle for equal rights and opportunities, and 'new' feminism, which privileged women's special disabilities and needs. 82 Literary 'equal rights' feminists like Winifred Holtby followed the realist tradition of documentary verisimilitude and emphasised the common humanity of men and women; literary 'new feminists' such as Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf explored the possibility of a specifically 'female' language and consciousness in experimentalist narratives characterised by fluid associations and intense moments of heightened perception. As Shaw emphasises, the 'new feminist' mode should not be seen as the expression of an essential female self, but as the product of a period in which women were newly in a position to make self-conscious choices about what it might mean to 'write as a woman'. While most interwar gynaecaeum fictions may be placed within the 'new feminist' mode, I think they are best understood as, in many senses, apprentice novels. The narratives act for the writers, just as the friendship does for the heroine, as a 'trial run'; they provide a forum for exploring the possibilities of language and for testing out the tempting but troubling question of female sexuality.

In these novels, the object of fascination or desire is invariably one who has escaped, or appears to have escaped, the fixed boundaries of feminine identity. She may, like Nanda's beloved Léonie De Wesseldorf in *Frost in May*, be an 'androgynous' figure: the
unfeminine, unchildish Léonie seems to Nanda like "a young prince, pale and weary from a day's ride, with his
tieback love locks carelessly tied back in a frayed
ribbon" (p. 79); she evokes "the feeling of page for
prince, too cold and absolute to be called love" (p. 80).
Or she may, like Jennifer in Dusty Answer or Marigold in
Rosamond Lehmann's The Weather in the Streets (1936), be one whose desires are directed towards other woman,
but who is not clearly and finally identified as
lesbian. Marigold, like Jennifer, is a creature of
ambiguities and contradictions; with her fresh silvery
skin and greenish gold-shot dress, Marigold looks
"strange, nymph-like, imprisoned" (p. 107),
disconcertingly fusing the sensuous and the cold, the
transparent and the dissimulating. The mysteriously
self-contained friend in the shimmering sea-green dress
appears in many interwar novels: the colour of the
dress, simultaneously "natural" and protean, reflects
the friend's refusal to be constrained by precise
definitions, and the heroine's feelings for her are
similarly open-ended, intensely sensuous and yet not
precisely "sexual".

The fluid and diffuse eroticism in these
relationships corresponds closely with Colette's
description of love between women as "an unresolved and
undemanding sensuality", "less concentrated than the
orgasm, and more warming", which "finds happiness in an
exchange of glances, an arm laid on a shoulder, and is
thrilled by the odour of sun-warmed wheat caught in a
head of hair'. Locked in her love for Mlle Julie, Olivia shifts between violent longings and

a more passive, a more languorous state, when I seemed to myself dissolving, when I let myself go... when I felt as though I were floating luxuriously down a warm, gentle river, every muscle relaxed, every portion of me open to receive each softest caress of air and water, down, down, towards some unknown, delicious sea. My indefinite desire was like some pervading, unlocalized ache of my whole being. (Olivia, p.63)

Here and in other novels of this period, the understanding of the passionate friendship as a 'stage' in the movement towards sexual identity provides a safe space from within which the writer can experiment with a language of female sexuality which does not depend upon a polarisation of masculine and feminine, and in which feminine sexuality is not defined in response and submission to masculine 'otherness'. In these novels, access to sexual identity is the 'gift' of another woman; it is attained through the model, and the gaze, of a more knowing female 'other'.

There is a particularly intricate example in Dorothy Richardson's Dawn's Left Hand (1931), which draws on the conventions of the 'mirror ritual' and the 'foreign friend'. Miriam first meets the French Amabel in that other 'gynaeceum', the women's club, where her attention is held by a pale oval face above 'a gown glowing silky rose-red through the dusk in which the forms of the other women showed no colour'(p.175), whose eyes smile recognition with a strange grace and charm. Thereafter, there is a continuing interplay between Miriam/Amabel; their identities remain distinct, but
Miriam is moved towards an acceptance of her sexuality both through her own sensuous response to Amabel, and through her awareness of Amabel's response to her. At their second meeting, the radiantly affectionate Amabel offers herself, 'as something to be judged, like a work of art' (p. 187). She kneels at Miriam's feet and turns up her face, 'patiently awaiting the fruit of a wondering stare' (p. 187):

'It's like a peach. Say it, say it.'
'It is,' said Miriam, admiring the girl's open appreciation of her own beauty, at this moment newly created for her in eyes into which she gazed as into a mirror. (p. 188)

Reading in Amabel's eyes 'the reflection of her own motionless yielding' (p. 190), under the 'strange spell' of Amabel's 'French intelligence' (p. 189), Miriam sees herself reflected through Amabel's perceptions, not of what she is, but of what she might be: 'she was unable to deny, in the raw material of her disposition, an unconscious quality of the kind that was being so rapturously ascribed to her' (p. 191). Later, Amabel's love insinuates itself into Miriam's perception of her physical self: arriving home at night, she turns to 'exchange over her shoulder a smile of congratulation with her reflected image':

The glass was not clear. Across her face, that should have shown in the reflected candle-light, was some kind of cloudy blur. Holding up the candle she found lettering, large and twirly, thickly outlined as if made with chalk or moist putty, moving with a downward slope across the centre of the strip of glass ... I love you, it said. (p. 196)

Amabel's love-message, written with Miriam's soap, is followed by a letter. Reading it, Miriam finds that
Amabel's strange handwriting - a balance of angles and curves, with odd gaps between the individual letters - remakes and transforms the contents of the letter, beautifying what it chooses to beautify. These different threads are pulled together when Miriam has her first sexual experience, with Hypo Wilson. Dining with Hypo, Miriam feels 'with the strength of two. Amabel was with her, young Amabel, with her mature experience of men' (p. 223). The narrative shifts to reveal Hypo and Miriam in bed together, and Miriam's sense of dissatisfaction: 'There ought to be homage. There was a woman, not this thinking self who talked with men in their own language, but one whose words could be spoken only from the heart's knowledge, waiting to be born in her' (p. 230). Hypo, blinded by his 'constricted, biological way of seeing sex' (p. 231) is 'incapable of homage ... But without a touch of it she could not come fully to birth for him' (p. 230). Through the homage of Amabel's imagined gaze, Miriam is 'birthed', and given a separate language of female sexuality which comes from 'the heart's knowledge' rather than the 'thinking self':

With the eyes of Amabel, and with her own eyes opened by Amabel, she saw the long honey-coloured ropes of hair framing the face that Amabel found beautiful in its 'Flemish Madonna' type, falling across her shoulders and along her body where the last foot of their length, red-gold, gleamed marvellously against the rose-tinted velvety gleaming of her flesh. Saw the lines and curves of her limbs, their balance and harmony. Impersonally beautiful and inspiring. To him each detail was 'pretty,' and the whole an object of desire.' (p. 231)
In **Olivia**, the female gaze is more specifically homoerotic. The schoolgirl Olivia, passionately in love with her teacher, returns to her room in a daze of jealousy and desire after watching Mlle Julie plant a kiss on the naked shoulder of another student at a school dance. She waits for Mlle Julie's promised visit, comforting herself with her teacher's assurance that, if not beautiful, Olivia has her points:

What had she said? Pretty hands, pretty feet, a pretty figure. Yes, but in French, what strange expression does one use? "Un joli corps." A pretty body. Mine, a pretty body. I had never thought of my body till that minute. A body! I had a body - and it was pretty. What was it like? I must look at it. There was still time. She wouldn't be coming yet. I lighted the candle, sprang out of bed and slipped off my chemise ... I climbed on to a chair ... I looked at the figure in the glass, queerly lighted, without head or legs, strangely attractive, strangely repulsive. And then I slowly passed my hands down this queer creature's body from neck to waist! - Ah! - That was more than I could bear - that excruciating thrill I had never felt before. (p.69)

Behind **Olivia** and other interwar fictions of the 'gynaeceum', lies the influence of a 'foreign friend': Colette. In Colette's own first novel, **Claudine at School** (1900), Claudine's crush on her teacher, the lesbian relationship between that teacher and the headmistress, and the passion of a younger girl for Claudine herself, are exuberantly and sensuously explored. There are frequent echoes of the 'Claudine' stories in interwar gynaeceum fictions; but equally, what we find is that the terms of Colette's story are 'anglicized' and brought in line with the conventions of the English 'learning' friendship. As Nicole Ward Jouve comments, Claudine is the active agent in her
relationships: she sets out (unsuccessfully) to seduce the soft and gullible Mademoiselle Aimée, and enters on a sustained war of tactics with her rival, the headmistress. In the English novel, the interplay between 'teacher' and 'pupil' works very differently: the naive and ardent English heroine is the willing acolyte, the more sophisticated friend is the idealised other who holds the key to the mystery of feminine identity. French, in earlier English novels the language of forbidden knowledge, now becomes the language which opens up new worlds, the language of sexuality. It is when Olivia listens to Mlle Julie read Racine aloud that she first feels the 'kindling spark' which lights the 'flame' (p. 26) of her passion for her teacher:

I went to bed that night in a kind of daze, slept as if I had been drugged and in the morning awoke to a new world - a world of excitement - a world in which everything was fierce and piercing, everything charged with strange emotions, clothed with extraordinary mysteries, and in which I myself seemed to exist only as an inner core of palpitating fire.

The walk that morning, the beauty of the forest, the sky, the deliciousness of the air, the delight of running - for the first time I enjoyed these things consciously.

... Every page of the Latin grammar seemed to hold some passionate secret which must be mine or I should die. Words! How astonishing they were! (pp. 28-29)

It is, simultaneously, a sexual and a literary awakening. To adopt Havelock Ellis's term, quoted earlier, these are 'hyperaesthetic' relationships, in which access to sexuality is inextricably fused with access to art. In Frost in May, Nanda's first communion gift from the half-French Léonie is a copy of the poems
of Francis Thompson, the reading of which 'excited her oddly, like words in a foreign language sung to a beautiful air' (p.103). Intoxicated by the rush of words, Nanda feels

she did understand, not with her eyes or her brain, but with some faculty she did not even know she possessed. Something was happening to her, something that had not happened when she made her First Communion ... This new feeling, whatever it was, had nothing to do with God'. (pp.103-4)

Once the awakening is completed, however, the relationship has nowhere to go. To some degree, this problem is circumvented by the circular structure of the narrative, which is often framed retrospectively as an investigation of the past; the relationship may be physically ended, but it continues to live on in the memory of the heroine, and to inform the structure of her life. This is often symbolised through a ritual exchange: in *Dusty Answer*, Jennifer gives Judith the copper bowl which, she says, is 'all of me' (p.179); in *Olivia*, Mlle Julie leaves Olivia the ivory paper-cutter which she invariably held in her hand when she read to her students. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa remembers Sally's gift as 'the most exquisite moment of her whole life': 'Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! ... And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it - a diamond, something infinitely precious' (p.33).

Even during the course of the 'awakening', however, there often signs of stress, especially in those novels
set in the enclosed space of the all-female institution. Candles cast strange shadows, and there are hints of a troubling and hidden knowledge which is never quite revealed; Rosamond Lehmann, like Clemence Dane, draws on the imagery of Childe Roland and the Dark Tower to describe Judith's sense of oppression within the women's college. As in earlier novels, friendship is founded on 'shared tastes', but the nursery teas of *Jane Eyre* and the cocoa parties of the early college stories are replaced by more sensuous fare: in interwar gynæceum fictions, the feasts shared by the friends consist of hot chocolate and rich cakes, patisserie oozing with billowy cream. Whereas, in *Jane Eyre*, the food was tempting but insufficient, in these novels it is ultimately seen to be unsustaining because it is too rich, too soft.

The friendship itself often ends in a sudden rupture: Nanda, in *Frost in May* is expelled from her convent for writing a naively 'decadent' novel; Olivia ends with the mysterious death of Mlle Cara, Mlle Julie's partner and former lover, and the closure of the school. The rupture reiterates the notion of friendship as a passing 'phase', and the boundaries of the gynæceum novel are restricted also in another sense. We are dealing here not just with a separate female space, but with an inner circle within that space. The heroine is 'chosen' from the undistinguished and insensitive mass of girlhood around her, and drawn by her more sophisticated friend into a tiny and select
élite. It is an intensely private and rarefied world: unlike the earlier college stories, in which the college and the friendships formed within it acted as a point of departure for entry into the public sphere, these fictions draw on an understanding of the romantic girlhood friendship as an anomalous phase, formative and yet at odds with the 'real' world.

Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936) presents an interestingly different version of the gynaeceum friendship. The novel draws on many familiar motifs: the foreign friend, the magical awakening, the sharing of food. But it also challenges the boundaries of the gynaeceum, by focussing on a relationship between two grown-up women who apparently have every reason not to be friends, and by insisting, throughout, on the interconnection between the public and the private worlds. *Summer Will Show* is set in 1848, the 'year of revolutions'. The private revolution of Sophia Willoughby, a wealthy English aristocrat, begins when, left alone after her two children die of smallpox, she sets off to Paris in search of her feckless husband and traces him to the flat of Minna, his mistress. Minna is telling, to a rapt audience, the story of her Lithuanian Jewish childhood; this strange and haunting narrative, with its rich evocation of landscape and ritual, pleasure and suffering, creates, as Wendy Mulford has said, 'a world of unattached possibility'.

*Summer Will Show* is about the transforming power of friendship, and the transformation which Minna's story
initiates in Sophia is not just, as in other interwar novels, a liberation of feeling: it is also a political awakening. Minna the story-teller takes us back to the world of Corinne and the early Victorian 'improvisatrices'; her art is a public art, and Minna's particular 'gift' is to arouse revolutionary fervour in her listeners through the telling of fairy-tales. After the audience has left, Sophia stays on, and Minna offers her hot wine: 'The warm spiced scent, slightly resinous, as though the Jewess had mixed all the summer forests of her childhood in the cup, was like a caress' (p. 139). Sophia drifts to sleep on Minna's sofa, barely conscious of a voice saying 'Sleep, you must sleep, my beauty, my falcon' (p. 150) and of the hands which untie her bonnet-strings, remove her shoes, and cover her with 'something warm and furry, stroking her, slowly, heavily, like the hands of sleep, stroking her hair and her brow' (p. 151). When Sophia awakes, her transformation begins: she spends a day pouring out to Minna, compulsively and feverishly, every detail of her past life:

Sitting on the pink sofa, her hair still falling about her shoulders, her feet still muffled in [Minna's] blue slippers, her eyes blackened with excitement, her lips dry with fever, she continued her interminable, her dying speech. At intervals, in some strange non-apparent way, there was food before her, and more wine in the glass, the fire built up or a lighted lamp carried into the room. (pp. 156-7)

Throughout the novel, the relationship between the two women, and the transformation which it effects in Sophia, is defined through the sharing of food, and it
is at once a plainer and more transcendent fare than the
cream cakes and chocolate of other gynaeceum novels.
What Minna and Sophia share, literally and
metaphorically, is bread and wine: 'their words, light
and taunting, rose up like bubbles delicately exploding
from a wine they were to drink together. People whom
they encountered turned round to stare after them. It
was not common, in those lean days, to see two faces so
carelessly joyful' (p. 214). Through this holy/unholy
communion, Sophia is extricated both from her husband,
who virtually disappears from the narrative, and from
the values of her class. Warner's narrative continually
relates the private revolution happening within Sophia
to the public revolution beginning outside her, and in
which, through Minna, Sophia becomes actively involved.
The shift in her political beliefs mirrors a shift in
her perception of Minna's features, which at first
appear 'uglier than one could have believed' (p. 123) but
later seem 'exaltedly beautiful as the face of an
angel' (p. 219); Sophia's recognition that Minna herself
is 'genuinely good, good as bread' (p. 240) parallels her
increasing involvement in a movement whose slogan,
reiterated throughout the novel, is 'Bread not Lead'.

Minna finally dies behind the barricades, but
Sophia carries on, and the ending of the novel shows her
reading, absorbed in an illicit copy of the 1848
Communist Manifesto. This scene, in which Warner's
narrative draws back from Sophia herself to place her
within her political moment, reflects Warner's own
commitments at the time when she wrote *Summer Will Show*. She had joined the Communist Party while working on the novel, and was intensely engaged in political activity throughout the 1930s. What the novel doesn't fully articulate is the other major change in Warner's life. In 1930, she had begun her life-long relationship with the poet Valentine Ackland, to whom *Summer Will Show* is dedicated, and the two women were living together. As Mulford notes, the effervescent and richly-textured relationship between Sophia and Minna is clearly informed by Sylvia's love for Valentine, but it is not represented as a lesbian relationship; Warner touches only lightly and ambiguously on the possibility of physical desire between women. It was not until the 1960s that it became possible in the novel to challenge overtly the line between 'normal' and 'abnormal' desire, and I want to look briefly at two novels published in that decade which are particularly interesting since both return, in different ways, to the 'scene' of the interwar gynaeceum friendship.

Sybille Bedford's *A Compass Error* (1968), set in the 1930s, is effectively a rewriting of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel* (1927); both novels have a precociously intellectual heroine poised on the edge of womanhood, who falls in love with an inaccessible older woman while summering on the Mediterranean. But in Bedford's novel, there is not one object of desire, but two. As Peter Vansittart has perceptively commented, both Therese and Andrée are Flavia's 'fairy godmothers';
each plays her part in Flavia's 'education' and sexual awakening. But I think Vansittart is quite wrong to see the two relationships as equivalent manifestations of 'false magic'. The whole point of the novel is that the two women are contrasted: we are offered a new version of the 'good mother' and the 'bad mother'.

Therese is offered to the reader as a woman who is physically and emotionally whole: nurturing and yet sensuous, physically powerful and yet tender, transparent and subtle, comfortably bisexual; Andrée, by contrast, is cool, enigmatic, asexual, austere. The conversation at Therese's table flows over literature and life, painting and politics; Andrée spurns poetry and ideas. The novel is full of precise and rich evocations of food and wine; the fare offered by Therese is 'simple, right, with an exquisite refinement in the simplicity, food such as can only be achieved by love, skilled care and a true taste'(p.40); Andrée barely touches food or wine, and mocks Flavia's epicurean aspirations. Many of the contrasts at work are familiar; where A Compass Error differs from earlier novels is in its representation of sexuality.

As effortlessly as she ministers to her family, Therese takes Flavia into her bed, 'in a manner compounded of protectiveness, sensuality and a great ease'(p.47). For Flavia, the fluid movement from 'the half-imagined'(p.47) to 'the always-known'(p.48) is 'a lightening, a light slight puff of happiness ... She told herself ... how cosy, how reassuring, how
nice’ (p. 48). ‘The sensual life’, she thinks, ‘is in the bag’ (p. 48). Flavia’s ‘compass error’ is to turn from the good fairy to the bad one; Andrée’s disconcerting fascination lies in the fact that she is neither cosy, reassuring, nor nice, and she plays with Flavia, alternately encouraging and deflecting her desires. As bad fairies are inclined to do, Andrée also places a curse upon Flavia’s cherished ambitions for the future: ‘You haven’t got what it takes ... You will never get a degree, Flavia, you will never be a fellow of your college. Never, do you hear me? Never’ (p. 182). And, as we know from the novel’s prologue, Flavia never does.

A Compass Error sexualises the gynaeceum friendship, but remains within its terms. Rosemary Manning’s The Chinese Garden (1962) offers a different kind of ‘revisiting’ of the interwar years. Set in 1928, the year of the publication of The Well of Loneliness, Manning’s novel returns to the schoolgirl love-affair and the inner space within the enclosed environs of the girls’ boarding-school. But whereas interwar gynaeceum fictions represent girlhood sexuality as free-floating, attachable temporarily to a female object, Manning specifically addresses the way in which lesbian sexuality is formed, and deformed, by the boundaries of the gynaeceum. Rachel, the central character, is trapped in a painful ‘crush’ upon one of her teachers, but in this novel the true object of desire is not a woman, but a place: the Chinese Garden
which offers an alternative vision of the meaning of love.

The school in which the novel is set is 'an amalgam of Sparta, Rugby and Cheltenham Ladies' College' (p. 63), run by a 'Roman' triumvirate whose 'Caesar' is the vigorously masculine headmistress; its militaristic regime of cold water, outdoor drill and 'bad food' is designed to turn girls into 'English gentlemen' (p. 63). But Manning's target is not simply or primarily the 'masculinisation' of women; Bampfield represents, rather, the restrictions placed by the social upon the ways in which desire can be imagined. As Alison Hennegan has said, running through The Chinese Garden is the theme of 'unknown knowledge', and Rachel's movement towards knowledge is less an 'awakening' than a rupture; at the end of the novel, her close friend Margaret is expelled after being found naked in bed with another girl. Rachel herself is precipitated simultaneously and abruptly into an awareness of lesbian love and sexuality and into a recognition of the tainted foundation of the institution which she loves, in which the staff themselves are locked in complex sexual and emotional relationships, but where the expression of passion between the girls is sought out and lopped off like a 'diseased limb' (p. 172).

Alternative 'knowledge' is represented by the Chinese Garden, a hidden and out-of-bounds place within Bampfield, in which Rachel enters 'a strange, secret world, a clear blue sky above, willows, a lake, a
coloured pagoda, and a tiny bridge - the world of a willow-pattern plate' (p. 91). Rachel discovers the garden through Margaret's agency, but the meaning which the garden holds for the two girls is not the same: the stream which runs through the garden is crossed by two bridges and falls into two pools. In Manning's intricate and self-referential narrative, there are frequent allusions to what might be called the lesbian cultural tradition: to 'Christabel', Clemence Dane, the 1931 German film 'Mädchen in Uniform' (set in a girls' boarding-school), and, of course, The Well of Loneliness itself, which Margaret reads illicitly in the garden, but which Rachel refuses to read. For Margaret, the garden is the place where she meets and makes love to Rena, a love which, Manning's narrative suggests, is real in itself but inevitably contaminated by the boundaries within which it is produced; Margaret sees a snake in the garden, and in her feelings for Rena love and hatred are inextricably fused. For the more innocent and unformed Rachel, on the other hand, the garden offers an image of possibilities which are only partly understood: 'the symbols of a precise pattern, a perfection greater than itself. Its complex image held within it a world of images, unfolding to the heart unending sequences of dream' (p. 92).

The divergences between the two streams take shape as a difference of language: Margaret challenges Rachel's allegiance to the 'Roman' regime, her passion for Latin poetry, her addiction to order, routine,
discipline and hardship, advocating instead 'the Greek attitude to physical beauty' (p. 97). But neither language is seen as adequate. The Chinese Garden, decaying and overgrown as it inevitably is, existing as it does within the bounds of Bampfield, offers in its fragile perfection a mysterious other language of 'delight':

It imaged for her an inner order behind chaotic and unlovely everyday existence. It reflected the logic of that other world, and it held within its narrow rim a draught of pure poetry. It was a thing created for delight, no matter how artificial a conception, or how decayed by time. (p. 135)

The possibilities offered by the garden are never fully articulated. The poems which Rachel reads there - Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel' - are both unfinished poems, and the metaphor of the 'hidden stream' which runs through the novel is taken from 'Kubla Khan'. Manning's narrative suggests that the secrets of the garden cannot be realised within Bampfield, and, after the discovery of Margaret and Rena's love-affair, the garden itself is destroyed. But at the very end of the novel, the adult Rachel finds herself, by chance, in the environs of Bampfield. Her decision not to enter is her final symbolic rejection of the institution and its 'iron bands' (p. 62); the garden, however, rises phoenix-like in her mind, perfect in its rare simplicity, its possibilities not eroded but ready to be explored. The Chinese Garden is a novel well in advance of its time in seeing sexuality as a process constructed and constrained within the boundaries of the social, rather than as an essence to be discovered; and,
perhaps even more so, in its final affirmation that the limits of those boundaries can, nevertheless, be continually re-imagined.

Throughout the postwar years, the gynaeceum friendship continued to appear in the novels of women writers: Elizabeth Taylor's *A Wreath of Roses* (1949), Barbara Pym's *Jane and Prudence* (1953), Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), Elizabeth Bowen's *The Little Girls* (1964) and Olivia Manning's *The Play Room* (1969) all draw upon schoolgirl, college or teacher-pupil relationships. Margaret Drabble's *Jerusalem the Golden* (1967) offers a consciously stylised version of friendship as 'mediation', in which, as in earlier novels, friendship acts both as an escape-route from the mother and as a 'rehearsal'; Clara moves on from the enigmatic and fascinating Clelia to a love-affair with Clelia's brother. But whereas Gabriel is transparent and touchable, Clelia remains mysterious and elusive, and in this *Jerusalem the Golden* is characteristic of the novels of the 1950s and 1960s. The terms have shifted: the heady intimacies of the interwar years are replaced by opaque relationships in which the women seem to be speaking to one another across an unbridgeable gulf. The characteristic tone is wry, ironic, distanced, often self-mocking, even in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), which cunningly finds a place for friendship by using the conversations of two women as a frame for the narrative. But the friendship of Anna and Molly remains adjacent to
the central substance of the novel, Anna's notebooks, and the narrative concludes with the two women going their separate ways. The disjunction here points to the troubling nature of 'sisterhood' during the interval between two periods of intensive feminist activity when these novels were written. Alongside the increasingly explicit representation of sexuality, there is another shift taking place: friendships which are not sexual come to be seen as curiously empty and directionless. Women are held together by the 'riddle' of femininity, but unable to speak openly about that riddle. Confidences are half spoken, secrets hinted at but not fully revealed; the girlhood friendship is often perceived across a gap of time, as a bond which is not broken but which is neither fully explicable nor fully recoverable.

In Janice Elliott's **Secret Places** (1981), however, the old codes reappear, alive and well: the hothouse school, the passionate 'learning' relationship with the 'foreign friend', the bandaged arm and the dark tower are all revived in a narrative which revisits the England of the Second World War. But Elliott's deployment of these devices departs in some suggestive ways from earlier fictions. English schoolgirl Patience and German schoolgirl Laura go to bed together, easily and naturally, and the interplay between 'foreign' and English has connotations beyond the familiar movement towards an aesthetic and sexual awakening. Like many earlier gynaeceum fictions, **Secret Places** is framed as a
reinvestigation of the past, but whereas in the interwar novel the past is reopened as a means of understanding the 'truth' of the present self, in Elliott's novel it is the past itself which is open to scrutiny. Like *The Chinese Garden*, Elliott's narrative shifts between first and third person, past and present perceptions. Questioning nostalgia, Elliott probes beneath the complacent surface of provincial wartime England to reveal the ways in which international divisions are reproduced within the walls of the gynaeceum. While *Secret Places* is not an explicitly feminist novel, it shows the influence of contemporary feminist concerns. Like the novels I shall be discussing in my final chapter, it is informed by the desire to rediscover the bonds between women as part of a process of re-examining, and re-imagining, the past.
1. MAKING HISTORY: THE CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

In this chapter, I shall be looking at feminist and 'post-feminist' fictions published since the mid 1970s. I shall be tracing the ways in which themes and motifs identified in earlier chapters take on a new significance in the light of the concerns of the contemporary women's movement, but I need to emphasise first that these concerns are related to the particular history of that movement. Appearing as it did after the long period of feminist inactivity which followed the Second World War, it was a movement which appeared at first not to have a history, and the representation of friendship in the contemporary novel is integrally related to the urgent desire, within the present women's movement, to recover the lost heritage of the bonds between women.

To return to a metaphor used in my previous chapter, it could be said that if ever there was a period when women stopped 'fumbling' and accepted that emotional satisfaction lay in marriage and children rather than in their relationships with their female friends, it was in the two decades which followed the Second World War. From the end of the 1930s, a new note enters the discussion of female friendship, indicative of what is perhaps the most devastating of the many
shifts discussed in this thesis. In *You and Yourself: Advice for Growing-up Girls* (1939), Merle Eyles tells her readers: 'Go into this business of making friends in the same way as you go into a job. You have your goods, show them attractively; give as much as you get; be generous with your friends, by that I mean, introduce acquaintances to each other, and you in turn will benefit'. ¹ The purpose of the 'business' is made perfectly clear; friends are useful because they know boys, but friendship itself is a transient and rather tedious stage in the 'real' quest for a lover. Exclusive friendship, or any idea of shared self-development, is simply silly: 'be faithful to them in a casual sort of way ... Quite naturally, when you get tied up with a boy, he will come first, and the same goes for them'. ²

Friendship - even the *girlhood* friendship, for so long an object of fascination and endless contention - has come to seem dull. It is noticeably absent as an issue from Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham's fascinating oral history, *Dutiful Daughters: Women Talk about Their Lives* ((1977), in which the women interviewees, of diverse ages and backgrounds, talk about their husbands and children, about sex, housing, work, politics, education, the war - about almost anything, in fact, except friendships with women. Even in the early polemical texts of the contemporary women's movement, the silence is apparent: Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* (1970) touches on the passionate girlhood
friendship, but not on relationships between adult women.

In the past decade, however, the picture has changed radically. The bonds between women have become central to the feminist agenda, explored by feminist critics and historians, by psychotherapists Susie Orbach and Luise Eichenbaum in their recent study *Bittersweet* (1987), and by feminist philosopher Janice Raymond in *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (1986). There has been a similarly dramatic change in the novels of women writers; as Paulina Palmer demonstrates, the past ten years have seen a flood of novels by feminist writers in which friendship, sisterhood and the female community are central issues. As Palmer emphasises, it is a richly diverse field, which includes lesbian feminist thrillers and carnivalesque lesbian comic novels, as well as novels which address, more starkly, the questions of collectivity, bisexuality, and the divisions of race and class.

Even more recently, female friendship has become a fashionable, almost mandatory, subject in the 'mainstream' novel: interesting examples by established novelists include Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* (1987), in which the enduring college-friendship between three women acts as a stable framework from within which to examine social change during the postwar years; Anita Brookner's *A Friend from England* (1987), in which the interplay between 'English' and 'foreign' friend is used
within the narrative to shift the reader's perception of the protagonist, and Emma Tennant's *The House of Hospitalities* (1987), which looks back to Antonia White's *Frost in May* in its representation of the aristocratic and androgynous Amy, who initiates her naive schoolfriend Jenny into the mysteries of sex, class and the adult world.

It is an encouragingly rich picture, and it would clearly be impossible for me to do justice, in a single chapter, to its full diversity. For a more comprehensive overview, the reader is referred to Palmer's forthcoming work, which offers a stimulating analysis of the representations of sisterhood and lesbian sexuality in the fictions of contemporary women writers. I have needed to be selective, and I shall be focusing specifically on the ways in which contemporary women writers have extended the 'tradition' identified in my earlier chapters. It will be clear, even from the brief summaries given above, that that tradition has not disappeared; the gynaeceum friendship, the artistic awakening, the foreign friend, are all very much present in the contemporary novel, now deployed in new ways within a changing context. There is a particularly interesting example in Penelope Farmer's *Standing in the Shadow* (1984).

*Standing in the Shadow* describes the passionate lesbian affair which develops between two middle-class housewives; as in earlier novels, the relationship is defined through the sharing of food, and Farmer's novel
stands in interesting contrast to Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac*, also published in 1984, which uses the same device. In *Hotel du Lac*, the food eaten by women indicates the claustrophobic insubstantiality of all-female company; the women in Brookner's 'house of lack' stuff themselves, in autonomous open greed or illicit privacy, with patisserie. 'Real' food is shared with and consumed by men, who devour with healthy appetites the fry-ups offered by women. Farmer's novel, by contrast, asks: what do women do together? and answers, exuberantly, they eat. The love-affair of Ellie and Clara develops initially over exquisitely-prepared little lunches, but the meals are rapidly abandoned as the two women move on to more erotic 'food'; wine spills and lunch is skipped as, with echoes of Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market', they gobble one another up in the heat of their passion. As in earlier novels, the relationship moves towards an artistic awakening: both women are artists, and although the affair itself ends, it pushes Ellie towards resuming her abandoned career as an illustrator and printmaker. There is also, however, another strand in this novel which we have not seen in earlier fictions. The relationship between Ellie and Clara is continually played against Ellie's memories of her dead mother; as the affair with Clara moves towards an end, so also, by contrast, does Ellie move towards an understanding and acceptance of her bond with her mother. This movement between past and present as part of a process of
rediscovering the ties between women is central to the contemporary feminist novel, and it is on this theme, particularly, that I shall be focussing in this chapter.

Paulina Palmer identifies two dominant strands in contemporary feminist representations of friendship: 'political' fictions, which emphasise the identification between women, and 'psychoanalytic' fictions which are more inclined to problematise 'sisterhood' and feminine identity. The two texts which I shall be considering in my next section, Fay Weldon's Female Friends (1975) and Michèle Roberts's The Visitation (1983) may be seen as representative of these two strands, but they are also indicative of a shift in the concerns of the contemporary women's movement. In the 1970s, what seemed most urgent was the establishment of a movement founded on what women share; Weldon's novel traces the lives of three women to assert the existence of a group female identity which is, fundamentally, a biological identity. In the 1980s, feminists have increasingly questioned the validity of affirming a separate female nature, emphasising that such an affirmation both effaces the real differences of race and class which exist among women, and carries the risk of reproducing the terms of female 'nature' as it is defined within a patriarchal society.

Rosalind Coward has commented caustically on the way in which, in the nineteen-seventies feminist bildungsroman, the lesbian relationship acts as a
facilitating 'stage' in the movement towards female autonomy:

In these novels where women's experience is highlighted, it has become a standing joke that we are to expect the first period, first kiss, first (fumbled) intercourse, first (disastrous) marriage, lesbian affair and usually lonely resolution. The end product is normally that the protagonist feels she has 'become her own person'.

In these novels, Coward comments, 'knowledge or understanding has been focussed exclusively on sexual experience' which 'becomes the way in which a woman finds out about herself', thus effectively reproducing an ideological understanding of 'woman' as the product of her sexual history. The lesbian affair provides a safe, separate female base from which a woman can come to terms with her 'true' sexuality.

Recently, however, there has been a shift in feminist understandings of the relationship between 'friendship' and 'knowledge', well illustrated in Janice Raymond's theoretical study, A Passion for Friends. Raymond argues, from a lesbian-feminist perspective, that friendship is the search for 'another self' which should not be based simply on sentiment or desire but 'rooted in knowledge' (p. 228). Attacking what she calls feminist 'victimism', in which female identity 'seems to be grounded in women's shared state of having been victimized by men' (p. 181), Raymond argues for a more visionary concept of female friendship as having revelatory power and as a realization of transcendence which creates for women ever-new possibilities of this-worldly existence. The "Other-worldly" power of female friendship revitalizes the power of women together in the real material world of female life and living. (p. 213)
The work of friendship, Raymond suggests, should be to move towards an alternative view of women, founded on a trusted knowledge that would come from an experienced and trusted advisor, a true mentor (p.186). What is striking about Raymond's book is that although the language she uses is the language of the late twentieth century, much influenced by the work of Mary Daly, the concept of friendship which she advocates is extremely close to that of the Victorian conduct manuals, now presented in a very different political context. Friendship is to act as a dynamic process, lifting women out of the confines of 'feminine' weakness rather than confirming it, leading to a new 'knowledge' of what it is possible for women to be. It is an understanding central both to The Visitation and to the novels considered in my final section, which examines a number of recent novels by English and American women writers in which the search for the 'lost' friend is interlinked with the quest for a revised feminine identity.

My decision to include American texts at this point warrants some explanation. So far, I have focussed upon English writers because I believe we have to take account of national specificity in analysing the representation of friendship in women's writing, not only because of the particular interplay between 'English' and 'foreign' which informs so many of the fictions discussed, but also because the evidence so far uncovered by historians suggests a difference between English and American real-life experience. In her
Carroll Smith-Rosenberg describes the rich separate female network which existed in the United States in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which the passionate friendships of women were the primary relationships in their lives. It is a picture very different from the more problematic experiences of English women described in my first chapter, and while it is likely that in the twentieth century there has been a closer correspondence between the two countries, there were specific reasons for confining my discussion of the 'gynaeceum' to English writers.

The school story is a particularly English genre; while it has long been a staple ingredient in the reading of English girls, it has never been a popular form in the United States, where even the 'Katy' stories by the nineteenth-century American writer Susan Coolidge are little known, although they have been read by successive generations of English girls. It seems that the needs met by the school story, and the particular fantasies which it offers, don't match the specificity of the American female experience. It is worth noting also that The Well of Loneliness was not suppressed in the United States; during the years when the gynaeceum novel offered the only space from within which English writers could explore erotic relations between women, American women had a more flexible, and somewhat more liberal, climate within which to write.
The last two decades have seen a much greater correspondence between the English and the American scenes. While there are important differences, the women's movements in both countries have developed in tandem, and with a number of affinities, two of which are particularly relevant here. Firstly, in both countries, the rise of feminism has been paralleled by, and found expression in, a huge resurgence of interest in women's writing. The late twentieth-century feminist consciousness has been informed by a pressing concern to recuperate the lost female fictional tradition, exemplified by the intensive republication of 'forgotten' novels by women writers, by informal women's reading groups and more formal evening classes.

Secondly, in both countries, the feminism of this period has had close links with the academy. Women's writing is studied increasingly as a component in Women's Studies and English Literature degree courses, and in extramural classes. There has also been a phenomenal expansion in feminist criticism, and while its concerns have been diverse, it has been characterised by a continuing concern for the rediscovery and reassessment of women writers and the female literary tradition.

Two points of divergence also need to be identified here. Firstly, Creative Writing has a much more securely-established place in the United States as an academically 'respectable' subject than it has in this country. Secondly, simply because of its larger population, but also perhaps because Women's Studies
courses are more firmly established there, the United States offers the woman writer a larger audience with an informed interest in the history of women's writing. The significance of both points will be clear when we come to look at the most recent development in women's writing about friendship: a cluster of novels which focus upon the quest for the dead woman artist. In some recent American variations on this theme, we find a new version of the 'foreign friend': the dead English woman writer.

II. FRIENDSHIP AS REBIRTH:

FEMALE FRIENDS AND THE VISITATION

Fay Weldon's Female Friends (1975) represents a radical break with the 'tradition' I have been following in this thesis, and not simply in the sense that Female Friends deals with a friendship between three adult women. In Weldon's ironic and fractured narrative, there is no idealised female role-model, no romantic 'foreign friend', no literary awakening; Weldon's women are friends by default rather than choice, initially thrown together as schoolgirls by an accident of fate, a botched evacuation programme, during the Second World War. As Chloe admits, she 'sometimes dislikes Marjorie, and sometimes Grace, and sometimes both at once'(p.8):

Marjorie, Grace and me. Fine citizens we make, fine sisters! Our loyalties are to men, not to each other. ... We are divided amongst ourselves. We have to be, for survival's sake. (pp.193-4)
The central consciousness is that of Chloe, who considers herself to be in 'the mainstream' (p. 114) of womanhood, in that she spends her life in domestic duties, nurturing children and ministering to Oliver, her unreasonable and unfaithful husband. But as Chloe reassesses her life, her experiences are linked and contrasted with those of her female friends: Grace, a beautiful and irresponsible 'burnt-out case' (p. 201) who lost her maternal instinct when her ex-husband stole her children, and Marjorie, a successful television producer who is 'one of nature's dead-ends' (p. 45) in that she bleeds too much for procreation or sexual fulfilment. Each woman pities, resents and envies the others; Chloe, pities Marjorie for being 'obliged by fate to live like a man' (p. 11) and feels morally superior to Grace, who has abortions, 'murders' (p. 152), and passes her one surviving child on to Chloe. When the women meet in pairs, they mock the friend who is absent, and each also relentlessly probes the vulnerable spots of the friend who is present, and it is this acerbic probing and mutual exposure of wounds which is, finally, seen to be invigorating and facilitating.

The dominant image in this novel is of women as the 'walking wounded'; it is an image which relates back to Chloe's childhood, to the wartime ethic of 'Stay Put' (p. 67), 'understand, forgive, endure' (p. 233), which Chloe has inherited from her mother, but it serves more fundamentally to indicate the perennial battle of the sexes which nobody wins, but in which women are always
on the losing side. Emotional bleeding is as inevitable as physical bleeding; both form an inescapable part of the process of generation and regeneration:

Female bodies lie strewn across the battle-field, of course they do, gaunt dead arms upflung towards the sky. It was an exhilarating battle, don’t think it wasn’t. The sun shone brightly at the height of it, armour glinted, sparks flew. And the earth receives its blood with gratitude. The seasons are renewed again. (p.236)

The imagery here has striking affinities with Simone de Beauvoir’s account of relationships between women in *The Second Sex* (1949). De Beauvoir is fascinated by lesbian and homoerotic relationships, to which she returns continually; they are finally defined as a retreat from battle, too easy because ‘there is no struggle, no victory, no defeat’ (p.436), but de Beauvoir dwells at length on the allure of erotic doubling, ‘the miracle of the mirror’ (p.436) which can only be accomplished when one woman traces the body of another. There is, however, a marked difference in de Beauvoir’s tone when she turns to non-sexual female friendships: ‘With other women, a woman is behind the scenes; she is polishing her equipment, but not in battle; she is getting her costume together, preparing her make-up, laying out her tactics’ (p.557). Such relationships, de Beauvoir suggests, are warm and comforting but inevitably frivolous, competitive and contingent upon women’s allegiance to the supreme authority and combatant, man: ‘Women are comrades in captivity for one another, they help one another endure their prison, even
help one another prepare for escape; but their liberator will come from the world of men'(p.560).

Weldon's novel works through the same metaphors and comes out the other side, affirming not only that women can 'liberate' one another but that they share a separate female world which has its own logic, its own substance and its own fascination. The narrative voice is sometimes Chloe's, sometimes an unidentified 'omniscient' female voice, which is by turns bland, censorious or insidious; none of these voices is entirely trustworthy. Platitudes, aphorisms, half-truths and superstitions are invoked to create the sense of a female subculture which is not rational yet has its own 'truth'. The three friends are from different class backgrounds, but their shared physical identity as women transcends these differences, despite their own resistance to this fact:

Marjorie, Grace and Chloe. They bled in unison, punctually and regularly for five days once every four weeks, whenever the moon was full. It was a fact of their existence which used to make Grace furious.

... 'We were always in time,' says Marjorie. 'Do you remember? Grace used to starve herself to get out of step but it never worked. Do you think it means anything? Do you think there's a kind of inner force which drives us all along? Perhaps we have a female group identity, as black-beetles do?

'No,' says Chloe. (p.76)

Yes, says Weldon's narrative. The novel shifts continually between past and present, establishing a broken but perceptible pattern across generations:

Marjorie, like Chloe's mother Gwyneth, lives without a man, gets her emotional satisfaction by cleaning and scrubbing for others; Grace, like Marjorie's mother
Helen, is 'talented ... bold and desperate' (p.16) and lives off men; Chloe, like Grace's mother Esther, sacrifices herself to her husband and children.

I have said that Female Friends breaks with tradition, but in fact it has some significant affinities with Charlotte Brontë's Shirley; like Brontë, although in very different ways, Weldon both celebrates 'sisterhood' and points to the bizarreness of its shared codes. Her narrative, teasing us and mocking itself, simultaneously gives a voice to women's culture and makes it strange: 'Feel your breasts today and have cancer tomorrow. A cervical smear now means the womb out soon. Experience shows it to be true, if not statistics' (p.100). But whereas Brontë's novel points to the constraints placed upon 'sisterhood' by women's limited social opportunities, for Weldon's women, education itself is of dubious value. Marjorie studies obsessively, goes to Oxford, but still has 'a hollow inside me, a bottomless pit' (p.45); Chloe writes a novel, but her husband prevents her from publishing it. Grace suffers from 'the disease of artistic talent' (p.202) but uses it only by having affairs with artistic men. Creativity is channelled through fertility: Chloe's career is aborted, but she compensates by producing children; Grace's frequent abortions are linked with her failure to put brush to canvas. The infertile Marjorie is consistently linked with death: she has 'spiritual VD' (p.119) and puts 'the finger of death' (p.202) on her television programmes.
Education and knowledge belong to the external, masculine world and have little relationship to the internal underworld of women:

Marjorie, Grace and me.
We have our arcane secrets, our superstitions, our beliefs, fact and fantasy mixed. Our sexual fears, both rational and irrational. Our own experiences which we share with each other. They are altogether different from what the novels and text books told us they would be.

We got our certificates, our diplomas, our degrees. We had miscarriages, abortions and babies. Marjorie and I caught the clap. We still cannot name our secret parts. We know them blindly, by feel, and not by sight or name. They rule us. (p.98)

For Weldon's women, ruled by their 'secret parts', language itself is a trap, as the narrative, with its continual shifts and undercuttings, insistently suggests. Grace prefers:

the silent embraces of her youth, when there were no words for what she did, or what was done to her, or if there were, she didn't know them.
In those other days of speechless intertwinnings, she feels, a darker force came into play. linking her more closely to the mindless patterns of the universe. Now this procreative essence shrivels in the light of knowledge. (p.89)

Language, and the knowledge transmitted by language, simply reproduce the structures of a world in which the dice is loaded against women: just as Chloe learns as a child to understand and forgive, so later she finds that 'everything Oliver says about the outside world is patently true' (p.101). Women are linked by their internal, physical identity, rather than their social identity: the childless Marjorie, 'deprived of those pilferings into past and future with which the rest of us, more fertile, more in the steady stream of generation, enrich our lives' (p.11) is still ruled by
her woman's bleeding and rioting hormones. The pattern of women's lives is the pattern of physical continuity, in which women form the link between past and future through their power to give life and, mysteriously, to take it: 'No-one lies dead in a coffin but that our neglect has sent them there, or else it was our death wishes, sickening the air about them while they lived' (p. 18). Social and material change are weapons with a limited effectiveness against intractable biology and unpredictable destiny:

Fate! Let us not think that we can too easily get the better of it, change the pattern of our lives. The Fata Morgana are tricky ladies, and obstinate too. The wisest of us know how to deal with them - to wish for things sideways, out of the corners of our minds, facing neither our hopes nor our fears too squarely. (p. 158)

Weldon's narrative finally moves, in its slippery way, towards an assertion of alternative possibilities: each woman, through the intervention of her friends, breaks her own apparently fixed pattern of female destiny. Grace finally listens to Chloe's complaints; unlike her model, Helen, she stops being simply a 'man's woman' and rediscovers her maternal instincts. Marjorie, goaded by her friends, ceases to look at life 'through a lens darkly' (p. 208); unlike Gwyneth, she has her fruitless womb removed early enough to achieve androgyny in a distant, more accommodating land. Chloe herself finally listens to the 'serpent voices' (p. 161) of her friends, and accepts that self-sacrifice is bad for the soul; Marjorie gives her a house to live in and,
unlike Esther, Chloe leaves her husband, with the final, exultant words 'I can, I can, and I do' (p. 237).

It is, however, a tricky business. These 'solutions' are achieved by narrative sleight-of-hand, produced like rabbits out of a hat. Grace 'does a soft-shoe shuffle amongst the bodies of the fallen, and keeps the vultures off a little while' (p. 236); Marjorie, 'patched up, removes herself from the conflict altogether, and finds another, healthier battle-field in Israel' (p. 237); Chloe's escape from the zone of the wounded is engineered by that oldest of devices, the unexpected legacy. Helen's death releases the house in which Chloe can be reborn; each of the three friends eludes, at least temporarily, the clutches of the 'Fata Morgana', but the battle continues, its terms unchallenged. Weldon's narrative, despite its teasing, remains locked in its own anti-rationalism; the optimistic conclusion sits uneasily against the mystical connections between procreation and death, the continual foregrounding of female physical experience - bleedings, abortions, pregnancies, sexual initiations - which have persistently trapped female destiny within a biologically determined identity. Female Friends reflects a particular moment within the contemporary women's movement, in which the identification and assertion of the bonds between women seemed paramount:

Tell me about your past, Julie begins to urge other women, and they to urge her. The women sit in circles talking. They are passing telegrams along battle-lines, telling each other stories that will not put them to sleep, recognising allies under the disguise of femininity, no longer smuggling
ammunition over back garden walls, no longer corpses in the church and mouths of men. 14

These are the concluding words of Michèle Roberts's first novel, A Piece of the Night (1978). In this novel, Roberts, like Weldon, emphasises the separateness of the masculine and feminine worlds; Julie escapes from a stifling marriage to a lesbian-feminist commune, and her story is interwoven with the histories of her mother and of a nineteenth-century nun to suggest the cohesiveness of women's experience. But Roberts's emphasis is on cultural continuity, rather than on biological identity; as she has said elsewhere, the images of the nun and the mother have a particular resonance for her as a woman writer, searching for female images with which to define the writing process:

The nun contemplates in silence. The housewife creates order out of chaos. The sibyl is possessed by the goddess. The priestess declaims to the listening people. The mother conceives an idea. The midwife aids the birth.

These images feel natural to me now, but didn't always. I had to find them; I struggled to find them. I needed to name myself in a way that connected female-powerful-creator. 15

Roberts's second novel, The Visitation (1983) 16 focusses specifically on the 'naming' of the female creator, and offers an ambitious reworking of themes we have seen in earlier novels. In A Piece of the Night, Julie's schoolfriend Jenny later becomes her lover; The Visitation has a different version of the gynaecium friendship, in which Helen's college friend becomes the 'midwife' who aids her 'birth' as a woman and a writer. Like Female Friends, The Visitation draws on the imagery of the wound, but here the wound is the damaged female
psyche, and the 'battle between the sexes' is going on within the central character.

The narrative traces a triple 'split' within Helen, as woman, artist and friend. Through Helen's relationship with her twin brother Felix, Roberts explores the splitting of the female subject, and the loss of the masculine self. Separated from her twin, Helen is also 'blocked' in her writing, trapped within the traditional dichotomies of body and mind, woman and artist. Finally, Helen is estranged from her oldest and dearest friend Beth, whose decision to join the Communist Party Helen sees as a betrayal of her allegiance to the women's movement.

The narrative interweaves past and present, tracing the history of Helen's 'splits'. The symbiotic union of the twins is disrupted at birth, but not sundered; it is shaken by the realisation of biological difference, but only decisively ruptured at the moment of entry into puberty. When Helen menstruates for the first time in the garden of her godmother's house, the leaden weight of femininity descends on her and the telepathic communion with her twin is broken. The Visitation is clearly informed by psychoanalysis, though by no means rigidly so, and it is interesting to note that, according to the Freudian analyst Helene Deutsch, the fantasy of the twin brother is a common one in early girhood:

"I once had a brother [often a twin brother]; I lost him, but I remember him very well." Girls often richly embroider this theme. The brother is endowed with all the qualities that the girl would
like to have herself, or he is blamed for all the impulses repressed and rejected by the girl's ego. Referring to her childish misdemeanours she maintains that it was he who was so "wicked" and "dirty", not she. With many children this double assumes such a real character that they give him a name, have conversations with him, and in general behave as though he actually existed ... The feeling that such a brother did exist often assumes the character of a vague memory, and this is an interesting example for the girl's "inner perception" of her own masculinity.17

In The Visitation, Felix likewise carries the weight of childhood 'naughtiness', and becomes, during the course of the novel, an increasingly shadowy figure. But whereas Deutsch sees the fantasy of the 'twin' as a passing phase characteristic of early puberty, when the girl is in doubt whether she is a man or a woman, Roberts's rich and densely-wrought narrative moves towards a fantasised resolution in which the two 'halves' of Helen are brought together, through the agency of Beth. The narrative moves delicately towards an affirmation that the fragments can be pieced together, that gender boundaries can be crossed without being eroded, and the part played in this by Beth, in an series of intricately-linked mirror rituals, is central. Beth and Helen first meet as students, in the labyrinthine corridors of their women's college:

Round the corner of the maze tunnel comes a young woman. It's almost like walking into a mirror, for this newcomer sports a grey mohair skirt and twinset very like Helen's own. ... Helen surveys the other woman skimming soundlessly towards her over the grey carpet. She has long curly hair the colour of fire, vividly blue eyes under pale brows, a pointed chin. She is small, no more than five foot two at a guess, yet she propels herself along like a shooting star, like an archangel on a mission.(p.39)
But the split within Helen which silences her writing is paralleled by, and feeds into, a rift in her relationship with Beth:

- It's as though there's a block, Helen muses, as she begins to untie the cord of her dressing-gown: which I can't see through. I'm beginning to think it's inside me. I've got to deal with it, before I can go on to whatever the next stage is.

She has reached the rock on which Beth sits, and, gasping with the effort, and with fatigue, pulls herself up and on to it. They are twin mermaids, the sea slapping at their tails which dangle into the water. Only now, when they are together again after such a long separation, when they hold their mirrors up to one another and gaze therein, they have to recognise their difference. The old enchantment, relied upon for years, no longer works. (p.91)

The differences between the two women are not eroded or discounted, but just as Roberts's narrative moves continually between the realist and the symbolic, so does the relationship between Helen and Beth work on two levels. In real terms, it acts as both catalyst and comfort, but it also acts as the device which propels the narrative towards an imaginary revision of gendered identity. In the symbolic narrative, Beth becomes the substitute mother/godmother who offers Helen an alternative route from girlhood to adulthood. This is signalled initially when she gives Helen a present; she pays for Helen to have her ears pierced, but the earrings she buys her are odd ones: a gold stud in one ear, and a diamante one in the other. It is, Helen feels, as though she were:

a member of a tribe living in a deep green forest, not at all like the environs of the Portobello Road. Just before her twelfth birthday, she is taken away into a clearing deep in the secret heart of the forest, along paths known only to the senior women of the tribe. They guide her steps ... Up
until now a child, she has gone smooth and naked. But the time has come for her to be initiated into the mysteries, the hour has come for her body to be painted, her hips to be fringed with sweet-smelling waxy flowers, her head to be crowned with a garland of green leaves, and her ear lobes to be pierced and then laden with rings of coral, bone and shell. And at night, around the sacred fire, she dances for the first time in public, in the company of women, her ritual dance. (pp. 72-3)

It is at once an absolutely female ritual, and one which ratifies Helen's two conflicting selves - her 'masculine' and 'feminine' sides. Later, the two women bathe naked in a pool; when they are disturbed by a voyeur, Beth puts him to flight, dispelling the male gaze. Finally, in a haunting, almost hallucinatory scene which is the culminating episode of the novel, the two women walk in a park together and Helen is symbolically reborn. The park is familiar to Helen: it turns out to be the garden which belonged to her godmother, and Helen now relives the menarche, guided by Beth. Earlier images of the mirror and the labyrinth are drawn together as Beth becomes Ariadne, gently paying out the string which Helen holds as she enters the maze; when they reach the pool at the centre of the garden, Beth insists that Helen must look into it and recognise her own image as a woman, not a monster. And then Beth ceases to be Ariadne, holding the magic ball of string. She drops it, she becomes midwife. She cuts the cord, and declares Helen separate, loose, free, baptised by tears. She commands her to sing of her redemption, her life, to speak, to write. She orders her: now define self, now define woman. The heart of the labyrinth is not the end, but another beginning. Start to write. (p. 173)

Helen becomes 'whole', reconciling within herself 'the masculine and the feminine; the productive and the
reproductive; the receiving and the creative; the light and the dark; the rational and the irrational; the active and the passive' (p.175) and starts to write. Like Lucy in The Mill on the Floss, Beth acts as the midwife who delivers the 'new' woman, but whereas Lucy does so by stepping aside in favour of Maggie, allowing the new to displace the old, the part played by Beth in The Visitation contributes not only to an extension of the boundaries of 'the feminine', but also to a revision of the female cultural tradition. Through the powerful mythological imagery identified with Beth, Roberts suggests both that the 'feminine' can incorporate the 'masculine', and that femaleness itself is power.

The descriptions of Beth in the novel correspond closely with one of Roberts's poems, a loving and lyrical celebration of women's friendship entitled 'Magnificat:

you arrived on the dot, in the nick of time, with your red curls flying ...
I called for you, and you came, you voyaged fierce as a small archangel with swords and breasts
you declared the birth of a new life
in my kitchen there was an annunciation
and I was still, awed by your hair's glory

you commanded me to sing of my redemption...

when we met, I tell you
it was a birthday party, a funeral
it was a holy communion
between women, a Visitation

it was two old she-goats butting
and nuzzling each other in the smelly fold

The Visitation likewise draws on the imagery of the Catholic liturgy: the title refers to the gospel story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth before the birth of Christ,
and Elizabeth's blessing of the child in Mary's womb. In The Visitation, Beth herself is pregnant: her benedictory 'fertilisation' of Helen's words serves to forge a link between two kinds of female 'fertility', ratifying creativity as feminine and reproduction as creative.

III. ART AND FRIENDSHIP:
THE QUEST FOR THE LOST PRECURSOR

The desire to identify women's shared cultural history is central to the contemporary feminist novel, but while Roberts envisages a broad female mythology which can be adapted to accommodate differences between women, other writers have concentrated their imaginations on a female culture which will reflect the specificity of race and locality. Ellen Galford's The Fires of Bride (1986) draws, like The Visitation, on the idea of the lost twin: artist Morag, living on a Scottish island, is drawn into a mysterious, transhistorical empathy with the goddess Bride, Christ's forgotten twin sister, and with the Sisters of Bride, a medieval order of nuns who worshipped the goddess. The Fires of Bride is an uneven novel which shifts rather uneasily between self-parody and celebration, but it is interesting for Galford's emphasis on the local identity of the female mystical tradition which she 'unveils'; its myths, mists and magic are all located within the context of Scottish nationalism and Scottish lesbian-feminist culture.
In *The Color Purple* (1982), Alice Walker likewise emphasises the specificity of the tradition she celebrates. Her exuberantly utopian re-imagining of the American South in the interwar years reflects Walker's continuing concern, evident in many of her essays, to redefine the boundaries of the 'creative' in ways which will acknowledge the history of black women's art. Through her love-affair with the night-club singer Shug, Celie finds sexual, emotional and creative fulfilment: the clothes she makes, with Shug's encouragement, combine function, liberation and art in their flowing form and vibrant colours.

Shug herself is particularly interesting in this context, since I think she represents a covert tribute to Walker's own artist-mentor, the writer Zora Neale Hurston. 'In my mind', Walker has said, 'Zora Neale Hurston, Billie Holiday, and Bessie Smith form a sort of unholy trinity. Zora belongs in the tradition of black women singers, rather than among "the literati," at least to me. ... Like Billie and Bessie she followed her own road, believed in her own gods, pursued her own dreams, and refused to separate herself from "common" people'. 19 Shug the nightclub singer clearly draws on Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith, but she looks very much like Zora Neale Hurston as described by Alice Walker. In her essay on Hurston, Walker dwells lovingly on her tilted hats, her flamboyant clothes, and describes a photograph of Zora 'with her foot up on the running board of a car - presumably hers, and bright red -'
looking 'racy'. In *The Color Purple*, Celie first encounters Shug through a photograph in which Shug, wildly beautiful in furs and rouge, is 'grinning with her foot up on somebody motorcar'. By fusing singer and writer, Walker neatly dissolves the apparent division between the 'common' and the 'uncommon', evoking an artist-precursor who crosses the boundaries between 'high' and 'low' art.

In this concluding section, I want to look at the ways in which feminism's 'backward search' for the artist-precursor has informed recent women's writing about friendship. In what appears to be an extraordinary number of novels published in the last decade, one of the friends is missing, and in most cases the narrative consciousness is located in the mind of the woman who is remembering, or seeking, this other woman after her death. Judith Kegan Gardiner noted, in 1981, that the 'dead friend' was a recurrent theme in women's fictions of the 1970s: 'One woman in each pair is more of a knower; the other one is to be known ... one of the recurrent motifs of these novels is that the seeking woman only understands the other woman after her death'. Gardiner suggests that the frequency of this theme is related to the problematic nature of the mother-daughter bond; just as the mother can only be understood as a separate person after childhood is over, so in these fictions the death of the friend represents the dissolution of the unregainable mother-child symbiosis.
I believe, however, that the process of identification and separation which characterises the "lost friend" fictions of the 1980s demands a rather different, and historically specific, interpretation. The preponderance of this theme is related to the desire of contemporary feminists to establish bonds between women across the span of time. In a number of recent novels, the "lost friend" theme takes a form which reflects the particular position of the contemporary feminist writer - concerned, simultaneously, to place herself within the female literary tradition, and to create a space from within which she can respond, as a writer, to the particular demands of the present moment.

The "lost friend" narrative is framed as a quest: the true identity of the friend herself, and the real nature of the relationship which once existed between the two women, are both in question. Friend and friendship are enigmas to be solved, and many of these fictions belong within another genre which has long been popular with women writers: the mystery story. There is indeed a sub-genre which might be called the "gynaecium mystery": the late 1930s and 1940s saw the publication of a number of these novels, including Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night* (1935), which focusses on an Oxford women's college, and Gladys Mitchell's *Laurels are Poison* (1942) and Josephine Tey's *Miss Pym Disposes* (1946), both of which are set in teachers' training-colleges for women. In these novels, the central issue is the tension between the public and the private life, while the "lost
friend’ fictions are concerned with the relationship between present and past, but most English versions of this theme also draw on the traditions of the gynaeceum.

Harriett Gilbert’s *The Riding Mistress* (1983) and J.R. Hulland’s mystery story, *Student Body* (1986) both depict pupil-teacher relationships which develop into lesbian love-affairs, and which, in the narrative present, have ended with the death of the ‘teacher’. In both novels, the pain of bereavement is a real issue, but both also show the younger friend moving towards a new equilibrium through her re-exploration of the past, as she rediscovers, through memory, the knowledge which the relationship offered. *The Magnificent Spinster* (1985), by the Canadian writer May Sarton, also explores the relationship between pupil and teacher after the teacher’s death, but in this case the relationship between the women was not a sexual one, although the narrator is lesbian. Rather, Sarton’s novel offers a recuperation and celebration of the early twentieth-century spinster-teacher. The narrative has many echoes of Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*; in effect what is happening is that the family-oriented Mrs Ramsay is being displaced as ‘mother’ in favour of Lily Briscoe, to offer a powerful affirmation of the validity of the single woman as mentor, precursor and friend.

*The Magnificent Spinster* is interesting also because of its form. The narrative is presented as occupying a space somewhere between biography and fiction, as a testament of love offered by the surviving
woman to her pioneering friend. In the United States, contemporary feminist interest in uncovering the lives of the pioneer women of the past has been paralleled by the rise of a new genre in women's writing about friendship, which I shall call 'gynobiography': the narrative which focusses on the quest of the female biographer to unravel the life of a dead woman artist whom she did not know personally, but with whom she increasingly identifies. It is a new version of the 'learning' friendship, and the past decade has seen a spate of novels by American writers in this genre, including Dorothy Bryant's *Killing Wonder* (1981), Amanda Cross's *The Question of Max* (1976) and *No Word from Winifred* (1986), Susan Daitch's *L.C.* (1986), and Alison Lurie's *The Truth about Lorin Jones* (1988).

In most of these novels, the object of the quest is a dead woman writer, and Dorothy Bryant's feminist mystery story, *Killing Wonder* will serve to illustrate the significance of this point. Young would-be writer Jessamyn Posey's one dream is to be part of 'a community of writers, a network, a sisterhood'(p.1). She is on the verge of fulfilling her ambition to meet feminist writer-heroine India Wonder when India is, as it seems, murdered; Jessamyn becomes obsessed with uncovering the truth about India's death and finds herself, instead, uncovering multiple 'truths' about her life. The validity of the feminist sisterhood of writers is placed in question, but finally affirmed; in the course of her investigation, however, Jessamyn finds herself
increasingly becoming India. Using India's pen, she finds herself writing in India's handwriting:

As I touched the pen to the paper, I could feel, all around me, rising up out of the darkness, the vibrations of the life lived in this space, deep and high, strong movements collecting into something like dark clouds thickening, closing in around me. Cautiously, slowly, I let myself breathe them in, deep, deeper, let my eyes close, let myself swim down, down to where I knew I was going, to where India was, to where I would become India, what she was here, what she knew here. (p.155)

This moment of identification and temporary submergence appears again and again in the gynobiography. It is indicative of the conflicting wishes held suspended in this genre, the desire to know, connect and identify with the writer-precursor, and the fear that to do so is to surrender the identity of the living artist, limiting her to reproducing the writing of the past. But the genre also offers another possibility, again exemplified in Killing Wonder. The dead India Wonder was a one-book wonder, author of the feminist classic Roma Pride's Journal, which Jessamyn deeply admires, but which, she discovers in the course of her quest, was not as 'true' as it appears to be. It doesn't take much work to guess that Dorothy Bryant, author of the feminist classic Ella Price's Journal (1972) is using her theme as a way of reappraising the 'truth' and validity of her own earlier writing, and this point has a more general application. The gynobiography can act as a means of exploring the possibility of a changing and dynamic tradition of women's writing, and questioning whether there is a
single 'women's truth' to be found in that tradition. It is a theme central to the earliest example of this genre I have come across, Gail Pass's Zoe's Book (1976).

The nameless narrator of Zoe's Book is an American postgraduate student, in London to research a dissertation on D.H. Lawrence. She is lured out of the British Museum and into a different kind of literary venture by the elderly, bedridden Zoe Mohr, who offers her the previously untold story of a woman writer, one of the Bloomsbury circle. In Zoe's flat, through Zoe's long and haunting monologues, the narrator is drawn into the world of interwar Bloomsbury, a world which includes Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Vita Sackville-West and Radclyffe Hall. As the boundaries between past and present dissolve and the identities of speaker and listener increasingly fuse, the narrator finds herself reliving Zoe's lesbian love-affair with Julia Carroll Gordon, retracing Zoe's own attempts to unravel the 'truth' of Julia's life, and following the story of Julia's discovery of herself as a writer.

Thus far, the story acts as a parable of the 'moment' of feminist academic awakening in the later 1970s: the shift of interest towards reclaiming women's writing, the desire to uncover the repressed history of women's work and women's love for women. The conclusion of Pass's novel, however, takes a different turn. Zoe's story proves to be a fantasy, the rich dreamlife of a woman who, crippled since girlhood, has lived her life through books. The narrator's bitterness at having been
led down the garden path is superseded by another literary 'awakening', in which she recognises that Zoe's story has its own 'truth', and takes up a different task, that of preserving Zoe's dreams for posterity, not as biography, but as fiction: as Zoe's Book.

Like other gynobiographies, Zoe's Book follows a fine line between nostalgia and interrogation of that nostalgia, suggesting simultaneously that the dream of a perfect union with the lost female writer is an unattainable fantasy, and that it is, nevertheless, a fantasy worth having. There is a similar process at work in two of Amanda Cross's mystery stories, The Question of Max (1976) and No Word from Winifred (1986). 'Amanda Cross' is, in her other life, feminist critic and academic Carolyn Heilbrun, and, like her creator, Cross's 'detective', Kate Fansler, is a professor of English Literature. The Fansler stories are selfconsciously literary mysteries, but over the years their focus has noticeably shifted; initially, Kate Fansler was a 'male-identified' woman, but in recent years, the stories have centred on the position of women in the academy and on issues related to women's writing.

In both The Question of Max and No Word from Winifred, the mystery derives from the will left by an Oxford-educated English woman writer, and, as in Zoe's Book, the narratives play with the known biographical details of real writers of the interwar years. In The Question of Max, Kate's investigations focus upon the life of Dorothy Whitmore, the tall, blonde author of a
novel entitled *North Country Wind*, made into a successful film after her early death. These and many other details signal to the knowing reader that Dorothy is based upon Winifred Holtby, but Cross's narrative teases the reader, superimposing upon Holtby's life other details drawn from the experiences of Holtby's close friend Vera Brittain. Much of the pleasure for the reader lies in recognising the points where fact becomes fiction; in the very act of reading the novel she is drawn into a community of women readers and writers, a 'sisterhood' of shared tastes. But there's more at work here than a feminist parlour game; the Englishness of the woman writer is central to the fantasy offered, and, as in so many earlier novels, the 'foreign friend' provides a means of renegotiating the boundaries of the 'creative' and the 'feminine'.

The 'lost friend' in *No Word from Winifred*, Winifred Ashby, is 'missing' throughout the narrative; she is known only through the testimony given by those whose lives she has touched, and through the journal which records her girlhood summers, spent in Oxford with her 'honorary aunt'. As in *Zoe's Book*, the English girlhood becomes the locus of impossible desires; the English boarding-school offers a fantasised separate space where gender is unconstrained, where the strangely androgynous uniform offers the girl control over her own body. In Cross's novel, it is a freedom which Winifred retains throughout her life, and which plays over into the lives of those with whom she comes into contact,
releasing in them something both of Winifred's unique ability to reinvent herself, and of her special capacity for friendship.

Kate's search for Winifred is thus a quest for the lost transforming power of friendship, but Winifred herself also has another significance: the story of her 'honorary aunt', principal of an Oxford college and author of popular historical novels about ancient Greece, fuses details from the lives of Mary Renault and Dorothy L. Sayers, and Winifred herself proves to be the illegitimate daughter of another Oxford woman writer. Like many earlier fictional friends, Winifred crosses the line between the 'indigenous' and the 'foreign'; she forges a link between English writers of the past and American writers of the present. There is a similar process at work in Zoe's Book, in which Julia Carroll Gordon is half-English, half-American. In this new version of the 'half-sisters' theme, the American writer/reader gains entry to the sisterhood of English women writers; meeting in imagination the English writers of the past, entering into the experience of English girlhood, she herself becomes part of that tradition. It is a fantasy specific to the American experience, clearly impelled by the sense that the English tradition is the 'real' tradition of women's writing, in relation to which the American writer must inevitably define herself. But the location of that fantasy in the interwar years is also significant. The artist-precursor in these novels signifies not only the
English tradition, but also a particular moment in that tradition when a new kind of female literary community became possible, and the figure of Winifred Ashby in No Word from Winifred is a particularly suggestive example here.

For any reader familiar with what might be called the original 'gynobiography', Vera Brittain's Testament of Friendship, Winifred's name, appearance and character identify her as, like Dorothy Whitmore in The Question of Max, a version of Winifred Holtby. The particular attraction of Holtby is made clear in Carolyn Heilbrun's recent book, Writing Women's Lives. Holtby's enduring friendship with Vera Brittain was, Heilbrun comments, 'an exemplary love'; drawing on Holtby's letters to Brittain and to her other lifelong friend, Jean McWilliam, Heilbrun argues that they represent a moment in which friendship between women became possible, in a real sense, for the first time. I think she overstates her point; in many ways, Holtby's letters are remarkable for their affinities with the letters of the nineteenth-century pioneers discussed in Chapter One, both in their range of subjects and modes and in the way in which the narrative of the letters consistently works to play back to the recipient a positive 'mirror' of herself. But Heilbrun's point is nevertheless an important one: for Brittain and Holtby, friendship meant, as it had long meant for men, the enabling bond that not only supported risk and danger but also comprehended the details of a public life and
the complexities of the pain found there. For Heilbrun, Holtby and Brittain are important because they were part of a circle of active feminists for whom friendship, writing and a strong sense of public responsibility were inextricably linked, and for whom friendship itself was founded on a shared commitment to work. Holtby, with her enduring determination to combine the life of a writer with active engagement in political work, becomes the symbolic centre of an alternative female tradition to the more rarefied world of 'Bloomsbury', a tradition more directly relevant to the struggles of the feminist writer today. But while Heilbrun/Cross draws on the figure of Holtby in both The Question of Max and No Word from Winifred, that figure has an interestingly different significance in each novel.

In The Question of Max, Dorothy Whitmore/Winifred Holtby acts simply as the locus of a celebration of the 'pioneer' woman writer; the narrative looks back nostalgically to the friendship of three young Oxford graduates. Cross contrasts the resonance which their stories hold for the woman researcher, and the ways in which the history of their lives is exploited by the villain of the novel, a male academic who murders, suppresses and distorts evidence in his determination to complete the biography of one of the women against her own expressed wishes. In short, what is at issue in The Question of Max is the appropriation of the female literary tradition by the patriarchal establishment.
The question posed by *No Word from Winifred* is a very different one. While the novel celebrates Winifred’s transforming power, she herself remains elusive: the ‘truth’ of her life is not recoverable. Whereas both *The Question of Max* and *Zoe’s Book* are informed by the desire to know the women of the past, Winifred Ashby in *No Word from Winifred* is offered as a positive figure precisely because she is not knowable. Winifred has links with the women writers of the past, but is not bound by them; she acts as the catalyst for change in the lives of the women of the present, but makes no permanent claims upon them, choosing rather to ‘disappear’. Winifred represents a vision of the female cultural tradition as a dynamic process, continually subject to interrogation and change; the novel reflects a shift in the contemporary feminist project from ‘rediscovery’ to ‘revision’, and a movement away from the quest for a final and stable ‘truth’ towards a notion of female identity as fluctuating and open to continual re-imagination.

It is a theme central also to a very recent gynobiography, Alison Lurie’s *The Truth about Lorin Jones* (1988). Lurie’s narrative follows familiar lines: the artist/biographer protagonist becomes increasingly obsessed with her subject, and as the boundaries between self and other dissolve, she finds herself living out the life of the other woman. But it is clear from early in the novel that Lurie is using the codes in a different way from earlier writers in this genre. Polly
Alter, woman-identified feminist and would-be artist, intends to write a biography which will expose the oppressive machinations of the patriarchal art establishment, but as she uncovers the multiple selves of artist Lorin Jones, she discovers that Jones was less exploited than exploitative. Polly’s growing disillusionment with her dead ‘alter ego’ is paralleled by her gradual extrication from her living best friend Jeanne, and here also the codes at work are familiar ones. Polly and Marxist-feminist lesbian-separatist Jeanne have a short-lived affair, but, like the food which she prepares for Polly - rich sponge-cakes and cocoa topped with cream - Jeanne’s caresses are soft and warm but ultimately unsatisfying. With her soft blonde curls and rosy-pink ruffled clothes, Jeanne is presented as the smothering mother, constraining Polly within a deadeningly cosy, inward-looking all-female world.

Lurie is a highly selfconscious writer; like Carolyn Heilbrun, she is a professor of English Literature, and I think it can be assumed that her particular deployment of well-worn conventions is not artless. Yet, in marked contrast to other gynobiographies, The Truth about Lorin Jones makes no reference to the tradition within which it is framed, to the history of women’s culture and women’s writing. Polly’s identification with, and separation from, Lorin Jones facilitates a new kind of ‘awakening’: having tracked down Lorin’s last, lost painting Polly makes love beneath it to Lorin’s final lover, an exchange
which initiates Polly's re-entry into heterosexual love, releasing her from the enclosed world of women.

The Truth about Lorin Jones is less a narrative of 'revision' than one of revisionism. It is offered to the reader as a 'post-feminist' novel, and the movement of the narrative suggests the hollowness of that concept: 'post-feminist' turns out to be suspiciously close to 'pre-feminist'. Polly is 'saved' both from the feminist-separatism propounded by Jeanne and the self-absorbed life of the artist represented by Lorin, and 'escapes', in the novel's self-mockingly romantic conclusion, to a new life which includes her son and her lover but is noticeably empty of women. The codes of the gynobiography are being used, it seems, not to re-imagine the boundaries of sisterhood, but to create a fantasised space beyond its boundaries.

And yet, not quite. While the allure of the cosy and wholesome Jeanne is systematically defused, the figure of Lorin Jones, fragile, elusive, and mysteriously self-contained, continues to haunt Lurie's narrative, placing in question Polly's apparently smooth progress back into 'normal' life. Lorin's canvases, with their subtly-nuanced, unnameable colours, their odd blank spaces and jagged holes, the elliptical fragments of writing which disrupt their cohesiveness, act throughout the narrative as a troubling presence in Polly's consciousness, suggesting unfinished business, unanswered questions. Even in this novel, with its 'post-feminist' anxiety about female collectivity, its
nostalgic impetus towards a revised nuclear family, the conventions of the learning friendship are at work. In her very refusal to be 'known', to offer back a comfortably recognisable and decodable mirror-image, Lorin Jones breaks the frame of Lurie's neatly-structured narrative. The enigmatic 'other' woman, disturbing object of fascination and desire, acts as in so many earlier novels as the sign of what cannot be fully understood or expressed: as the tantalising indicator of a more complex, more open-ended 'knowledge' of what it might mean to be a woman and an artist.
CONCLUSION

My reasons for concluding this thesis with The Truth About Lorin Jones are entirely fortuitous. It happens to be the most recently-published example of what I see as the dominant genre in the representation of women's friendship at the present moment. I admit, though, to a sense of dissatisfaction at ending on a negative note, and to a secret hope, cherished throughout the writing of this thesis, that at exactly the right moment, the 'perfect' novel about female friendship would appear. Yet I am equally conscious that such a hope goes against the grain of my own argument.

The novels discussed in this thesis do not offer us the 'truth' about women's friendships. No single novel considered here offers a final, perfect or timeless version of friendship and sisterhood: nor should we expect or hope that they should. The meaning of friendship has continually been linked with specific understandings of what a woman is, and should be: each generation has challenged earlier definitions and produced its own, but these in turn are inevitably constrained by the limitations upon what can be 'imagined' at a particular moment.

At the same time, it should be clear that the long-established connections between friendship, the search for knowledge and the pursuit of the ideal have offered successive generations of women writers particular opportunities for questioning and
transforming the available understandings of both femininity and friendship. Their narratives are important precisely because they are not 'the truth': their dreams, utopias, impossible texts, form part of the continual, and continually changing, movement towards a new 'knowledge', not of what women 'are' but of what women can be.

As with the 'exchange rituals' of the mid nineteenth century and the 'Girton Girls' and schoolgirl friends of succeeding generations, the concept of the 'backward search' has provided a medium for expressing the fantasies and anxieties of women at a particular historical moment. If it seems sometimes to be founded in a nostalgic yearning for a mythical past in which women were undivided, it has also served as a means of imaginatively revising that past, and of rethinking the relationship between woman 'then' and woman 'now'.

'This backward search', thinks Kate Fansler in Amanda Cross's No Word From Winifred, 'which makes good novels, makes bad living.'1 Having just devoted a considerable portion of my life to precisely such a search, I am not likely to concur - but then neither does Cross, in her novel. As I have suggested, the 'Winifred' of this novel represents both the 'lost' friend and the 'lost' woman writer. Kate Fansler, detective and feminist academic, has fulfilled her part of the quest by tracing Winifred's origins, unravelling the secrets of her life and establishing that she is not dead, but alive. At this point, she gives up her
search, respecting Winifred's desire to 'disappear' to the Third World. The quest is taken over by Kate's niece, who has played 'Watson' to Kate's 'Holmes' throughout the novel, and who sets off on her own journey to find Winifred and to see another part of the world:

"I'm not seeking something wonderful, or mysterious... I'm not lost in a fantasy, or a search for the answer to life. I just think finding Winifred is what I want to do. And when I've found her - if I find her - who knows? Probably I'll write a book called In Search of Winifred." (pp.215-6)

The 'dead friend' is alive, but in a different place. Cross's conclusion suggests that it's up to a younger generation to continue the search, and find that place. Their task is to move beyond the constraints of the Anglo-American tradition, beyond the anglophile and the eurocentric, and to find new modes of relating to 'Winifred': to discover fresh ways of uncovering and extending the traditions of women's writing, and to devise alternative forms for expressing the relations between women, as writers and as friends. It seems an appropriate parable on which to end.
NOTES

Page references in the text are to the editions cited in these notes. Where the edition used is not the first, the date of first publication is indicated in parentheses. Place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION

2. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (1929), 1977, p.79.
6. Woman to Woman, p.3.
9. 'The (US)es of (I)dentity', 441.
11. 'Desperately Seeking Difference', p.115.
15. 'Language and Gender', p.82.
16. Faderman's model is followed by Sheila Jeffreys in The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930, 1985. Vicinus and Smith-Rosenberg also see the history of women's friendship in terms of a radical shift from nineteenth-century freedom and innocence to twentieth-century repression, but offer important


19. For an alternative viewpoint, see Joan Nestle's *A Restricted Country: Essays and Short Stories* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987), 1988, which argues persuasively for a recognition of the specificity of lesbian history and sexuality.

20. *Communities of Women*, p. 5.


CHAPTER ONE


6. As in many later novels, in *Emma* the questioning of friendship paradoxically provides the space for the intricate exploration of friendship: for a fuller and very interesting analysis of the female friendships in *Emma*, see Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature*, pp. 274-301. Todd speculates (pp. 400-401) that Austen's rejection of friendship in *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* may be rooted in ambivalent feelings about her sister Cassandra, but, rather surprisingly, Todd doesn't discuss *Pride and Prejudice*, in which the teasing and supportive relationship between the Bennet sisters is so strongly endorsed.

8. Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773), 1820. Chapone’s letters were constantly reprinted up to at least 1844.


10. Sarah Scott and her friend Barbara Montagu put the ideal of *Millenium Hall* into practice in their own lives; see Jane Spencer’s helpful introduction to the 1986 edition of *Millenium Hall*.

11. My account of the lives of Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby is taken from Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen*.


14. See Mavor, pp.73-77. In her final chapter, Mavor gives a fascinating account of the constantly shifting myth of the ‘Ladies’ in the past century and a half. The two friends have been variously represented as man-haters, as crossed in love, as vowed to celibacy, as men dressed as women or as women dressed as men. In later ‘histories’ of the friends, it was Sarah, rather than Eleanor, now with the added embellishment of boots and buckskin breeches, who came to be seen as the ‘masculine’ half of the pair. In all the protean versions of their story, it would seem, the popular imagination has endlessly returned to their apparent reconciliation of intransigent polarities: to their ability to be simultaneously ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, ‘pious’ and ‘perverse’.


17. Farningham, p.58.


23. Mrs. John Sandford, Woman in her Social and Domestic Character, 1831, pp.2-3.

24. For the education of middle-class girls in the Victorian period, see Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal, 1982, Chapter 2.

25. See Harrison, Chapter 5 and Hall, 'The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology'.

26. Craik, p.170. This is a conscious appropriation of the term which is, says Craik, 'so mis-used by that arch im-moralist, that high-priest of intellectual self-worship, Goethe'. It is used by Craik to signify 'the spiritual consanguinity, which, though frequently co-existent with, is different from any tie of instinct or blood-relationship' (p.170).

27. Grey and Shirreff, I.262.


30. Pullan, p.192.


32. Grey and Shirreff, I.265.

33. Grey and Shirreff, I.263.

34. Craik, pp.174-5.

35. Yonge, p.151.


41. Yonge, p.147.

42. Craik, p.171.

43. Craik, p.184.

44. Grey and Shirreff, I.267.


46. See Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920, 1985, p.36. Anna Jameson gives an interesting description of a 'very singular' household in which the 'head of the family' was the youngest of two unmarried sisters. The other members of the household were another sister, a widow, her two children, and an unmarried intimate friend. See Anna Jameson, Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, edited by G.H. Needler, 1939, Letter 79, January 1840, p.120.
47. Page references in this section are to: Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, ed. Needler; Geraldine Jewsbury, Selections from the Letters of Geraldine Endor Jewsbury to Jane Welsh Carlyle, edited by Mrs Alexander Ireland, 1892.

48. Geraldine Jewsbury (1812-1880) met Jane Carlyle in 1841; Jewsbury was twenty-nine, and Jane, the wife of Thomas Carlyle, was forty. Jewsbury was a reviewer for the Athenaeum for many years, and a reader for Bentleys. Among her novels were Zoë: The History of Two Lives (1845), The Half Sisters (1848), and Constance Herbert (1855). She combined this active professional career with the conventional role of the sole surviving daughter of a motherless family: living in Manchester, she kept house first for her father and then for her brother until, after her brother’s marriage in 1853, she went to live in London. Jameson (1794-1860) met Ottilie von Goethe in 1833, when both women were in their thirties. Ottilie, Goethe’s daughter-in-law, was a widow with young children. Jameson, after working as a governess for many years, had married in 1825, but separated from her husband after four years. Her husband lived permanently in Toronto. She spent a year in Canada from 1836-37, after which they were legally separated. She wrote indefatigably from 1829, partly to support her immediate family in England. Her works included: The Diary of an Ennuyée (1826), Characteristics of Women (1832), Sacred and Legendary Art ((1848). For Jewsbury’s life, see Susanne Howe, Geraldine Jewsbury: Her Life and Errors, 1935; for Jameson, see G.H. Needler’s introduction to Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe and Anna Jameson, Letters and Friendships, 1812-1860, edited by Mrs Steuart Erskine, 1915.

49. Jameson, Letter 188, November [1856], p.213.

50. Quoted in the introduction to Jameson, p.xiv.


52. Jameson, Letter 33, May [1836], p.35.


55. Jameson, Letter 7, October [1833], p.11.


59. Quoted in the introduction to Jameson, pp.vii-viii.

60. The limited boundaries of sisterhood are dramatically demonstrated in the story of the circle of friends recorded in Helen Heineman’s Restless Angels: The Friendship of Six Victorian Women, Athens, Ohio, 1983. This self-consciously radical sisterhood began in 1818, when a pair of orphaned English sisters, Frances and Camilla Wright, met the Garnett sisters, children of an ‘enlightened’ family which had settled in the United States. The young women, all in their early twenties, vowed eternal friendship; later, the
circle extended to include the English novelist Frances Trollope. The women were united by their enthusiasm for possibilities offered by the New World, and planned a permanent home there together, a community of sisterhood where principle would be put into practice. The dominant figure and motivating force in the sisterhood was undoubtedly Frances Wright. Strong, charismatic, visionary, she evoked the passionate admiration of the other women, who saw her as the focus of all their ideals and hopes. As Frances Trollope wrote to Julia Garnett, 'Some of my friends declare that if worship may be offered, it must be to her - that she is at once all that woman should be - and something more than woman ever was - and I know not what beside - and I for my part applaud and approve all they say' (quoted in Heineman, p.56). The sisterhood, now scattered over Europe, was sustained by letters over long years of separation until, in 1826, Frances Wright purchased land at Nashoba in Tennessee, and set up a co-operative community based on slave emancipation and inspired by Robert Owen's community at New Harmony. The plan, initially shared by all, was for the rest of the sisterhood to join the Wright sisters there. But Nashoba, and Frances Wright, quickly became deeply controversial as Wright freely expressed her anti-religious opinions and opposition to the marriage tie. In 1827, there was a widely-publicised scandal over free sexual liaisons at the Nashoba community. When the proportions of the scandal became clear, the sisterhood foundered. Frances Trollope, who visited Nashoba briefly, told the Garnetts that Frances had made herself so unpleasantly conspicuous that she could not brave public opinion by making contact with her. Harriet Garnett, the most strong-willed of the Garnett sisters, succumbed to pressure from her mother and sister, coming to accept that 'the step once taken, there is no return - at least for a woman. The gates of the most rigid convent are not so insurmountable a barrier betwixt the world and the nun they enclose as public scorn makes against a woman who has joined such a community as Nashoba' (quoted in Heineman, p.94). The rest of the sisterhood increasingly characterised Frances as 'masculine', while seeing her loyal but more passive sister Camilla as her innocent victim. When the Wright sisters returned to Europe after the collapse of the Nashoba community, neither woman was 'received' by her former friends. Transgression of the bounds of respectability was to risk relinquishing the 'name' of woman, and thus permanent exclusion from the circle of sisterhood.

63. Quoted in Howe, p.53.
CHAPTER TWO


17. For Craik and Jewsbury, see Shirley Foster, Victorian Women’s Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual, 1985, chapters 1 and 2; for Martineau, see Valerie K. Pichanick, Harriet Martineau: The Woman and her Work, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1980.


21. Geraldine Jewsbury, The Half Sisters, 2 vols, 1848; Georgiana Fullerton, Grantley Manor, 3 vols, 1847; Elizabeth Sewell, Margaret Percival, 2 vols, 1847. Despite the close resemblances between these novels, publication dates are so close that there seems to be no possibility that any one of the novels can be seen as a direct response to another. Although Woman’s Friendship was not published until 1850, Aguilar died in 1847 at the early age of 31.

22. Corinne was first translated into English in 1807, but the 1833 edition, translated by Isabel Hill, with metrical versions of Corinne’s odes by Letitia Landon, was particularly popular. For a valuable discussion of the influence of Corinne, see Ellen Moers, Literary Women, New York, 1977, especially Chapter 9, and Cora Kaplan’s introduction to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh and Other Poems, 1978, especially pp. 15-22. The poet-heroine of Aurora Leigh (1857) is, once again, the child of an English father and Italian mother.


24. Leonora was written in response to Mme de Staël’s Delphine (1802), (Butler pp. 200-1) and one wonders whether de Staël’s choice of a name for Corinne’s repressive English family (Edgermond) wasn’t intended as a dig at Edgeworth. The writing of
Leonora is in itself an interesting example of the difficulties experienced by women in making female friendship - even problematic female friendship - the central focus of a novel. When Edgeworth completed her first draft, her female readers were highly enthusiastic. One commented: 'on no rock do [young women] founder so often as on unguarded female friendship - it is my horror'. Edgeworth's father, however, found the novel flat and spiritless; Maria set out to complete it in a conscious 'female spirit of opposition'. See Butler, pp.293 and 295.


27. For Fullerton's life, see Charlotte M. Yonge, 'Lady Georgiana Fullerton. Mrs. Stretton. Anne Manning', in Mrs Oliphant and others, Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign, 1897, pp.195-216.


29. See Lilian Faderman, Surpassing The Love Of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present (New York,1981, n.d. [1982]), Part III, Chapter 4. 'Christabel' was first published in 1816. Faderman argues, pp.460-1, that Geraldine was not intended to be seen as a woman, but as a disembodied evil spirit; the constant references to the poem in novels about female friendship, however, show that this is not the way in which it has been interpreted by women readers.

30. For the genesis of Margaret Percival, see Sewell, Autobiography, p.99. Sewell's idolisation of her brother precipitated a breakdown in adolescence, and her autobiography contains an eloquent picture of the suffering and tension caused by this relationship. It's worth noting that Harriet Martineau, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot also had extremely close childhood relationships with brothers which later turned sour. Such a close identification with a male in the early years of life, before gendered subjectivity is fully formed, followed by such a drastic rupture, obviously has implications for the later acceptance of gendered identity. Their novels suggest a particularly immediate awareness that the boundaries between the genders are not as clear or as final as they are supposed to be, and a strong undercurrent of dissatisfaction with feminine socialisation and the
limitations of a corporate, subordinate feminine identity.


34. For Aguilar's life, see the anonymous introductory memoir in *Home Influence* (1847), 1850. Among her extremely popular novels, which were still being recommended for young women at the end of the century, were *A Mother's Recompense* (1850) and *A Vale of Cedars* (1850). *Home Influence* had reached its twenty-fourth edition by 1869.

CHAPTER THREE

3. See for example Gaskell's comment to George Smith, when she discovered that 'George Eliot' was a woman: 'I should have been more 'comfortable' for some indefinable reason, if a man had written them instead of a woman, yet I think the author must be a noble creature'. Quoted in Winifred Gérin, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Oxford, 1976, p.254.
6. Since completing this chapter I have read Patsy Stoneman's *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Brighton, 1987. Stoneman argues persuasively that Gaskell's fiction offers a revision of patriarchal structures, working towards 'inducing caring attitudes in men and exposing conventional motherhood as the means of infantilising women' (p.19).
11. For an illuminating discussion of the significance of the blush in *North and South*, see Stoneman, pp.130-1.


17. Quoted in Haight, p.72.


19. See for example Moers, p.267; Beer, p.90.

20. Quoted in Haight, p.165.


22. Quoted in Haight, p.397.


26. I give here the reading in the Clarendon edition of *Jane Eyre*, edited by Jane Jack and Margaret Smith, Oxford, 1969, p.215. Q.D. Leavis's silent substitution of 'Diana' for 'Dian' in the Penguin edition (p.201) is interesting in itself, but the feminising ending of Diana's name indicates the different versions of 'Dian' represented by Blanche and Diana.

27. For recent feminist analyses along these lines, see for example Helene Moglen, *Charlotte Brontë: The Self Conceived*, New York 1978, Chapter 3; The Marxist Feminist Literature Collective, 'Women's Writing: Jane Eyre, Shirley, Villette, Aurora Leigh', in *1848: The Sociology of Literature*, edited by Francis Barker and others, University of Essex, 1978, pp.185-206. The Collective offer an interesting Lacanian analysis, in which they argue that Rochester's 'maiming' represents his successful passage through the castration complex; he accepts his place in the signifying chain and enters the Symbolic order as bearer, rather than maker, of the Law. I would argue, however, that the point about Ferndean is that it offers a fantasised revision of that order.


33. That this is a conscious regression to an old formula is suggested by the fact that when Caroline meets Rose Yorke, she is reading Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, in which precisely this formula appears.
35. Mary Taylor to Charlotte Brontë, April 1850, in *Mary Taylor*, ed. Stevens, pp.93-4. It is worth noting that after she had read the whole of *Shirley*, Taylor appears to have modified her opinion, although her comments were characteristically double-edged. She wrote to Brontë that 'Shirley is much more interesting than J. Eyre - who indeed never interests you at all until she has something to suffer. All through this last novel there is so much more life and stir - that it leaves you far more to remember than the other' (Mary and Ellen Taylor to Charlotte Brontë, 13 August 1850, in *Mary Taylor*, pp.97-8).
36. Mary Taylor, *Miss Miles: Or, a Tale of Yorkshire Life 60 Years Ago*, 1890. For Taylor's life and the writing of *Miss Miles*, see *Mary Taylor*, ed. Stevens. Pauline Nestor suggests that the friendship between Dora and Maria in *Miss Miles* draws on Taylor's relationship with Charlotte Brontë (*Female Friendships and Communities*, pp.96-7).
40. Newton, p.110.

CHAPTER FOUR
1. Alfred Tennyson, *The Princess* (1847), *The Poems of Tennyson*, edited by Christopher Ricks, 1969, II.75-6, p.761. (Ricks notes, p.761, that these lines were added in 1851). Tennyson's double-edged representation of a women's college is cheerfully appropriated by the writers of school and college stories discussed in this chapter, who frequently refer to the poem. The line quoted here forms the epigraph to L.T. Meade's *A Sweet Girl Graduate*
(1891), the title of which draws on Tennyson’s ‘sweet girl-graduates in their golden hair’ (Prologue, 142, p.747) At the end of this novel, the students act out The Princess as their end-of-term play.


4. Unfortunately, the history of this fascinating institution has not yet been documented. My account of its membership and activities is taken from the journal Shafts, edited and largely written by Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp. Shafts was effectively the house journal of the Pioneer Club; like the club, it began its life in 1892. The journal lasted, with some hiccups, until 1899.


7. My account of Linton’s life in this chapter is taken primarily from George Somes Layard, Mrs. Lynn Linton: Her Life, Letters and Opinions, 1901, but see also Herbert Van Thal, Eliza Lynn Linton: The Girl of the Period, 1979. Gordon Haight attributes Eliot’s decision to move to London and earn a living by her pen to the influence of Linton’s example; in later years, Linton was among the relatively few women who continued to visit Eliot during her cohabitation with Lewes, but the two women were never close. Shortly after her entry on to the London literary scene, Eliot helped George Chapman to censor some of the ‘objectionable’ passages in Linton’s novel Realities (1851), which both considered dangerously sensual in tone. (Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot (1968), Harmondsworth, 1985, Chapters 3 and 12.) Despite their excisions, even the ‘strong-minded’ Geraldine Jewsbury was alarmed by the novel when it appeared: ‘Have you seen a wonderful book by Miss --- called Realities? Oh good gracious! good gracious! that any woman should have ever been given over to such bad taste! ...the book makes one feel “trailed in the mud.”’ (Selections from the Letters of Geraldine Endsor Jewsbury to Jane Welsh Carlyle, ed. Mrs A. Ireland, 1892, Letter 113, June 1851, p.405.)

9. These articles were reprinted in The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays, 2 vols, 1883.
10. See Layard, pp. 41-5.
12. Quoted in Layard, p.247.
14. Quoted in Layard, p. 343.
15. Letter to Miss Alyce Bagram, quoted in Layard, p.294. The Heavenly Twins (1893) was by Sarah Grand; Iota's A Yellow Aster (1894) is discussed later in this chapter.
18. L.T. Meade, The Cleverest Woman in England (1898), 1904. My own copy was awarded as a Sunday School prize for regular attendance in 1904!
20. Ella Hepworth Dixon, The Story of a Modern Woman, 1894. Boumelha, p.64, quotes Dixon's statement that she intended this novel as 'a plea for a kind of moral and social trades-unionism among women'.
22. Sarah Grand, The Beth Book (1897), introduced by Elaine Showalter, 1980. 'Sarah Grand' was the pseudonym of Frances McFall. For a discussion of Grand's feminism considerably more sympathetic than my own, see Norma Clarke, 'Feminism and the Popular Novel of the 1890s: A Brief Consideration of a Forgotten Feminist Novelist' in Feminist Review, No. 20, Summer 1985, pp.91-104.
25. The fullest account of the history of the girls' school story is in Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig's arch but nevertheless useful You're a Brick, Angela! A New Look at Girls' Fiction from 1839 to 1975, 1976.
26. The popularity of Meade and Doudney is noted by Edward Salmon in 'What Girls Read', Nineteenth

27. I have discussed the continuing popularity of the girls’ boarding-school story, and the particular fantasies which it offers the young reader, more fully elsewhere; see Gill Frith, ‘The Time of Your Life: The Meaning of the School Story’, in Language, Gender and Childhood, edited by Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Urwin and Valerie Walkerdine, 1985, pp.113-36.

28. See Angela Brazil, My Own Schooldays, 1925.
33. A Newnham Friendship, p.53.
35. Quigly, Chapter 4.
37. Lanoe Falconer, Mademoiselle Ixe (1890), 10th ed., 1892. ‘Lanoe Falconer’ was the pseudonym of Mary E. Hawker. The novel was published as the first volume in Fisher Unwin’s Pseudonym Library, after being rejected by a number of publishers. It was inspired by Falconer’s reading of Russian writers such as Turgenev and Stepanik, and motivated particularly by an article published in The Times which described the plight of women radicals in Russian prisons. Falconer was a fervent Liberal, and the novel asserts a Liberal commitment to the brotherhood of nations, gently but systematically puncturing the self-satisfied, jingoistic
insulaity of the English bourgeoisie. After Gladstone's enthusiasm for the novel was reported, *Mademoiselle Ixe* sold, as one bookseller put it, by the cartload; it was translated into many languages, banned in Russia, sold over 40,000 copies in England alone and was still going into new editions in 1912. For the reception of the novel and Falconer's life, see Evelyn March-Phillipps, *Lanoë Falconer*, 1915. So far as I have been able to discover, Falconer was not involved with the Pioneer Club, but her biographer was an active member. Falconer's novel, *Shoulder to Shoulder: A Tale of Love and Friendship*, 1891, focusses on the activities of a club for working-class girls.

41. My account in this paragraph draws especially on Burstyn, Chapters 4 and 5, but see also Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The New Woman As Androgyne' in Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, New York, 1985.
45. Review in *The Athenaeum*, 17th March 1894, quoted in Van Thal, p.188.
47. For the reception of *A Yellow Aster* and Ménie Muriel Dowie's lone travels in the Karpathian mountains, see Gail Cunningham, p. 58 and pp.73-4.
48. Rhoda Broughton, *Dear Faustina*, 1897. Broughton is, like Linton, a paradoxical figure. She was a highly successful writer, notorious in her youth for the daring representation of sexuality in her sensation novels. Possibly, as with Linton, her antagonism to the women's movement reflects the precariousness of her own claims to 'respectability'.
49. See Evelyn Sharp's autobiography, *Unfinished Adventure*, 1933. Sharp was later an active socialist and militant suffragette.
CHAPTER FIVE


4. See 'The New Woman as Androgyne'.


7. See Surpassing the Love of Men. The pivotal case study in Faderman's argument (pp.147-56) is the Woods-Pirie case of 1811, in which two Edinburgh schoolmistresses successfully sued Dame Gordon, the grandmother of one of their pupils, for loss of livelihood and defamation of character. Gordon's sixteen-year-old granddaughter, who slept in the same room as her teachers, had complained that at night Miss Woods would enter the dormitory, get into Miss Pirie's bed, climb on top of her friend, and shake the bed. She also reported several conversations which strongly suggested a sexual relationship. Dame Gordon immediately informed the other parents that their daughters were in grave moral danger; by the end of the week, every single pupil had been removed. The schoolteachers won their case because the House of Lords accepted that such a 'crime' was unknown in Britain and that love between women could not have a sexual expression. It seems to me that what is most striking about this case is the discrepancy it suggests between public, male discourse and private, female
discourse: for while the men on the bench clearly saw sexual relations between 'respectable' women as an impossibility, the women concerned just as clearly did not. Faderman discusses the case more fully in her Scotch Verdict: Miss Pirie and Miss Woods vs. Dame Cumming Gordon, New York, 1983.


9. For a fuller account of this debate, see Martha Vicinus 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding-School Friendships', Signs, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1984, 600-22, especially pp.600-1.


11. See Krafft-Ebing, pp.262-91 and Ellis, Chapter 4.


13. Radclyffe Hall, The Well of Loneliness (1928), introduced by Alison Hennegan, 1982. The novel was declared obscene in November 1928 after a highly-publicised court case; for a full account of the trial proceedings, see Vera Brittain, Radclyffe Hall: A Case of Obscenity?, 1968.


18. 'Inverts and Experts', p.25.

19. Introduction to The Well of Loneliness, p.xi.


22. There are two particularly interesting examples in Winifred Holtby's South Riding (1936) and Daphne du Maurier's Rebecca (1938). Both novels have a
version of a female 'primal scene' which picks up on a common girlhood escapade - the illicit visit to the mother's bedroom - and also on two recurrent literary motifs, the mirror ritual, and the figure of the mad promiscuous first wife as the locus of fearful sexuality. In *South Riding*, the mother of the emotionally unstable Midge is confined in a mental hospital. Midge enters her mother's bedroom and dresses up in her mother's clothes. When she faces her image in the glass, she is interrupted by her father; seeing, in the mirror, a tall black figure with a blazing ball of a face, Midge is reduced to a state of hysteria. *Rebecca* has a series of moments when the nameless heroine looks in the mirror and is identified with her husband's dead former wife. This Oedipal triangle culminates when the heroine secretly visits Rebecca's room and examines the lavish contents of her wardrobe. She is discovered by the sinister Mrs Danvers, Rebecca's surrogate, who insists that the heroine touches Rebecca's bedclothes and underwear; this prurient exploration is paralleled by an intense accumulation of fear.

26. The article, which is reprinted in Brittain, Radclyffe Hall (pp.52-8), includes Douglas's notorious comment that 'I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel'(p.57).
29. Quoted in Dickson, p.165.
30. 'Inverts and Experts', especially pp.17-18.
31. See Brittain, *Radclyffe Hall*, p.36.
33. Mary Renault, *The Friendly Young Ladies* (1944), with a new afterword by the author, 1984. For the genesis of the novel, see Renault's afterword.
34. Renault comments in her afterword, p.281, that on re-reading the novel after twenty years 'what struck me most was the silliness of the ending'.

37. Three Essays on Sexuality, p. 152.

38. 'Appendix B: The School-Friendships of Girls', pp. 368-84 in Ellis, Sexual Inversion, p. 374.

39. Sigmund Freud, Dora (1905), pp. 31-164 in Case Histories 1, Pelican Freud Library Vol. 8, edited by Angela Richards, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 95. As has often been noted, Freud failed in his initial analysis to recognise the full extent and importance of Dora's attachment to her father's mistress, Frau K. He persisted in locating the source of Dora's hysteria, and the focus of her erotic interest, in Frau K's husband, a substitute father, despite Dora's own resilience to this suggestion. It was only when he came to see that the source of Dora's extensive knowledge of the secrets of sexuality must have been Frau K, (rather than, as he had previously assumed, Dora's governess) that he recognised the importance of the attachment. His new insights were never incorporated into the final text of the analysis; they were recorded in a series of extensive footnotes, remaining adjacent to the 'real' triangle of Dora, her father and Herr K. The structure of the essay mirrors and prefigures the place which the girlhood friendship was to occupy within psychoanalytic theory, as a necessary yet anomalous stage in the girl's movement towards heterosexuality.

40. I am drawing here on the following manuals addressed to girls and young women: G.M. Ireland Blackburne, A Girl's Difficulties, 1895; Lucy Soulsby, Stray Thoughts for Girls (1893), new and enlarged ed., 1903; Mrs George Curnock, A Girl in her Teens and What She Ought to Know, 1907; Amy B. Barnard, The Girl's Book about Herself, 1912; Elizabeth Chesser, From Girlhood to Womanhood, 1913.


42. Soulsby, p. 170.

43. Chesser, p. 95.

44. See for example Dorothy K. Horne, 'A Former Schoolgirl's Point of View', pp. 79-87 in Advance in Co-education, edited by Alice Woods, 1919; similar points are made by Havelock Ellis's female adviser in 'The School Friendships of Girls'.

45. For the 'spinster-teacher moral panic', see Clement Dane, The Women's Side, 1926; Mary Scharlieb, The Bachelor Woman and Her Problems, 1929; Mary Chadwick, Adolescent Girlhood, 1932; Mary S. Wood, A Modern Girl's Problems, 1935; Phyllis Blanchard, The Care of the Adolescent Girl (New York, 1920), 1921. For a useful account of changes in the understanding of female adolescence in this period, see Carol Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up
Mrs Humphry Ward, Delia Blanchflower, 1915. Ward, author of the best-selling Robert Elsmere (1888) and many other novels, was born in 1851. She was yet another paradoxical anti-feminist: a consistent opponent of women’s suffrage, but an active campaigner for women’s higher education. See Enid Huws Jones, Mrs. Humphry Ward, 1973. Vera Brittain’s Honourable Estate (1936) is in many ways a rewriting of Delia Blanchflower, which reverses Ward’s argument to extricate ‘feminism’ from ‘lesbianism’. (Ward herself makes an appearance in the novel, when she watches a suffrage procession from behind lace-curtained windows). In Brittain’s novel, Gertrude is a successful writer, whose friendship with the unhappily-married Janet is the central focus of her life, but when Janet becomes involved with the women’s movement, Gertrude rejects her. At the end of the novel, it emerges that while Janet’s passion for Gertrude was ‘normal’, Gertrude was a repressed invert. Brittain’s ‘Gertrude’ is much more sympathetically represented than Ward’s; her story is framed as a plea for an acceptance of inversion. Nevertheless, the novel exemplifies the problems of making such a plea from within the dominant discourse. Brittain shifts the weight of ‘abnormality’ from feminism to anti-feminism, but retains the distinction between the ‘normal’ and the ‘abnormal’.

Clemence Dane (Winifred Ashton), Regiment of Women, 1917. The novel was written between 1914 and 1915. The title is of course taken from John Knox’s 1558 pamphlet, First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, which is quoted as follows on the title-page: ‘The monstrous empire of a cruell woman we knowe to be the onlie occasion of all these miseries; and yet with silence we passe the time as thogh the mater did nothinge appertain to us’. There is no biography of Dane; for her early years, see Twentieth Century Authors, edited by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, New York, 1942, pp.346-7.

Surpassing the Love of Men, p.341.


See Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900–1925 (1933), with a preface by Shirley Williams, London and Glasgow, 1979, p.583.

See Faderman, Surpassing the Love of Men, pp.341 and 471 and Baker, pp.260 and 271. Dane declined the commission to dramatise The Well of Loneliness on the grounds that the novel could not be made into a play (Baker, p.260).


54. Female Sexuality, p. 372.
56. Scharlieb, pp. 51 and 53.
59. The Women’s Side, p. 57.
60. Blanchard, p. 144.
62. Naomi Royde-Smith, The Tortoiseshell Cat, 1925.
64. De Courtivron, p. 215.
65. Angela Brazil, Loyal to the School, 1921, p. 232.
66. Angela Brazil, For the School Colours, 1918, p. 215.
68. See Gillian Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil, 1976. In her autobiography My Own Schooldays (1925), Brazil’s account of her girlhood friendships, which she continually describes as ‘red-hot’ and ‘white-hot’, is as unselfconscious as the representation of friendship in her novels.
69. Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Moves Up, 1921, p. 40.
72. Quoted in Troubridge, p. 69.
73. Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (1927), 1977.
74. ‘Olivia’, Olivia (1949), with afterword by Susannah Clapp, 1987. Dorothy Bussy was the sister of Lytton Strachey. For an interesting discussion of the autobiographical origins of Olivia, see Vicinus, ‘Distance and Desire’.
78. See ‘Lesbian Intertextuality’.
79. See Sex, Politics and Society, Chapter Eleven; see also Sheila Jeffreys, The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1860-1930, 1985, Chapter Nine. Nicola Beauman gives a number of revealing
examples, drawn from fiction and autobiography, of women's confusion about their sexuality in this period, including Naomi Mitchison's account of how Marie Stopes's widely-read *Married Love* (1918) transformed her sex life; see Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39*, 1983, Chapter Five.

86. See Nicole Ward Jouve, *Colette*, Brighton, 1987, p.89. For one example of what appears to be a direct borrowing from Colette, compare the moment when Judith brushes Jennifer's hair in *Dusty Answer* (p.178) with Jouve's illuminating discussion of a similar moment in Colette's *Claudine Married* (Jouve, pp.92-3). Antonia White translated a number of Colette's novels, including *Claudine at School*.
89. *This Narrow Place*, p.113.
90. *Summer Will Show* was intensively researched, and it is noticeable that Warner's description of Minna's features 'with their Jewish baroque, the hooked nose, the crescent eyebrows and heavy eyelids, the large full-lipped mouth' (pp.123-4) corresponds closely with descriptions of George Sand given by her contemporaries; compare, for example, the extracts from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's letters quoted in Patricia Thomson, *George Sand and the Victorians: Her Influence and Reputation in Nineteenth-Century England*, London and Basingstoke, 1977, p.52.
91. This Narrow Place, p.118. For a poignant account of the relationship between Sylvia and Valentine, see Valentine Ackland, For Sylvia: An Honest Account, 1985.


93. Introduction to A Compass Error, pp.xv-xvi.


95. Introduction to The Chinese Garden, p.11.

CHAPTER SIX

1. Merle Eyles, You and Yourself: Advice for Growing-up Girls, [1939], p.64.

2. Eyles, p.58.


4. See 'Sisterhood, Relations between Women, and Women's Community' and 'Contemporary Lesbian Fiction: Texts for Everywoman'.

5. See 'Sisterhood, Relations between Women, and Women's Community'.


10. For representations of lesbianism in the novels of American women writers, see Jeannette H. Foster, Sex Variant Women in Literature, (New York, 1956), Tallahassee, Florida, 1985, Chapter Nine. One particularly interesting example is The Price of Salt by 'Claire Morgan' (Patricia Highsmith), published in 1952, which offered a lesbian love story with a happy ending.

11. For an interesting discussion of the teaching of women's writing in higher education and extra-mural classes, see 'Remembering: Feminism and the Writing of Women', pp.106-39 in Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class, edited by Janet
Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O’Rourke and Chris Weedon, 1985.

27. Writing a Woman’s Life, p.100.

CONCLUSION
BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following is a list of editions consulted and quoted in the text. Place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

A. PRIMARY SOURCES

1. NOVELS, PLAYS AND POEMS

Many of the novels discussed are rare in their original editions, but have recently been republished; where this is the case, I have cited the current edition. Dates of first publication are indicated in parentheses. (Autobiographical writings are listed in Section 2; other non-fictional writings by novelists will be found in Section 3.)

Aguilar, Grace. Home Influence (1847), with anonymous introductory memoir, 1850
--- Woman's Friendship: A Story of Domestic Life, 1850

--- Northanger Abbey (1818), ed. Anne H. Ehrenpreis, Harmondsworth, 1972
--- Pride and Prejudice (1813), ed. Tony Tanner, Harmondsworth, 1972
--- Sense and Sensibility (1811), ed. Tony Tanner, Harmondsworth, 1969

Bedford, Sybille. A Compass Error (1968), introd. Peter Vansittart, 1984

Bowen, Elizabeth. The Hotel (1927), 1950
--- The Little Girls (1964), Harmondsworth, 1982

Brazil, Angela. For the School Colours, 1918
--- Loyal to the School, 1921

Brittain, Vera. Honourable Estate, 1936

Brontë, Charlotte. Jane Eyre (1847), ed. Q.D. Leavis, Harmondsworth, 1966
--- Shirley (1849), ed. Andrew and Judith Hook, Harmondsworth, 1974
--- Villette (1853), ed. Mark Lilly, introd. Tony Tanner, Harmondsworth, 1979

--- Hotel du Lac (1984), 1985
Broughton, Rhoda. *Dear Faustina*, 1897


Bruce, Dorita Fairlie. *Dimsie Moves Up*, 1921


Caird, Mona. *The Daughters of Danaus*, 1894


Coleridge, Mary E. *The Shadow on the Wall: A Romance*, 1904


Craik, Dinah Mulock. *Mistress and Maid*, 2 vols, 1863

--- *Olive* (1850), n.d.


--- *The Question of Max* (New York, 1976), New York, 1984

Daitch, Susan. *L.C.*, 1986

Dane, Clemence. *Regiment Of Women*, 1917

Dixie, Lady Florence. *Gloriana; or, the Revolution of 1900*, 1890

Dixon, Ella Hepworth. *The Story of a Modern Woman*, 1894

Doudney, Sarah. *Michaelmas Daisy*, 1882

--- *Monksbury College: a Tale of Schoolgirl Life*, 1878

--- *When We Were Girls Together*, 1886

Dowie, Ménie Muriel. *Gallia*, 1895
Drabble, Margaret. **Jerusalem the Golden** (1967), Harmondsworth, 1969
--- **The Radiant Way**, 1987

Edgeworth, Maria. 'Angelina; or, L'Amie Inconnue' (1801), in *Moral Tales*, Tales and Novels Vol. 1, 1857, pp. 221-82
--- **Helen** (1834), Tales and Novels Vol. X, 1857
--- **Leonora** (1806) Tales and Novels Vol. VIII, 1893, pp. 242-423

Edwardes, Annie. **A Girton Girl**, 3 vols, 1885

--- **Middlemarch** (1871-2), ed. W. J. Harvey, Harmondsworth, 1965


Falconer, Lanoë. **Mademoiselle Ixe** (1890), 10th ed., 1892
--- **Shoulder to Shoulder: A Tale of Love and Friendship**, 1891

Farmer, Penelope. **Standing in the Shadow** (1984), 1986


Fullerton, Lady Georgiana. **Grantley Manor**, 3 vols, 1847

Galford, Ellen. **The Fires of Bride**, 1986

Gaskell, Elizabeth. **Cranford** (1853) and **Cousin Phillis** (1865), ed. Peter Keating, Harmondsworth, 1976
--- **Mary Barton** (1848), ed. Stephen Gill, Harmondsworth, 1970
--- **North and South** (1855), ed. Dorothy Collin, introd. Martin Dodsworth, Harmondsworth, 1970


---  *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), introd. Alison Hennegan, 1982

Hanscombe, Gillian E.  *Between Friends* (Boston, Massachusetts, 1982), 1983


---  *South Riding* (1936), introd. Lettice Cooper, 1988

Hulland, J.R.  *Student Body*, 1986

Iota.  *A Yellow Aster* (3 vols, 1894), 12th ed., 1894


James, Henry.  *The Bostonians* (1886), Harmondsworth, 1966


Keeling, Elsa D’Esterre.  *Appassionata*, 1893


La Tourette, Aileen.  *Nuns and Mothers*, 1984


---  *In Haste and at Leisure*, 3 vols, 1895

---  *The One Too Many*, 3 vols, 1894

---  *The Rebel of the Family*, 3 vols, 1880

Lurie, Alison.  *The Truth about Lorin Jones*, 1988


Maurier, Daphne du. Rebecca (1938), 1975

Mayor, F.M. The Third Miss Symons (1913), introd. Susan Hill, 1980

Meade, L.T. Betty, a Schoolgirl, 1894
--- The Cleverest Woman In England (1898), 1904
--- The Girls of Merton College, 1911
--- The Girls of St. Wode's, 1898
--- The Hill-Top Girl, 1906
--- A Sweet Girl Graduate (1891), 1894
--- A World of Girls, 1886

Mitchell, Gladys. Laurels Are Poison (1942), 1986

Moore, George. A Drama in Muslin (1886), introd. A. Norman Jeffares, Gerrards Cross, 1981


Olivia. Olivia (1949), with afterword by Susannah Clapp, 1987


Pym, Barbara. Jane and Prudence (1953), 1981

Radcliffe, Ann. The Italian (1797), ed. Frederick Garber, 1968

Renault, Mary. The Friendly Young Ladies (1944), with new afterword by the author, 1984

Rhys, Jean. Tigers Are Better-Looking, with a Selection from 'The Left Bank' (1968), Harmondsworth, 1972


Roberts, Michèle. A Piece of the Night, 1978
--- The Visitation, 1983

Royde-Smith, Naomi. The Tortoiseshell Cat, 1925


Sarton, May. The Magnificent Spinster (New York, 1985) 1986


Sewell, Elizabeth M. *Margaret Percival*, 2 vols, 1847


Spain, Nancy. *Poison for Teacher: A New Entertainment*, 1949


Staël, Mme de. *Corinne; or, Italy* (Paris, 1807), trans. Isabel Hill, with metrical versions of the odes by L.E. Landon, 1833

Stronach, Alice. *A Newnham Friendship*, 1901

Syrett, Netta. *Nobody´s Fault*, 1896
--- *Rose Cottingham* (1915), Chicago, 1978
--- *The Tree of Life*, 1897


Taylor, Mary. *Miss Miles: Or, a Tale of Yorkshire Life 60 Years Ago*, 1890


Tey, Josephine. *Miss Pym Disposes* (1946), Harmondsworth, 1983

Vaizey, Mrs George de Horne. *A College Girl*, 1913


Ward, Mrs. Humphry. *Delia Blanchflower*, 1915
For ease of reference, it has been my policy to use the most accessible edition of novels currently available in more than one edition; where available, I have used the editions in the Penguin Classics series and the Virago Modern Classics series. In the case of Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, however, quotations in the text have been checked against the Clarendon editions, as listed below. Any significant discrepancies are indicated in the notes. Minor differences in punctuation have not been noted.

--- Shirley, ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, Oxford, 1979
--- Villette, ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, Oxford, 1984


2. LETTERS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Ackland, Valentine. For Sylvia: An Honest Account, 1985

Brazil, Angela. My Own Schooldays, 1925

Brittain, Vera. Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925 (1933), with preface by Shirley Williams, London and Glasgow, 1979

Holtby, Winifred. Letters to a Friend, ed. Alice Holtby and Jean McWilliam, 1937
--- Selected Letters of Winifred Holtby and Vera

--- Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe, ed. G.H. Needler, 1939

Jewsbury, Geraldine. Selections from the Letters of Geraldine Endson Jewsbury to Jane Welsh Carlyle, ed. Mrs Alexander Ireland, 1892

Lister, Anne. I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister, 1791-1840, ed. Helena Whitbread, 1988

Manning, Rosemary. A Corridor of Mirrors, 1987

Martineau, Harriet. Harriet Martineau's Autobiography, with memorials by Maria Weston Chapman, 3 vols, 1877


Sharp, Evelyn. Unfinished Adventure, 1933


3. CONDUCT BOOKS, ESSAYS, PSYCHOLOGICAL TEXTS AND OTHER CONTEXTUAL MATERIAL

Aguilar, Grace. The Women of Israel (1845), 6th ed., 1870

Barnard, Amy B. The Girl's Book about Herself, 1912


Blackburne, G.M. Ireland. A Girl's Difficulties, 1895

Blanchard, Phyllis. The Care of the Adolescent Girl (New York, 1920), 1921

Carpenter, Edward. The Intermediate Sex, 1908

Chadwick, Mary. Adolescent Girlhood, 1932

Chapone, Hester. Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady (1773), (bound with John Gregory, A Father's Legacy to his Daughters) 1820

Chesser, Elizabeth. From Girlhood to Womanhood, 1913

Cobbe, Frances Power. *The Duties of Women*, 1881


Craik, Dinah Mulock. *A Woman's Thoughts about Women*, 1858

Curnock, Mrs George. *A Girl in her Teens and What She Ought to Know*, 1907

Dane, Clemence. *The Women's Side*, 1926


Ellis, Sarah Stickney. *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society*, Character and Responsibilities, 1845

--- *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), n. d.

Eyles, Merle. *You and Yourself: Advice for Growing-up Girls*, [1939]

Farningham, Marianne. *Girlhood*, 1869


Gregory, John. *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), (bound with Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*) 1820

Grey, Maria and Emily Shirreff. *Thoughts on Self-Culture, Addressed to Women*, 2 vols, 1850


--- *Ourselves: Essays on Women* (1864), 1884


Pullan, Matilda. *Maternal Counsels to a Daughter*, 1855

Raymond, Janice G. *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (Boston, Massachusetts, 1986), 1986


Sandford, Mrs John. *Woman in her Social and Domestic Character*, 1831

Scharlieb, Mary. *The Bachelor Woman and her Problems*, 1929

Soulsby, Lucy H. M. *Stray Thoughts for Girls* (1893), new and enlarged ed., 1903

Streatfeild, Noel, ed. *The Years of Grace*, 1950


Wilson, Gay. "Women's friendships", *Saturday Review*, Vol. 18, 1864, 176-7

Wood, Mary S. *A Modern Girl's Problems*, 1935

Woods, Alice, ed. *Advance in Co-education*, 1919

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own* (1929), 1977
--- *Women and Writing*, ed. Michèle Barrett, 1979

Yonge, Charlotte M. *Womankind*, 1876

B. SECONDARY SOURCES

I. Published Material


Abel, Elizabeth, ed. *Writing and Sexual Difference*, Brighton, 1982


Boumelha, Penny. *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*, Brighton, 1982

Bratton, J.S. *The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction*, 1981


Bryant, Margaret. *The Unexpected Revolution: A Study in the History of the Education of Women and Girls in the Nineteenth Century*, 1979

Burstyn, Joan. *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, 1980


Cadogan, Mary and Patricia Craig. *You're a Brick, Angela! A New Look at Girls' Fiction from 1839 to 1975*, 1976

Clarke, Norma. 'Feminism and the Popular Novel of the 1890s: A Brief Consideration of a Forgotten Feminist Novelist', *Feminist Review* No. 20, Summer 1985, pp.91-104


Coward, Rosalind. *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today*, 1984


Davidoff, Leonore and Hall, Catherine. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, 1987


Foster, Jeannette H. *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, (New York, 1956), with afterword and addenda by Barbara Grier, Tallahassee, Florida, 1985


Freeman, Gillian. *The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil*, 1976


--- *Elizabeth Gaskell*, Oxford, 1976


Hall, Catherine. 'The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology', in *Fit Work For Women*, ed. Sandra Burman, 1979, pp.15-32
Harrison, J. F. C. The Early Victorians, 1832-1851, 1971


Howe, Susanne. Geraldine Jewsbury: Her Life and Errors, 1935


Jacobus, Mary, ed. Women Writing and Writing about Women, 1979

Jeffreys, Sheila. The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930, 1985

Jones, Enid Huws. Mrs. Humphry Ward, 1973

Jouve, Nicole Ward. Colette, Brighton, 1987


Kaplan, Cora. Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism, 1986


Kersley, Gillian. Darling Madame: Sarah Grand and Devoted Friend, 1983

Killham, John. Tennyson and 'The Princess': Reflections of an Age, 1958

Kunitz, Stanley J. and Howard Haycraft, ed. Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature, New York, 1942

Layard, George Somes. Mrs. Lynn Linton: Her Life, Letters and Opinions, 1901

Light, Alison. 'Writing Fictions: Femininity and the 1950s', in The Progress of Romance, ed. Radford, pp.139-65

Lovell, Terry. Consuming Fiction, 1987

McKenzie, K. A. Edith Simcox and George Eliot, 1961

March-Phillipps, Evelyn. Lanoë Falconer, author of "Mademoiselle Ixe", 1915
Marinelli, Peter V.  Pastoral, 1971

Marks, Elaine.  'Lesbian Intertextuality', in Homosexualities and French Literature, ed. Marks and Stambolian, pp.353-77


Mavor, Elizabeth. The Ladies of Llangollen (1971), Harmondsworth, 1973


Moers, Ellen. Literary Women, New York, 1977


Mulford, Wendy. This Narrow Place, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics, 1930-1951, 1988

Myers, Walter L. The Later Realism, Chicago, 1927


Newton, Judith. 'Villette', in Feminist Criticism and Social Change, ed. Newton and Rosenfelt, pp.105-33


Nicolson, Nigel. Portrait of a Marriage, 1973


Oliphant, Mrs, and others. Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign, 1897

Pichanick, Valerie. Harriet Martineau: The Woman and her Work, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1980


Salmon, Edward. 'What Girls Read', *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XX, 1886, 515-29

Schellenberger, John. 'Fiction and the First Women Students', *New University Quarterly* 36(4), 1982, 352-8


Shafts, Vols I-VII, 1892-99

Showalter, Elaine. A Literature of their Own (Princeton, New Jersey, 1977), 1978


Stoneman, Patsy. Elizabeth Gaskell, Brighton, 1987

Strachey, Ray. The Cause (1928), with new preface by Barbara Strachey, 1978


Taylor, Helen. ‘Class and Gender in Charlotte Brontë’s Shirley’, Feminist Review, No.1, 1979, 83-93


Tillotson, Kathleen. Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (1954), with corrections, 1961

Tindall, Gillian. Rosamond Lehmann: An Appreciation, 1985

Todd, Janet. Sensibility, Methuen, 1986
--- Women’s Friendship in Literature, New York, 1980

Troubridge, Una. The Life of Radclyffe Hall, 1961

Uglow, Jennifer. George Eliot, 1987

Van Thal, Herbert. Eliza Lynn Linton: The Girl of the Period, 1979
Vicinus, Martha. 'Distance and Desire: English Boarding-School Friendships', Signs, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1984, 600-22
Vicinus, Martha, ed. Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, (Bloomington, Indiana, 1972), 1980
--- A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women, (Bloomington, Indiana, 1977), 1980
Weeks, Jeffrey. Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present, 1977
--- Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800, 1981
Wilson, Elizabeth. 'I'll Climb the Stairway to Heaven: Lesbianism in the Seventies', in Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions, ed. Sue Cartledge and Joanna Ryan, 1983, pp.180-95
II. Unpublished material
--- 'Sisterhood, Relations Between Women, and Women's Community', (Chapter Six in Paulina Palmer, Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist Theory, forthcoming, Hemel Hempstead, 1989)

C. GUIDELINES

In the presentation of this thesis I have used the following guidelines: