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**Sacrifice as a Narrative Strategy: The Construction and  
Destruction of the Self in May Sinclair, Mary Butts, and H. D.  
Melin Schyllert, K.**

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**Sacrifice as a Narrative Strategy:  
The Construction and Destruction of the Self in May  
Sinclair, Mary Butts, and H. D.**

**Sanna Melin Schyllert**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates sacrifice in experimental narratives of the early twentieth century by May Sinclair, Mary Butts, and H. D. (Hilda Doolittle). I argue that sacrifice is used as a narrative strategy for negotiating the relationship between self and other, not only on a thematic level, but also in terms of narrative strategy. These shifts are not only indicative of the tendency to experiment with unexpected narrative strategies in early twentieth century fiction, but also reveal a concern with the individual self in relation to a community of other selves that intersects several wider issues in the historical/cultural context of the works studied: the First World War, first-wave feminism, psychoanalysis, and anthropological research. As first-, second-, and third-person modes of narration are interspersed, the boundaries between narrative selves are continually dissolved and reinstated. The continuous negotiation of the boundaries of the narrative voice means that these narratives promote both the death and the resurrection of the subjective self through the use of sacrifice as a narrative strategy.

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## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

## Introduction

This thesis investigates sacrifice in experimental narratives of the early twentieth century written by the three authors May Sinclair, Mary Butts, and H. D. (Hilda Doolittle). I argue that sacrifice is used as a narrative strategy for negotiating the relationship between self and community on both a thematic level and a stylistic level in the works studied. Sacrifice is understood in this thesis as meaning acts of renunciation, normally made in times of uncertainty or upheaval, which have the potential to confer a quality of transcendence to the performer of the sacrifice and the thing or person sacrificed, as well as effect a negotiation of chaos and order in a given community. I discuss this definition of sacrifice and related concepts at length below. The thematic use of sacrifice concerns both transcendent and concrete aspects of the concept, for instance spiritual awakening on the one hand and actual death on the other, because the two are inseparable; in order for a death to be a sacrifice it has to involve a transcendental facet.

The stylistic use of sacrifice concerns the formation and abnegation of the narrative self through pronoun shifts: otherwise unmarked changes to the personal pronoun that indicate a change in the narrative stance. The continuous negotiation of the boundaries of the narrative voice is a grammatical representation of the sacrificial theme on the pages of the novels studied, because it expresses not only moments of uncertainty and identity crises, but also a return to certainty with every shift back to a familiar referent. The pronoun shifts thereby simulate sacrifice in that they dissolve and reinstate boundaries between narrative selves, thus negotiating between chaos and order.

What I bring to the discussion of the fiction of May Sinclair, Mary Butts, and H. D. is an exploration of the connection between sacrifice and the self, and how this links in with experiments with narration in the form of shifts between the first, second, and third personal pronoun in the narrative voice. The pronoun shifts not only show a suspicion towards a hegemonic narrator and a linear narrative, but also imply a continual dissolution and reconstitution of the self. I will consider what, if any, relation the concept of sacrifice has to narrative innovation in general.

The self is understood here as a combination of qualia and the autobiographical self, and community is understood as the experience of intersubjectivity. Qualia is understood here as defined by David Chalmers as a ‘quality of experience’ of consciousness, or ‘those properties of mental states that type those states by what it is like to have them.’<sup>1</sup> I will argue that the convergence of sacrifice and experimental narration, formally expressed through pronoun shifts in the narrative voice, is contingent on the problem of a simultaneous realisation of a defined self and an intersubjective consciousness. The operational definition of intersubjectivity as used in this thesis is that of a shared experience between more than one subject. Sacrifice is represented linguistically and thematically in the studied fictional narratives to temporarily make sense of and create order in a context that lacks an institutionalised belief. Understanding the relationship between self and community is crucial for the concept of sacrifice, as it prompts the question of whether it is right for the community to take precedence over the self. Whereas the

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<sup>1</sup> David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4; 359, n. 2. This, for Chalmers, is ‘[t]he really hard problem of consciousness’ in philosophy as opposed to the nuts and bolts of neurophysiology: ‘[w]hy should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all?’ David Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.



act of sacrifice implies that the answer is yes, I interpret the works studied here as representing an ambiguous stance. The central object of this thesis is to find out why sacrifice takes a central position in the studied works, and how it can be read both as regenerative or creative and destructive.

Sacrifice is often perceived as destructive – its connotations are to terrorism, scapegoating, violence, and death. Yet to make sense of the texts that this thesis seeks to investigate, where sacrifice plays an integral part in events that both promote and negate self-development, a less one-sided understanding of sacrifice is needed. The thesis will therefore attempt to look at sacrifice without ascribing to it an inherently negative value, in order to understand its role in developmental as well as destructive processes.

The choice of authors was made after careful consideration of several writers of the early twentieth century, some of whom will be looked at briefly in chapter 1. The decision to focus on May Sinclair, Mary Butts, and H. D. developed out of this initial investigation, where it was found that these three authors represent three different and significant ways of writing sacrifice into fiction in the interwar period. In chapter 1, I give the details of my reasoning behind this choice.

The first section of chapter 1 deals with the contextualisation of sacrifice in early twentieth century fiction. I then outline my conceptualisation of sacrifice in its philosophical and anthropological context. Here, I use various theories of self-consciousness – primarily those of G. W. F. Hegel, Daniel Dennett, and David Chalmers – to connect sacrifice with intersubjectivity, that is, the self in relation to other selves. I argue that rather than being a problematic concept, sacrifice is actually crucial to the formation of self for protagonists in the novels studied. For this reason I am using sacrifice as a wide concept that encompasses aspects of the term from

ritual blood sacrifice to more everyday forms of self-immolation. The chapter finally explains the connections between sacrifice and the pronoun shifts that mark various plateaux of the narrator-protagonist's renunciation and realisation of the self, which will be exemplified in the case studies.

Chapter 2 concerns May Sinclair, primarily her two novels *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919) and *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922). I propose that the two novels adopt two opposing methods to describe experiences of the self. In the former narrative, sacrifice serves as a key to reaching an illuminated state of self, or self-realisation, whereas the latter novel presents a dark-sided counterpart: sacrifice that leads to self-annihilation. The narrative techniques used in each novel represent not only a side of sacrifice and its relation to self-realisation, but a side of the problem of consciousness as well.

The work of Mary Butts, dealt with in chapter 3, exemplifies ritual sacrifice in the novel through the use of scapegoating and mythologising mechanisms to address some of the problems that modernism sought to illustrate. The three novels *Ashe of Rings* (1925), *Armed with Madness* (1928), and *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932) incorporate a plethora of images of sacrifice, crucifixion, self-immolation, and literal blood sacrifice. The texts are also deeply concerned with the space between communal responsibility and individual freedom; they probe whether or not humans need structure, and whether it is possible to institute a community that is not oppressive to any one individual. Interestingly, all of the sacrifices in Butts' novels appear to be made with the aim of bringing about structure. The suggestion of the chapter is that they are not singularly successful in doing so.

The early prose works of H. D. are the focus of chapter 4, in which the conception of identity and selfhood is found to be tied to notions of sacrifice in a

variety of contexts: war, motherhood, martyrdom, and classicism. The negotiation between self-sacrifice and self-assertion in H. D.'s Madrigal cycle – which consists of *HERmione* (written 1926, published 1981), *Asphodel* (written 1921-2, published 1992), *Bid Me to Live (A Madrigal)* (written 1939, published 1960), and *Paint It Today* (written 1921, published 1992) – creates a need for experimental pronoun shifts in the narratives.<sup>2</sup> These shifts in turn create a space of intersubjective consciousness that continuously negotiates the boundaries of the self.

The works chosen from each author share a narrative strategy that is related to sacrifice – shifts in the personal pronoun used by the narrative voice. The significance of reading sacrifice as a theme side by side with these experiments on the grammatical level brings a new perspective on pronoun shifts as a narrative strategy. The pronoun shifts represent a continuous giving up and regaining of the self on the level of the sentence and are therefore conceptually linked to a concern with sacrifice through the negotiation between individual and community, a highly relevant issue in the historical context of the fictional works.

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<sup>2</sup> See further discussion about the complications involved in dating these works in chapter 4, n.2.

## Chapter 1

### Sacrifice and Experimental Narration

In order to look at the experimental narratives in this study through the prism of sacrifice, it is essential to situate the concept of sacrifice in relation to early twentieth-century fiction. It is also necessary to formulate a definition of sacrifice that is relevant both to the case studies and to their wider context. In this chapter, I will look at the relationship between sacrifice and experimental narration by placing sacrifice in the context of modernist fiction, discussing definitions of the concept, and relating sacrifice to theories of consciousness and the self. I will also explain my choice of materials and what type of narrative pronoun shifts I look at in the selected novels in order to clarify how the narrative strategy is linked to sacrifice as a theme.

#### **Sacrifice in Modernist Fiction**

Sacrifice has been identified as a central theme in much modernist fiction in previous scholarly work, but normally these works have used definitions of sacrifice that are narrower than the one applied in this thesis. Sacrifice in these studies tends to be understood as ritual sacrifice, which implies an orientalised or othering of the concept, rather than looking at its wider significance. One such study is *Culture and Sacrifice: Ritual Death in Literature and Opera* (2007), in which Derek Hughes examines the role that ritualised human sacrifice has played in Western culture and

states that '[h]uman sacrifice is everywhere in Modernist texts.'<sup>1</sup> Hughes' study concerns human sacrifice only, and it distinguishes between human and other kinds of sacrifice by claiming that human sacrifice is equivalent to 'moral chaos' and thus representative of 'primal barbarity'; human victims signify a 'corruption of sacrifice.'<sup>2</sup> Hughes further argues that James George Frazer is the only anthropologist to have any major literary influence: 'Only at one point has there been any substantial interaction between literature and anthropology: in the influence of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.'<sup>3</sup> Hughes boldly claims that Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss' *Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice* (*Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, 1898) 'made no impact on literature,' but does not back up this statement beyond pointing out that '[i]ts account of the logic of sacrifice was theoretically and psychologically remote...'<sup>4</sup> This appears to be a very misleading claim given the influence of Hubert and Mauss on for instance Jane Harrison's work, which in turn had a profound effect on modernist authors as shown for instance in Martha C. Carpentier's *Ritual, Myth and the Modernist Text: The Influence of Jane Ellen Harrison on Joyce, Eliot and Woolf* (1998). There will be further discussion below of the intertextual relevance of Jane Harrison and the importance of her work for the authors studied. Hughes' statement about Hubert and Mauss and his neglect of Harrison skews the image he gives of sacrifice in modernist literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Hughes, *Culture and Sacrifice: Ritual Death in Literature and Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, *Culture and Sacrifice*, 6; 11.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, *Culture and Sacrifice*, 6. Several scholars have dealt with the impact of the work of James George Frazer on writers of fiction, notably in John B. Vickery's *The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough* (1973), and *Sir James Frazer and the Literary Imagination: Essays in Affinity and Influence* (1990), a collection of essays edited by Robert Fraser.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, *Culture and Sacrifice*, 211.

An earlier, pioneering work in the area of sacrifice in fictional narrative is Kenneth Burke's *Language as Symbolic Action* (1966), which explores the notion of the protagonist as a scapegoat. Burke, a literary theorist and assistant editor of as well as contributor of fictional works to the modernist magazine *The Dial* in the 1920s, had ideas similar to those of anthropologist Mary Douglas and philosopher René Girard as regards sacrifice and the structuring principle of society and his work is fundamental to later scholarship that has been done on sacrifice in modernist fiction. Burke considered sacrifice to be a precursor to governance, law, and social order. In *The Rhetoric of Religion* (1961), wherein he reads the Bible as a narrative, he writes that 'the emergence of the turn from mere sacrifice to the idea of outright redemption by victimage' is gradual, and that 'ultimately the idea of cleanliness attains its full modicum of *personality*, in the idea of a fitting personal sacrifice.'<sup>5</sup> Sacrifice, according to Burke, becomes gradually less concerned with the gift-sacrifice anthropologist Marcel Mauss writes about in *Essai sur le don* (*The Gift*, 1925) – that is, strictly transactional offerings in return, for example, for a good harvest – and more preoccupied with personal victims or scapegoats, Christ being the foremost example in a post-Christian paradigm: 'a theological view of the narrative can lead to a more "promissory" kind of classification, whereby all sacrifices and sufferings preceding the Crucifixion can be classed as "types of Christ."'<sup>6</sup> Burke finds that all dramatic narrative needs a scapegoat or victim, because 'if *drama*, then *conflict*. And if *conflict*, then *victimage*. Dramatism is always on the edge of this vexing problem that comes to a culmination in tragedy,

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 216. Emphasis in original.

<sup>6</sup> Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion*, 218.

the song of the scapegoat.<sup>7</sup> Narrative and sacrifice are intimately bound together in this view. If indeed all narrative has an element of sacrifice – if there is sacrifice in all narrative – the three authors studied utilise this element in a particular way by experimenting with the narrative form in order to negotiate a continuous development of the fictional self.

Several later scholars on the topic build on Burke's theories, among others Thomas Cousineau, who argues in *Ritual Unbound* that the reason for the ambivalence with which modernist writers treat sacrifice is the double-edged realisation that scapegoating as a social phenomenon brings about in a twentieth-century context: 'On the one hand, we recognize the injustice of persecuting victims in whose guilt we can no longer plausibly believe; on the other hand, we cannot imagine how to create a human community that does not have its scapegoats.'<sup>8</sup> Cousineau maintains that the novels he looks at are aesthetic answers to the modernist issue with sacrifice in that they constitute 'an *imaginary* solution to the intractable problem of creating, in the *real* world, a non-sacrificial economy.'<sup>9</sup> These works either wholly reject the sacrificial ritual as having no value for modern man, Cousineau concludes, or defend the individual character that has been or is to be sacrificed while retaining the notion that sacrifice is a necessary outlet of communal violence.<sup>10</sup> The first type is exemplified by *Ulysses*, a text that Cousineau perceives as ridiculing and thus wholly rejecting both ritual and religion. To exemplify the

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, ed. Joseph R. Gusfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 125.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas J. Cousineau, *Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modernist Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Cousineau, *Ritual Unbound*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Cousineau, *Ritual Unbound*, 17.

second type, Cousineau uses Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which appears to describe the inescapability of sacrificial violence when social boundaries are transgressed. Modernist works are thereby undoubtedly negative towards sacrifice according to Cousineau, and display this antipathy either by rejecting sacrificial ritual altogether as having no value for the modernist individual, or by way of defending an individual character that has been or is to be sacrificed but retaining the notion that scapegoating is a necessary evil in society.<sup>11</sup>

The main difference between Cousineau's reading of modernist sacrifice and my own concerns the value of sacrifice. The novels I work with do not categorically present sacrifice as necessary or unnecessary, or the value of sacrifice as being inherently good or bad. Rather than either rejecting or defending the sacrificial ritual, they display an interest in the nature of sacrifice and its relationship with the construction and destruction of the self. They do not linger on the potential horrors of sacrifice, nor do they bypass them as unproblematic.

While my argument includes the tenet that sacrifice in modernist fiction is much concerned with the self and its construction through consciousness, it is also just as attentive to the issue of selves in relation to one another – in fact, the two rely on each other, as I will show below. This contradicts William A. Johnsen, who finds that the modernist preoccupation with sacrifice is primarily an expression of solipsistic individualism. In *Violence and Modernism* (2003), he reads selected writings of James Joyce, Henrik Ibsen, and Virginia Woolf alongside anthropologists

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<sup>11</sup> John B. Vickery's *The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) further outlines the intertextual relationship between Frazer's work and William Butler Yeats, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce. Cousineau is currently undertaking work on a related project, which builds on Kenneth Burke's assertion that all protagonists are essentially sacrificial victims. Thomas Cousineau, 'The Daedalus Complex,' accessed on 25 August 2015, <https://sites.google.com/site/thedaedaluscomplex/home>.



of the same era, who regarded sacrifice as an archaic or exotic phenomenon, and suggests that the three modernists acknowledged sacrifice as a pertinent element of modern culture in the form of scapegoating. This hypothesis is naturally reliant on René Girard, whose theories Johnsen uses to underpin his readings.<sup>12</sup>

Johnsen further proposes in a 2011 article that modernist authors not only saw the continued relevance of sacrifice in the twentieth century; they were ‘fascinated by *its persistence*’.<sup>13</sup> He argues that René Girard’s theory of deviated transcendency may be employed to explain why characters tend to become self-sacrificial. The notion of deviated transcendency builds on the principle of mimetic rivalry, which, at its culminating point is denoted by Johnsen as ‘modern order break[ing] down.’<sup>14</sup> The modernist literary character displays a ‘need to be self-sacrificial’ due to the fact that he ‘desires some sense of transcendent self-offering of himself to others but not for others, a sacrifice not as an offering or gift but of self-gratification, even self-divinization.’<sup>15</sup> This could be framed as self-serving sacrifice, a seemingly contradictory idea, as sacrifice is thought of as displacing the self for the benefit of the other. Outside of the individualist opposition between self and other, it appears to be less of a contradiction; however, Johnsen’s reading is grounded in the notion that sacrifice as self-serving cannot possibly have a positive impact beyond the individual who makes the sacrifice. As an outlet of the modernist feeling of

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<sup>12</sup> William A. Johnsen, *Violence and Modernism: Ibsen, Joyce and Woolf* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 140-1. Simon De Keukelaere has done similar work on Woolf in ‘What is deviated transcendency? Woolf’s *The Waves* as a textbook case,’ *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 12-13 (2006): 195-218.

<sup>13</sup> William A. Johnsen, ‘Modern Sacrifice,’ *Religion and Literature* 43, no. 3 (2011): 194. Emphasis in original.

<sup>14</sup> Johnsen, ‘Modern Sacrifice,’ 195.

<sup>15</sup> Johnsen, ‘Modern Sacrifice,’ 195.

discontinuity with history, then, literary characters are not only preoccupied with sacrifice, but long to perform it, a wish that Johnsen reads as purely egocentric and devoid of any interest in the benefit of the community.

I argue, contrary to Johnsen, that sacrifice as a self-serving endeavour and sacrifice for the advantage of others could well be considered as two sides of the same coin, bearing in mind that sacrifice entails both sacralisation and destruction, as will be shown in the following section where I discuss the definition of sacrifice. The question here is more one of intentionality rather than of the outcome of the sacrifice. A self-sacrificial act that gratifies the person performing it can of course have a secondary purpose of being of value to the community. However, one may pose the question of whether a sacrifice originally intended to benefit the community can also benefit the individual who is being sacrificed. The answer may depend on the issue of whether or not the sacrifice is to some degree voluntary; if the sacrificed person believes in the higher purpose and that the sacrifice is necessary for the community, then it will also be self-gratifying. One example of this is sacrifice in wartime, which is motivated by such calls to arms as ‘your country needs you.’

War is and has always been intimately connected to sacrifice for obvious reasons: the importance of violence to many theories of sacrifice, and the inherent narrative of war as a sacrifice for a higher purpose.<sup>16</sup> For that reason, it is hardly surprising that interwar fiction should deal with sacrifice to some extent. After 1918, people struggled to make sense of the apparently senseless waste of human life provoked by increasingly advanced technological warfare. Unsurprisingly, modernist

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<sup>16</sup> Allen J. Frantzen provides a useful overview of the relation between war and sacrifice by looking at this conceptual juncture in two historical contexts, the Middle Ages and the Great War, in *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

fiction brims with narratives that deal with death in war. Many of the questions provoked by the deaths of many thousands of soldiers can be boiled down to one: was it worth it? The immensity of that human sacrifice must be clearly motivated by a higher principle if the idea of the nation-state and the honour of warfare is to continue to have any value. In a time of upset and social upheaval such as the period during and after the First World War, stability can be expected to be an increasing concern. Marcel Proust identifies the core of the problem in the final instalment of *In Search of Lost Time*, where he writes about the relationship between the individual and the state in wartime, and the role of narrative as a mediator of this relationship. The quote is from the first part of the seventh instalment, which takes place during the war. Marcel is walking around Paris at night and meets Baron de Charlus, who is siding with Germany, and hopes if not for victory for the Germans, then at least for them to avoid being annihilated, which is what causes Marcel to think about individuals belonging to nations:

[W]ithin a nation the individual, if he is truly part of the nation, is simply a cell of the nation-individual. It is ridiculous to talk about the power of propaganda. ... The real propaganda is what – if we are genuinely a living member of a nation – we tell ourselves because we have hope, hope being a symbol of a nation's instinct of self-preservation.<sup>17</sup>

Proust implies that the reason why it would be 'ridiculous' to speak of the potency of propaganda is because it would be powerless without the grand narrative of the nation-state and the individual subjects' internalisation of that narrative. Propaganda only works on those who are already inclined to believe in the nation and to see themselves as part of it, whether consciously or not, so it is not actually necessary at

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<sup>17</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time vol 6: Time Regained*, trans. Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin (London: Vintage, 1996), 103.

all. Being told to make a sacrifice for a country when one does not truly feel like a full member of that country is not going to have the same impact as on ‘a living member of a nation’. For that reason, it is all the more important for society to keep its structures intact and preserve its national images; without that sense of security and stability regarding communal concerns, the whole nation could fall to pieces when attacked by an enemy.

While this thesis does not give its undivided attention to the First World War, armed combat necessarily forms a contextual background for the studied works. A number of studies on the topic of sacrifice and war in English modernist fiction have attempted to point out a discursive shift concerning sacrifice that coincides with the war.<sup>18</sup> Evelyn Cobley’s article ‘Violence and Sacrifice in Modern War Narratives’ (1994) argues that narratives of the First World War describe soldiers as sacrificial victims, which fundamentally alters the image of war from that of a heroic battle to a more gritty and dehumanising process.<sup>19</sup> Derek Hughes reiterates and modifies this point when stating that the use of the term sacrifice changed during the First World War to become invested with an ‘almost desirable’ quality compared to the way in

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<sup>18</sup> See for instance *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality in Modern Literature: Bodies-at-War*, edited by Petra Rau, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, edited by Sharon Ouditt, (London: Routledge, 1994); Mark D. Larabee, *Front Lines of Modernism: Remapping the Great War in British Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Evelyn Cobley, ‘Violence and Sacrifice in Modern War Narratives,’ *SubStance* 23, no. 3, issue 74 (1994): 77.

which it had been used in English media during the Crimean War.<sup>20</sup> In *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (2003), Vincent Sherry maintains that the discourse used by the government with regard to the war generated literary experimentation due to negative reactions to the legitimisation of armed combat through political rhetoric: ‘In the political discourses of the Great War, where the language of public reason goes so massively and disastrously wrong, the first words of a truly novel consciousness may begin to spell themselves out in the reverse lettering of this discredited myth, in a modernity against itself, in modernism.’<sup>21</sup>

It is not only clear from previous research that modernist fiction is deeply affected by the war and its various narratives – and thereby the understanding of sacrifice as an act of some value – it is also evident that the value of sacrifice undergoes a significant change at this time. My research will show how the works studied negotiate and try to make sense of that change through a particular narrative strategy that combines a thematic concern with sacrifice with formal experiments in narrative voice. The thesis thus focuses on three authors whose work applies this particular combination: May Sinclair, Mary Butts, and H. D.

The reason for the exclusion of certain other authors in this thesis is the particular narrative strategy used in combination with an ambiguous concern with sacrifice: pronoun shifts. This strategy does exist in Woolf and Richardson to mention two examples, but does either not take shape in relation to sacrifice or does not relate to the negotiation of self in relation to others. Below, I examine pronoun

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<sup>20</sup> Derek Hughes, ‘Human Sacrifice and the Literary Imagination,’ *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, ed. Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 231.

<sup>21</sup> Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 16.

shifts further – which ones I will look at and what function they have. This discussion will further illuminate my choice of materials.

A question that lies at the centre of this thesis is whether or not the narrative strategy employed by Sinclair, Butts, and H. D. is specific to modernist fiction. Research done by Cousineau and Johnsen suggests that the preoccupation with sacrifice in literary fiction is particular to the modernist period. While Johnsen's work connects modernism's anxiety about itself to the desire for self-sacrifice, and Cousineau primarily argues that the scapegoating treatment of protagonists is specifically apparent in modernist fiction, I would like to draw attention to another way that modernist literature represents sacrifice: through formal innovation. Modernist fiction is of course known for its experiments with narrative form, and my contention is that sacrifice is specifically connected to those experiments. In the following section I outline in further detail the parallels between formal experimentation and depictions of sacrifice that will be dealt with thoroughly in each separate chapter.

### **The Concept of Sacrifice**

I will now outline the arguments for a wide, inclusive definition of sacrifice that relates to self-consciousness and self-perception. Building on theories of sacrifice from the field of the anthropology of religion, I maintain that sacrifice is relevant across time and place, not as a static concept of specific ritual practices, but as an understanding of how individuals relate to each other in that it creates an intersubjective space. By intersubjectivity I mean a shared cognition of any particular event, that is, a mutual understanding within the group that performs or takes part in the sacrifice. The group can be termed a community through its creation

of a sense of belonging, which is achieved through partaking in the sacrifice. I argue that sacrifice has a non-dichotomous yet ordering function in the narratives studied. It is crucial to establish the ordering function of sacrifice for the argument that follows because it founds the claim for sacrifice as constructive. Sacrifice does not entail violence and chaos only – it simultaneously creates an order out of chaos, without which it would not have the potential to reinforce the self. I will now look at sacrifice in the framework of anthropology and religious studies in order to establish these aspects more fully.

I rely on the assumption that sacrifice is inherently religious, as it is derived from a way of thinking that is categorised as religious, even when talking about ‘everyday’ sacrifice. The etymological meaning of the word sacrifice, to do or to make holy, from the Latin words *sacer* (holy) and *facere* (to do or make), has at least two possible interpretations: turning something previously regarded as mundane into something holy, or to perform a holy or sacred act. I do not propose that all acts of everyday sacrifice are consciously meant to be ‘religious,’ as in made with a supernatural being in mind, but that all acts of sacrifice are imbued with ideas derived from religious thinking. Anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries asserted that the widespread inclusion of sacrifice in religion pointed to the universality of the notion of sacrifice as a concept.<sup>22</sup> Naturally, there is great plurality when it comes to sacrificial acts, and in order to define the concept in a wide sense, all such variations have to be considered. In the foundational work *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, anthropologists Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Cohen and West, 1964), 13-4, for a brief discussion on the generic unity of sacrifice. See also further details of their definition of sacrifice below.

looked at the smallest common denominators and formulated a definition that has been in use since the early twentieth century and still is today. It should be noted that the work of Hubert and Mauss has been criticised for eurocentrism and methodological shortcomings. Despite these concerns, the definition is still considered relevant in the field of religious studies.<sup>23</sup> I return to the definition itself in further detail below.

French philosopher René Girard's theories are also useful for this study in that they combine philosophy, anthropology, and literary criticism. They do, however, put forward Christian sacrifice as something other and apart from sacrifice in other religions. Girard's motive here is to find evidence for the supremacy of Christianity as religious belief, which is decidedly not a scientific endeavour. I will return to a discussion of the details of Girard's argument below. A number of scholars who build on Girard argue that sacrifice is integral to human society and even fundamental to our cognisance of existence, as noted in the introduction to *Violence, Desire, and the Sacred* (2014), a collection of work that is based on and develops Girard's theories on sacrifice: 'Sacrifice ... represents the human project in a fundamental way, that is, to survive and thrive in relationship with each other and in terms of the almost uncontrollable and undefined desires that we have for *more*, in fact, *for "being" itself*.'<sup>24</sup> The volume posits that sacrifice is essential to human society, as it can be found in societies across the globe and throughout history. In the

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<sup>23</sup> For further details on the work of Hubert and Mauss as understood and used today, see Nick Allen, 'Using Hubert and Mauss to think about Sacrifice,' in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, ed. Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147-162.

<sup>24</sup> Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, and Joel Hodge, 'Introduction,' in *Violence, Desire and the Sacred, Volume 2: René Girard and Sacrifice in Life, Love and Literature* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2014), xvii. Emphasis in original.



same vein of understanding sacrifice as a universally applicable concept, Gavin Flood writes that ‘sacrifice has ... become a way of ordering the world, of expressing hope, and of giving life meaning. This ordering of the world through sacrifice has often ... occurred at times of crisis,’ which is an expression of specificity within the general.<sup>25</sup> Flood is pointing to the general usage of sacrifice as way to bring structure and order to chaos specifically in moments of upheaval. I maintain that this is a crucial point for reading sacrifice in fiction produced in early twentieth-century England, a time and place of extensive social change.

Although I write of sacrifice as a structural concept, I do not propose a structuralist approach in the sense of the term as used in anthropology, but I am firmly relying on such poststructuralists as Judith Butler to assert that sacrifice as structural can be used to criticise the same structures it creates.<sup>26</sup> It is possible to think of this concept as poststructural sacrifice. I purposefully do not wish to use this term as I think the conception of sacrifice that I use moves beyond poststructuralism into an acknowledgement that structures are needed in society, while retaining the realisation that these structures, if rigidly maintained, are harmful for those who do not fit into the structure but remain on its borders or in its ‘between’ spaces.

As I wish to consider sacrifice as a wide concept, I take my departure from the Hubert and Mauss definition, and go on to look at the related concepts of scapegoating and victimhood, but do not look at the details of what sets various aspects of sacrifice apart from others, only what brings them together under the umbrella term of sacrifice. The definition of sacrifice that is given by Hubert and Mauss in the introduction to *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* is ‘a religious act

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<sup>25</sup> Flood, ‘Sacrifice as Refusal,’ 116.

<sup>26</sup> See for instance Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), 4.

*which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of a moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned.*<sup>27</sup>

This definition underlines three important elements of the concept as used here.

Firstly, sacrifice is primarily a religious act, or, in cases where one is tempted to use the phrase secular sacrifice, an act that is derived from a religious frame of thought, that is, that there exists a purpose higher than oneself or one's own material wellbeing, and that the sacrifice serves this purpose.<sup>28</sup> Hubert and Mauss are clear in that they regard sacrifice as purely religious: 'Sacrifice is a religious act that can only be carried out in a religious atmosphere and by means of essentially religious agents.'<sup>29</sup> This definition indicates that there is a transcendental element in sacrifice. Giving something up for a higher purpose is a sacred performance, one that involves the sanctification of all those involved.

The second point in Hubert and Mauss' definition of sacrifice states that the victim of the sacrifice is consecrated, which means that it is not only beneficial for the individual to perform a sacrifice – that is, to sacrifice something other than oneself – for a higher purpose, but that it is also beneficial, within the framework that validates the sacrifice, to *be sacrificed*. In the words of Hubert and Mauss, the victim, once destroyed, is 'separated definitively from the profane world; it [is] consecrated, it [is] sacrificed...' <sup>30</sup> Thirdly, the sacrificial act has the power to alter the

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<sup>27</sup> Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 13. Emphasis in original.

<sup>28</sup> Secular sacrifice can be used to term the everyday use of the word sacrifice, for example as in 'to sacrifice one's career to have a family.' Secular sacrifice is normally regarded as equivalent to 'giving something up,' which is of course a meaning that goes far beyond the scope of ritual or religious sacrifice and can extend to any kind of renunciation, including one that does not confer a sense of consecration. I will discuss and exemplify this further in chapter 2.

<sup>29</sup> Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 35. Emphasis in original.

state of the person who performs it, as well as the state of his or her objects. This is effected through representation in the victim of the sacrificer by way of a proximity between the two: 'Through this proximity the victim, who already represents the gods, comes to represent the sacrificer also.'<sup>31</sup> The act of sacrifice is an act of representation, and the patron of the sacrifice may thereby be considered as sacrificed himself, if only symbolically.

Using this interpretation, it is tempting to think that sacrifice can be understood as being part of a particular kind of exchange-based economy, in which participants give up one thing in return for another. Hubert and Mauss indeed thought of the 'gift-sacrifice' as the first and original form of sacrifice out of which other kinds later developed.<sup>32</sup> Mauss touches upon this idea in the seminal work *The Gift*, in which he compares gifts between humans with sacrifice as a gift to the supernatural or a gift between humans 'in the sight of the gods and nature.'<sup>33</sup> Importantly, as Mauss points out in the introduction to this study, the gift-sacrifice is not made without the expectation of a return – it is not a charitable gift, but a silent economic agreement: 'exchanges and contracts take place in the form of presents; in theory these are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily.'<sup>34</sup> Sacrifice can therefore not be understood solely as renunciation, because it implies a reciprocal link. It is however important not to simplify the term and consider it as having a purely economic or transactional function, as sacrifice more often than not entails giving up something that has a value outside the symbolic economy of sacrifice, that is, something that is of worth or use both as a worldly object and as a

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<sup>31</sup> Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge, 2002), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, 3.

sacrifice. Additionally, I would argue that there is rarely a guarantee of returns on the deal in a strictly economic sense. For this reason, it is not possible to equate sacrifice and for instance money, which of course has no value or use outside of a particular economic system.

The outcome of a sacrifice could of course have great value even if it is not comparable to a gift or money. Georges Bataille holds in *La Part Maudite* (*The Accursed Share*, 1967) – a ‘book of political economy’ according to its author – that there is such a thing as giving without receiving. He bases his theory on the sun, ‘which dispenses energy – wealth – without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving.’<sup>35</sup> For Bataille, this partly explains the practice of making a sacrifice even when there is no discernible return: ‘In former times value was given to unproductive glory, whereas in our day it is measured in terms of production ... dominated though it is by practical judgment and Christian morality, the archaic sensibility is still alive’.<sup>36</sup> The notion of sacrifice, particularly when perceived as unproductive or uneconomic, is perceived as something that should be outdated, yet it remains relevant.

The Hubert and Mauss definition further makes clear that sacrifice is an action that will generate change; it effects a sacralisation, and it ‘*modifies the condition of a moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects*’.<sup>37</sup> This aspect is also highlighted in Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber’s introduction to *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*: ‘[T]he thing that is sacrificed, whether an external object or the self, is thereby [through the sacrificial rite] changed from a profane into

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<sup>35</sup> Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share. Vol I: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 9; 28.

<sup>36</sup> Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice*, 13

a sacred item, and this transformation signifies symbolically the need and the potential of the world as a whole to be remade in likeness of the divine.<sup>38</sup> The potential for change is particularly important for the understanding of sacrifice as an anthropological concept.

It may seem contradictory to argue that sacrifice is both an agent of change and one of order, but I wish to argue that the change-making properties of sacrifice are in fact crucial to its ability to reinforce any kind of structure. The structure may be of a revolutionary nature or be more conservative; the anthropologists of the late nineteenth century claimed that ritual sacrifice was purely conservative, but more recent scholarship provides a firm basis on which to consider ritual sacrifice as making things new. Consider for instance any of the examples from Hinduism brought up by Gavin Flood in his chapter ‘Sacrifice as Refusal’ in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, for instance that of the Vedic sacrifice, which ‘is performed within the “sacred canopy” of a cosmology with a fixed order’ – a re-enactment of the world’s structure as it is seen in this particular culture. The sacrificial death itself does not only signify destruction, but also re-birth and, importantly, ‘the affirmation of the order of the world.’<sup>39</sup> Flood argues that, generally, ‘sacrifice is concerned with the future, with piling up merit in heaven... and structuring the universe in an ordered way that relates the future to the present and a higher world to the lower world.’<sup>40</sup> Sacrifice, then, is both a way in which to create change and in which to reinstate an order.

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<sup>38</sup> Meszaros and Zachhuber, ‘Introduction,’ 5.

<sup>39</sup> Flood, ‘Sacrifice as Refusal,’ 126.

<sup>40</sup> Flood, ‘Sacrifice as Refusal,’ 124.

Jane Ellen Harrison was an early twentieth-century classical scholar and suffragist whose work was read by and resonated with all three authors studied in this thesis. Her work is included here as it deals with the change-making and ordering properties of sacrifice in ancient Greece, and her ideas on this influenced the thinking of Sinclair, Butts, and H. D. Harrison belonged to the Cambridge Ritualists, a group of Cambridge classical scholars who shared the conviction that myth originates in ritual. In *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913), following Hubert and Mauss' introductory definition of sacrifice, the sacrificial ritual is understood by Harrison as a vehicle through which something is made holy and, once the sacrifice has been completed, as transferring the quality of sacredness to the whole community that is involved in the ritual. The thing that is hoped to be achieved through the sacrifice – which in most of Harrison's examples is the fertility of soil and people – is invested in the image of the object to be sacrificed. In one example, the offering takes the form of a bull and the desire for fertility becomes transmuted into a desire for the animal. This is an example of the change-making properties of sacrifice.

The perceived sanctifying properties of sacrifice are evident at this stage in Harrison's description of the ritual. After the killing, the bull is dismembered and shared by all, thereby affording the members of the community that performs the sacrifice a piece of its sacredness in death. Through the consumption of this meal, Harrison argues, the bull lives on by way of both feeding and sanctifying the people: '[I]t was not to give him up to the gods that they killed him, not to "sacrifice" him in our sense, but to have him, keep him, eat him, live by him and through him, by his grace.'<sup>41</sup> Harrison's wording here clarifies that there is a parallel between ritual

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<sup>41</sup> Jane Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (Bradford: Moonraker Press, 1978), 46.

sacrifice and the Eucharist. The sacrificial ritual has invested the victim, the bull, with holy properties. The ingestion of its meat transfers the holiness of the bull onto the people who consume him. For Harrison, this is a description of a primeval sacrifice.

Harrison argues further on that this ritual forms the basis for understanding the meaning of sacrifice, a ritual which has now come to signify something less corporeal and more symbolic: '[I]n place of sacraments, holy bulls killed and eaten in common, we get sacrifices in the modern sense, holy bulls offered to yet holier gods. ... Religion moves away from drama towards theology...'<sup>42</sup> Harrison posits that ritual becomes art when culture reaches a point where the ritual is no longer significant for the religious cult. This hypothesis is particularly relevant for the modernist authors I study, who all express the originally religious concept of sacrifice through the art of narrative. In this view of the development of religion, sacrifice developed from being a literal murder of a person or animal to become a symbolic gesture: 'art ... risen out of ritual,' or the symbolic ritual of the Eucharist.<sup>43</sup> The sacrifice, originating in ritual, still retains one of its basic functions as a mediator between chaos and order.

René Girard's theory of scapegoating links sacrifice with a structuring principle by seeing it as an outlet for chaos, which has a subsequent outcome of restored order in a society. Girard was deeply influenced by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his thinking, but also by the aforementioned literary theorist Kenneth Burke. Girard's theory proposes that scapegoats are needed to control the constant build-up of violence in society due to so-called mimetic desire or rivalry: the

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<sup>42</sup> Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, 38.

inclination to want what someone else has got. A scapegoat is not necessarily the same thing as a sacrificial victim, however; for Girard, the death or exclusion of the scapegoat is not voluntary, whereas an element of choice or at least compliance is not uncommon in rituals of human sacrifice. For instance Jessica Frazier, building on work done by Laura Rival, argues ‘that shamanistic notions of inter-subjectivity meant that even [the Aztecs’] human sacrifices were partly sacrifices of the shared self, rather than a scapegoated Other.’ Frazier further suggests that ‘[t]he fact that numerous violent temple-sacrifice traditions viewed death as the gateway to a post-mortem life lived in the divine realm, supports the idea that the significance of many animal and human sacrifices lay in their potential for life, not for death.’<sup>44</sup> In this study, both voluntary and involuntary sacrifice are regarded as equally worthy of attention.

Seen in a broader perspective, sacrifice is not solely related to actual, physical violence that leads to ritual death; the violence of Girard’s theory can also be regarded as a form of negotiation of chaos and order in a given group. Scapegoating, as well as other forms of sacrifice, have the function of averting or channelling disorder. Rather than just denoting a particular kind of ritual or violent event, I wish to derive from Girard the notion of sacrifice as related to chaos and order, but in opposition to Girard, I understand sacrifice as both productive and destructive. Girard builds on Hegel in considering desire to be a fundamental drive that feeds into the dialectic of power relations: one individual wants what the other one has and vice versa, thereby creating tension and ultimately conflict. In Hegel’s thought – to which I will return in more detail – desire controls self-consciousness,

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<sup>44</sup> Jessica Frazier, ‘From Slaughtered Lambs to Dedicated Lives: Sacrifice as Value-Bestowal,’ in *Sacrifice and Modern Thought*, ed. Julia Meszaros and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112; 113.



as it is that which instigates the master-slave dialectic as well as prompts the individual to want to be recognised by, and thereby ‘mirror’ themselves in, the other. This is part of the mimetic rivalry process: the progression from wanting the same thing to fighting over it, which then evolves to a state of violent interaction in general, now removed from the initial coveted object. ‘Mimetism is a source of continual conflict. By making one man’s desire into a replica of another man’s desire, it invariably leads to rivalry; and rivalry in turn transforms desire into violence.’<sup>45</sup> It is this violence, Girard holds, that needs to find an outlet in the form of sacrifice. Malcolm Bull similarly argues, on the basis of the theories of Hegel and Girard, that the threat of chaos in human communities is usually heralded by the ceasing of sacrificial practices. If Girard’s argument is that chaos in society is staved off by the practice of sacrifice, Bull means to say that when sacrifice is not present as a tool with which to re-establish order, chaos takes over and society, or societal order, is destroyed.<sup>46</sup>

According to Girard, the scapegoat mechanism comes into play when a society, due to internal strife, has reached a point of chaos and is at risk of being violently destroyed or dissolved. The situation is then defused by the victim onto which all the internal violence is projected: ‘[S]ociety is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a “sacrificeable” victim, the violence that would

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<sup>45</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 169. For a longer discussion of mimetic desire and rivalry, see René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (London: Continuum, 2003), 7-29.

<sup>46</sup> Malcolm Bull, *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision and Totality* (London: Verso, 1999).

otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most desires to protect.’<sup>47</sup> The victim thus symbolises not only the struggle between members in the society, but also the members themselves, as they were the original targets of the violent acts. As the victim shoulders the burden of the violence that brought chaos to its social group, it is either ejected from society or destroyed, but paradoxically also sacralised. Through its annihilation or expulsion, peace is restored to the community that performed the sacrifice. This suggests that sacrifice exists to keep societies in order and to stifle the chaos that, according to Girard, will inevitably arise among humans as a consequence of violence born out of mimetic desire, and that ‘sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from *its own* violence’ by offering an outlet for that accumulated violence.<sup>48</sup> It is thereby possible to read the Girardian sacrifice as multifaceted though violent; it is not solely destructive, as its purpose is to save the community from violence.

Understanding sacrifice as purely destructive does not seem to make sense, then, even when sacrifice is understood as violence. Bataille, however, claims the opposite. In ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’, he reads sacrifice through Hegel, but understands it through Alexandre Kojève’s interpretation, which emphasises the Hegelian idea of reality as nothingness. In this reading, sacrifice is synonymous with death; in fact, ‘[f]or Kojève, “the ‘dialectical’ or anthropological philosophy of Hegel is in the final analysis a *philosophy of death*”’.<sup>49</sup> There are several issues with

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<sup>47</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 8. Emphasis in original. Paul S. Fiddes also points this out in ‘Sacrifice, Atonement, and Renewal,’ 49.

<sup>49</sup> Georges Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,’ *Yale French Studies* 78 (1990): 10. Bataille does highlight the affinity of sacrifice and holiness through his treatment of Hegel, and although he traverses a different path than that of Hubert and Mauss, he arrives at the same conclusion that they do in this matter.

this analysis. Nothingness only implies death insofar as death entails complete destruction, that is, in an atheistic worldview. This is the whole point for Kojève – to show that Hegel is an atheist at heart. The problem is that, for Kojève, ‘Nothingness’ or ‘negativity’ is opposed to the Hegelian god, whereas for Hegel, nothingness *is* god, not in the atheist sense – that god does not exist – but in the sense that god is ‘Indeterminate’.<sup>50</sup> Although Hegel’s attitude to Buddhism and Chinese religion was one of surface disdain, Timothy Morton argues that ‘there is a remarkable and historically probable collusion between Hegel’s view of the nothingness of the in-itself ... and the dominant form of Tibetan Buddhism of which he was aware.’<sup>51</sup> A long quotation from *Phenomenology of Mind* that Bataille supposes will support his reading clearly states that ‘the life of Spirit is not that life which is frightened of death, and spares itself destruction, but that life which assumes death and lives with it.’<sup>52</sup> The inference Bataille makes is a very expected one – to assume that death is equal to destruction – and is likely to be the reason why many readings of Hegel tend towards a mystical interpretation. However, the concept of death as understood here is not opposed to life, but is part and parcel of it. Bataille and Kojève’s idea that death equals annihilation is in opposition to sacrifice as conceived of in this study.

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<sup>50</sup> Heinrich Dumoulin, ‘Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42, no. 3 (1981): 462. Timothy Morton, ‘Hegel on Buddhism,’ *Romantic Circles*, published February 2007, accessed on 17 July 2016.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/buddhism/morton/morton.html>. Freud’s death drive seems to be another reformulation of this phenomenon; see for instance Marcus Boon, Eric M. Cazdyn, and Timothy Morton, *Nothing: Three Inquires in Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 227, and Kenneth Liberman, ‘Negative Dialectics in Madhyamika and the Continental Tradition,’ in *East-West Encounters in Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Ninian Smart and B. Srinivasa Murthy (Long Beach: Long Beach Publications, 1996), 185-202.

<sup>52</sup> Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,’ 14.

It is not only the influence of Kojève that emphasises sacrifice as destructive here; it is also likely to be a result of Bataille's reading of Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift* (*On the Genealogy of Morality: A Polemic*, 1887). The purpose of sacrifice as expressed by Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morality* is the pursuit of constancy and remembrance: 'When man decided he had to make a memory for himself, it never happened without blood, torments and sacrifices: ...all this has its origin in that particular instinct which discovered that pain was the most powerful aid to mnemonics.'<sup>53</sup> In this view, sacrifice is a necessary evil in order for humans to keep memories, to make history, and to effect a sense of continuity. It is not particularly far-fetched to consider sacrificial rituals as such, since rituals are by definition repetitive, but Nietzsche maintains that self-sacrificial actions have the same purpose:

In a certain sense, the whole of asceticism belongs here: a few ideas have to be made ineradicable, ubiquitous, unforgettable, 'fixed', in order to hypnotize the whole nervous and intellectual system through these 'fixed ideas' – and ascetic procedures and lifestyles are a method of freeing those ideas from competition with all other ideas, of making them 'unforgettable'.<sup>54</sup>

In this sense, ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice are two expressions of the same function, not oppositional pairs, as they are often seen from late Christian and secular perspectives. In each act of sacrifice, there is a memory of a previous sacrifice, and as with other rituals, these repeated acts carry with them the reproduction of structure, while containing the power to effect change. Despite its

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<sup>53</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diehte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38.

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 38.

ordering function, then, a paradoxical but fundamental element of sacrifice is its change-making properties.

Even in the bleak view of sacrifice proposed by Georges Bataille, there is a redeeming element that relates to the structure- and change-making feature of sacrifice. In Gavin Flood's reading of Bataille, his theory bears a strong resemblance to that of Girard in that it is viewed as a channel for a 'superabundance of energy;' Bataille thereby sees a resemblance between ritual sacrifice and war.<sup>55</sup> Flood maintains that 'Bataille perceives the link between sacrifice and war in his idea of the excess of energy that needs to be wasted to bring society back to a state of equilibrium; and in contemporary western society, it is war that best approximates to any residue of a sacrificial culture geared towards ordering or making sense of the world.'<sup>56</sup> Disorder, then, is remedied by sacrifice, as it is a practice through which order is felt to be established and violations against that order are remedied.

Looking at a variety of theorists above, I have arrived at the following definition of sacrifice as used in this thesis: acts of renunciation that confer a quality of transcendence to the performer of the sacrifice and the thing or person sacrificed, and effect an intersubjective negotiation of chaos and order in a given group. I have also established that, despite its ordering function, a fundamental element of sacrifice is its change-making properties. Furthermore, I have found that sacrifice is not only destructive, but can also be viewed as beneficial. These findings are primarily related to the role of sacrifice in a group; the next section will show what role sacrifice plays for the individual self.

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<sup>55</sup> Flood, 'Sacrifice as Refusal,' 120.

<sup>56</sup> Flood, 'Sacrifice as Refusal,' 117.

## Sacrifice and Self-Consciousness

I will now look at the links between self-consciousness and sacrifice so as to lay the foundation for the claim that sacrifice not only facilitates intersubjectivity – that is, shared cognitive experience between several conscious selves – but that it is equally important for a subjective perception of self, or self-consciousness. I will use Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, 1807) to show the link between self-consciousness and sacrifice and argue that sacrifice is compatible with a preoccupation with the self via intersubjectivity.

Self-consciousness is often understood as a perception not only of the self in isolation, but of the self in relation to others. Hegel's well-known theory of the master-slave dialectic posits that self-consciousness *only* exists in relation to the other, which is a basic tenet for a contemporary or poststructural understanding of most nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropology.<sup>57</sup> This theory was first outlined in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, where Hegel posits that there can be no self without an Other to that self, that is, no subject without an object to which it is related: 'Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it *is* only by being acknowledged or "recognized."'<sup>58</sup> This means that in order for humans to perceive

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<sup>57</sup> 'Master' and 'slave' are commonly used as the English translation of the German original *Herr* and *Knecht*, but alternate, more literal, translations have been suggested for *Knecht*, such as servant or bondsman, since *Knecht* does not necessarily imply what is usually understood by 'slave': a human being who is considered the master's possession, and is required to perform unpaid labour.

<sup>58</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baille (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), 104. Although Baille's translation of the title's '*Geistes*' is '*Mind*' the work is more commonly known in English as *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, following A. V. Miller's translation. It is interesting to note the difference as the one implies more religious content than the other. It is often argued that no translation of this work can be unproblematic due to the cryptic nature of the text.

themselves as selves, they must be able to mirror themselves in an Other, who paradoxically becomes both an image of one's own self and its contrast.

The distinction between master and slave, Hegel argues, originates in the difference in their respective experiences of self-consciousness. The master has an 'independent' and 'immediate consciousness,' one 'that exists *for itself*,' whereas the slave has a 'dependent' and 'existent consciousness' which 'is not purely for itself, but for another'.<sup>59</sup> Paradoxically, the moment that the master realises himself as such, he also realises that his consciousness is in fact a dependent one, since his 'certainty of himself' has to be mirrored in the consciousness of the slave in order to exist. Hegel states that '[the master] is thus not assured of self-existence as his truth; he finds that his truth is rather the unessential consciousness,' which conversely entails the independence of the consciousness of the slave.<sup>60</sup>

Ironically then, Hegel's theory posits that it is not those in power who manage to establish an independent consciousness of the self, but those who work. The slave, through his renunciation of the self and creation of things through his work, gains a self-image, both by being mirrored in his master and in the product of his work.<sup>61</sup> Hegel proposes that the activity of work *is* independent existence. Work also creates something external, which lets the consciousness of one who does the work experience a more or less permanent symbol of its independent existence: 'The consciousness that toils and serves accordingly attains by this means the direct apprehension of that independent being as its self.'<sup>62</sup> The master, who has obtained recognition from the slave and will therefore project an image of fully realised

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<sup>59</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 108.

<sup>60</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 110.

<sup>61</sup> Bull, *Seeing Things Hidden*, 216.

<sup>62</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 111.

selfhood, ultimately helps to afford independence of consciousness to the slave, whose self-image is reflected in that of the master.

Hegel argues that it is by giving up a sense of self, or by putting it at risk, that it is possible to achieve self-consciousness.<sup>63</sup> In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, it is postulated that

it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is it tried and proved that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence...

The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. In the same way each must aim at the death of the other, as it risks its own life thereby...<sup>64</sup>

Sacrificing the self is not a mere aid to the completion of a fully formed self-consciousness, but it is *required* for the successful development of selfhood. In Douglas Hedley's words, 'the path to self-realization is through the *sacrifice* of the natural and immediate life of the self whereby it is in opposition to the not-self. ... Self-conscious life is properly a continual dying to live.'<sup>65</sup> The losing side in the original fight for wealth and recognition, that is, the slave, becomes the one who has the possibility for true self-consciousness. Hegel thus, at this stage, applies a

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<sup>63</sup> Ludwig Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Daniel Smyth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 94-5.

<sup>64</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, 107.

<sup>65</sup> Douglas Hedley, 'For God's sake: why sacrifice? Mediating Reflections on Peter Jonkers and John Milbank,' *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 50, no. 3-4 (2008): 304. Emphasis in original. The phrase 'a dying to live' that Hedley uses echoes *Mary Olivier*; see further discussion in chapter 2.



sacrificial economy to metaphysics in order to formulate a model of the creation of selfhood in relation to society. Knowledge of the self is the only absolute truth according to Hegel, but this cannot be accomplished without the other. In order to exist, self-consciousness has to be incorporated into another consciousness. Self-consciousness needs acknowledgment and cannot exist without intersubjectivity, that is, without another self. Acknowledgment from the other creates a true certainty of the self and thereby the existence of self-consciousness.

In order to connect the discussion of self-consciousness and sacrifice with the field of narrative, it is useful to have a brief look at recent theories in the philosophy of mind to see how current theories of self-consciousness inform my argument. I build on the theory that if the self is to be understood as having an experience of consciousness, it has to narrate its self-reflection to another subject. Daniel Dennett has proposed that the conscious self does not exist at all outside language. He calls the self a ‘centre of narrative gravity’, which – like other centres of gravity – is an entirely theoretical construct, needed in order to make sense of various concrete facts of life.<sup>66</sup> This idea is based on Dennett’s heterophenomenological approach to the self, which entails a joining of the subjective experience of self with an intersubjective perspective – an attempt to overcome the binary of emic and etic approaches within the field of anthropology.<sup>67</sup>

Dennett’s theory proposes that all we can know about the self is the narrative that is spun around it. In *Content and Consciousness* (1969), he explains that this is the reason why, for example, we find it difficult to make sense of the consciousness

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<sup>66</sup> Daniel Dennett, ‘The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity,’ in *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives*, ed. by F. Kessel, P. Cole and D. Johnson (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1992), 103-15.

<sup>67</sup> Emic means the perspective of a cultural insider and etic that of the cultural outsider.

of animals and other sentient beings, and assume that their experience of consciousness must be different from that of a human experience of consciousness, because ‘if dumb animals are aware of things, have conscious experience, we can never know what it is like, since they cannot tell us.’<sup>68</sup> Human beings understand self-consciousness through the narrative of the self – the self has not only got to be reflective, but also able to narrate its self-reflection to another subject if it is to be understood as having an experience of a conscious self.

Heterophenomenology is more or less equal to intersubjectivity – Dennett bases his ideas on Husserl and what the former calls autophenomenology – in the sense that the heterophenomenological approach to the world entails not only ‘the subjective world of one subject – not to be confused with the real world’, but also the narrative that one subject imparts to another, a method that, Dennett posits, ‘leaves out no objective phenomena and no subjective phenomena of consciousness.’<sup>69</sup> In effect, Dennett is proposing that consciousness *behaves like* narrative and, conversely, that narrative behaves like consciousness. He does not say that narrative *is* consciousness (or vice versa), despite it being a tempting conclusion to draw from his theory. However, what can be concluded is that narrative and consciousness have similar functions, which means that theories of how consciousness works may be fruitfully applied to narrative.

Daniel Dennett and David Chalmers both hold that the experience of consciousness is a continual dialogue between sense perception and phenomenal

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Content and Consciousness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 134.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Dennett, ‘Who’s on first? Heterophenomenology explained,’ *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10, no. 9 (2003): 20. Dennett refers to ‘Husserl’s autophenomenology’ in Daniel Dennett, ‘Heterophenomenology Reconsidered,’ *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6, no. 1-2 (2007): 248.

belief, which creates an ever evolving narrative about the self. If Dennett does not ask what consciousness is, but '*how it behaves*,' Chalmers does ask what its character is, or what it is like to have a consciousness.<sup>70</sup> Chalmers also takes it one step further by asking *why* consciousness behaves as it does and why we have one at all. His phenomenological stance is grounded in the importance of belief in any given experience of consciousness: 'The most important phenomenal beliefs are *first-person* phenomenal beliefs: subjects' beliefs about their own experiences and especially about the phenomenal character of the experiences that they are currently having. Examples include the belief that one is now having a red experience, or that one is experiencing pain.'<sup>71</sup> These beliefs are 'cognitively significant knowledge'; rather than considering beliefs as being opposed to knowledge – as is normally the case in a scientific paradigm – Chalmers suggests they are a form of knowledge that is of vital importance for us in order to make sense of phenomenal experience.<sup>72</sup>

Chalmers' theory is significant here in that it provides a link between belief, conscious experience, and narrative, where the continuously evolving narrative of the self is created through the belief in the conscious experiences of the self. This phenomenon will be exemplified in the context of sacrifice in the novels studied below. It relates to my argument insofar as I maintain that the novels studied show, through the combined use of the theme of sacrifice and the narrative strategy of pronoun shifts, how consciousness is constructed through the interlocking of a belief in the experience of the self and a continuous narrative of the self.

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<sup>70</sup> Daniel Dennett, 'Heterophenomenology Reconsidered,' *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6, no. 1-2 (2007): 268. Emphasis in original.

<sup>71</sup> Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness*, 251. Emphasis in original.

<sup>72</sup> Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness*, 257.

The explanation given above of how consciousness is created suggests that the conscious self is always re-examined, evaluated, and re-constituted as the narrative on which it is built is re-told. The idea that the self is a continuous work-in-progress is not new; Hegel posits that if the self is to be fully realised, a constant dialectic movement is required between the effort to make things its own to sate its desire and master objects on the one hand, and to give them up on the other. But as soon as objects are mastered, the desire for them goes away as they no longer retain a sense of independence. If objects are easily conquered, the self and its consciousness gets bored; desire has to be challenged, not just immediately gratified. There has to be a struggle and possibly even a sacrifice. Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in the reflection or incorporation of another self-consciousness, just as in the sacrificial ritual, where the sacrificed object is eaten and thereby incorporated into the performer of the sacrifice, who gains a fuller sense of self.

Hegel hypothesises that the ritual of sacrifice allows for the self to be ‘raise[d]... into being this pure divine element,’ that is, the soul in its purest state as part of ‘absolute Being,’ which then ‘turns back into the self; and... descends, through this mediating process of the cult, from its universality into individual form, and thus combines and unites with actual reality.’<sup>73</sup> It may be relevant to note that Hegel did not understand sacrifice as one may in the wake of two hundred years of the anthropological study of religion, and that he would probably have based his definition of the term primarily on early seventeenth-century German theology. However, as mentioned in footnote 38, Hegel did not formulate his theories in a Christian vacuum – he would have been aware of other religious formations and traditions.

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<sup>73</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 420.

According to Hegel, sacrifice refines the self to the point where it can experience moments of ‘absolute Being’ – a universal unfolding of Mind. The self can thereby feed into the joint community of selves, as well as return back into itself. This process allows for the self to be both sacrificed and re-affirmed, or realised. Sacrifice creates the possibility for the development of self-consciousness. Robert Brandom states that Hegel’s claim includes the assertion that ‘one identifies with what one is willing to *risk* and *sacrifice* for.’<sup>74</sup> This also applies to the way in which ritual sacrifice has been interpreted by those anthropologists who agree that the community has to be identified with its sacrificial victim in order for it to reap the benefits of the rite, for instance those following in the footsteps of Hubert and Mauss. The self-awareness of identification is thereby intimately connected with not only the notion of abnegation but with sanctification as well.

Sacrifice forms an opportunity for questioning, discussing, and possibly resolving the tension that is the result of the tension between creating, destroying and recreating the self anew. The relationship between sacrifice and the self is central for understanding modern sacrifice, as sacrifice can be applied as a hegemonic device for maintaining the subjugation of certain individuals within a social group, such as are seen as representative of ‘change, ambiguity and compromise’ – or, in Malcolm Bull’s words, contradiction – but it can paradoxically also become a tool for understanding and even creating change.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Robert B. Brandom, ‘The structure of desire and recognition: Self-consciousness and self-constitution,’ *Philosophy Social Criticism* 33, no. 1 (2007): 130. Emphasis in original.

<sup>75</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 199-200; Bull, *Seeing Things Hidden*, 256.

### **Pronoun Shifts as a Narrative Strategy**

Within the field of narratology, the preferred explanatory models are often schematic and rulebound. However, the innovative narrative techniques used in early twentieth-century fiction are notoriously elusive of distinction and description. For this reason, it can be difficult to apply conventional narrative schemas to modernist fiction.

Morton P. Levitt makes a case in *The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction* (2006) for the confusion surrounding such techniques as used in *Ulysses* (1922) and *The Waves* (1931) as being caused by critics' attempts to make sense of stylistic innovations through applying categories that do not suit the narratives. Levitt suggests that 'Telemachus' lacks a narrator altogether and that it will cause problems if we 'invent a narrator where there patently is none.'<sup>76</sup> Richard Walsh has similarly argued for the usefulness of leaving the construction of a narrator aside because literary theory has moved beyond the original function of the narrator as an intermediary between author and work. Walsh explains that '[t]he purpose of the narrator is to release the author from any accountability for the "facts" of fictional narrative.'<sup>77</sup> This function is not needed, according to Walsh, because 'it is possible to theorize narrative ... in a way that avoids any incommensurability between attitudes of direct engagement and critical knowingness; between participation in, and consciousness of, the game of fictive discourse.'<sup>78</sup>

While I do not doubt that it is possible to speak of the author instead of the narrator, and to do so without accidentally stumbling into intentional fallacies, I am

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<sup>76</sup> Morton P. Levitt, *The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction: From a New Point of View* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2006), 93.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2007), 74.

<sup>78</sup> Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 172.

not convinced that the term narrator is symbolic of ‘an unhelpfully convoluted and hedged theoretical orthodoxy.’<sup>79</sup> In the case studies of this thesis, it is rather more helpful to think of narrators instead of authors, because it allows for the depersonalisation or multifaceted personalisation of the narrative voice to be more easily grasped. Since the authors of the novels are undoubtedly historical persons, using the term ‘author’ to designate a narrator that is either non-personal or shifting between a variety of persons would be confusing.

When discussing a narrator that has no persona, I maintain that it is still convenient to use the term ‘narrator’ to designate the voice in the text that does not constitute direct speech, as there is no other satisfactory option. Levitt does not offer any alternative, but holds that to talk of a narrator in ‘Telemachus’ is to assume the omniscience of that narrator, a belief that would ‘deny the very heart of [Joyce’s] work’ according to Levitt.<sup>80</sup> While I agree that it would be out of place to speak of an omniscient narrator here, there is no reason to assume that a narrator has to be omniscient – or that it is personified – just because it exists, even though that may be the general assumption. Levitt concludes that the events related are done so through Stephen’s consciousness. If so, it is clear that Stephen is an intra- and homodiegetic narrator, according to the typology set up by Gérard Genette.<sup>81</sup>

The problem, rather than an assumption of omniscience where there is none, is that the narration does not belong to Stephen in isolation; if it had, Stephen could have been read as an ordinary first person narrator. The effect that Joyce creates is that of free indirect discourse or stream of consciousness, since it allows for a sense

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<sup>79</sup> Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 171.

<sup>80</sup> Levitt, *The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction*, 93.

<sup>81</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 128.

of shared experience. It does not necessarily follow that the narrator has a persona. Since Stephen is the focaliser, but the personal pronoun 'I' is not used – from which it can be inferred that there is no conscious exposition to an assumed audience – the consciousness of the character has been opened to reveal what goes on inside it more directly than if mediated through a narrator that was conscious of itself as narrator.

The sort of narrative experimentation that displaces a conventional narrator could be termed 'stream of consciousness,' but in light of the fact that the term does not cover all aspects of shifts in personal pronouns, I prefer to use 'intersubjective narration' to designate those instances where the narration in the novels studied opens up to potentially include more than one subjective consciousness. Furthermore, the term intersubjective emphasises the quality of narration that is essential to the argument, which means that narrative techniques that would not normally be labelled as stream of consciousness, such as the second person singular, can also be taken into consideration here.

Free indirect discourse is another term that could be used for some of the experimental modes of narration employed by Sinclair, Butts, and H. D. Violeta. Sotirova attempts to decipher the origins of free indirect style in her study *Consciousness in Modernist Fiction*, which concerns fictional representations of consciousness in Joyce, Lawrence, and Woolf. The three case studies are indicative of an intersubjective experience between characters, and free indirect style allows for 'the presentation of consciousness so that it becomes evocative not of an individual character's viewpoint, but of the dialogic interrelatedness of the viewpoints of self and other.'<sup>82</sup> In Joyce, she specifically finds 'vague pronominal references,' which

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<sup>82</sup> Sotirova, *Consciousness in Modernist Fiction*, 87.



are indicative of informal speech.<sup>83</sup> Note that these are not narrative pronoun shifts, but personal pronouns used in a way that obscures to whom they refer. The free indirect discourse or style neither entirely encompasses nor defines the specific narrative strategy I explore. It is used to describe a mode of third-person narration that focalises one or several characters so as to lessen the narrator's presence and bring the reader inside the mind of the character, which is applicable to several instances of third-person narration that I exemplify. I do not focus on this term because I do not wish to specifically highlight shifts between free indirect discourse and direct discourse, but only shifts within what can be termed free indirect discourse. My interest is in the use of a variety of personal pronouns in those parts of the narration that is not to be understood as direct speech, which may be described as a movement between different kinds of free indirect discourse. Sotirova holds that '[t]he technique of *free indirect style* is not new with modernism. What is new is its internal make-up.'<sup>84</sup> One of the elements of this internal make-up is the type of pronoun shifts that I look at. It seems thereby as though shifts in the pronoun that refers to the narrator are typically modernist, although this needs further data to be evidenced.

Previous research done on personal pronoun shifts proposes that the change in person is an expression of a desire on the part of the narrator to emphasise a certain event in the story. Working in comparative linguistics, Anna Margetts states in her 2015 article 'Person shift at narrative peak' that the meanings and functions of such shifts have still not been fully investigated. Her research builds on the 1983 work *The Grammar of Discourse* by Robert E. Longacre. Longacre suggests that

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<sup>83</sup> Violeta Sotirova, 'The Roots of a Literary Style: Joyce's Presentation of Consciousness in *Ulysses*,' *Language and Literature* 19, no. 2 (2010): 131.

<sup>84</sup> Sotirova, *Consciousness in Modernist Fiction*, 28.

shifts in personal pronouns occur due to a culmination in the narrative that is defined as a ‘peak’ and is distinguishable from (but normally aligned with) climax or denouement, which both refer to a corresponding culmination in content, whereas a narrative peak is where the importance of an event is marked structurally or grammatically.<sup>85</sup> Margetts discusses several other linguistic factors that affect person shifts that are more or less contingent on the language – examples are given in Dutch, Saxon, and Saliba-Logea – but for the purpose of this study, it is worth noting that Margetts finds that ‘discourse factors impact person choice. There are ... cases where the protagonists of otherwise third-person narratives are tracked by first- or second-person indexes.’<sup>86</sup> She goes on to suggest that these are ‘peak-marking and internal-evaluating devices’, where internal evaluation refers to William Labov’s definition of narrative clauses that are formally distinguished from the rest, for example through a tense or pronoun shift, as indicating something noteworthy. The purpose of this study is to show where these noteworthy moments, marked by pronoun shifts, signify a sacrificial development and destruction of the self for a character.

The pronoun shifts that I am chiefly concerned with here are termed by Margetts as ‘person shifts proper’, which denote discursive shifts in personal pronoun that do not form part of reported direct speech (within inverted commas), questions, or imperatives.<sup>87</sup> Person shifts proper have some tendency to occur along with tense shifts, but not exclusively. Margetts writes that these shifts have, among other functions, the potential to save the narrator and narratee from so-called ‘face-

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<sup>85</sup> Robert E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse* (New York: Plenum Press, 1983), 24.

<sup>86</sup> Anna Margetts, ‘Person Shift at Narrative Peak,’ *Language* 91, no. 4 (2015): 763.

<sup>87</sup> Margetts, ‘Person Shift at Narrative Peak,’ 769.

threatening acts', a convention of polite society that illustrates how seemingly meaningless linguistic details are fundamentally associated with our perception of the self.<sup>88</sup> If a pronoun shift can protect one's self-confidence, it has the implied potential to instill a sense of self in narrator and narratee or, conversely, to deplete it.

What, then, does sacrifice have to do with narrative experimentation? I posit that formal innovations that trouble the perception of narrative voice illustrate the same issues that the concept of sacrifice brings to the surface, namely the relationship between self and community. Sacrifice temporarily dissolves boundaries between self and community, self and other, or subject and object, and modernist narrative experimentation does the same, in that it allows for a multivocal narrative. This multivocality lets separate individuals speak on behalf of a community, and furthermore questions the identity – or even the existence – of a single narrator by momentarily suspending the boundaries between narrator and character, that is, subject and object, thereby creating instances of intersubjectivity.

The specific technique that will be focussed on is that of shifts in the personal pronoun used by the narrative voice. The shifts seen in the works studied here – as in most novels where such things occur – are usually from third person narration to first person narration, followed by a continuous oscillation back and forth between the two, but there are cases of second-person narration as well as the first person plural 'we'. These shifts may be, as Brian Richardson puts it, 'compelling for readers and potentially problematic for theory,' but they are nonetheless well suited to express the previously discussed issues that exist at the point of convergence between

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<sup>88</sup> Margetts, 'Person Shift at Narrative Peak,' 759.

sacrifice and modernist writing: the troubled relationship and permeable boundaries between individual subjects.<sup>89</sup>

The second person singular is generally less used than the first or third person singular as referent for the narrator, which could be explained by the uncertainty of its meaning, being positioned in between the subjective first person and the objective third person. As Brian Richardson states in *Narrative Theory* (2012), '[s]econd-person fiction cannot easily be reduced to either homodiegetic or heterodiegetic status, but hovers ambiguously between these two conventional positions.'<sup>90</sup> It could be supposed that the narrator, if extradiegetic, calls the protagonist 'you' and 'she' alternately. However, this would complicate the reading of any parts with first-person narration. Alternately, 'you' may at times simply be used as an indeterminate personal pronoun – meaning 'one' – to establish a sense of dialogue with the reader. Cohn suggests using the term 'memory monologue' as a designator for second person narrated texts in which the narrator and narratee are one and the same.<sup>91</sup> As Fludernik points out however, this term mainly applies to retrospective narratives.<sup>92</sup>

The history of pronoun shifts in the narrative voice goes far further back than the interwar period. Margetts's examples of shifts from third to second person in Homeric Greek narratives are a testament to the fact that such occurrences can be

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<sup>89</sup> Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), 61.

<sup>90</sup> David Herman, James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowitz, Brian Richardson, and Robyn R. Warhol, *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 53.

<sup>91</sup> Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 183.

<sup>92</sup> Monica Fludernik, 'Second-person narrative as a test case for narratology: The limits of realism,' *Style* 28, no. 3 (1994): 473, n. 9.

found throughout literary history.<sup>93</sup> In his study *A Theory of Narrative* (1979), Franz Stanzel points to William Makepeace Thackeray as an early user of this technique in *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852). While Thackeray does employ these shifts, they are mainly to be understood as a way of differentiating between the narrator and character in so much as they are separated by time. Longacre, though analysing this phenomenon only very briefly, uses two examples where '[h]eighted vividness [is] obtained by a shift to a more specific person, i.e., the shift is from a third person to second person to first person, or from plural to singular within a given person': Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables* (1851).<sup>94</sup> Joseph Conrad uses pronoun shifts in several works: *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), *The Secret Agent* (1907), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911).

As opposed to what happens in the modernist works I look at in this thesis, the pronoun shifts in Dickens, Hawthorne, and Conrad do not normally generate any confusion as to whether or not the narrator is a character in the story, however. According to Allan H. Simmons, the shifts in Conrad are instead an indication of the specifically modernist concern of 'individual worth and identity [that] stem from the very collective endeavour they challenge.'<sup>95</sup> However, modernist authors were often trying to find new ways of expressing conscious experience; as David Herman insists, 'the modernist accent falls less on fictional worlds than on fictional-worlds-as-experienced.'<sup>96</sup> While the shifts in themselves are not only to be found in

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<sup>93</sup> Margetts, 'Person Shift at Narrative Peak,' 777.

<sup>94</sup> Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse*, 29-30.

<sup>95</sup> Allan H. Simmons, *Joseph Conrad* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 56.

<sup>96</sup> David Herman, *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 243.

modernist fiction, they do feature more prominently and regularly in works of this period and after; Brian Richardson tends to focus on the second half of the twentieth century in his study of the phenomenon, as he finds that it is a common strategy for writers who wish to overcome binary structures of any kind, which is an inevitable result of postmodernity. Levitt uses Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* as an example of a narrative where the internal subjective experience of each character blends together to form a whole: '[B]ecause of their lifetime of shared experiences, the six protagonists of the novel may be said to form a community; this explains both why they seem to share a language and why they may in other ways appear interchangeable.'<sup>97</sup> This is the very essence of intersubjectivity as portrayed in modernist fiction, and *The Waves* may be the clearest instance of such narration. The novel is not part of the material used for the thesis however, as the shifts in pronoun are not unexplained – it is always clear which of the characters is currently in charge of the narrative. Furthermore, the purpose of its pronoun shifts is not related to sacrifice as a strategy for negotiating the space between the individual and the community.

Of the authors studied in this thesis, Mary Butts comes closest to resembling Woolf's take on intersubjectivity, primarily in two out of the three novels studied: *Armed with Madness* (1928) and *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932). However, where Woolf lets the multivocality of her characters remain the same throughout the narrative – the technique of multivocality is explored in depth – Butts continuously alters the dynamic of the multivocality to drive the narrative towards sacrifice and uses multivocality to raise questions about power and narrative. According to Sotirova, Joyce's experiments with multivocality are similar to Woolf's. Using

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<sup>97</sup> Levitt, *The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction*, 99.

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism she argues that Joyce was aiming partly to create an effect of the reality of spoken dialogue, and partly to involve 'the reader in a subtle dialogue with the author (or narrator) because the construal of reference requires the joint effort of two interactants.'<sup>98</sup> As opposed to informal speech, 'a reader's interpretation of these pronominal references is probably not going to be automatic' or even effortless.<sup>99</sup> This exemplifies how important pronoun shifts are in terms of creating meaning from the narrative – they call for the attention of the reader by producing confusion. This is certainly true in Butts and even more so in H. D.

In May Sinclair, the pronoun shifts are largely markers of shifts within one character's consciousness. Here, shifts between levels of consciousness are represented by the three personal pronouns she (self as distanced object), you (self as proximate object or indeterminate subject), and I (self as subject). This sometimes occurs in Butts and H. D. as well, and will be exemplified accordingly in each chapter. The influence of psychoanalytic theory cannot be overlooked here. All three authors were interested in and informed on the topic, albeit in different ways. This will be further explored in the separate chapters, where I look at how this informed their work, from Sinclair's struggle to reconcile herself with Freud in 'Clinical Lectures on Symbolism and Sublimation' (1916) and her critique of Jung in 'The Way of Sublimation' (1915), to Butts' acceptance of psychoanalysis as the new religion in *Traps for Unbelievers* (1932), and H. D.'s fraught personal relationship with analysis in *Tribute to Freud* (1956).

Shifts in personal pronoun that convey various levels of a character's consciousness were used in several other novels at the time, such as Rosamond

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<sup>98</sup> Sotirova, 'The Roots of a Literary Style,' 143.

<sup>99</sup> Sotirova, 'The Roots of a Literary Style,' 137.

Lehmann's *Dusty Answer* (1927), which shifts between second- and third-person narration seamlessly. Another notable example is Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*, a thirteen-volume novel published between 1915 and 1938, where second- and third-person narration is intertwined primarily in the later instalments.<sup>100</sup> Richardson claimed of her own protagonist Miriam that there was no one 'there to describe her,' overtly pointing to a lack of the presence of an omniscient narrator.<sup>101</sup> In contrast to Sinclair's *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919) and *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922), the novels of Lehmann and Richardson are more distinctively *Bildungsroman* in the sense that they mainly chart the growth and development of their characters as young women.<sup>102</sup> Sinclair's two novels are more clearly concerned with sacrifice as the two protagonists are shown to reach the end of their lives unmarried, which gives them a problematic outsider status in society in the early twentieth century. More importantly, the pronoun shifts in *Dusty Answer* and *Pilgrimage* are not seen to have a particular relation to sacrifice as this concept is not an ambiguous concern in either work.

H. D. uses pronoun shifts in a variety of ways in her fiction, depending on the era of her writing. In some of the works that are looked at in this thesis, such as *Paint It Today* (1992), the pronoun shifts frequently cause a confusion as to the identity of the narrator, whereas in others, such as *HERmione* (1981), H. D. is more similar to Sinclair in her use of pronoun shifts, which primarily refer to levels of

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<sup>100</sup> This is not including the posthumous *March Moonlight*, which was first published in the 1967 collected edition.

<sup>101</sup> Gloria G. Fromm, *Dorothy Richardson: A Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 66.

<sup>102</sup> While *March Moonlight* does leap ahead a few years, it does not form a definite end to Miriam Henderson's life in the way that *Mary Olivier* is thought to do and *Harriett Frean* definitely does.



consciousness within the protagonist. There is, however, an added element of multivocality that is similar to that used by Butts. H. D.'s pronoun shifts may be read as a combination and development of Sinclair's and Butts' more distinctly separate styles.

While my overall argument is that the innovations in narrative technique in the works studied are the formal expression of the intersubjectivity that is a result of sacrifice, there are distinct differences in the relationship between sacrifice and formal experimentation, both between the three authors and within the oeuvre of each author. In each chapter I will therefore provide examples from specific works of what is maintained above in order to support my claim, and to give a detailed analysis of various ways in which narrative experiment interacts with depictions of sacrifice.

## Chapter 2

**‘Let everything go except yourself. Hold on to yourself....**

**But you felt your self going’: Two Sides of Sacrifice,**

**Selfhood, and Narrative Voice in May Sinclair<sup>105</sup>**

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the concept of sacrifice in relation to notions of selfhood, and how this relationship is portrayed through narrative innovation in two works that are written in an experimental style: *Mary Olivier: A Life* (1919) and *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922) – henceforth referred to as *Mary Olivier* and *Harriett Frean*. In the former narrative, sacrifice serves as a key to reaching a state of spiritual enlightenment and self-realisation, whereas the latter novel presents a dark-sided counterpart: sacrifice that leads to self-annihilation. Other novels by Sinclair to which the concept of sacrifice is relevant are not dealt with here as these are written in a realist mode and are therefore not pertinent to the central concern of my thesis, which is the relationship between sacrifice and narrative pronoun shifts. The narrative techniques used in the two novels are specifically tailored to their respective portrayals of sacrifice, as the novels each represent not only a side of sacrifice and its relation to self-realisation, but a version of the representation of consciousness.

The central problem that will be explored in this chapter is what the opposition between the representation of sacrifice in the two novels means, and how this opposition is connected with the differing styles of narration in the novels. I will argue that May Sinclair adopts methods to describe experiences of the self that

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<sup>105</sup> May Sinclair, *Mary Olivier: A Life* (London: Virago Press, 2002), 351.

resound with current theories of self-consciousness in the work of Daniel Dennett and David Chalmers.

Sinclair portrays a variety of levels of self-realisation using narrative experiment. The novels studied show Sinclair's concern with the self on a lexical level; pronoun shifts and narrative reticence prompt questions as to the degree of insight into the self – and thereby realisation of the self – of the main character in both novels. The use of second-person narration in *Mary Olivier* marks an attempt at creating intersubjectivity in that it simulates a joint experience of reader and narrator, suggests self-reflection within the mind of the protagonist, and questions the division between the subject and object of the narrative. The increasing incidence of first person narration towards the end of the novel indicates the growing realisation of the self of the protagonist through sacrifice. In contrast, the narration in *Harriett Frean* is strictly third person, focalised mainly through Harriett, who, in opposition to Mary, is not able to form a sense of self that is separate from that of her mother.

It is my contention that the reason why there are less pronoun shifts in the narration of *Harriett Frean* than in *Mary Olivier* is because Harriett has no self through which to narrate her life in the first person; neither does she make sacrifices that can be considered conducive to the creation of such a self. This also explains why second-person narration is not used, as there is no self *to* which the narration can be addressed, be it from within Harriett – either from a distance of some time as I argue is the case in *Mary Olivier*, or in a direct way as an internal dialogical thought process represented on the page – or from any external narrator. It is clearly the case – as for example Suzanne Raitt and Phillippa Martindale have previously argued – that *Mary Olivier* is a representation of a successful sublimation and

*Harriett Frean* is one of unsuccessful sublimation, or repression.<sup>106</sup> What has not been previously addressed is the role of sacrifice in portraying the difference between sublimation that is concurrent with sacrifice that has a productive outcome and repression that is concurrent with sacrifice that has a destructive outcome. My contribution to the subject is to illuminate the relation between narrative technique and how the sacrifices made by Mary Olivier increase her sense of self as an individual and as a part of a metaphysical community and, contrarily, how the sacrifices made by Harriett Frean have the opposite effect. The focus of the present chapter is therefore the difference between these two kinds of sacrifice and how these differences are linked to narrative strategy.

My contention is that while *Mary Olivier* can be read as a case-study, *Harriett Frean* demonstrates Sinclair's effort to write an almost antiseptic novel of consciousness to a greater extent. The third person narration in *Harriett Frean*, however closely focalised through the main character, is a way of approaching consciousness as a clinical or empirical case-study. This clinical nature of Sinclair's novels, which is explored by Leslie de Bont in the book chapter 'Portrait of the Female Character as a Psychoanalytical Case: The Ambiguous Influence of Freud on May Sinclair's Novels' (2017), is the reason why contemporary reviewers found the novel to be so modern. It was termed a 'nearly medical' novel by critic Frank Swinnerton, which intimates modernity in a sense of being scientific or clinical, but also insinuates a problematic lack of empathy or feeling. Frank Swinnerton's words

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<sup>106</sup> See Suzanne Raitt, *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 213-68, and Phillippa Martindale, "'The Ceasing from the Sorrow of Divided Life': May Sinclair's Women, Texts and Contexts (1910-1923)," PhD dissertation (University of Durham, 2003), 125-205.

taken out of context may sound like harsh criticism, but his is in fact a favourable review:

[*Harriett Freen*] was a genuine advance in a particular form of impressionistic realism then first attracting notice. This short novel ... was significant. It skimmed the cream, as it were, of a life. ... For that reason, its brief simplicity, 'The Life and Death of Harriett Freen' is worthy of remembrance. It is very nearly medical.<sup>107</sup>

Conversely, Sinclair was criticised in *The Little Review* for relying too heavily on psychoanalysis as a basis for her characterisations in *Mary Olivier*. Jane Heap stated that

the line-up of her characters in 'Mary Olivier' reads like the list for a clinic. Pathological predestination bears small relation to creative inevitability. ... May Sinclair did not convince me that Mary had a conception of life. ... life ran parallel to her; she never knew what was going on. Her 'great spiritual triumph' in the end is the completion of the frustration, the capping proof that she had not escaped being devoured by her mother.<sup>108</sup>

Whether one chooses to read the ending of *Mary Olivier* as a triumph or a failure, the consensus is that the novel is written like a medical case. I argue that while *Mary Olivier* can certainly be read as a case-study in terms of content, *Harriett Freen* is more specifically clinical in form.

I therefore suggest that the innovative style of *Harriett Freen* cannot be fully comprehended without juxtaposing it with *Mary Olivier*, as they are two sides of the same coin, not only in terms of storyline, but of narrative style. While Laurel Forster argues that, as opposed to *Mary Olivier*, 'what is emphasized in Sinclair's portrayal

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<sup>107</sup> Frank Swinnerton, *The Georgian Literary Scene 1910-1935: A Panorama* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1950), 307.

<sup>108</sup> jh, 'Eat 'em alive!' *The Little Review* 6, no. 8 (1919): 30-2. Need to add 'Jane Heap at beginning of note

of Harriett is the nature of childhood experiences, not the persona or individual identity of the child,' I perceive the difference between the two novels as involving a rather more ground-breaking shift, from the experience of being a child, which is represented in *Mary Olivier*, to the 'scientific' observation of the experience of being a child, which is represented in *Harriett Frean*.<sup>109</sup>

I will show in this chapter how Sinclair's narration as a manifestation of consciousness is representative of two sides of the present-day consciousness debate in philosophy *Mary Olivier* is a narrative representation of the subjective or inner experience of one consciousness, and *Harriett Frean* is a narrative representation of the objective or outer view of the experience of another consciousness. In the first novel, the first- and second-person pronouns are used to capture the closeness between narrator and conscious experience in *Mary Olivier*, whereas the third-person pronoun used in the latter illustrates the separation between the two in *Harriett Frean*.<sup>110</sup>

Sinclair employs sacrifice to allow her characters to form personalised belief systems, promoting an individualistic approach to spirituality. This does not mean that Sinclair connects sacrifice with purely individualist intentions, however. In order to reach a state of fulfilment, characters need to renounce something or someone, sometimes with altruistic motives but more often with a metaphysical, universal community of spirit in mind – what is referred to in *Mary Olivier* as well as in Sinclair's philosophical writings on idealism as the Absolute.

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<sup>109</sup> Laurel Forster, "'Imagism ... is a state of soul': May Sinclair's Imagist Writing," in *May Sinclair: Moving Towards the Modern*, ed. Andrew Kunka and Michele K. Troy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 115.

<sup>110</sup> See chapter 1 for a discussion and contextualisation of these concepts.

**‘[T]he idea of the Absolute is *not* primitive. It is a very late and highly “sublimated” idea’: The Place of Sacrifice in Sinclair’s Psychoanalytic Idealism<sup>111</sup>**

The tenets of idealism and the concept of the Absolute are central to Sinclair’s thought and several of her fictional works, *Mary Olivier* in particular, and they provide a theoretical background for mapping out Sinclair’s understanding of sacrifice. Broadly speaking, idealism claims that all reality is created in the mind, and is therefore immaterial or non-existent outside of any perceiving consciousness.

There are several different schools of idealism. Sinclair makes clear in *A Defence of Idealism* that she is in disagreement with Berkeley and subjective idealism, and that she is partial to Hegel even though she criticises his justification of Christianity. As to her contemporary defenders of idealism, Sinclair was particularly influenced by the work of T. H. Green. Sinclair’s philosophical work – published in two monographs, *A Defence of Idealism* (1917) and *The New Idealism* (1922) – builds on two basic principles: the individuality of the human spiritual consciousness, or Life-Force, and its unity with the greater, universal Life-Force.

The individual Life-Force, then, is part of or can become part of the macro Life-Force. The concept of the Life-Force in idealism can be likened to the Brahman, with the corresponding Atman as the individual Life-Force, in Hindu philosophy in the sense that it is an indefinable entity that pervades, or can pervade, any individual consciousness and can only be approached through deep spiritual practices, if at all. As Sinclair herself points out in *A Defence of Idealism*, idealism’s Life-Force can

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<sup>111</sup> May Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism* (London: Macmillan, 1917), 277. Emphasis in original.

also be compared with Nirvana or the Dao in Buddhist and Daoist philosophy respectively:

[In the Vedic, Buddhist, and Daoist texts,] thought leads and the passion for the Absolute follows; until thought overthrows the thinker; and thought and passion, and the desire of Life are consumed (or consummated) in Nirvana, or in the “Emptiness and Nothingness” of the Great Tao.<sup>112</sup>

The Life-Force can be considered to be the same as the Absolute, or to be a way of reaching the Absolute.

Non-binary concepts such as Sinclair’s Absolute are often irreconcilable with Western philosophy without some form of allowance for mysticism, which Sinclair readily recognises in *A Defence of Idealism* where she devotes an entire chapter to mystic knowledge of the Absolute. Claire Drewery states that Sinclair ‘echoes Bergson’s contention that consciousness is characterised by the conflict between a continuity and a stasis of the self,’ whereas the example she uses from *A Defence of Idealism* to substantiate her claim points rather to the contrary.<sup>113</sup> Sinclair holds that ‘[b]efore Monism can work it must have a principle which shall be both static and dynamic.’<sup>114</sup> For Sinclair, it is not a question of conflict or even choice between stasis and flux – both exist within each other.

The same principle is applied to unity and plurality, and the individual and community; these are not seen as oppositional pairs in Sinclair’s philosophical works. Inspiration is taken not only from Eastern philosophy, but also from chosen parts of Hegel’s idealism. While Hegel maintains that the individual consciousness has the

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<sup>112</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 278.

<sup>113</sup> Claire Drewery, ‘Mysticism, Idealism and the Reality Aesthetic,’ *Pilgrimages* 4, (2011): 127.

<sup>114</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 334.



right to exercise complete freedom, he also states that the subjective will ought to coincide with the communal will. In other words, individual freedom ought to be exercised by those wills that are compliant with what is good for the society of which they are part.<sup>115</sup> Idealist morality builds on this principle, assuming that the common good must decide what is good for the individual and what that individual should want. Sinclair uses the assumption of a unity between a community of individuals in both her fiction and other writing, as shall be seen further on.

The idea that self-sacrifice enables self-realisation is fundamental in *A Defence of Idealism*. The works of Spinoza, as well as the British philosopher T. H. Green, are of particular importance to Sinclair here. Self-sacrifice and self-realisation are intertwined concepts in both Green and Sinclair's respective idealisms. It has been argued both by George M. Johnson and Hrisey D. Zegger that Sinclair drew on Green's work when maintaining that the road to self-realisation is through self-sacrifice.<sup>116</sup> Green posits in his *Prolegomena to Ethics* that 'a perfecting of *man*' can only be achieved in 'a life determined by ... a will of all which is the will of each,' that is, a surrender of the individual will to the communal good.<sup>117</sup> In *A Defence of Idealism* Sinclair stresses the importance of selfhood, but also of individuality as

only one stage, and that not the highest and the most important stage, in the real life-process of the self. It may be that a self can only become a perfect self in proportion as it takes on the experiences of other selves... The

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<sup>115</sup> See for instance G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baille (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), 301-2; 351-2.

<sup>116</sup> George M. Johnson, *Dynamic Psychology in Modern British Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 17-8, and Hrisey D. Zegger, *May Sinclair* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), 19-22.

<sup>117</sup> T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), 311. Emphasis in original.

individual ... may have to die that the self may live. ...this sacrifice would not mean what is called 'subjective immortality,' but rather the very opposite. In subjective immortality the individual lives precariously in the memory of posterity... [I]t is a form of consciousness to which ... he has contributed but does not share. *He* has no consciousness of anything any more at all. But the life after death of the perfected self would mean an enormous increase of consciousness, through a spiritual communion in which all ... is finished and complete.<sup>118</sup>

Sinclair considers individuality to be of less value than the selfhood that comes out of sharing 'the experiences of other selves'. However, any and all sacrifice does not perfect the self; it has to bring the self into an intersubjective or 'spiritual' union with other consciousnesses, with a world-consciousness, or world-spirit. A sacrifice that does not do so, one that leads to what Sinclair calls 'subjective immortality,' is not beneficial to the self-realisation of the one who makes the sacrifice. In this view, then, self-sacrifice is not just made for the sake of a cause that is bigger than oneself, but also in order to achieve the realisation of one's own self.

Clearly, community is key for Sinclair's conception of sacrifice and the self; as the above quotation shows, the sacrifice of one subject facilitates intersubjectivity in the form of 'communion'. Christine Battersby holds that 'Sinclair is closer to Spinoza than to Green,' arguing that the author puts less emphasis on the 'social duty' of women than on their individual development, referring specifically to the account of Mary Olivier's progress towards becoming an artist.<sup>119</sup> While I agree that there is certainly a sense of the importance of individuality in the novel, I will argue later in this chapter that it is only through Mary's acts of abnegation and submission

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<sup>118</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 375.

<sup>119</sup> Christine Battersby, "'In the shadow of his language': May Sinclair's Portrait of the Artist as Daughter,' *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies* 33-4 (2002): 106.

to a higher power that she is able to reach a state of self-realisation and enlightenment.

Although Sinclair appears to be more often concerned with a spiritual or transcendent community rather than a physical, social one, she argues in her philosophical work *A Defence of Idealism* (1917) that the community of the human race is indebted to the individual. The individual, in order to be perceived as a self, is sacrificed for the benefit of the community. Sinclair sometimes uses the word ‘individual’ as a synonym for ‘self’ and sometimes as distinct from ‘self’, as in the quotation above where the ‘individual’ is sacrificed for the ‘self’. This is accomplished via sublimation, a refinement and transformation of the libido – ‘the primordial will-to-live’ – into ‘supreme expressions of individuality – love and will.’<sup>120</sup> The sacrifice of individual for community is not so much a choice as a prerequisite for the healthy development of the individual for Sinclair: ‘The perfect individual is the person perfectly adapted to reality through the successive sublimations of his will.’<sup>121</sup> Sacrifice of the libido, or transformation of primordial desires into outputs of creativity, is thus an integral part of what it means to be a complete individual.

In the working out of her thoughts on the libido, Sinclair was naturally indebted to psychoanalytic theory, both Freudian and Jungian. While she discussed and was influenced by both, she was more inclined towards Jung’s acceptance of religion as an integral and necessary part of the human psyche.<sup>122</sup> In the unpublished

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<sup>120</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 40.

<sup>121</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 80.

<sup>122</sup> For an in-depth look at Freud’s influence on Sinclair, see Leslie de Bont, ‘Portrait of the Female Character as a Psychoanalytical Case: The Ambiguous Influence of Freud on May Sinclair’s Novels,’ *May Sinclair: Re-Thinking Bodies and Minds*, ed.

work 'The Way of Sublimation', written in 1915, Sinclair also criticises Jung however, noting that his generalisations are too broad, and she describes him as 'a bull in a china shop' when dealing with religious beliefs. She finds that, in his work, 'most things under the sun are degraded (or exalted) to aspects of the Libido.'<sup>123</sup> Sinclair prefers Jung over Freud partly due to his lesser insistence on the Libido as sex only, but also because Jung acknowledges that religion can be the ultimate way of sublimation, if it is revisited and reformulated to suit what is known of the mind after psychoanalytic theory. However, she takes a stand against Jung's description of ancient religion as primitive in *Psychology of the Unconscious*, and holds that texts such as the Upanishads are 'already highly sublimated, with concepts that have been passed not once but many times through the crucible of the human intellect'.<sup>124</sup> Sinclair is primarily interested in the Upanishads for their metaphysical ideas, their explanation of everything as one in the ultimate state of reality, Brahman. She thereby relates Hindu religion, but also in some instances Buddhism and Daoism, to her notions of idealism and its concept of the Absolute.<sup>125</sup>

Sinclair considered sacrifice in the form of sublimation to be the only healthy and productive way to deal with desire: 'For the happy normal individual, desire is never repressed; it is either directed and controlled, or it wanders of its own accord

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Becky Bowler and Claire Drewery (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 59-78.

<sup>123</sup> May Sinclair, 'The Way of Sublimation,' 1915, unpublished typescript, Department of Special Collections, Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania, box 23, 5.

<sup>124</sup> Sinclair, 'The Way of Sublimation,' 43.

<sup>125</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 246.

into the paths of sublimation.’<sup>126</sup> In ‘The Way of Sublimation’, Sinclair argues that all sacrifice is made for the need of redemption, which she equates with sublimation:

[P]rimitive repression ... evolves in course of time into a whole system of repressions, carried on into civilization, sacrifices... culminating in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, a sacrifice that receives an intense significance through the fact, now disclosed by the study of comparative mythology that the Cross was originally a phallic symbol. It is all the same thing going on for ever – the redemption of the flesh; the redemption of the soul from the tyranny of flesh.<sup>127</sup>

Here, repression and sacrifice are placed on an evolutionary scale, where sacrifice is seen as a form of ‘primitive’ sublimation and psychoanalysis the most modern form of sublimation. The crucifixion – the sacrifice to end all sacrifice – is seen as the stepping stone between ritual sacrifice and the form of sublimation as employed in psychoanalysis. For Sinclair, then, not all sacrifices are equal to sublimation:

‘Christianity, Buddhism, and Brahmanism, for instance, were developed on the lines of repression, the primitive religions (and Brahmanism in its primitive form) proceeded by the open but still imperfect way of sublimation through symbolic ritual...’<sup>128</sup> Sinclair viewed psychoanalysis as the modern-day variant of ‘primitive’ symbolic ritual, in that the soul is brought to light and cleansed through religious ritual in the same way that psychoanalysis can be seen as a purification of the dark, destructive side of the libido: ‘...the sinful, secret libido [is] dragged out of its hiding-place in the Unconscious into full consciousness and thus made clean.’<sup>129</sup> Sinclair thus compares and equates symbolic ritual with psychoanalysis and its sublimative power.

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<sup>126</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 9.

<sup>127</sup> Sinclair, ‘The Way of Sublimation,’ 26-7.

<sup>128</sup> Sinclair, ‘Symbolism and Sublimation I,’ 120.

<sup>129</sup> Sinclair, ‘Symbolism and Sublimation I,’ 120.

Sinclair also writes in *A Defence of Idealism* that sublimation is ‘the diversion of the Life-Force, of the Will-to-live, from ways that serve the purposes and interests of the species, into ways that serve the purposes and interests of individuals’; it is a controlling of the libido as sex drive.<sup>130</sup> Sinclair equates the libido with idealism’s ‘Life-Force,’ the concept of ‘*mana*’, Bergson’s ‘*Élan Vital*’ and Schopenhauer’s ‘Will to Live,’ and thereby understands the concept as possible to re-route into other productive channels of energy.<sup>131</sup> Sinclair further defines the ‘Life-Force,’ as a ‘desire striving for fulfilment and for sublimation, an energy made manifest in such forms and in such a manner as to declare its spiritual source.’<sup>132</sup> Taking control of the libido by sublimating it implies the sacrifice of not giving in to impulses wrought by it, such as passion, violence and greed. This means that sacrifice and sublimation are intimately connected and that both are means towards the end of becoming a realised self, one who is not limited by the libido as sex drive.

According to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, sublimation, as opposed to repression, is the correct way of re-directing or transforming the Life-Force into healthy, productive channels. In ‘Clinical Lecture on Symbolism and Sublimation I’, published in *The Medical Press* in 1916, Sinclair writes: ‘Sublimation itself is the striving of the Libido towards manifestation in higher and higher forms. ... [B]ecause of the blind force of the Unconscious behind [the libido], sublimation cannot always keep pace with instinct, and the first oscillations in the balance

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<sup>130</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 7.

<sup>131</sup> May Sinclair, ‘Clinical Lecture on Symbolism and Sublimation I,’ *The Medical Press*, 9 August 1916, 122, n. 5; Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 363; Sinclair, ‘The Way of Sublimation,’ 23.

<sup>132</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 330.

between libido and sublimation begin.’<sup>133</sup> A prerequisite of this balancing act is sacrifice as a necessary element of sublimation, but only sacrifice made by a truly self-effacing individual. Sinclair quotes Jung in her second paper on the subject, ‘Symbolism and Sublimation II’, in order to indicate the nature of sacrifice as sublimation: ‘The aggressive, self-assertive ego cannot make the indispensable sacrifice. ...only through the mystery of self-sacrifice is it possible to be “born again.”’<sup>134</sup> It is the willing sacrifice of the self – as opposed to the assertiveness of the ego – that effects sublimation.

Scholars often tend to read Sinclair’s work as highly individualistic and diametrically opposed to a high valuation of institutions such as family and religion. Allison Pease, for instance, notes in her article ‘May Sinclair, Feminism, and Boredom: “A Dying to Live”’ (2006) that sublimation ‘requires the strength to assert one’s own individuality ... and to reject the social institutions such as family or religion.’<sup>135</sup> However, in ‘The Way of Sublimation’ and ‘Symbolism and Sublimation’ Sinclair – like Hegel – clearly finds that selfhood can only be achieved through taking part in and giving yourself to a community. As has already been noted, she overtly equates sublimation with symbolic ritual, and emphasises the primary role of religion for sublimation in a footnote to an enumeration of various manifestations of sublimation in ‘Symbolism and Sublimation I’: ‘I have arranged them provisionally on what I think Professor Jung would consider the right

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<sup>133</sup> Sinclair, ‘Symbolism and Sublimation I,’ 119-20.

<sup>134</sup> Sinclair, ‘Symbolism and Sublimation II,’ *The Medical Press*, 16 August 1916, 142.

<sup>135</sup> Allison Pease, ‘May Sinclair, Feminism, and Boredom: “A Dying to Live”.’ *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 49, no. 2 (2006): 170.

ascending scale. Personally, I should place Religion first *and* last.’<sup>136</sup> The specifics of her argument suggests that she places ‘primitive’ religion first and contemporary Christianity last, as she regards ritual sacrifice in archaic traditions as sublimative and what she perceives as contemporary Christian sacrifice to be repressive, a view that is based on the previously mentioned idea of human thought evolving from magic to religion to science. Nevertheless, given this statement, Sinclair’s association of sacrifice and sublimation merits further investigation.

For Sinclair, the product of sublimation is when the libido (which she equates with both will and desire) takes the shape of a productive outlet, such as artistic creation, whereas the outcome of repression is the libido in its destructive form – the performance of a sacrificial act with the purpose of self-aggrandisement, for example. Matthew Kibble writes of the matter as discussed by Sinclair in ‘Symbolism and Sublimation’ that

...May Sinclair... suggests that each successive life-form in the evolutionary chain might be seen as the ‘sublimation’ of the previous one, so that Jung’s ‘libido’ becomes a creative, divine life-force striving towards a higher moral end. ... She does not see Libido as a sexual drive at all, but as a divine will with a natural progressive aim. Perversion has no useful relation to cultural production here: it is even seen as ‘unholy’ and destructive.<sup>137</sup>

It is important to note that the ‘evolutionary chain’ of life that Kibble mentions is, for Sinclair, wholly non-deterministic; in *A Defence of Idealism*, she clarifies that sublimation constitutes evolution, which is for that reason not biologically determined. This may seem counter-intuitive if evolution and biological determinism are thought of as going hand in hand. However, Sinclair’s use of the concept of

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<sup>136</sup> Sinclair, ‘Symbolism and Sublimation I,’ 122, n. 4.

<sup>137</sup> Matthew Kibble, ‘Sublimation and the Over-Mind in H.D.’s “Notes on Thought and Vision,”’ *ELT* 41, no. 1 (1998): 51.



evolution in relation to individual identity, inspired by Herbert Spencer, suggests the possibility of change within each individual (Lamarckism) rather than any implied fixedness in a hereditary chain: ‘Individuals, in their successive (and successful) sublimations, raised the primordial will-to-live from the level of mere need and want, through the stages of desire, to those supreme expressions of individuality – love and will.’<sup>138</sup> To suggest that Sinclair is saying that all individuals are determined to be sublimations of previous generations through the inescapability of evolution – and thereby sublimation – is, I think, to misunderstand her point, since she makes it quite clear that sublimation rarely happens by default. Furthermore, she emphasises the tentative nature of the idea of the human race as a unified organism and is troubled by evolutionary determinism. She does not, however, dismiss it out of hand, but addresses it from several angles in the book’s first chapter, which is on the theories of Samuel Butler, and concludes that

if we narrow [the individual] down to his bare achievements as an individual, the small experience he acquires for himself in his short lifetime, compared with his immense accumulations in the persons of his progenitors, doesn’t really amount to a row of pins... If you say it is all for the Race and not for the individual, and that the individual only exists in and for the Race, that doesn’t make the affair a bit more intelligible or a bit better. In fact it makes it worse... For what is the Race but an abstraction, if it is not the sum of the individuals that compose it?<sup>139</sup>

Towards the end of the chapter, she stands firm in her conviction that individuals contribute to the evolutionary chain but remain detachable from it: ‘The individual’s heritage is *his*, if we allow him ... “a little dose” of selfhood over and above his

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<sup>138</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 40.

<sup>139</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 37.

sense of need, over and above reason and judgment, over and above memory. The Individual is not his heritage. His heritage is his.’<sup>140</sup>

I further disagree with Kibble’s understanding of Sinclair’s notion of the libido as asexual – she clearly includes the sex drive in the term, but does not restrict it to mean only that. This can be seen throughout the article as she mentions the ‘sexual libido’ when she wishes to refer to that specific element within her wider, more inclusive understanding of libido as a term. Kibble nevertheless points to an important distinction between a creative and a destructive side of the Life-Force, which leads to positive and negative ways of enacting sacrifice, or sacrifice based on sublimation versus sacrifice based on repression.

According to Sinclair, a sublimated will is the foundation of everything that is the result of human culture. Sublimation, she writes,

is Here – everywhere. Always and now. ... All religion, all art, all literature, all science are sublimations in various stages of perfection. ... The houses we live in, the pavement we walk on, the steamships, trains and motor cars we travel by, chairs and tables, machinery and the products of machinery are so many instances of sublimation carried out in the concrete.<sup>141</sup>

Her idea that sublimation is the source of everything, even tables and chairs, builds on the notion that the productive energy of the libido is liberated through sublimation and can thereby be channelled into the creation of art and innovation. ‘Civilisation’ can for that reason be seen as having been made purely through sublimation, which is a transformation of the libido into creative energy – a productive form of sacrifice. In its destructive counterpart, the libido is repressed and will take illness or perversion as its outlet. Sinclair exemplifies both of these processes in her fiction.

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<sup>140</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 41.

<sup>141</sup> Sinclair, ‘The Way of Sublimation,’ 22-3.

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Sinclair's stance on the relations among sacrifice, self, and community is noticeably ambiguous when her early fiction is contrasted with the more experimental novels. In the pre-war novels and stories, Sinclair emphasises the way in which sacrifice relates to the so-called woman question, and points to the choices that women have to make in order to have the freedom to work as creators. At this early stage, sacrifice primarily illustrates a feminist point by questioning the fact that women are not allowed to combine a family life with work, but also provides the starting point of her concern with the opposition of individualism and community that is at the heart of the concept of sacrifice.<sup>142</sup>

With the advent of the First World War, the conceptual treatment of sacrifice in Sinclair's writing becomes more complex in that it takes the community on a national level into consideration. In *Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915), her own first-hand account of the early days of the war in Belgium, Sinclair expresses some reservations as to the purpose of sacrifice. Being required to take a step back and observe the sacrifices of others for herself and the nation, she salutes the bravery of the soldiers and nurses while questioning the sense of it all. The enforced passivity is palpably distressing to her: 'I'm bored', she writes, plainly and impatiently – but there is not much that can be done to remedy it.<sup>143</sup> On the one hand, she wishes to be an active participant in the effort, but on the other, she is unable to

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<sup>142</sup> For a brief overview of sacrifice in Sinclair's pre-war fiction, and a more detailed discussion of how the war altered Sinclair's attitude to sacrifice, see Sanna Melin Schyllert, 'Why British Society Had to "Get a Young Virgin Sacrificed": Community, Feminism and Sacrificial Destiny in *The Tree of Heaven* (1917),' *May Sinclair: Re-Thinking Bodies and Minds*, ed. Becky Bowler and Claire Drewery (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 177-93.

<sup>143</sup> May Sinclair, *Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1915), 103.

make herself useful due to her age and inexperience. Sinclair's seething frustration is felt in the text, especially in one rambling sentence that cannot be quoted in full here due to its extreme length:

To have nothing to do but hang about the Hospital on the off-chance of the Commandant coming back unexpectedly and wanting a letter written; to pass the man with the bullet wound in his mouth a dozen times a day ... to see all this and be utterly powerless to help ... to sit in a hateful inactivity, and a disgusting, an intolerable safety ... to want to stop it and to be unable to stop it, and at the same time to feel a brute because you want to stop it – when they are enjoying the adventure – I can only say of the experience that I hope there is no depth of futility deeper than this to come.<sup>144</sup>

Wanting but not being allowed to make a sacrifice comparable to those she sees around her, Sinclair is dejected. Not only is the inactivity depressing to her, but the misery that surrounds her is a constant reminder of how little she herself is suffering – her lack of physical danger is what pains her the most. Not being able or allowed to give herself to the joint cause, her treatment of the war is fraught with ambivalence, even though she clearly supported the war effort; she appears to have been torn between positions on the war due to the frustration of not being able to take part in it. Her fictional accounts of the war – most prominently *The Tree of Heaven* (1917) – interrogate assumptions of sacrifice being inherently good or bad.

Sinclair's correspondence also shows that she was personally aware of the multifaceted nature of war sacrifice, and the importance of belief in the war as a communal cause, in a 1916 letter to Charlotte Mew, commenting on Richard Aldington being called up to fight in France:

Poor H. D.! She has been so fine in the way she's taken her husband's being conscripted. It isn't *her* country's War, and yet she behaves as if it were. I wish he could have been spared for her sake as well as his own. I can't

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<sup>144</sup> Sinclair, *Journal of Impressions in Belgium*, 102-3.

imagine anything more awful than being sent into the trenches to fight for a cause you don't believe in – unless it is the state of mind that doesn't believe, and that can imagine that anything that's been thought and written (within the last twenty years anyhow) more important than the winning of the War!<sup>145</sup>

Sinclair expresses her sympathy for those who do not believe in the war but are forced to make sacrifices for it anyway, yet, in the second part of the same sentence, she deplores those who do not believe in anything at all apart from the importance of philosophy and literature. It is yet another statement that attests to Sinclair's ambiguous attitude towards the idea of the nation and its demand for sacrifices in the war.

In the more experimental works written after the war, where Sinclair lets the reader into characters' minds in order to explore insecurities and ambivalence regarding the function and value of sacrifice, the focus is on the application of self-sacrifice as a possible road to self-realisation. The communities of womanhood and the nation fade into the background, and instead it is a form of metaphysical community – spiritual unity with the world – that is sought through sacrifice by protagonists like Mary Olivier. The concept of sacrifice, then, is central to Sinclair's work throughout her career, and is concerned with a way out of the juxtaposition of the need to realise the self on the one hand and sacrificing the individual for the benefit of community on the other, be it in the context of feminism, war, or spiritual fulfilment. The following section looks at Sinclair's idea of sacrifice in the two experimental novels *Mary Olivier* and *Harriett Frean*, and explores the way in

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<sup>145</sup> Letter from Sinclair to Charlotte Mew, 25 August 1916, Berg collection, New York Public Library, quoted in Theophilus M. Boll, *Miss May Sinclair: Novelist. A Biographical and Critical Introduction* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), 111.

which Sinclair presents the dynamics between sacrifice and selfhood by using innovations in narrative technique.

**‘Your self willed. It was free to will’: Sacrifice, Narrative Position, and the Realisation of the Self in the Experimental Fiction of May Sinclair<sup>146</sup>**

The stories of Mary’s and Harriett’s lives, from infancy to maturity, are not only strikingly similar to May Sinclair’s own lifestory, as has been pointed out in previous scholarship, but also to one another.<sup>147</sup> While Harriett’s story is one of repressive, destructive sacrifice, *Mary Olivier* portrays sacrifice as a way of producing creative energy. One way in which it is possible to tell that sacrifice is sublimative rather than repressive for Mary is through its results: she is enlightened, she is content, she has her secret happiness, and an insight into her self, which she feels can never be taken away from her. She has a centre of narrative gravity, which is displayed to the reader where she occupies the first-person narrative position in the text.

The formal experiments that I look at in relation to sacrifice in Sinclair are, as in Butts and H. D., pronoun shifts that mark various plateaux of the respective protagonists’ renunciation and realisation of the self. *Mary Olivier* is primarily a depiction of sacrifice as self-fulfilment, but it also shows how sacrifice and self-fulfilment can contrast if the impetus to sacrifice is external and not motivated by an inner spiritual commitment. The story is one of struggle for independence and freedom from the domination of Victorian family life, but also a portrayal of the

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<sup>146</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 351.

<sup>147</sup> See for instance Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 240, where *Harriett Frean* is considered ‘a companion piece’ to *Mary Olivier*, and both stories are read alongside May Sinclair’s own lifestory.

desire to fulfil the expectations of society by conforming to culturally determined mores. I explore how Mary carves out a place for herself in the world by navigating to a point of agreement between what is expected of her and her own individual desires. Her struggle with ambivalent feelings regarding sacrifice is displayed by shifts in the narration that not only question the identity of the narrator, but also the various levels of development of self-realisation that she undergoes. In the following, I argue that these shifts are concurrent with the stages of Mary's development that concern her notion of self in relation to sacrifice.

'Letting go had somehow done the trick': Mary Olivier's Self-Realisation through Self-Sacrifice<sup>148</sup>

*Mary Olivier* is sometimes described as a novel that tracks the development of the female artist, in comparison with James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) or Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1938).<sup>149</sup> Mary goes through a number of stages in her growth on the way to becoming a self-sufficient, published writer, who relies only on her own capabilities. I argue that her self-realisation is wholly dependent on the sacrifices she makes, both physical and spiritual. Through giving up her individuality, she paradoxically achieves a higher, enlightened sense of self that affords her the space to exercise her creative power. While performing repeated transgressions against the rules and norms of society, Mary also continually enacts sacrifices to atone for the same, making herself into a Girardian scapegoat by breaking the rules of society, accepting and internalising the blame that others place on her, and performing a sacrifice that brings her world back to a state of

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<sup>148</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 379.

<sup>149</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 2-3. Battersby, 'In the shadow of his language,' 106.

normalcy.<sup>150</sup> Sinclair does not discuss the scapegoating function at length elsewhere. Nevertheless, this model of conduct is the foundation for most of Mary's life decisions, and consequently the basis of the narrative.

Mary's upbringing is entirely based on the principle of self-abnegation. *Mary Olivier* and *Harriett Frean* can both clearly be read as narratives through which Sinclair tries to come to terms with the Victorian ideal of womanhood.<sup>151</sup> During Mary's formative years, her mother inculcates this behavioural model by means of religious instruction. She teaches Mary that she must never be naughty, a concept that includes a wide range of behaviours – from reading the wrong sort of books to desiring her brothers' toys – but it can broadly be summarised as acting selfishly. Mrs Olivier suggests that God will punish any offence against this characteristic, as she warns Mary that he 'hates selfishness and self-will. ... He wants [you] to give up [your] will,' thereby linking God, or godliness, with selflessness.<sup>152</sup>

Sinclair's views on Christian sacrifice being a form of repression – as opposed to the kind of ritual sacrifice that constitutes sublimation – that she expressed in 'Symbolism and Sublimation I,' come to the fore in Mrs Olivier's oppressive teachings of destructive self-abnegation: the kind of sacrifice that produces nothing but pain and anxiety. She assumes that Mary wants to satisfy God above herself and therefore uses guilt to make her daughter behave well, stating that if Mary only behaves well when and if she feels like it, that too is morally reprehensible: 'Being good when it pleases you isn't being good... It's not what

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<sup>150</sup> See chapter 1 of this thesis for a discussion of what constitutes a scapegoat.

<sup>151</sup> See for instance Terry Phillips, 'Battling with the Angel,' in *Image and Power: Women in Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sarah Sceats and Gail Cunningham (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014), 128-38.

<sup>152</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 14



Jesus means by being good. God wants us to be good all the time, like Jesus.’<sup>153</sup>

Mary’s mother continually uses the example of Jesus and the threat of God in her lessons of morality for Mary and wants her to refrain from giving way to her impulses and inclinations for the purpose of ‘being good.’

In relating Mary’s studies of Greek mythology, the novel again echoes ‘Symbolism and Sublimation I’, where ritual sacrifice in archaic traditions is regarded as sublimative and Christian sacrifice as repressive. Mary finds that Zeus has some things in common with Jehovah; but she has the liberty to contemplate the Greek god with a certain amount of freedom, as ‘you hadn’t got to believe in him’: ‘He liked sacrifices. But then he was honest about it. He didn’t pretend that he was good and that he *had* to have them because of your sins.’<sup>154</sup> In other words, Zeus is more likeable because he appears more human, is not aloof and does not make himself out to be morally superior, like Jehovah, who is supposed to be better than humans despite thirsting for sacrifices to be made in his honour. The two gods’ respective personifications and attitudes to sacrifice correspond to Sinclair’s view of different kinds of sacrifice and their varying sublimative effects.

Mary’s struggle with the Christian conception of sacrifice is rooted in her disbelief in the figure of Jehovah as presented to her by Mrs Olivier: the God who has a benign, forgiving side and a dark, punishing side. Mary cannot reconcile the two: ‘The one God was the nice, clever, happy God who made Mamma and Mark and Jenny and the sun and Sarah and the kittens. He was the God you really believed in.’<sup>155</sup> She is unable to accept the forbidding God, who decided that Jesus was to be

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<sup>153</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 28

<sup>154</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 79.

<sup>155</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 45.

crucified ‘because you were naughty.’<sup>156</sup> This brings the theodicy problem to mind: why do good people have to suffer if God is truly benevolent? Sinclair addresses the issue of suffering as conceived in Christianity in *A Defence of Idealism*:

It would be absurd to say that Christian asceticism was worse than any other, but none has been more unclean and more profane in its repudiation of the earth. Christianity took to itself the ritual of the world it conquered; but it refused the one thing in that ritual which was necessary to its own salvation – the simple, sacramental attitude to life. In spite of its beautiful doctrine of love and mercy and pity, it was instinct with the spirit’s cruelty to the flesh. And it is precisely this atonement manqué, this failure of a spiritual religion to be spiritual enough, that is at the root of half the evil and the sickness and the suffering of the modern world.<sup>157</sup>

Sinclair appears to be saying that Christian sacrifice is, in fact, not sacrificial at all in the strict etymological sense of the word, as it does not make anything holy – rather, in its austere opposition of body and spirit, it fails to convert physical suffering into transcendence or epiphany.

Questioning the Christian notion of sacrifice and thereby God’s persona, Mary is increasingly drawn towards an interest in idealist philosophy, the idea that everything has a cosmic or spiritual unity, and consequently a belief in Pantheism. She looks up the concept in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and finds that it is an idea of God that she can accept, and ends up formulating her own personal belief on the grounds that the ‘universe, material and mental, is nothing but the spectacle of the thoughts of God.’<sup>158</sup> Mary’s Aunt Lavinia is similarly sceptical towards the received teachings of the family religion. Mary learns of the sacrifices that her aunt has had to make: to give up the man she loved because he belonged to the wrong church, and

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<sup>156</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 51.

<sup>157</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 280.

<sup>158</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 99.

give up being a teacher because she had promised her mother to take personal care of a ‘weak-minded’ sister. Despite this, or rather because of it, Lavinia professes to be happy in her old age: ‘I’ve got all I want. I’ve got all there is. When everything’s taken away, then God’s there. ... Until everything’s taken away there isn’t room to *see* that he’s there.’<sup>159</sup>

Believing in the pantheistic nature of God is not an instant solution to the conflicted emotions that Mary feels regarding the sacrifices she herself is required to make, however; she is initially devastated when her plan to follow her friend and possible love interest Mr Sutcliffe on a several month-long voyage to the south of France is cancelled due to her brother Roddy being taken ill. During the process of trying to come to terms with these events, the narration shifts briefly into the second person and Mary’s internal dialogue thereby becomes visible on the page: ‘...it seemed to her that it was impossible to give up going to Agaye. You simply could not do it.’<sup>160</sup> Struggling internally, she lies in bed praying for strength, just as she was taught to do as a small child: ‘If Anything’s there – if Anything’s there – make me give up going’.<sup>161</sup> In infancy, Mary similarly lies in bed and prays for strength to give up her wish for a cat. She is able to renounce her desire the next day, but is later given the cat anyway after having badly hit her head – an early lesson in sacrificial economy.<sup>162</sup>

Giving up the journey abroad with Sutcliffe in order to act as a nurse for Roddy constitutes Mary’s first realisation of the power and potential of self-sacrifice.

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<sup>159</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 222.

<sup>160</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 259.

<sup>161</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 260.

<sup>162</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 14-6.

To her own surprise, her prayer for strength is followed by an experience of serene acceptance and even delight in the forthcoming sacrifice:

Her mind left off crying. ... She was aware of a sudden checking and letting go, of a black stillness coming on and on, hushing sound and sight and the touch of her arms on the rough counterpane, and her breathing and the beating of her heart. There was a sort of rhythm in the blackness that caught you and took you into its peace. When the thing stopped you could almost hear the click. She stood up. ... She had a sense of exquisite security and clarity and joy. She was not going to Agaye. She didn't want to go.<sup>163</sup>

The introspective depiction of Mary's moments of self-realisation is delivered in the second person, signalling a narrative move inward – a gain in self-realisation – but also of losing oneself to 'the blackness that caught you'. Realising that she can transform her desire in this way – from wanting to go to Agaye to not wanting to go – is a crucial moment in Mary's development. She still dwells on the loss of an experience of worldly enjoyment, but the episode quoted above is her first glimpse through a door to her own inner, spiritual depths, previously unknown to her. As is evidenced toward the end of the novel – which I will return to below – Mary considers this inner space to be a source of feelings of strength and fulfilment that no outward circumstance can shake or damage. The episode also makes Mary consider the meaninglessness of life; after her brother's death she studies the Upanishads and Buddhist sutras, and reads that the material body is nothing and that all things that are of essence, Mary's self as well as the selves of others, are the same.<sup>164</sup>

Her sacrificial epiphany in combination with studies of Eastern religion and idealism allows Mary to join ideas about the importance of the individual self on the one hand and sacrifice on the other. The sacrifice that Mary makes in order to

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<sup>163</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 260-1.

<sup>164</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 276.

conform to society's expectation that she stay at home and take care of her brother thus becomes internalised and consequently transformed into an individual choice, which not only affords her happiness because of the convergence of her wish with the larger community, but also because it creates a moment of joyous epiphany.

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*Mary Olivier* is one of Sinclair's more experimental works as regards narrative voice.

The narration is three-tiered; it consists of a mix of first, second and third person narration. The focus of *Mary Olivier* is, as opposed to most of Sinclair's pre-war fiction, on Mary's navigation through a variety of thoughts and feelings about the sacrificial experiences she has, rather than outward manifestations of them and how they are perceived by other people. The narrative style used is specifically well-suited to this, as it mediates between Mary's feelings of doubt and commitment while still retaining the sense of a unified self. The unconventionality of the narration also forms a vehicle for events in Mary's life that do not lend themselves easily to description, for instance her mystic experiences. Through the shifts in narrative person, the reasons for and justification of Mary's sacrifices as she herself perceives them, and how these connect with her perception of mysticism, can be transmitted directly to the reader. Furthermore, the pronoun shifts employed represent the movement between the introspective self in the first person, the intersubjective self in the second person, and the objectification of the self in the third person in a literal way on the page.

The second- and third-person variations are those that are most used, and fairly equally so, whereas the first person is only used towards the end of the novel. Even in the third person, a resistance to conventional distance between character and narrator can be discerned, as the name 'Mary' is only used on a few occasions – 'she'

is used most frequently throughout the book, which means that Mary is always the point of focus as there is seldom any need to clarify to whom the pronoun refers. As the three different tiers are used interchangeably and irregularly, and are not necessarily marked by paragraph breaks, gaps or other such divisions in the text, the impression created is that of a more or less seamless shift between the narrative positions.

As Sinclair was greatly influenced by the theories of psychoanalysis, she wanted to find new ways of depicting inner lives through her fiction. She was also evidently fascinated by the way in which Dorothy Richardson had managed to give her readers a sense of looking into her main character's mind. She first acknowledged the narrative technique of staying as close as possible to the protagonist in her 1918 review of *Pointed Roofs*, *Backwater* and *Honeycomb*, the first three novels of the *Pilgrimage* series. Sinclair writes that Richardson gets 'closer to reality than any of our novelists who are trying so desperately to get close.'<sup>165</sup> Sinclair had a sense that the only reality that a novelist could accurately describe was an entirely subjective reality, immersed in the consciousness of one main character. This, writes Sinclair in the review, creates 'the effect of an extreme concentration on the thing seen or felt' – not the thing in or by itself as in Imagism – which makes descriptions more vividly subjective.<sup>166</sup> Another quotation from the review could just as well be used to describe *Mary Olivier*: 'The first-hand, intimate and intense reality of the happening is in Miriam's mind, and by presenting it thus and not otherwise Miss Richardson seizes reality alive.'<sup>167</sup> Through her experiments

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<sup>165</sup> May Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson: Book Review of *Pointed Roofs*, *Backwater*, and *Honeycomb*.' *The Egoist* 5, no. 4 (1918): 58.

<sup>166</sup> Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson,' 58.

<sup>167</sup> Sinclair, 'The Novels of Dorothy Richardson,' 59.

with narrative voice in *Mary Olivier*, written around the same time as the review of *Pilgrimage*, Sinclair herself attempted to ‘seize reality alive’ in stressing the centrality of the perceiving self.

I argue that the first-, second- and third-person modes of narration reflect Mary’s mind at various stages of self-realisation and development, but not in a strictly linear sense. The interposition of the second person – and, more seldom, the first person – into what is otherwise a novel mainly narrated in the third person does not just create the assumption that there is no other narrator but Mary, but indicates the protagonist’s struggle with the unification of her self into a single entity. This is indicative of the well-known concern of the recognition and overcoming of the fragmented self in modernist fiction.

Generally, shifts in tense in *Mary Olivier* are unremarkable because they follow the pronoun of the sentence’s noun phrase; the third-person narration of the novel is generally written in the past tense, while the first person is mostly in the present. One example of first person narration in the past tense can be found in chapter 35:

Last night I began thinking about it again. I stripped my soul; I opened all the windows and let my ice-cold thoughts in on the poor thing; it stood shivering between certainty and uncertainty. I tried to doubt away this ultimate passion, and it turned my doubt into its own exquisite sting, the very thrill of the adventure. ... If it never came again I should remember.<sup>168</sup>

This quotation briefly shifts the narrative into a journal or epistolary style, one which is an abrupt move towards conventional first-person narration in an otherwise unconventionally narrated novel. The section is brief, however, and conspicuously placed at the end of the novel, when the reader will already be used to shifts in

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<sup>168</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 379-80.

personal pronouns as signifying movement from an outer perspective of reflection to an inner perspective of experience. The first person narration in the past tense mixes the two and creates an inner perspective of reflection.

The second-person narration is for the most part in the past tense, but there are some exceptions; towards the end of the novel, there are a few instances where second person narration briefly meets the imperative: 'Let everything go except yourself. Hold on to yourself.... But you felt your self going.'<sup>169</sup> This example gives the impression of a direct exhortation to the self from within the self – an illustration of the multiplicity of the unified self mentioned earlier – to hold on, because that is the only stable point in Mary's experience of reality. But the self, too, is subject to change, and Mary is taken out of the present tense as she relates the realisation that she is no longer able to hold on to her self. However – as posited by Hegel – it is only through giving up her self that she can fully realise her self; she is not actually able to lose it. This sentiment is expressed in a following instance of second person present tense: 'Knowing reality is knowing that you can't lose it. ... That's the risk you take.'<sup>170</sup> It seems that this shift to the present tense points to an important shift in Mary's consciousness: the realisation that no matter what happens, her self can never be truly lost.

Both the pronoun and the tense shifts, then, are intermittently – although not wholly or regularly – concurrent with the stages of the development of Mary's self. The possibility is created due to the character's successful sublimation of libido. There is a striking clarity with which the shifts in narration are used; although it might be assumed that a novel in which three narrative levels alternate would be a

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<sup>169</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 351.

<sup>170</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 379.



complex read, *Mary Olivier* is remarkably lucid. The narration may be in constant flux, but there is a steady unifying point, a centre of narrative gravity that holds the narrative together and creates a cohesive whole. The idea that ambivalence does not have to mean disintegration of the self comes from Thomas Schramme's theories as presented in 'On Being Wholeheartedly Ambivalent: Indecisive Will, Unity of the Self, and Integration by Narration.'<sup>171</sup> The term 'centre of narrative gravity' was coined by Daniel Dennett, who argues that the self is a fictional construct of consciousness, created in order to make sense of the world.<sup>172</sup> This core unity is essential for the reader's experience of the text, and more importantly the main character, as coherent. If one were to understand the first-, second- and third-person narrators in *Mary Olivier* as three distinctly separate voices, belonging to different identities, the story would become confusing indeed. But since the narrator, regardless of the shifts in personal pronouns, still has the semblance of a unified being – Mary – the story remains coherent.

In the first of Mary's moments of spiritual bliss, the narration as experienced through her mind is a describer of objects. Here, Mary's mind can be considered as an objective camera lens that acts as an impersonal narrator. There is no person or action in the narration at all, only the visual image of her natural surroundings:

A queer white light everywhere, like water thin and clear. Wide fields, flat and still, like water, flooded with the thin, clear light; grey earth, shot delicately with green blades, shimmering. Ley Street, a grey road, whitening suddenly where it crossed open country, a hard causeway thrown over the flood. The high trees, the small, scattered cottages, the two taverns, the one tall house had the look of standing up in water.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Thomas Schramme, 'On Being Wholeheartedly Ambivalent: Indecisive Will, Unity of the Self, and Integration by Narration,' *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17, no. 1 (2014): 27-40.

<sup>172</sup> See further details in chapter 1.

<sup>173</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 48.

The effect the scenery has on Mary lasts a lifetime, and the exhilaration that she gets from the beauty of her surroundings recurs throughout the novel. What is interesting here is that there is no narrator, in the same sense that the first part of James Joyce's *Ulysses* can be read as having a narrator without a persona – or, as Morton P. Levitt argues, no narrator at all – the text is directly inside the consciousness of the protagonist.<sup>174</sup> Battersby similarly suggests that parts of *Mary Olivier* 'interposes the voice of an impersonal narrator,' but gives no examples or textual evidence that what she perceives as narrated by no one, or someone other than Mary, could not just as well be read as part of Mary's own experience.<sup>175</sup>

The intermittent use of the second person appears to be rather haphazard, as it occurs on both auspicious and mundane occasions. I hold that its main purpose is to portray the multiplicity inherent within not just Mary, but any consciousness. Monica Fludernik's contention that 'novels [that] contain only segments of second-person fiction and are therefore framed within a first- or third-person narrative... are... easily naturalized as interior monologues in the second person' underpins the understanding of the second-person narrator as Mary's interior monologue.<sup>176</sup> As Sinclair outlines in *A Defence of Idealism*, the unity of the self is arbitrary in the sense that it is made up of several different entities: 'a plurality of finite consciousnesses, a plurality of finite selves, held together by one Real Self, existing in and through and for one Real consciousness; and that without loss to the integrity

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<sup>174</sup> Morton P. Levitt, *The Rhetoric of Modernist Fiction: From a New Point of View* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2006), 93. See chapter 1, where I discuss Levitt's supposition.

<sup>175</sup> Battersby, 'In the shadow of his language,' 107.

<sup>176</sup> Monika Fludernik, 'Second-person narrative as a test case for narratology: The limits of realism,' *Style* 28, no. 3 (1994): 449.

of one finite item of the finite complex, without rupture to the unity of the one Self.<sup>177</sup> The nature of the self as understood by Sinclair can be likened to a sort of membrane: permeable, yet still delineated by borders. The fictional representation of Mary's self (or selves) is befittingly multiple yet unified; it is divided by the use of different pronouns that remain in unison as they all refer back to the same self.

The second-person pronoun can at times also be read as pertaining to the reader of the novel, as opposed to Mary herself. Several of the instances when the second person is used, it refers to commonplace experiences in life, such as the experience of walking over frost-bitten grass, and breathing crisp, clean air on a bright winter's day: 'The white, ruffled grass stood out stiffly and gave under your feet with a pleasant crunching. The air smelt good; you opened your mouth and drank it in gulps.'<sup>178</sup> However, the 'you' cannot be read as such throughout the novel, as in the opening of chapter III of 'Infancy': 'Aunt Charlotte came in first with a tight, dancing run. You knew her by the long black curls on her shoulders.'<sup>179</sup> Since the 'you' supposedly knows Aunt Charlotte – it is not necessarily the case that all readers of the novel can be presumed to have experienced frost, but this must be considered as a more commonplace experience than recognising Aunt Charlotte by her curls.– this reference is more likely to be read as Mary addressing herself rather than the average reader of the novel. Suzanne Raitt similarly supposes that the 'you' refers to both Mary herself and the reader, as she proposes that '[t]he text's continual slippage into the second person' is the result of 'a formal exploration of the impossible condition of self-knowledge,' and that it 'registers the continual

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<sup>177</sup> Sinclair, *A Defence of Idealism*, 378.

<sup>178</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 9.

<sup>179</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 32.

disintegration of consciousness into unanswerable questions... which imply that “you”, in fact, have as good a chance of knowing “I/me” as “I” have.’<sup>180</sup>

The reasoning above is crucial to my understanding of Sinclair’s narrative use of sacrifice in order to construct Mary’s sense of self. Raitt’s assertion adds evidence to my argument that *Mary Olivier* is an intersubjective or heterophenomenological narrative. The self not only has to be self-reflective to exist, but also needs to narrate its self-reflection to another subject if it is to be understood as having an experience of a conscious self, according to Daniel Dennett as outlined in chapter 1.

Mary is an object in both the second- and third-person perspectives, but as the ‘impersonal narrator’ and first person narrator, she becomes a subject, which points to the purpose behind the use of shifts in narration: showing the development of the self through sacrifice. The question of the objectivity of Mary, her mind, and her narration has been discussed ever since the publication of the novel; Sinclair wrote in a letter to Ezra Pound in 1919, in response to Pound’s opinion that the narration in *Mary Olivier* was subjective, that ‘Mary’s mind is “objective” to me.’<sup>181</sup> Taking the quotation above as an example, they are both right. It seems as though, for Sinclair, the subjective and the objective are not polar opposites as regards literary representation, but rather two aspects of an experiential reality. The sense experience that passes through Mary’s mind is objectively narrated in the passage, but the *experience* itself is subjective, since it belongs to Mary. Sydney Kaplan argues that Mary can be usefully thought of as a tripartite subject, since she is

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<sup>180</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 221.

<sup>181</sup> Sinclair to Pound, 24 Oct. 1919, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Ezra Pound Papers, Box 48, fo. 2136. May Sinclair’s papers only contains Pound’s correspondence up to 1912, for which reason his letter to which Sinclair is responding is not quoted here.

relating memories from several different viewpoints at once: a direct presentation of the event, her internal commentary – from the time of the event – and her external commentary – from the distance of a later date. Kaplan's conclusion is that the events that are related are subjectively selected for inclusion by Mary as narrator, based on her 'quality of thinking at the specific time' of the event: 'Each incident captures the *quality* of Mary's mind at that stage of her growth, but it does not necessarily give us the mind itself.'<sup>182</sup> Sinclair herself had consciously attempted to make Mary's mind objective and a 'mirror of "objects"', an attempt which can sometimes be seen to succeed.<sup>183</sup> If an objective mind means that the mind is not an object but an invisible or transparent medium, it would follow that in the long quotation above where there is no perceived narrative position but it is inferred that the description is that which Mary sees, Mary's mind is objective in this instance, because if her mind is objective, the mental process is not represented on the page, only the things perceived.

Mary's epiphanic moments may occur repeatedly through the narrative, but it is also pointed out that they are never exactly the same: 'She would go back and back to the places where it had come, looking for it, thinking that any minute it might happen again. But it never came twice to the same place in the same way.'<sup>184</sup> While Mary's behaviour is cyclical in that she tries to recreate the circumstances under which she can reach a transitory state of spiritual fulfilment, her experiences are not duplicated from one time to another. Similarly to ritual sacrifice, then, the epiphanic moments are repeated but never identical, even though the conditions may

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<sup>182</sup> Sydney Kaplan, *Feminine Consciousness in the Modern British Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 52.

<sup>183</sup> Sinclair to Pound, 24 Oct. 1919.

<sup>184</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 93-4.

be the same. The similarity between Mary's epiphanic moments and ritual acts points to the sublimative potential for Mary in the epiphanic moments as opposed to her attempts to practice Christianity.

Towards the end of the novel, when the first-person narration starts to appear and gradually becomes more frequent, the narrative gravity has grown stronger and pulls harder towards its centre. First-person narration signifies a move towards freedom for Mary; the first instances of first-person narration coincide with the time of Mary's mother's death. They are also concerned with Mary's thoughts on her relationship with Richard, something that indicates that she is ready to let go of the mother-daughter symbiosis which denies her existence as an individual self. The first time first-person narration occurs is when Mamma suffers a stroke; the second is when Mary wakes up from a dream in which her mother has died.<sup>185</sup> On the first occasion, Mary thinks that if Richard wants her mother dead and is able to will her to for instance have a stroke, she has to counteract him through the use of her own psychical powers. The way in which these are described is reminiscent of the telepathy at work in Sinclair's short story 'The Flaw in the Crystal' (1911). Much like Agatha, Mary lies flat on her back in darkness when she summons her power from within. On the second occasion, Mary asks: 'Why can't I dream about something I want to happen? Why can't I dream about Richard?'<sup>186</sup> Mary as a first-person narrator – the two sentences are not within inverted commas – reflect back on the things that happen in her own consciousness and question her mind's inner workings.

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<sup>185</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 350, 352.

<sup>186</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 352.

As is suggested by the pronoun, first-person narration signifies a focus on the narrative self. The impending loss of her mother is forcing Mary to become a fully independent individual. She wants to stay awake until her mother sleeps, for her mother's sake ostensibly, but also for her own sake, so as to make the most of every single moment that she has left with her. The element of self-centredness in Mary's grief caused by the anxiety of losing someone close to her is covertly indicated by the use of the first person perspective. The first-person singular pronoun 'I' signifies that we are dealing here with the self and the ego, which, taking Sinclair's interest in psychoanalysis into account, implies that Mary is coming to terms with her desires and trying to gain a balance between the sacrificial self and the assertive ego. The issues at hand are directly related to the libido: love and death.

The feelings expressed are uncharacteristically self-centered: wanting her mother to live, despite Mamma's explicit wish for death, and wanting to dream about pleasant things like Richard instead of her dying mother. For once Mary appears to put her own needs before those of Richard and her mother. As has been argued previously by Christine Battersby in a comparison of *Mary Olivier* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Mary Olivier only 'attains the status of an individual' as her mother dies.<sup>187</sup> It is not surprising, then, that she should express these feelings in the voice of the individual, subjective 'I' that simultaneously and paradoxically wishes both for freedom from the mother and for the mother to live on. Sacrifice is shown here to be the key to Mary's navigation between self-centered and selfless thoughts and emotions; only when she can be reconciled with the idea of sacrifice can she let go of her self, and thereby become self-fulfilled.

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<sup>187</sup> Battersby, 'In the shadow of his language', 109.

The sacrifice of Richard Nicholson, the last of Mary's suitors in the novel, is more complex than the earlier renunciations. He is initially thrown over because of Mary's mother, as is evidenced by the tortured conversation between her and Mary after the former has received a note from Nicholson to ask for her daughter's hand in marriage: 'Mamma had been crying all evening. ... "I've no security with you, Mary...."' In brackets, Mary thinks 'I've killed myself.... This isn't me.' Here, the sacrifice she has to make feels like suicide, or an annihilation of the self, without any epiphanic feeling of joy. The mother comments as though she could hear Mary's thoughts: "'I'd rather see you in your coffin.'" "I *am* in my coffin." "I wish I were in mine," her mother said.'<sup>188</sup> At this juncture, Mary has yet to undergo the process of sublimation and is therefore prone to think of the sacrifice as destructive to her self rather than affirmative of it, particularly in a situation where her mother is pressuring her to make the sacrifice, which removes the agency from Mary and makes her feel that it is not her own decision.

However, before Mary ends the relationship, and even before her mother expresses her opinion on the matter, there are several hints that Mary's desire is simply to be with Richard, rather than to marry him. Her anxiety in connection with Nicholson is expressed as 'uneasiness': '[T]here was something else. Something to do with Richard Nicholson. Something she didn't want to think about. Not fear exactly, but a sort of uneasiness when she thought about him. ... She was not sure she wanted Richard Nicholson to come back.'<sup>189</sup> When Richard expresses his wish to marry, her reaction is not so much joyous as fearful: "'I want to marry you, Mary.'" (This then was what she had been afraid of. But Mamma wouldn't have thought of

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<sup>188</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 349.

<sup>189</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 339-41.



it.) “I didn’t think you wanted to do that. Why should you?” “It’s the usual thing, isn’t it? When you care enough.”<sup>190</sup> The reasons Richard lays out for wanting to marry are closely bound to the expectations of society. Mary on the other hand thinks that ‘we should spoil it by marrying’, thereby upsetting the stereotypical assumption that women want to marry above all else and men want to keep themselves free and single. Richard states: ‘We can’t exactly go on like – like this, you know.’ Mary’s reply substantiates her unwillingness to even contemplate marriage: ‘Don’t let’s think about it. Here we are. Now this minute. It’s an hour and a half till dinner time. Why, even if I go at nine we’ve got three hours.’<sup>191</sup> She is happy to be living in the moment when they are together, without any further demand being placed on her. Their conversation ends with an intimation that Richard is becoming a threat to Mary: ‘He had got up. He wanted to stand. To stand up high above you.’<sup>192</sup> Even though Richard is supportive of Mary’s writing, appreciative of her intellect, and encourages her bike-riding, Mary would become his subordinate, legally and socially, if they were to marry, which would impede Mary’s self-development.

To give up marrying Richard, then, is not unequivocally a sacrifice demanded by Mary’s mother; the text suggests that Mary is unwilling to untie the familial bond to her mother only to enter into another that may become just as oppressive of her quest to realise her self. When she tries to explain this to him, he becomes angry and confused: ‘You’re trying to tell me you don’t want me. ... I’m sorry, Mary. You seem to be talking about something, but I haven’t the faintest

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<sup>190</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 345-6.

<sup>191</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 345.

<sup>192</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 347.

notion what it is. But you can make yourself believe anything you like if you keep on long enough.’<sup>193</sup> He tries to suggest that her hesitation is only ‘nerves’ and in response to her explanation of past mystical experiences of epiphany patronisingly says ‘Poor Mary.’<sup>194</sup> She responds: ‘You have to find it out for yourself; and even that might take you all your life...’<sup>195</sup> Their relationship ends both because of Mary’s anxiety about her mother and because of her need for self-realisation.

The sacrifice of Richard is not, then, portrayed as necessarily negative or unwanted. Rather, the ensuing solitude is a prerequisite not only for Mary’s self-realisation, but for the occupation that affords her a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction: writing. Mary’s creative output is read by Diana Wallace, Suzanne Raitt, and Emma Domínguez-Rué, among others, as a sublimation of her unfulfilled sexuality and an escape from the oppression of her mother, but none of them consider Mary’s sacrifices as necessary for her development of her self, which is what facilitates her ability to channel desire into creative output. There is a strong focus on sexuality in these three discussions of Mary’s sublimation, as in much critical literature on Sinclair. The combination of the author’s marital status on the one hand and her interest in psychoanalysis on the other has invited many to draw the conclusion that Sinclair was a sexually frustrated spinster who tried to find a way to sublimate her own desire by way of creative writing, and the autobiographical hints in *Mary Olivier* produces the further assumption that the same is true of Mary: ‘Sinclair’s belief in sublimation allows her to show female sexual energy being redirected into artistic creation or philosophical thought, rather than necessarily ...

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<sup>193</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 365-6.

<sup>194</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 366.

<sup>195</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 366.

producing neurosis.’<sup>196</sup> The focus on sexual frustration strengthens the reductive image of Sinclair as ‘spinster novelist’, overlooks the many facets of desire that she portrays in her work, and undermines the project of establishing her as an important modernist writer as it makes her seem simplistic and single-mindedly focussed on the plight of the spinster, when in actuality her various treatments of sublimation cover many more aspects. The strongly Freudian interpretation of *Mary Olivier* by Domínguez-Rué – in an article titled ‘Pen-Is-Envy’ – is particularly difficult to reconcile with Sinclair’s disagreement with Freud in general, and with the reading of Mary’s narration as identical with Sinclair’s thoughts in particular: ‘Although Sinclair always made it clear that her concept of desire was not exclusively sexual, she compares it with “the feeling you had when you thought of babies: painful and at the same time delicious” (*Mary Olivier*, p. 263).’<sup>197</sup> Apart from the ill-advised practice of conflating the words of a fictional character with the ideas of an author, interpreting a ‘painful’ but ‘delicious’ feeling, which is connected to babies, as necessarily sexual might also be considered jumping to conclusions.

Bearing in mind Sinclair’s thoughts, inspired by idealism, on the importance of sacrifice for the development of self, it is remarkable that Mary’s sacrifices are not normally read in this light. Rather, the sacrifices – if considered at all – are thought of as repressive, destructive of the self, and enforced by Mary’s mother, who is seen by Domínguez-Rué as ‘...some terrible goddess whose rage can only be appeased with sacrifice.’<sup>198</sup> This is a one-sided view of sacrifice, which fails to see

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<sup>196</sup> Diana Wallace, *Sisters and Rivals in British Women’s Fiction, 1914-1939* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 80.

<sup>197</sup> Emma Domínguez-Rué, ‘Pen-Is-Envy: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Woman Writer in May Sinclair’s *Mary Olivier*,’ *Journal of Gender Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 159.

<sup>198</sup> Domínguez-Rué, ‘Pen-Is-Envy,’ 156.

the usefulness of sacrifice for Mary, and disregards the many occurrences in the story where sacrifice facilitates epiphany. It also overlooks Mary's choices later in life, when she makes sacrifices that are not demanded by her mother, and her choices as a girl to refuse to conform and make certain sacrifices that *are* demanded – relinquishing her pursuit of knowledge, for instance. Raitt does find that 'the idea of sublimation as a form of self-discipline allowed her to construct the self as, in the end, its own salvation', but does not say anything further as to how self-discipline (or self-sacrifice) as sublimation leads Mary to her moments of epiphany.<sup>199</sup>

The description of Mary's feelings about an idea for a play that she wants to compose is similar to the feelings that she has in her moments of epiphany: it affords her an intense happiness, which is reliable and stable, something that will always 'go on, whatever happened. Whatever happened, *it* would still be happy.'<sup>200</sup> No matter what occurs, this will remain the same, just as her ecstatic moments will remain the same. Her enjoyment of the solitary task of writing is translated into words that imply a sense of unity with something external to her as an individual, as she describes her writing as a companion, an entity in itself.

Mary wishes to keep both her 'secret happiness', her ecstatic epiphanical moments, and her writing happiness to herself and not share it with others, not even Richard. The self that experiences the spiritual ecstasy must not be associated with the self that enjoys her time with Richard: 'She didn't want to mix him with *that* or with the self that had felt it. She wanted to keep him in the clear spaces of her mind, away from her memories, away from her emotions.'<sup>201</sup> When he is finally allowed to

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<sup>199</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 233.

<sup>200</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 312. My emphasis.

<sup>201</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 335.

read her writing and wishes to publish it, she is afraid of the sacrifice she assumes will have to follow: 'Now that it had happened she was afraid, seeing, but not so clearly, what would come afterwards: something that would make her want to leave Morfe and Mamma and go away to London... She was afraid of wanting that more than anything in the world.'<sup>202</sup> The joys brought by Richard, London and a budding career are all fragile because they are transitory; she knows that she is not allowed to indulge in these activities because of her sense of duty to Mamma. However, her happiness in writing, as well as her ecstatic happiness, cannot be taken away from her; both are products of sacrifice, rather than things that can be threatened by it.

Mary's epiphanical moments are closely associated with sacrifice and the sublimation of desire. The way in which Mary's secret happiness in the later years of her life is described makes it still more akin to religious ecstasy than before. Her moments of enlightenment, even though they are only moments, are also everlasting. She feels safe in the knowledge that they will always return, even if the intervals are long: 'Whatever It was, It was there. You could doubt away yourself and Richard, but you couldn't doubt away It. It might leave you for a long time, but it came back. It came back. Its going only intensified the wonder of its return'.<sup>203</sup> She trusts in 'It' as Mrs Olivier trusts in God. Mary's unshakeable belief in 'It' stands in stark contrast to her feelings towards the Christian image of God that has been introduced to her as the punishing and erratic father figure. Belief in 'It' also helps Mary to make the most difficult sacrifice of all: giving up her relationship with Richard. She feels that she 'couldn't possibly have done' that on her own, 'not like that, all at once, making that incredible supernatural happiness and peace out of nothing at all, in one

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<sup>202</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 339-40.

<sup>203</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 367.

night, and going on in it, without Richard'.<sup>204</sup> Her ability to make the sacrifice while simultaneously retaining her happiness affirms her belief in 'It'; her successful sacrifice proves to her that 'It' exists. The sacrifice has gone from destructive to productive by way of faith in a higher, spiritual entity, of which Mary's self is one small part. In giving herself up to 'It', Mary gains a sense of self-fulfilment that she is unable to have with only Richard; she needs the affirmation of a spiritual world to get anywhere in the worldly sphere. She needs the support of something other-worldly, here expressed as 'It', which may be assumed to be Sinclair's conception of the Life-Force.

In giving up marrying Richard, Mary not only gains a sense that she will never truly lose his love, but is also reassured in her belief in the constancy of her own real self. Perfect happiness is not the happiness that is associated with worldly links with other people; it can only be found within oneself, in the spiritual community with the Life-Force. Paradoxically, Mary finds that this is the way she can avoid losing Richard: by finding her real self in the Absolute, she also finds Richard's real self. The Absolute is what reality and the real self means to Mary by the end of the novel, and the only way to retain it is to let go. There is no risk involved in the sacrifice when she feels that she will not lose her real self:

Loving him more than herself she had let him go. Letting go had somehow done the trick. ... If there's anything in it at all, losing my real self would be losing Richard, losing Richard's real self absolutely and for ever. Knowing reality is knowing that you can't lose it. That or nothing. Supposing there isn't anything in it? ... Supposing there's nothing in it, nothing at all? That's the risk you take. There isn't any risk.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 367.

<sup>205</sup> Sinclair, *Mary Olivier*, 379-80.

The conscious analysis of the self and the awakening of the ‘real self’ through sacrifice are here intertwined with the shifts in personal pronoun between ‘she’, ‘my’, and ‘you’. The quotation displays the continuous dynamic between certainty and uncertainty of the reality of the Absolute, which is the heightened plane of existence where she feels that she is at one with everything and everyone – including Richard – and as the section closes by the determined statement that there is no ‘risk’, indicating a final sense of strong conviction, *Mary Olivier* should be considered to have a happy ending.

My contention, then, is that *Mary Olivier* is a tale of productive sacrifice, with a positive outcome for the person performing the sacrifice, even though it may not seem like it at first glance. Mary’s story has a happy ending, both in a spiritual and a feminist sense. She does not marry, and that does not constitute failure for her – unlike many other female protagonists, she enjoys a sense of fulfilment that comes from within herself, rather than from conforming to the societal norm that assumes that a happy conclusion to a woman’s bildungsroman has to involve a suitable marriage. Boll maintains that ‘[h]appiness through sacrifice became a closed question in this novel.’<sup>206</sup> Jean Radford’s contends in her preface to the novel’s Virago edition that sacrifice is an important theme in Sinclair’s writing, and that the self-immolation displayed by Mary Olivier builds on a view of sacrifice that she paradoxically connects with first-wave feminism: the self-effacing Victorian angel in the house. Radford’s analysis evokes the notion of a destructive kind of sacrifice that appears to be the only way out of the traditional roles available to women. However, as has been shown here, Mary’s sacrifice is not of the destructive kind, and the end of the story shows her to be content, fulfilled, and realised as a person in her own

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<sup>206</sup> Boll, *Miss May Sinclair*, 243.

right. Nothing in the text suggests that she has failed at life – contrarily, the quotation above strongly suggests that she finds a sense of fulfilment towards the end of her life – but many readers are inclined to equate the happy ending of a woman's story with the fulfilment of romantic love. The lack of married bliss at the end of *Mary Olivier* seems to be the main reason for it being perceived as an unhappy, or at least troubling, ending.

Readings of *Mary Olivier* have become slightly more favourable in later years – critics contemporary with Sinclair were 'generally lukewarm or unenthusiastic' – and Suzanne Raitt reads Mary as a self-sufficient woman who has 'perfected' the process of sublimation and 'needs no one' except 'some sense of a presence beyond her own.'<sup>207</sup> In contrast, Boll – a generally favourable biographer but necessarily a product of his time – cannot resist a reading of *Mary Olivier* that supposes Sinclair to be an elderly spinster conjuring up a dream of romantic young gentlemen, assuming with a hint of disapproval that 'Richard Nicholson is a fantasy based upon Richard Aldington, who was about thirty years younger, not six years older, than May Sinclair.'<sup>208</sup> It is difficult to find any reading, even a current one, that does not express a sense of discomfort with Mary's choice to remain single.

However, the text clearly shows that Mary is not unhappy at the end of the novel; rather, she is to be envied, firstly because she is in control of her own life, and thereby independent, and secondly because she has realised the full potential of her self. The conclusion of Mary's spiritual journey resembles that of a sage who denounces worldly things in order to fulfil herself spiritually more than that of a pitiable spinster whose life has come to nothing. The sacrifices that oppress and limit

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<sup>207</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 239; 232; 233. .

<sup>208</sup> Boll, *Miss May Sinclair*, 245



her paradoxically afford her spiritual happiness as well as the possibility of becoming a writer, as Mary realises her inner self and its unity with a larger world-spirit. The following subsection will outline what happens in a narrative where there is no such success, but rather the opposite: where sacrifice becomes destructive of the self due to repression of the libido.

‘It was through her renunciation that he had grown so strong, so pure, so good’:

Harriett Frean’s Destructive Sacrifice<sup>209</sup>

If *Mary Olivier* is described as a novel that depicts the development of a woman writer, *Harriett Frean* is often referred to as a portrayal of the wasted life of a Victorian spinster.<sup>210</sup> Harriett means to get happiness out of unhappiness, a sense of self-worth out of self-sacrifice, just like Mary Olivier. Yet, something goes wrong; her sacrifices yield only misery for herself, as well as for the people around her for whose benefit she is supposedly bending her will. The experimentality of *Harriett Frean* has so far mainly been considered in terms of the novel’s brevity; a life spanning over sixty years is portrayed in under two hundred pages. Other considerations of the narrative strategy deal with content that is left out, partly due to the narrator’s detachment from the central character. Suzanne Raitt comments that ‘Sinclair’s ironic distance ... is signalled through the novel’s style,’ and that it is ‘formally ... an advance on *Mary Olivier*,’ and Leigh Wilson contends that the structure of the novel depends upon ‘gaps and lacks,’ and the spaces in between, as

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<sup>209</sup> May Sinclair, *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1922), 77.

<sup>210</sup> See for instance Martindale, ‘The Ceasing from the Sorrow,’ 176; Martindale, ‘Suffrage and *The Three Brontës*,’ 194 n. 9; Kunio Shin, ‘Humiliating Modernism: Literature, Shame, and the Public in the Novels of May Sinclair, Wyndham Lewis, and Virginia Woolf,’ PhD dissertation (University of York, 2006), 103.

its ‘narrative device is structured around silence and absence.’<sup>211</sup> I suggest here that these spaces between are the necessary product of a narrative that is meant to represent the consciousness of an unrealised self: a consciousness that is unable to take the subjective position.

The development of Sinclair’s stylistic manifestation of consciousness in *Harriett Frean* can be clearly seen when juxtaposing the first handwritten draft of the novel with the published version. Before revisions, the first page was more similar to the beginning of *Mary Olivier*, where the mother is referred to as ‘Mamma’ even when the narrative voice is in the third person: ‘Mamma said it a third time. And each time Baby laughed. ... “I wonder why she thinks it’s funny,” said Mamma. Papa said, “I don’t know.”’<sup>212</sup> The effect is a greater proximity to Harriett’s subjective experience, as the language is simpler, and the parents are called by the names ‘Baby’ would use. It reads as a representation of what would be happening in Harriett’s consciousness at the time, as opposed to the outside rendering of the same, which is seen in the revised version: ‘Her mother said it three times. And each time the baby Harriett laughed. ... “I wonder why she thinks it’s funny,” her mother said. Her father considered it. “I don’t know.”’<sup>213</sup> Interestingly, Sinclair adds words rather than deleting them here, which would seem to go against those rules of imagism to which the novel otherwise adheres. Laurel Forster writes of Sinclair’s revisions that ‘nonessential words are deleted, adding to the economical expression, and such

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<sup>211</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 244; Leigh Wilson, “‘It was as if she had said....’: May Sinclair and reading narratives of cure,” PhD dissertation (University of Westminster, 2000), 111.

<sup>212</sup> May Sinclair, *Life and Death of Harriett Frean*, May Sinclair papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania. Ms. Coll. 184, box 12, folder 232-6.

<sup>213</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 1.

“cutting” of superfluous words and phrases was a well-known technique of the Imagists.<sup>214</sup> It is unsurprising that the two of Sinclair’s novels that ‘[treat] the “thing” [if the thing in this case is the self] directly, whether subjective or objective,’ have been labelled imagist.<sup>215</sup> It is understandable that the brevity of *Harriett Frean* has caused it to be more overtly perceived as part of that movement, but there is arguably ‘no word that did not contribute to the presentation’ in *Mary Olivier*, despite it being a longer text and regardless of whether or not Mary’s mind is thought subjective or objective.<sup>216</sup>

In answering the question of what Harriett’s sacrifices are lacking for the development of her self, it is pertinent that she is a little too eager to make them; as outlined above, where the performance of a sacrificial act with the purpose of self-aggrandisement is equal to repression for Sinclair. This prompts the question of whether they are the result of a sublimation of desire, which in *Mary Olivier* is portrayed as a difficult state to attain. In opposition to Mary, Harriett willingly engages in self-abnegation with the express intention of pleasing others, primarily her mother. As a child, she is rewarded for standing apart from others at a children’s tea party by not clamouring for a piece of cake when she was accidentally not given any. Her mother explains to her: ‘It is better to go without than to take from other people. That’s ugly.’ Harriett takes it to heart and from then on equates selflessness and self-sacrifice with being good and beautiful. She realises that although it may hurt to give up something you want, in the end you are rewarded by feeling good

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<sup>214</sup> Forster, ‘Sinclair’s Imagist Writing,’ 115.

<sup>215</sup> Forster, ‘Sinclair’s Imagist Writing,’ 111. According to F. S. Flint writing about Imagism in *The Egoist* in 1915, its aim is ‘[d]irect treatment of the “thing,” whether subjective or objective.’ F. S. Flint ‘The History of Imagism.’ *The Egoist* 2, no. 5 (1915): 71.

<sup>216</sup> F. S. Flint ‘The History of Imagism.’ *The Egoist* 2, no. 5 (1915): 71.

about yourself: 'Ugly. Being naughty was just that. Doing ugly things. Being good was being beautiful like mamma. ... Sitting up there and being good felt delicious.'<sup>217</sup> Behaving well is equal to being beautiful; behaving badly is to be ugly. Harriett learns that she can feel good not only about herself through sacrifice, for example by giving up cake in order to receive praise from her mother, but also that she can elevate herself to a level of righteousness above other people, whose motives are considered egotistical and less pure or righteous than hers. This sense of pride in Harriett quickly grows stronger, as her continuous sacrifices make her feel morally superior to others.

When the narration is wholly channelled through Harriett, the focalisation invokes the reader's understanding and sympathy; it creates an understanding of the main character as someone who has been forced to sacrifice things, even though the legitimacy of the sacrifice itself is questioned. When the narrative voice shows a hint of disdain towards the sacrifice, implying that the actions of the protagonist are not as righteous as she believes them to be, it produces an awareness of the protagonist as an unreliable focaliser. This can be seen at any point where the narrator is overtly distanced from Harriett, for example when she goes to visit Priscilla and Robin after their marriage and she experiences sensations of jealousy towards Priscilla, who, despite being paralysed and having lost her baby, feels 'voluptuous content' as she tells Harriett of all the things Robin does for her. Harriett, meanwhile, 'was aware of a sudden tightening of her heart, of a creeping depression that weighed on her brain and worried it. She thought this was her pity for Priscilla.'<sup>218</sup> The ironic distance with which this and other events are narrated reinforces the reader's perception of

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<sup>217</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 15.

<sup>218</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 75.

Harriett's reasoning as misguided and sets up an opposing viewpoint in the form of an otherwise anonymous narrative voice.

This strange relationship between the narrative voice and Harriett – alternately understanding, alternately condescending – creates a sense of stream of consciousness akin to that used in *Mary Olivier*, but the intermittent instances that allow narratorial comment to break through are more suggestive of free indirect discourse as used by Virginia Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), as the narrator is impersonal though permeable for the most part. However, since the narrator is clearly external to Harriett, it is not a case of dissonant self-narration, that is, ironic distance between self as narrator some time after the event and self as protagonist at the time of the event, like the parts of *Pilgrimage* and *Mary Olivier* that cover the early years of the respective protagonists' lives seem to be.

Self-denial is not only reported to make Harriett feel good, it even makes her think of herself as almost divine, 'sitting up there' on a pedestal alongside the flawless Mamma, who, according to Harriett, is equal to God and Jesus in her beauty. Harriett substitutes devotion to God for devotion to her parents, believing them to be omnipotent, omniscient and without fault. Harriett is scolded for her blasphemous comparison of Mamma to God and is warned that she 'mustn't say things like that, Hatty; you mustn't, really. It might make something happen.'<sup>219</sup> It is understood by Harriett that the idea is that God would punish her for comparing him to Mamma, but she doesn't appear to be frightened by the prospect. She is much more terrified of displeasing her mother, whose approval means more to her than anything else: 'Saying things like that made you feel good and at the same time naughty, which was more exciting than only being one or the other. But Mamma's frightened face

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<sup>219</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 15.

spoiled it.’<sup>220</sup> Harriett’s morals are thereby shown to be tied to a sense of desire to please her parents, who in Harriett’s eyes are on an equal footing with, or perhaps even more important than, God.

Harriett feels that she has an inadequate understanding of the Christian faith because of the conflation of devotion to her parents with that of devotion to God. She thinks of her mother’s faith as unavailable to her; for Harriett, it is an unknown faculty that enables belief and trust in God: ‘Her mother had some secret: some happy sense of God that she gave to you and you took from her as you took food and clothing, but not quite knowing what it was.’<sup>221</sup> Mamma becomes the mediator between her and God, not unlike the way in which Mother Mary is in Roman Catholicism, as a more accessible divinity to which you may confer your thoughts. This also means that she never has the incentive to develop enough of a sense of self to achieve a direct unmediated belief or relation to God. Rather than directly praying to God, who is too far removed from humans to be communicated with, Mary as well as other saints can be more easily approached. Harriett’s imitation of belief is only made possible through her devotion to Mamma as a deity, which is also why she cannot make sacrifices for God directly.

The sacrifices Harriett makes, then, are not a matter between herself and a spiritual reality, but between her and her parents. This is evident from what ensues after she strolls down Black’s Lane and picks red campion as a child, where there is a house with ‘something queer, some secret, frightening thing about it,’ and she is not allowed to go.<sup>222</sup> Interestingly, there was a folkloric belief widespread in

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<sup>220</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 15.

<sup>221</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 40-1.

<sup>222</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 18.

northern England in the nineteenth century that picking red campion would cause one's mother to die, a connection that implies that disobedience toward the mother is a symbolic killing of the mother.<sup>223</sup> Harriett is being deliberately disobedient on this occasion, and delights in the act of naughtiness: 'She kept on saying to herself: "I'm in the lane. I'm in the lane. I'm disobeying Mamma."'”<sup>224</sup> The same feelings of instant gratification that are at work here, however, are also what prompt her subsequent obedience and continual sacrifices. As her father explains, 'nothing is forbidden. We don't forbid, because we trust you to do what we wish. To behave beautifully...'”<sup>225</sup> Mr and Mrs Frean are counting on Harriett to want to please them; the threat of being seen as undutiful, and thereby ugly, is unbearable to Harriett because of her religious devotion to her parents.

The surface value of the 'beauty' or 'ugliness' of behaviour in the novel is significant; it constitutes a critique of what gives aesthetic pleasure that stands in stark contrast to *Mary Olivier*. Mary's sense of aesthetic beauty is developed through her exposure to poetry and natural surroundings, not through obedience. In *Harriett Frean*, Mamma is beautiful because of her behaviour as perceived by Harriett, and the phrase 'behaving beautifully' indicates the necessity of adhering to a set of observable rules, as opposed to in the earlier novel, where the turn away from such rules and towards a free-spirited, creative energy permits Mary to reach aesthetically greater heights in her writing.

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<sup>223</sup> The plant is known as 'mother-die' in Cumberland. Roy Vickery, *Garlands, Conkers and Mother-Die: British and Irish Plant-lore* (London: Continuum, 2010), 53-4.

<sup>224</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 17.

<sup>225</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 23.

Not only is Harriett's notion of sacrifice coloured by the view of her parents as venerable, it is also affected by her sense of self-worth being bound up in the feeling of pride after she has forgone something. The shame she feels when learning that she has let them down is detrimental to her self-image, which is built on forgoing pleasure to please others. The small spark of insurrection against this creed is effectively quenched by hurting Harriett's pride, telling her after she has gone down Black's Lane that she is 'guilty of ... [b]reaking trust. Meanness. It was mean and dishonourable of you...' <sup>226</sup> As Harriett breaks down in tears, the narrative voice states that '[s]he would always have to do what they wanted; the unhappiness of not doing it was more than she could bear.' <sup>227</sup> This feeling is the diametrical opposite of that which she experiences after she denies herself cake. For Harriett, unhappiness becomes emblematic of doing things according to her own will.

Harriett learns as a child that she should behave beautifully for two reasons, then: because her parents expect it and because it feels good to receive their validation. The good feeling comes out of pleasing her parents, and the knowledge of having done something that is morally justifiable to them. She also learns that behaving beautifully involves sacrificing one's own wants and needs – that is, ridding oneself of desire. But Harriett's sacrifices seem to almost increase rather than eliminate her desire, as her desire is to be perceived as unselfish. Just as other children would be unable to say no to cake at a party, Harriet appears to be unable to deny herself the feeling she gets from behaving beautifully, which for her means to deny herself anything that she wants.

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<sup>226</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 22.

<sup>227</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 23.



The practice of this belief culminates in the love triangle between Harriett, Priscilla, and Robin, which ultimately ends in heartbreak for all three. Harriett falls in love with Robin, a man who is engaged to be married to her childhood friend Priscilla. Robin eventually lets Harriett know that her feelings are requited, but she turns him down, telling him he must keep his promise to Priscilla. Harriett's desire of doing the right thing overtakes her desire to marry Robin, which is conveyed through a dialogue that almost seems like a parody of a love scene due to the sudden emotional outburst in a text that is otherwise characterised by a restrained tone in both dialogue and narrative:

'You can't say you don't love me, Hatty.' No. She couldn't say it; for it wouldn't be true. ... 'I can't. I'd be doing wrong, Robin. I feel all the time as if she belonged to you; as if she were married to you.' 'But she isn't. It isn't the same thing.' 'To me it is. You can't undo it. It would be too dishonourable.' 'Not half so dishonourable as marrying her when I don't love her.' 'Yes. As long as she loves you. She hasn't anybody but you.'<sup>228</sup>

Robin argues that it would be more wrong for him to marry a woman who he does not love, rather than to leave her for Harriett, whereas Harriett cannot but think that it would be bad behaviour to steal her friend's fiancé. According to her idea of continual sacrifice, which she puts above both her and Robin's feelings, they must give up being with each other because of Priscilla. She finally convinces Robin that it would be indecent of them both to rob Priscilla of her expected marriage, and he finally concedes to the marriage with the ominous words: 'Whatever it's like I've got to go through with it.'<sup>229</sup> The choice of words conjures up a feeling of resignation and dejection. Robin sees that he has to throw himself on the sword of marriage with Priscilla in order to remain good in Harriett's eyes. Her high standards of behaviour

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<sup>228</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 60.

<sup>229</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 62.

affect Robin because of his love for her; he wants to show her that he is an honourable man by laying down his life for her moral standards. Conversely, his sacrifice consists of marrying another woman.

Robin is forced to give up his love for Harriett, and as he does not submit to this sacrifice freely nor is able to see any positive outcome of it, it is, as with Harriett's abnegations, another destructive sacrifice. Harriett's decision to refuse him, and to persuade him to marry Priscilla, leaves him in a less than desirable situation with an exacting wife who does nothing but give him orders. Robin becomes 'moody and morose,' increasingly showing his growing impatience and frustration with life as time goes by.<sup>230</sup> It slowly dawns on Harriett that he might be very unhappy and that she is partly to blame for it, but the thought is quickly beaten down with a sanctimonious mantra: 'She thought of her deep, spiritual love for Robin; of Robin's deep, spiritual love for her; of his strength in shouldering his burden. It was through her renunciation that he had grown so strong, so pure, so good.'<sup>231</sup> Harriett again tries to eliminate any feelings of guilt or thoughts that can lead to a sense of having done wrong. She clings to the notion that Robin has grown stronger through her sacrifice and refuses to think that he has fared badly from his forced sacrifice, in a similar way as she represses her emotions regarding her own supposed sacrifices for the morality in which she has been instructed. In contrast to Mary's renunciation of Richard, there is no inner turmoil or struggle for Harriett that is followed by a serene determination to give up Robin – she has not internalised the decision to sacrifice, but does it simply on account of what behaviour will be approved or condemned; it

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<sup>230</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 75.

<sup>231</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 77.

is the performance of a modest attitude – which Sinclair links to repression as has been shown above – rather than a sacrifice in which Harriett actually believes.

The motivation of this sacrifice is to be seen as having ‘behaved beautifully’, as opposed to confirming that it is what would be best for her construction of selfhood. The dependence on acknowledgement of the ‘beauty’ of the sacrifice is shown by Harriett turning to her parents for assurance, which she is readily given. The choice of words – describing the sacrifice as beautiful – signifies its superficiality. Her father reassures her of having made the right decision, and the sentiment is reiterated internally by the narrative voice as focalised through Harriett: ‘She couldn’t. She couldn’t. It was no use thinking about him’; however, a comment on the deeper truth of Harriett’s feelings is inserted in the following sentence: ‘Yet night after night, for weeks and months, she thought, and cried herself to sleep.’<sup>232</sup> The objective way in which this is described is crucial in relation to the meaning of the sacrifice for Harriett’s sense of self. It is a way of showing that this struggle has a different meaning and outcome for Harriett than Mary Olivier’s struggle does when she gives up Richard – Harriett overtly pushes conscious thought to one side, but her emotional reaction is a testament to the fact that she is hurting, and before she succeeds in repressing her feelings, she is inconsolable. Harriett’s decision, then, is an ambiguous one. She struggles with thoughts of what might have been, as well as with emotions of sadness and loss, even though she is convinced that she has made the right decision, led by her moral compass that has been shaped and reinforced by her parents. She tells herself that she has done the right thing and believes it on a superficial level. But despite this, she still cries over Robin. It is thereby evident that she has not sublimated her desire for Robin, but only repressed it – as suggested by

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<sup>232</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 63.

Jean Radford in the introduction to the novel in its 1980 Virago edition – with the consequence that Robin is forced to make a sacrifice that he does not choose or understand.<sup>233</sup> In stark opposition to Mary Olivier, who makes sacrifices that are not always acknowledged by the people around her, but who has a firm conviction that she is doing the right thing, Harriett has done what is outwardly seen as the right thing, but experiences inner turmoil due to regret and later guilt.

The repression of desire on which Harriett's sacrifices are based becomes even clearer when, after seeing Robin as an aged, ill-tempered man, she is deeply bothered by the fact that she no longer finds him attractive; 'she couldn't love him, couldn't go on being faithful. This injured her self esteem.'<sup>234</sup> Her desire for Robin is connected to her self-esteem because of the misconception of sacrifice as repression instead of sublimation; as she has built her self-image on the sacrifice of her desire for Robin – which was not a sacrifice in the form of sublimation, but merely a repression of her desire – her self-esteem is injured due to the realisation that the sacrifice is no longer valid, as Robin is no longer an object of desire.

Robin's sacrifice is not the only one that Harriett's behaviour incurs, however. It has previously been pointed out that the novel, as indeed Sinclair's whole oeuvre, is full of dead babies.<sup>235</sup> Priscilla and Robin's, as well as Maggie's child, die because of Harriett actions. In addition to the dead human babies, there is also the doll that Harriett has to share with Connie Hancock, which she later pretends is dead and buries in a box in the cupboard – simply because she had had to share it

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<sup>233</sup> Jean Radford, 'Introduction,' *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (London: Virago, 1980), no page numbers.

<sup>234</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 135.

<sup>235</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 20.

with her friend: 'If I can't have her to myself I won't have her at all.'<sup>236</sup> The dead doll, like the dead babies, is dead because of Harriett's selfishness, the difference being the overt or conscious decision to 'kill' the doll, whereas the babies die for the indirect reason that Harriett has made selfish decisions. This seems to suggest that since Harriett is unable to sublimate her desire for approval from her parents – that is, to be disobedient to and thus 'kill' them, as the red campion scene implies – and equally incapable of sublimating her romantic desire for Robin, the symbolic sacrifice of the younger generation – dolls and babies – takes place instead. The final full thought in Harriett's mind before she loses consciousness on the operating table at the end of the novel – that it is 'sad to go through so much pain and then to have a dead baby' – not only suggests that the dead baby trope is particularly strong in this novel because it is emblematic of Harriett's life and death, but also indicates the latent guilt Harriett feels over the behaviour that she now realises was selfish.<sup>237</sup> She feels responsible for the death of the babies, in the first instance because of her idea of what self-sacrifice should be, and in the second due to the opposite: an overpowering emotion wanting Robin and Maggie respectively for herself.

The sacrifice of Robin remains in Harriett's mind as a good thing, up until the point when she finds out what Robin really felt about her in his later life. His niece Mona comes to visit and appears to be in the same situation that Harriett was: she is in love with a friend's fiancé and he wants to break off his previous engagement. Harriett advises Mona not to let him do it, using the example of her own sacrifice in order to try to make her point. Mona gives a response that punctures Harriett's carefully maintained beliefs: 'How could you? ... You insulted Aunt

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<sup>236</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 7-8.

<sup>237</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 183.

Prissie. ... That's how she got her illness. And it's how he got his. And he'll kill Aunt Beatie. ... Look at the awful suffering. ... There's no common sense in it. ... Of course he hated you, after what you'd let him in for.'<sup>238</sup> This no-nonsense speech manages to get through to Harriett and finally crushes the image of her beautiful sacrifice.

The narrator, however, has always shown an awareness of the fact that this sacrifice was not a good thing at all. This is first done through a short re-telling of the nervous breakdown that Harriett seems to have after her rejection of Robin, entirely devoid of details and emotions: 'Towards spring Harriett showed signs of depression, and they took her to the south of France and to Bordighera and Rome. In Rome she recovered.'<sup>239</sup> The great distance between the narration and Harriett here is symptomatic of the lack of sympathy for what she is going through at this point: learning to think of the sacrifice of Robins as a good thing. When Harriett's face is described as having acquired an 'arrogant lift,' this suggests further distance, and a disapproval of Harriett from the narrator's point of view.<sup>240</sup>

The narration here is phenomenological in the sense that it is a representation of beliefs about Harriett's own experiences and their phenomenal character, as described by David Chalmers and outlined in chapter 1. However, it does not relate Harriett's inner narrative in the way that *Mary Olivier* does; because Harriett has no self, she has no centre of narrative gravity, and as such allows for an objectification of her inner processes to a further extent than that seen in *Mary Olivier*. This means that the narrator can keep their distance from Harriett and still describe what is

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<sup>238</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 145-7.

<sup>239</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 64.

<sup>240</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 67.

taking place inside her psyche, even to the extent of knowing what Harriett herself is unable to realise because it is in her unconscious. When Harriett goes to see Robin and Priscilla after their marriage, she is portrayed as deriving an almost illicit pleasure from witnessing Priscilla's inability to be a satisfactory wife to Robin: 'She still thought of Prissie's paralysis as separating them, still felt inside her a secret, unacknowledged satisfaction. Poor little Prissie.'<sup>241</sup> The comment 'Poor little Prissie' is indicative of the disdain for Harriett that the narrator sometimes exudes, here under the guise of free indirect discourse – this is presumably a thought going through Harriett's mind – that at the same time creates a sense of ironic distance between narrator and protagonist, as it is easily inferred that Harriett is repressing a feeling of resentment towards Prissie for having ended up with Robin.

After the conversation with Mona, the gap between Harriett and the narrator becomes narrower, as Harriett can no longer be comforted by the honourability of what she believed was an altruistic act. Even though she outwardly maintains that she would do it again if she had to, her inner voice of reassurance is gone forever, replaced with the truth as spoken by Mona, up until this point understood by the narrator but kept repressed and silent. As Leigh Wilson points out, the distance that has been kept up between Harriett and the narrator dissolves here.<sup>242</sup> As the narrator's knowledge comes to the surface of Harriett's understanding, not only the space between narrator and protagonist, but also that between reader and story, diminishes.

Why does Sinclair feel the need to insert Mona into the story here? Surely the reader has understood all along that what Harriett did was wrong and that Robin

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<sup>241</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 73.

<sup>242</sup> Wilson, 'It was as if she had said,' 112.

hated her for it. It must be assumed, then, that Mona fills a different function: that of showing how Harriett's subjectivity is dependent upon the realisation of her self, which in turn is dependent on whether or not the truth about Robin is repressed or realised. Although she tries to push the realisation away, it is acknowledged by the narrator as 'the truth' in a sentence describing what Harriett sees, which expresses the struggle within Harriett between repression and realisation. The reason why Mona is needed in the scene is to provoke this struggle. Harriett comes closer to the narrator in this scene because she is on the verge of making a realisation pertaining to the undeveloped self: that she has never sublimated her desires.

Mona functions as a catalyst, not only for the realisation of the truth, but for a possible intersubjective experience of consciousness for Harriett:

Harriett sat a long time ... trying to see the truth. She saw the girl ... flashing out the truth. Was it true that she had sacrificed Robin and Priscilla and Beatrice to her parents' idea of moral beauty? Was it true that this idea had been all wrong? That she might have married Robin and been happy and been right? 'I don't care. If it was to be done again to-morrow I'd do it.' But the beauty of that unique act no longer appeared to her as it once was, uplifting, consoling, incorruptible.<sup>243</sup>

The narrative stays in the third person past tense – never straying into the first or second person, except within inverted commas – but the focalisation moves closer to Harriett's hidden inner truth in the three questions posed; for a brief moment, the gap between Harriett and narrator is closed, as the questions appear to be the product of her conscious mind. As the narrator then relates her direct thought within inverted commas, however, the gap returns, all sense of truth is gone, and Harriett is back in her state of repression. The final sentence makes clear that the repressed thought has

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<sup>243</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 147-8.



not disappeared, but remains deep down in Harriett's unconscious, hindering her from feeling good about her sacrifice of Robin.

In the light of Sinclair's interest in psychoanalysis, Harriett must be read as a fundamentally undeveloped adult, whose unsublimated childish desire for parental approval controls her life completely. Contrary to Allison Pease's reading, that Harriett 'lack[s] anger and desire,' I hold that it is precisely her abundant, uncontrolled desire that makes her self disintegrate under the weight of her sacrifices, rather than, as Mary Olivier, gain a stronger sense of self through self-abnegation.<sup>244</sup>

Harriett's sacrifices are detrimental to her sense of self because they are not based on any spiritual fulfilment through sublimation, but rather on feeding her desire and pride. This is why she, in order to keep her spirits up when she is feeling low, needs to remind herself of how good it felt to make the sacrifice, and the rush of emotion connected to the act. When her mother dies, '[s]he consoled herself by thinking of the sacrifices she had made, how she had given up Sidmouth, and how willingly she would have paid the hundred pounds [for the operation that could have saved her mother's life].'<sup>245</sup> She pretends to accept her mother's death calmly and serenely, but inwardly, '[s]he wanted her back again. And she reproached herself, one minute for having been glad [that her mother is at peace after a painful illness], and the next for wanting her.'<sup>246</sup> In a vulnerable position such as this, Harriett tries to shield herself from pain by reminiscing about sacrifices made, which gratifies her desire for external approval. Her memory of the renunciation of Robin similarly functions as an indulgent pleasure for the ego: 'At her worst she could still think

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<sup>244</sup> Pease, 'May Sinclair, Feminism, and Boredom,' 171.

<sup>245</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 105.

<sup>246</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 105.

with pleasure of the beauty of the act which had given Robin to Priscilla.<sup>247</sup> The enjoyment of recalling this to mind is disturbed by the frankness of Mona; after Harriett and Mona's conversation about the sacrifice, 'the beauty of that unique act no longer appeared to [Harriett] as it once was, uplifting, consoling, incorruptible,' despite trying to push the comprehension of the true nature of the act out of her consciousness.<sup>248</sup> The loss of the reassurance formerly connected with this memory creates a sensation of a 'crumbling away, bit by bit, of her beautiful and honourable self, dying with the objects of its three profound affections: her father, her mother, Robin.'<sup>249</sup> The ego is thus easily shattered by Mona's questioning of Harriett's intentions and moral; compared with Mary Olivier's indestructible self that slowly builds towards fulfilment, Harriett's ego is as robust as a house of cards.

It is not enough, then, for Harriett to remind herself about past experiences of self-denial, not only due to Mona Floyd's view of the sacrifice of Robin, but because Harriett's memories soon fade, and consequently fail to give her the same satisfaction of desire, and thereby sense of self, as before: 'If only she could have remembered. It was only through memory that she could reinstate herself. ... She clung to the image of her mother; and always beside it, shadowy and pathetic, she discerned the image of her lost self.'<sup>250</sup> Sinclair explicitly states that Harriett has in fact lost her self, and places this insight in conjunction with the image of the dead mother. Harriett has never before had a sense of self as separate from her mother, then, which in a psychoanalytical reading is strongly suggestive of a lapse in Harriett's development, as Philippa Martindale states: 'Harriett ... suffer[s] from ...

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<sup>247</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 116.

<sup>248</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 148.

<sup>249</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 148-9.

<sup>250</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 110.

a pre-Oedipal complex from which she is never able to escape.<sup>251</sup> The bond to the mother forms Harriett's only understanding of her self, which means that when she loses her parent, she also loses her self, as the self is only experienced via the mother. The reading is problematic, however, due to the application of the Oedipal complex on a female child, who, according to Freud, would not suffer from such a complex due to her inability to completely reject the mother, with whom she must necessarily identify on account of her gender.

Harriett's failure to sublimate her desire, and her subsequent actions, are based on her failure to realise a sense of self. It later transpires that her growing 'feeling of insecurity,' 'almost physical sense of shrinkage,' and 'the crumbling away, bit by bit, of her beautiful and honourable self,' are all connected with 'Mona, with Maggie and Maggie's baby.'<sup>252</sup> Both Mona and Maggie have pointed out to Harriett that she has made two decisions that have had life-changing consequences for others due to her own selfish reasons: to give Robin to Priscilla, and to send away Maggie and her baby.

It is difficult to differentiate between the third person narrator and Harriett's consciousness in this quotation; the two blend almost seamlessly and blurs the distinction between Harriett's perceptions, unreliable as the narration shows them to be, and those of the narrator. Read from a psychoanalytical perspective, this could also be seen as Harriett finally realising something that has been hidden away in her subconscious all along.

Another example that shows an instance of minimal distance between or even conflation of Harriett's consciousness and the narrative voice is that which relates

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<sup>251</sup> Martindale, 'The Ceasing from the Sorrow of Divided Life,' 199.

<sup>252</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 148-9.

her realisation of her mother's knowledge that she was dying and yet actively choosing not to be treated for her disease: '*That* was her secret. That was why she had been so calm when Papa died. She had known she would have him again so soon.'<sup>253</sup> Again, the gap between narrator and character closes for a few sentences; on this point, however, it is not opened back up as Harriett is unable or unwilling to push this realisation aside, even though she does not discuss it openly with friends. The symbiotic narration is retained as the chapter is brought to a close: '...to herself she said that everything had not been done. Her mother had never had her wish. And she had died in agony, so that she, Harriett, might keep her hundred pounds.'<sup>254</sup> Interestingly, Harriett has a rare moment of clarity and is able to say something 'to herself' that is based on true insight instead of wishful thinking or caricatured behaviour. It is conceivable that the conversation with Mona and the experience of intersubjectivity it brings has created the possibility for instances of openness to her self. However, it is also important to note that the realisation is not of Harriett's own misguided sacrifice, but of her mother's self-immolation. While it may be a disturbing realisation, it is not connected to Harriett's desire or her sense of self, which allows the narration to stay on the level of Harriett's conscious mind.

The distance between narrator and focaliser means that the focaliser is fundamentally incapable of being subjective in terms of narrative position. Harriett has no realised self, but the self-image that she does have is primarily based on two conditions: the first being the beauty of her sacrifice of Robin, and the second is that Harriett needs to occupy the role of the baby. When these two conditions can no longer be met, her sense of self starts to 'crumble,' and ultimately disintegrates. As a

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<sup>253</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 107. Emphasis in original.

<sup>254</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 107.

result, the narrative voice can never be fully subjective; even when Harriett's thoughts are related without inverted commas, her focalised narration still has to be mixed with that of an impersonal narrator.

On some points, the narrator appears to be suspiciously silent. One of these is the reason why Harriett is sent away to boarding school; while it may not seem to require any explanation other than her parents wanting her to receive an education, it does not answer the question why they send her away from home to do so; she is not particularly gifted academically, and there is no trouble within the home that is known at this point in the novel. Chapter III begins with a description of the Hancocks, which ends abruptly with the following sentence: 'She was glad Connie hadn't been sent to her boarding school, so that nothing could come between her and Priscilla Heaven.'<sup>255</sup> There is a gap in the narrative here; suddenly Harriett is packed off to school, for which there is no explanation. As the preceding lines portray the Hancocks, it is possible that some event that concerns them has taken place, which necessitates Harriett's removal. Such a theory would be pure conjecture if it were not for the memories that resurface in Harriett's mind at the very end of her life on the operating table: '...the doctor was really Mr Hancock. ... Don't let him touch me... There's a dead baby in the bed. Red hair. They ought to have taken it away.'<sup>256</sup> While it is possible to argue that these memories are conflations of events – Mr Hancock is not the only person with red hair in the novel; there is also 'the red-haired woman in the sweetie-shop [who] has got a little baby, and its hair's red, too' – it is suggestive of a trauma of some sort.<sup>257</sup> The implication is that Harriett's past

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<sup>255</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 28.

<sup>256</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 182-3.

<sup>257</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 10.

experiences have made her emotionally repressed and unable to work toward self-realisation despite continuously making sacrifices. The circular re-telling and repetition of certain events further suggests narrative reticence in the sense that these things are not possible for Harriett to approach directly, but must be related in a similar manner as they are realised in her consciousness.

A further implication of repetition in the novel is that the only way for Harriett to retain a sense of self after her mother's death is through memory.<sup>258</sup> In a way that is reminiscent of ritual ancestor worship, Harriett must repeatedly conjure up the sense of the mother out of whom she has constructed her own 'lost' self. The return to childhood that she experiences at the end of her life is intimated not only by the replication of her relationship with the mother through Maggie, and the resurfacing of repressed memories in her final moments in the hospital, but in the reassessment and replaying in her mind of what her formative years were like; 'her mind would go backwards, returning, always returning...'<sup>259</sup> She redecorates the drawing room to appear as it did when she was a child, and reinstalls the blue egg workbox that was hidden away at her mother's death: 'She sat gazing at it a long time in happy, child-like satisfaction. The blue egg gave reality to her return. When she saw Maggie ... she thought of her mother.'<sup>260</sup> As previously mentioned, her 'shadowy' self is constructed entirely from the recognition she gets from the mother, which is why she experiences a loss of that self when her mother dies: 'It was only through memory that she could reinstate herself. ...always beside [the image of her

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<sup>258</sup> In Suzanne Raitt's words, 'she tries to find herself by moving backwards...' Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 249.

<sup>259</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 175.

<sup>260</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 176.

mother] ... she discerned the image of her lost self.’<sup>261</sup> Harriett’s only sense of self ever came from the reflection of herself in the mother. The reversion to childhood, then, not only emphasises the circularity with which the entire story is narrated, but also the importance that the repetition of memory has for Harriett’s self-image after the death of her mother.

Since Harriett does not experience a sense of self before her mother’s death, the sacrifices she makes up until then are not proper sacrifices in the sense that they do not open up an avenue to Harriett’s spiritual fulfilment or self-realisation, and they do not contain the potential to ‘make holy’ either the object or the performer of the sacrifice. They may be similar to the transactional sacrifices described by Marcel Mauss in *The Gift*, which I mention in chapter 1, in the sense that Harriett gives something up with the expectation of receiving something else in return. However, there is a significant difference between the two: Harriett’s sacrifices are entirely secular, made out of surface intentions, and based on wanting to be perceived as ‘beautiful’. During her mother’s illness, Harriett urges her mother to undergo an expensive operation because ‘[s]he wanted to feel that ... she had shrunk from no sacrifice.’<sup>262</sup> Harriett’s focus is on the surface appearance of whether or not she has been willing to make a sacrifice, not on whether her mother wishes to have the operation or whether it is likely to be beneficial to her. Sinclair’s phrasing here – ‘she had shrunk from no sacrifice’ – has a further suggestive significance: Harriett’s self has shrunk from not making any productive or sublimative sacrifices.

After Harriett’s mother dies, however, ‘she felt the vague stirring of her individual soul,’ as the inevitable consequence of losing the self, as she has done

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<sup>261</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 110.

<sup>262</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 102.

through the death of her mother, entails an awakening and rebirth of the self.<sup>263</sup> As she realises that she is free to make her own choice about where to go to church, and consequently switches to a high church service and priest, Harriett is torn between guilt for abandoning her mother's brand of theology and a longing for the cure that her own individual soul needs: '[S]he felt that she had done something cruel and iniquitous, but necessary to the soul.'<sup>264</sup> Although she attempts to create a sense of individuality at this point, it appears to be too late to start building a self that can withstand questioning from the outside world, as the scenes with Lizzie Pierce and Mona show. Although Harriett tries to keep up the appearance of feeling secure within herself in front of her acquaintances, the stirring of her burgeoning individuality is disrupted by her repressed feelings about Robin and Priscilla, and Maggie and her baby. After the events from the death of Mrs Frean to Harriett's own illness, she can no longer find pleasure in anything, but instead only finds an increasing 'feeling of insecurity' within.<sup>265</sup>

The satisfaction Harriett retains in middle age is that which she gains from her idea of 'exclusiveness.' Lacking a community, she tells herself that she is too good for the company of others: '[H]er perishing self asserted itself in an increased reserve and arrogance.'<sup>266</sup> Reverting to the notion that her parents are the only worthy people with whom she has ever come in contact, she rejects the possibility of social interaction with her neighbours. She calls on them only because the man of the house, Mr Brailsford, writes for the same paper to which Mr Frean used to be

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<sup>263</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 112.

<sup>264</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 113.

<sup>265</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 148.

<sup>266</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 166.



‘connected,’ but at this point Harriett has turned into ‘an unnecessary little old lady’ in the eyes of her neighbours, whose company is neither sought nor required.<sup>267</sup>

Throughout the story, Harriett’s inability to form an independent self is reiterated; it is as though she has never really been a real person. This stands in contrast to her friends Lizzie, Sarah, and Connie, who all appear to have some form of realisation of their selves. If Harriett might be read as undeveloped due to never having married, Lizzie Pierce is a character that will show any such psychoanalytical reading to be reductive, as she too remains a spinster, but is clearly worthy of the narrator’s implicit admiration, while Harriett finds her ‘provoking’: ‘Harriett had no patience with Lizzie’s affectation in wanting to be modern, her vanity in trying to be young, her middle-aged raptures over the work – often unpleasant – of writers too young to be worth serious consideration. They had long arguments in which Harriett, beaten, retired behind *The Social Order*...’<sup>268</sup> Clearly, the narrator is not particularly sympathetic to Harriett here. Sinclair is criticising those of her own generation who are not supportive of the members of the young avant-garde; she was herself well-known for the patronage of many such writers, Richard Aldington and Mary Butts among others.<sup>269</sup> Lizzie Pierce is explicitly portrayed as a woman who has managed to make an individual of herself through intellectual effort rather than as a traditional Victorian middle-class wife and mother, and when Harriett argues against her modern ideas with a reference to her being her father’s daughter, Lizzie retorts: ‘I’m William Pierce’s, but that hasn’t prevented my being myself.’<sup>270</sup> The comment presupposes an understanding of Harriett as not being herself, not having realised her

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<sup>267</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Freen*, 168.

<sup>268</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Freen*, 115.

<sup>269</sup> Boll, *Miss May Sinclair*, 120; 125.

<sup>270</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Freen*, 116.

self, because of her preoccupation with being the daughter of her parents as opposed to a free individual.

Having built her notion of self entirely on the acknowledgement gained from her parents, Harriett's self-image falls to pieces when they are both gone. After her mother's death, she is 'horrified' to realise that she is unable to retain her self-image:

[S]he had seen herself surviving as the same Harriett Frean with the addition of an overwhelming grief... But she was not there. Through her absorption in her mother, some large, essential part of herself had gone. ... All her memories of her mother were joined to the memory of this now irrecoverable self.<sup>271</sup>

Similarly, in the final years of her life, Harriett reverts back to childhood and substitutes Maggie for her mother, leaving behind all attempts at being an adult individual: 'She was happy in the surrender of her responsibility, of the grown-up self she had maintained with so much effort, clinging to Maggie, submitting to Maggie, as she had clung and submitted to her mother.'<sup>272</sup> She wants to become part of Maggie, like she was part of her mother. When Maggie finally leaves to care for her dying mother, Harriett cries; in the chapter immediately following, she falls ill and dies.

Harriett's words in the last two pages of the novel suggest yet again that she was never a full, living person, separate and self-sustaining: 'It's sad – sad to go through so much pain and then to have a dead baby. ... Mamma – '<sup>273</sup> The first sentence could allude to a possibility that Harriett has had a stillborn child out of wedlock. The line also intimates that Harriett's thoughts run on Priscilla and Robin's

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<sup>271</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 108.

<sup>272</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 170.

<sup>273</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 183-4.

child that dies in infancy, or Maggie and her baby that dies after she sends them away, which is of course conceivable as it may be argued that the line does not have to be read as meaning that the child is dead at birth. A third possible interpretation is advanced by Suzanne Raitt; it is Harriett herself who is the dead baby, and that her realisation at the very end of her life is that she has in fact not fulfilled the hopes and expectations of her parents, since she has not succeeded in becoming an individual: 'Harriett herself... is metaphorically a dead baby, one that failed even to begin the process of development.'<sup>274</sup> As she has never realised her self, she is, in effect, stillborn; her mother gave birth to her, but was never separated from her, because Harriett never became a subject of her own, but remained a dependent subdivision of her mother.

In her own death, Harriett does in some way achieve what she has been longing for: an experience of symbiosis with or resemblance to her mother. Being diagnosed with cancer, the same disease that killed her mother, she is allowed to believe that she can re-live, or at least re-enact, her mother's final months of life and subsequent death: 'She was raised to her mother's eminence in pain. With every stab she would live again in her mother. She had what her mother had.'<sup>275</sup> Raitt also points to the opposition between this 'ecstatic, and fatal identification with her dead mother' and the ecstasy of creation portrayed towards the end of *Mary Olivier*, as the results of repression and sublimation of desire, respectively.<sup>276</sup> The trouble for Harriett is that despite having the same illness as her mother, she does not in fact have 'what her mother had'; she has no family of her own, no religious belief in

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<sup>274</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 250.

<sup>275</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 178.

<sup>276</sup> Raitt, *May Sinclair*, 243.

which she trusts, and no self. Therefore, she cannot make the sacrifice her mother made, because she has nothing for which to make it: 'Only she would have an operation. This different thing was what she dreaded, the thing her mother hadn't had ...'<sup>277</sup>

Harriett does not understand the basic relationship between self and other, or herself and other people, because she has no self. Her performances of sacrifice are attempts at copying her mother's actions, but she does not succeed in her mimicry as they lack the foundational beliefs of her mother. The sacrifices themselves have no deeper metaphysical meaning for Harriett because she has no developed self with which to experience that meaning; she therefore has a limited cognitive capability of other people's subjective experiences.

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This chapter has looked at sacrifice and the internal experience of the self in two experimental narratives by May Sinclair, where the Hegelian idea of self-realisation through self-sacrifice, coupled with the psychoanalytic theory of sublimation as necessary for the development of the self, are represented through narrative experiment. Narrative voice and position depend on a sense of self in the two novels studied. *Mary Olivier* is written in a mixture of third, second, and first person narration, which allows for a manifestation of the well-developed sense of self – and thereby spiritual intersubjectivity – that Mary Olivier attains throughout the novel. The flow of the use of the different pronouns shows the oscillating nature of the intersubjective experience; it is neither constant nor stable. In comparison, the intersubjective nature of the narration in *Harriett Frean* is less frequently attained, and never reaches the point of the protagonist being fully in communion with any

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<sup>277</sup> Sinclair, *Harriett Frean*, 178-9.

other subject, which is symptomatic of the lack of her own sense of self. I have pointed to the way in which Sinclair grapples with the difficulty of relating experiences of the self in text by using two different narrative approaches, one heterophenomenological and the other objective to the point of being 'very nearly medical'.

### Chapter 3

## **‘It is for art to take over the anthropologist’s material’: Sacrifice, Community, and Narrative Construction in Mary Butts<sup>278</sup>**

Mary Butts’ fiction incorporates a plethora of images of sacrifice from crucifixion to self-immolation, as well as a constant negotiation of the space between communal responsibility and individual freedom. The texts repeatedly pose the questions of whether or not humans need structure, and whether it is possible to institute a community that is not too restrictive for the individual. While all of the sacrifices in Butts’ novels appear to be made with the aim of bringing about structure, I suggest here that not all of them are successful in doing so, for reasons that will be explored in this chapter.

I posit that, while sacrifice in the novels is ostensibly justified by the needs of the community, it is the embedded narrative, or the narrative within the narrative – what Mieke Bal refers to as hyponarrative – surrounding the sacrificial act that creates the structure upon which a cohesive community can be built, rather than the sacrificial act in itself.<sup>279</sup> To evidence this, the chapter will primarily look at Butts’ three novels *Ashe of Rings* (1925), *Armed with Madness* (1928), and *Death of Felicity Taverner* (1932), as these are her most characteristic works of fiction in terms of style and subject matter, as well as being her most well-known works. I will

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<sup>278</sup> Mary Butts, *The Journals of Mary Butts*, ed. Nathalie Blondel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 325.

<sup>279</sup> Mieke Bal, ‘Notes on Narrative Embedding.’ *Poetics Today* 2, no. 2 (1981): 41-59.

consider those of her works of non-fiction that deal with the theme of sacrifice, such as *Traps for Unbelievers* (1932), a pamphlet on the contemporary state of religion in England. Butts' short fiction and two historical narratives – *The Macedonian* (1933) and *Scenes from the Life of Cleopatra* (1935) – are not included in this study as they are not paramount to a study of sacrifice in her overall work as they only deal with the theme peripherally, if at all. One story that has sacrifice as a more central theme is 'Friendship's Garland,' in which the first person narrator refers to two of her friends as officiating a 'cult' in a Paris café turned 'temple': 'They were priests there, and I hoped a sacrifice. All the same, I was afraid of their temple.'<sup>280</sup> The ambivalent attitude to sacrifice that can be seen in Butts' novels is also expressed here; there is a simultaneous fascination with and disgust of the concept. The story ends with a mystical experience, involving a talking tree that instructs her to '[k]eep tabu.'<sup>281</sup> Afterwards, the narrator feels cleansed and rejuvenated, 'like a child that has been dipped in dew,' pointing to the link between sacrifice and purity.<sup>282</sup>

**'With human divinity about, human sacrifice is never far away': The Context of Mary Butts<sup>283</sup>**

Mary Butts' placement within the spectrum of modernist literature seems to be gradually moving from that of a peripheral point to becoming more central. A number of recent publications on modernism deal with her work at length and several others mention it as part of general discussions of modernist literature. In the

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<sup>280</sup> Mary Butts, *With and Without Buttons and Other Stories*, ed. Nathalie Blondel (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1991), 22.

<sup>281</sup> Butts, *With and Without Buttons*, 24.

<sup>282</sup> Butts, *With and Without Buttons*, 24.

<sup>283</sup> Mary Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1932), 28.

1980s and early 90s, when Christopher Wagstaff was compiling material for the first full-length critical biography of Butts, there was very little research done on her, however, and the consideration of her work was certainly not helped by most of it being out of print. Following the rediscovery of women modernists that was generated by among others Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (1990), as well as the discussion of Butts' work in Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country* (1985), a number of Butts' novels and short stories were republished in McPherson & Co's series 'Recovered Classics' in the 1990s. A critical interest in her work appears to have been sparked around the millennium, when not only Wagstaff's book *A Sacred Quest* (1998) was published, but also Natalie Blondel's biography *Mary Butts: Scenes from the Life* (1998). The publication of extracts from Butts' journals edited by Natalie Blondel in 2002 soon followed. From then on, a small number of literary scholars have worked steadily towards Butts' re-establishment within the heart of the modernist movement. Caroline Maclean's *The Vogue for Russia: Modernism and the Unseen in Britain 1900-1930* (2015) is one example of a recent study that takes Butts' writing into account.

Whereas the work done on Butts at the end of the twentieth century mainly revolved around feminist readings, the more recent scholarship appears to have turned its focus to the importance of religion for Butts. Roslyn Reso Foy's *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism in the Work of Mary Butts: Between Feminism and Modernism* (2000) pioneered the study of Butts in relation to religion. Reso Foy argues that, in combining 'a Judeo-Christian spirituality with a matrilineally pagan one', Butts constructs a new womanhood, one which unites 'feminine qualities of the past with



those of the present.’<sup>284</sup> The study also stresses the importance of Jane Harrison for Butts, suggesting that ‘the primal female principle that revels in its identification with the natural world and with the cosmic order outside subjective time and space’ are at the centre for both writers.<sup>285</sup> Jane Garrity’s *Step-Daughters of England* (2003) develops the picture of Butts’ national imaginary, which is built with the mixture of archaic myth and progressive femininity. Garrity’s study additionally deals with the work of Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Townsend Warner, and foregrounds these authors in relation to interwar nationalism in Britain. Like Reso Foy, Garrity combines her investigation of Butts’ interest in anthropology with a feminist perspective, and argues that Butts used the work of Jane Harrison to construct her ideas of British nationality.<sup>286</sup> More recent studies of Butts and spirituality are Matthew Sterenberg’s *Mythic Thinking in Twentieth-Century Britain: Meaning for Modernity* (2013), which again foregrounds Butts’ interest in ritual, myth, and magic, and relates this preoccupation to the overall concern with forms of spirituality aside from Christianity in modernist literature, arguing that the study of anthropology opened up the exploration of new religious formations, not just for Mary Butts, but also for John Cowper Powys, Charles Williams and David Jones, who all shared Butts’ interest in the legend of the Grail.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Roslyn Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism in the Work of Mary Butts: Between Feminism and Modernism* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 11.

<sup>285</sup> Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism*, 9.

<sup>286</sup> Jane Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 189.

<sup>287</sup> Matthew Sterenberg, *Mythic Thinking in Twentieth Century Britain: Meaning for Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 70.

Andrew Radford's *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism: The Enchantment of Place* (2014) is another recent full-length study on Butts. Like the previously mentioned scholars, Radford looks at Butts' emphasis on nature as feminine, the relationship between her work and the anthropological study of religion, and the political interests that can be inferred from her writings. The book places Butts within the context of neo-romanticism, and proposes that 'Butts's work shifts from canvassing, with subtle accuracy, the human body's navigation of unfenced natural terrain, to a defensive chauvinism.'<sup>288</sup> Neo-romanticism is considered by Radford as a strand of modernism that shows a particular interest in both ancient religion and new religious formations, as well as the natural environment, which makes it a category into which Butts fits neatly. Problematising this, Radford finds the 'patrician nativism' that Butts exudes to be 'a crucial caveat to revisionist textual scholarship that presupposes unproblematic links between aesthetic modernism and the industrial "modernity"' that can be found in her later work.<sup>289</sup> I will return to and discuss the significance of scapegoating in relation to Radford's argument in the following section.

While a number of studies have been devoted to Butts and religion, none have focussed specifically on sacrifice. Radford, Garrity, and Reso Foy have written to some extent about the scapegoating mechanisms that Butts uses, but they all contend that it is the sacrifice in itself that Butts employs to create a new structure, or to reinforce an archaic one. I argue in this chapter that such a reading disregards the importance of the hyponarrative, around which all three of the studied novels revolve.

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<sup>288</sup> Andrew Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism: The Enchantment of Place* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), xiii.

<sup>289</sup> Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism*, 218.

Butts set out her own view of the current state of religion in the pamphlet *Traps for Unbelievers*, published in 1932. The text argues that secularisation will not deliver us from the need for moral laws in society, and that in an era of ‘indifference to the forms as well as to the spirit of every variety of Christianity’ people will turn to other truths, for instance belief in science.<sup>290</sup> Psychoanalytic theory, having become firmly established in the intellectual world and its discourse by the time of Butts’ writing the pamphlet, is perceived as filling such a function. In stating this, Butts uses a familiar trope, as she writes that ‘psycho-analysis is one of the lambs of God who is taking away the sins of the world just now.’<sup>291</sup> The lamb of God, or the scapegoat, absolves people of their transgressions against the moral code; in a society without gods, this lamb has to be replaced by something else that has a cleansing, ordering effect which helps us to make sense of the world and our place in it.

Mary Butts was an avid reader and devoured the main works of psychoanalytic theory. According to her journal, she spent Boxing Day in 1918 studying *Psychology of the Unconscious*: ‘Have done little else than read Jung – I think that I am a fair example of libido rising freely into the conscious. There is the good life.’ Butts then goes on to quote a few lines from William Blake that point to the imagined fruitful outcome of giving in to desire: “‘Abstinence sows sand all over / Thy ruddy limbs & flaming hair / But desire gratified / Plants fruits & seeds of beauty there.” (...) All asceticism but an introversion of libido.’<sup>292</sup> Butts’ reading of

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<sup>290</sup> Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, 6.

<sup>291</sup> Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, 9.

<sup>292</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 110. Rachel Potter also points out that Butts was briefly interested in Freud just after the end of the First World War. Rachel Potter, *Modernist Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 9.

Jung appears to have confirmed her own thoughts about expressions of her desire; repressing the libido will not lead to ‘the good life.’ Evidently, the issue of women’s libido is not only one that pertained to Butts’ private life, but one that affected her fiction too; at a time when women were not generally considered (or supposed) to have such desires, Butts’ female fictional creations were allowed to express as much sexual desire as the male ones. Psychoanalytic theory and research strengthened the notion that the sexual libido exists in most people irrespective of gender, and as such it is no wonder that such an explanatory model would appeal to Mary Butts. Her diary shows that it was a satisfactory way of rationalising her own emotions, as well as a perfectly good ground on which to base her characters.

Like Sinclair, Butts seems to have taken to Jung, whose works she refers to frequently in her journal, and she accepts his theoretical standpoint with more ease than she does Freud’s. In an entry on 17 July 1920, she comments: ‘Dreams want tackling – now especially with Freud uncontaminated with Yang about, & so popular. It is undignified to run the gauntlet of anal eroticism-criticism – Yeats has protested; more protests & quick.’<sup>293</sup> Although clearly critical of ‘the great game of Hunt-the-Complex,’ she still thought of Freudian theory as valuable for her creative process.<sup>294</sup> As she starts writing *Death of Felicity Taverner* in 1928 and records the process of conception, she writes a note to herself on the side: ‘Use Freud.’<sup>295</sup> Nevertheless, Jacqueline Rose argues that Butts ‘rejected his account of the supernatural as pure psychological projection. And in the process she mounts a

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<sup>293</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 161.

<sup>294</sup> Blondel, ‘Introduction,’ 2.

<sup>295</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 294.

wholly convincing critique of the limits, not to say anthropocentrism, of Freud.<sup>296</sup>

This is in reference to a line in *Armed with Madness*: ‘Freud very useful in the case of irrational fear ... what had happened today was objective and odd.’<sup>297</sup> An interesting side note is that Butts’ first husband John Rodker came to publish the collected works of Freud, with the assistance of Anna Freud, in the 1940s, after the Freud family had settled in England.

Butts posits that the substitution of religion for psychoanalysis is a step back towards the assumed archaic belief in the divinity of man. She writes, considering the welter of books being published at the time on the topic of ‘Primitive Animism,’ that ‘it looks as if we were back where we started... Shall we... devise a suitable formula for that most reasonable of magical conclusions, the worship of the God-Man?’<sup>298</sup> The divinisation of man entails, for Butts, human sacrifice, since there is an even bigger need to keep strict boundaries of cleanliness and hygiene if physical human beings are to be worshipped. Her problem is that modern society has not yet figured out a way in which to ‘redescribe’ this ritual to suit its needs: ‘With human divinity about, human sacrifice is never far away. That might come in again if, O profoundly magical process! the right word could be discovered to redescribe it. Lacking these, there are some very curious practices about.’<sup>299</sup> Butts suggests that ‘the right word,’ the right formula, can bring about a ‘magical process’ that will reawaken human divinity. The ‘curious practices’ that have temporarily replaced that magic are detailed as ‘the preoccupation with physical infection’, an obsession with

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<sup>296</sup> Jacqueline Rose, ‘Bizarre Objects: Mary Butts and Elizabeth Bowen,’ *Critical Quarterly* 42, 1 (2003), 82.

<sup>297</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 16.

<sup>298</sup> Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, 27.

<sup>299</sup> Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, 28.

cleanliness and hygiene, 'now often become a rite.'<sup>300</sup> In this way, Butts' argument suggests that the hygiene ritual is reborn as a product of science to replace ritual sacrifice.

Science taking the place of religion, however, implies a deficiency for Butts, since it is missing some element of the magical or mystical; the magic involved in primitive religion does not exist in science. As Butts does not spell out the exact nature of the magic that science is missing – she states that '[m]agic has not yet been properly defined' – it is difficult to grasp the full meaning of that deficiency.<sup>301</sup> Since Butts herself considered magic undefinable, it is a problematic endeavour to try to establish any coherent demarcation of the concept as used by her. As it is represented in her writing, both fictional and otherwise, it is primarily a mystical concept: something that is experienced rather than objectively evidenced. When describing a magical episode in her childhood, in which stones come to life as people, Butts draws a connection between magic and mana, which is another central concept for her: '[The stones] stopped being persons and became again plain stones. ... A magic. It usually meant – this was when I was very little – that the *mana* of some bead or button had replaced them.'<sup>302</sup> It is the magic, or mana, that enables the stones to become personalised: a non-permanent, mystical essence of vitality. Butts appears to have seen the possibility of magic in almost everything – even her own hair according to her biographer Natalie Blondel – but most predominantly in nature, especially trees and stones, as is attested by a sequence in *Death of Felicity Taverner* where particular kinds of stones have the potential to 'become a magic ... if they

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<sup>300</sup> Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, 29.

<sup>301</sup> Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, 25.

<sup>302</sup> Butts, *The Crystal Cabinet*, 88.

aren't broken up and built into a house.'<sup>303</sup> As a concept, magic is not integral to my discussion; while it may be used to denote the transmutative element involved in certain types of sacrifice, magic is not central for a discussion of the constructive and community-building functions of sacrifice, which is the focus here.

It can only be assumed that Butts purports to point to something in *Traps for Unbelievers* that is inherent in the ritual of sacrifice, since the lack of magic in science is the reason why human sacrifice might 'come in again.' Butts describes the sense of magic in sacrifice as 'a very peculiar kind of awareness,' one which 'has something to do with a sense of the invisible, the non-existent in a scientific sense, relations between things of a different order.'<sup>304</sup> Butts is trying to describe some form of communion with the supernatural, which is of course absent from ordinary scientific endeavours as we know them; the twentieth-century hygiene rituals of the West do not include any intention of forming a link with the supernatural – rather, the very definition of these rituals as scientific precludes any association of them with the unseen, unmeasureable, and unverifiable sphere of the supernatural – but they are about creating order, which is why Butts sees them as watered-down replacements for religious rituals. While Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1966) relates rituals of hygiene to religion, she does not suggest as Butts does that the modern-day obsession with hygiene is symptomatic of a lack of religion or a replacement for ritual sacrifice.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Blondel, *Scenes from the Life*, 115-6; Mary Butts, *The Taverner Novels* (Kingston: McPherson & Co, 1992), 332. For a discussion of the sacred nature of stones in Butts and Paul Nash, see Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism*, 208-13.

<sup>304</sup> Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, 25.

<sup>305</sup> See further discussion of *Purity and Danger* in chapter 1.

Human sacrifice, Butts argues, may become popular again, not only due to its addition of that magic which does not exist in science, but because it is contingent on human divinity, in that human divinity brings about human sacrifice and vice versa. The supposition that a sacrificial object is holy or divine coincides with the Hubert and Mauss definition of sacrifice, which had an important impact on anthropology as a discipline. The part of the Hubert and Mauss definition that is referred to here is that which states that the thing sacrificed becomes sacralised, is made holy, in order for the sacrifice to be complete; the sacrificial object is ‘*consecrated*, it [is] *sacrificed*...’<sup>306</sup> Butts clearly took an interest in the study of anthropology, even noting in her journal that ‘[i]t is for art to take over the anthropologist’s material’ in order to fully make sense of the beliefs of mankind, since ‘even the best of them [the anthropologists], Frazer hardly, gives one the least idea, the least suggestions of the passion, the emotion that made men behave like that.’<sup>307</sup> The work of J. G. Frazer and Jane Harrison is alluded to a number of times in Butts’ journals, along with evidence that Butts continually re-read *The Golden Bough*, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, and *Themis*.<sup>308</sup> In Butts’ answer to the problem of a lack of magic in an increasingly secular society, she proposes to reinstate the ‘magical process’ of primitive ritual through sacrifice. The notion that human sacrifice is due for a comeback is evident in her fiction, with the scapegoat theme in *Death of*

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<sup>306</sup> Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*. trans. W. D. Halls (London: Cohen and West, 1964), 35. Emphasis in original.

<sup>307</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 324-5.

<sup>308</sup> See for example Butts, *Journals*, 263, 280-1, 283, 342, 346, 350. Reso Foy, Garrity, and Radford all comment on the influence of Jane Harrison on Butts: Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism*, 55-8; Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, 203; Andrew Radford, ‘Defending Nature’s Holy Shrine: Mary Butts, Englishness, and the Persephone Myth,’ *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 3 (2006): 145.



*Felicity Taverner* as one of the main representations of human sacrifice. I will return to the topic of scapegoating in Butts for a longer discussion below.

Another influence on the idea of human divinity is the Nietzschean view of the androcentrism of a secular society, which proposes the worship of the perfected human being. Butts asks whether we should ‘devise a suitable formula for that most reasonable of magical conclusions, the worship of the God-Man.’<sup>309</sup> In Nietzschean terms, the God-Man may be supposed to correspond to the *Übermensch* or Superman, a higher level of being that evolves from a state of secularism and subsequent nihilism. After the death of God, the Superman replaces man’s former object of veneration, thus making the perfected human into a divinity himself, Nietzsche suggests in *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 1883-5).<sup>310</sup>

Several scholars have previously indicated the impact of Nietzsche on Butts.<sup>311</sup> Robin Blaser discusses the topic at length, also pointing to the importance of the work of A. R. Orage, in particular *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age* (1906).<sup>312</sup> Blaser outlines the general impact of Nietzsche on early twentieth-century culture and literature, emphasising how nihilism affected Butts’ writing. I will return to this outline in my discussion of the characterisation of Nick

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<sup>309</sup> Butts, *Traps for Unbelievers*, 27.

<sup>310</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. by Thomas Common (New York: Random House, 1917), 83.

<sup>311</sup> See for instance Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism*, 59, Emma Seymour, ‘Curing the ‘Dis-Ease’: An ecocritical reassessment of reactionary politics and ecological prescience in the work of Mary Butts (1890–1937),’ *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism* 9, no. 1 (2008): 15, and Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism*, 126, 148, 170-1.

<sup>312</sup> Robin Blaser, “‘Here lies the woodpecker who was Zeus,’” *A Sacred Quest: The Life and Writings of Mary Butts*, ed. Christopher Wagstaff (Kingston: McPherson & Co., 1995), 159-223.

Kralin in *Death of Felicity Taverner*. Jennifer Kroll also points out that '[q]uotations from Nietzsche are laced throughout much of [Butts'] work. The concept of the Apollonian and Dionysian seems to have been especially central to her creative vision.'<sup>313</sup> Butts mentions Nietzsche on several occasions in her journals, verifying that she did indeed read his work.<sup>314</sup> Roslyn Reso Foy comments specifically on a line in *Armed with Madness* that states that the age of modernity is an age of '[r]evaluation of values,' and that this echoes 'Nietzsche's "transvaluation of values,"' which in *Ecce Homo* (1888) is outlined as 'an emancipation of all moral values, in a saying of yea, and in an attitude of trust, to that which hitherto has been forbidden, despised, and damned.'<sup>315</sup> While the wording certainly suggests that Butts, as so many other modernists, took her inspiration from Nietzsche in considering herself to be at the dawn of a new age, the overall ideology of the Taverner group in *Armed with Madness* certainly does not coincide with the Nietzschean critique of modernity and his call to reject values like love, 'self-abnegation and modest retirement,' in favour of 'a heart transformed to brass.'<sup>316</sup> They do not embrace the Nietzschean disdain for traditional morals and values, but rather the opposite. In the Taverner world, a continuation of traditional beliefs are paramount; they may be mixed up with a measure of permissiveness that seems to throw them over, but that does not amount to a rejection of humanism.

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<sup>313</sup> Jennifer Kroll, 'Mary Butts's "Unrest Cure" for The Waste Land,' *Twentieth Century Literature* 45, no. 2 (1999): 172, n. 17.

<sup>314</sup> See for instance Butts, *Journals*, 109; 383.

<sup>315</sup> Reso Roy, *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism*, 59. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* vol XVII, ed. Oscar Levy, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 92.

<sup>316</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 151 (§221); 127 (§203).

Nietzsche also allows for a certain amount of respect for tradition. In *Jenseits von Gut und Böse: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886) he states that '[d]eep reverence for age and the traditional – all law rests on this twofold reverence – belief in and prejudice in favour of ancestors and against descendants, is typical of the morality of the powerful,' as opposed to progressive and, in Nietzsche's work within inverted commas, 'modern' ideas.<sup>317</sup> This is likely to have rung true for Butts, as would the tendency to value highly matters of the between. *Beyond Good and Evil* is particularly emphatic on the point of placing itself between, or beyond, polar opposites. Nietzsche berates the tradition of Western philosophy for being too preoccupied with binary thinking, or 'antithetical values.'<sup>318</sup> Scholarly interest in this trait has formed the basis of comparisons of Nietzsche's work to Daoist classics like the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, where non-dichotomical thinking is a key fundament.<sup>319</sup> Butts makes incidental references to Daoism in her journals, at one point drawing a parallel between the Dao and the Grail.<sup>320</sup> Jennifer Kroll confirms that Butts was 'very much attracted to Taoism'.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 196 (§260).

<sup>318</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 34 (§2).

<sup>319</sup> See for instance *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Hans-Georg Moeller, 'The "Exotic" Nietzsche – East and West,' *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 28 (2004): 57-69; Katrin Froese, *Nietzsche, Heidegger and Daoist Thought: Crossing Paths In-Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Ge Ling Shang, *Liberation as Affirmation: The Religiosity of Zhuangzi and Nietzsche* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

<sup>320</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 413

<sup>321</sup> Kroll, 'Mary Butts' Unrest Cure for the Waste Land,' 167

Butts apparently had an interest in several aspects of Chinese religious practices, as her unpublished papers contain a poem called ‘Advice of the Yi-King.’<sup>322</sup>

On several occasions in her journals, Butts comments on the importance of ‘letting go’ and being ‘free from the pair of opposites;’ at times, she attests to the impossibility of the task however, and advocates compromise through magic:

Since we are not free from the pair of opposites, we have to make an image of that freedom in the world and call it a compromise. But the English should remember that they cannot be free of the pair of opposites till they know what they are like. This ‘magic in the world’ consists of an agreement – often tacitly come upon – to provide outlets from the destroying passions which in the same time will give relief to an amiability now stale.<sup>323</sup>

The ‘agreement’ that is suggested here is fundamental to Butts’ thinking, it seems, since it is based on the core concept of magic. The wish to come to a compromise or agreement regarding binary opposites is noteworthy, since it indicates an ambiguity at the heart of Butts’ understanding of the world.

Magic appears to be related to the Greek concept of *sophrosynê* – meaning well-balanced or moderate with positive connotations – according to notes made in Butts’ journal. The term has no direct English equivalent. It has been suggested that it has the same meaning as the Swedish concept *lagom*, which is likewise difficult to translate, but can be understood as perfection through moderation.<sup>324</sup> Jane Harrison writes of *sophrosynê* in her essay ‘Scientiae sacra fames,’ and refers to Gilbert Murray’s *Four Stages in Greek Religion* (1912) in terming *sophrosynê* as something

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<sup>322</sup> ‘Guide to Mary Butts Papers GEN MSS 487,’ Yale University Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library General Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts, accessed 2015-07-26, <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.butts>.

<sup>323</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 123; 137.

Karl Clifton-Soderstrom, *The Cardinal and the Deadly: Reimagining the Seven Virtues and Seven Vices* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 72.

akin to ‘the scientific spirit ... which knows and is quiet, which *saves* and is saved.’<sup>325</sup> An unfinished thought recorded in her 1918 journal indicates that Butts thought of the concept of *sophrosynê* in conjunction with magic:

The conception of *Sophrosynê* as it developed among the Epicureans & today by Norman Douglas & Anatole France?  
“Epicurus approves none of these things.” The Epicurean & rationalist & the subconscious emotions demanding their secret satisfactions  
Magic —<sup>326</sup>

In 1917, Butts quotes *Rise of the Greek Epic* (1907) by Gilbert Murray, one of the Cambridge Ritualists, in her diary on the definition of the term: ‘It is something like Temperance, Gentleness, Mercy, sometimes Innocence, never mere Caution, or tempering of dominant emotion by gentler thought.’<sup>327</sup> Two years later, she writes an entry where she defines it as ‘[t]he moment when one reaches the point of the union of opposites ... One is then conscious of the state which is beyond good & evil.’<sup>328</sup> Butts thus connects magic, *sophrosynê*, and Nietzsche’s call to move beyond oppositional binaries.

It is clear, then, that Butts appears to have picked through Nietzsche’s writing, choosing aphorisms to include in her own writing, which suited her own philosophy, and interpreting these according to her own taste. Robin Blaser holds that Butts formed her interest in Nietzsche through Blake, ‘in whose work the issues of becoming, consciousness, and will are given a necessary vision,’ again

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<sup>325</sup> Jane Harrison, *Alpha and Omega* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1915), 123.

<sup>326</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 97. Butts breaks off here and her notes go on to concern a short story called ‘Madonna of the Magnificat’.

<sup>327</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 89. In Murray’s own words, ‘[s]ophrosynê, however we try to translate it, temperance, gentleness, the spirit that in any trouble thinks and is patient, that saves and not destroys, is the right spirit.’ Gilbert Murray, *Four Stages in Greek Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), 182.

<sup>328</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 123.

emphasising the issue of ambiguity and a departure from the binary opposites that colour most of Western philosophy, and, furthermore, that Butts' fiction shows a sensitivity to the 'loss of cultural meaning' that is typical for modernism.<sup>329</sup> As the influence of Christianity on Western philosophy creates an opposition between ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice, Nietzsche, in his criticism of Christian values, keeps the idea of the opposition between the two, but values ritual sacrifice above self-sacrifice. The loss of meaning in Butts' novels is substituted with a belief in the magic of things, such as is evidenced in *Traps for Unbelievers*, which – if it includes human sacrifice – could be interpreted as 'reverence for all that is severe and harsh,' as Nietzsche proposes in *Beyond Good and Evil*.<sup>330</sup> However, Butts' idea of magic and ritual sacrifice does not preclude the need for self-sacrifice, as I will show below.

Butts' journals further propound the fact that she was ultimately, and throughout her life, concerned with the inherent magic in objects, places, and people. This being the foundation of her belief, she went through several phases of interest in various systems of thought, from Aleister Crowley's paganism during the early 1920s to Anglo-Catholicism in the final years of her life. The autobiographical account *The Crystal Cabinet* attests to the establishment of Butts' concern with magic in childhood. Her earliest memories include an experience of the natural environs of her home, Salterns, as a soulful, living creature, brought to life in the child's eyes via magic; the house is 'a place on the magic map a child makes of its home, apart from the green wood... a place about which, if I had been asked, I might

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<sup>329</sup> Blaser, 'Here lies the woodpecker who was Zeus,' 212; 213.

<sup>330</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 196.

have said: “There are deads about it.”<sup>331</sup> She goes on to describe a scene in which she perceives a little man digging among the bushes, only to realise that the man is not really there, but is some sort of spectre or incarnation of nature. After this vision, she perceives a change in the wind, and is filled with a sense of mystery and sacrality: ‘These were matters you were supposed to hold your tongue about, as about things like that wind, and a goddess called Artemis who shot with the new moon.’<sup>332</sup> Nature as holy in Butts’ fiction is a topic on which much has been and may be said, but here it is sufficient to note that the magic perceived in nature is deeply connected to a sense of meaningfulness for Butts; the magical qualities of nature are what make it spiritually significant.<sup>333</sup>

According to her journals, Butts was not interested in the research of magical practices that entailed going about it in what she called a ‘direct’ way; on 15 March 1921, she writes: ‘Is magic too direct an approach [to reach the astral plane]? All profound perception is in some way or seems to be in some way oblique. *Then* it is fruitful. Direct magical practice fatigues & rather disgusts me (I except [sic] the evocations & the earth pentagrams).’<sup>334</sup> She did however take an initial liking to the occult philosophy of Thelema, and visited Aleister Crowley in Sicily in 1921. While unimpressed by Crowley’s leadership skills and distinctly opposed to certain parts of his practice, Butts appears to have found through her trip to Sicily an outlet for her

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<sup>331</sup> Mary Butts, *The Crystal Cabinet: My Childhood at Salterns* (London: Methuen & Co., 1937), 14.

<sup>332</sup> Butts, *The Crystal Cabinet*, 15.

<sup>333</sup> See for instance Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, 207-9; Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism*, 27-9; Radford, *Mary Butts and Neo-Romanticism*, 45-6.

<sup>334</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 179.

own creativity in getting to know the supernatural or astral realm through new avenues; she wished to do so in her own individual way.<sup>335</sup>

Butts' interest in alternative and archaic religious practices and beliefs has been well-researched in the past. Spanning from a belief in magic to a dedication to the study of anthropology, Butts' writing – both fictional and non-fictional – covers a wide and diverse spectrum of religion. This is reflected in her treatment of sacrifice, the multifaceted nature of which I will demonstrate below. The following sections of this chapter look at the varieties of sacrifice in the novels, and how these relate to narrative technique, in order to establish the importance of narrative structure for the meaning and function of the sacrificial scenes.

I argue that the variations in Butts' depictions of sacrifice coincide with variations in the narration, and that it is the forms of narration rather than the acts themselves that control the success of the sacrifices. I deal with the three novels chronologically, starting with self-sacrifice in *Ashe of Rings* and its relation to Butts' initial use of experiments in narration, moving on to look at instances of disorderly sacrifice in *Armed with Madness* and the disorder of its narration, through to a reading of *Death of Felicity Taverner*, where the structure of the embedded narrative creates a foundation for the successful structuring of a society through sacrifice.

### **‘[T]he pictures in their minds’: Sacrifice, Multivocal Narration, and Intersubjectivity<sup>336</sup>**

I make a distinction between the three novels studied here based on the type of sacrifice depicted in them: scapegoating in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, disorderly

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<sup>335</sup> Blondel, *Scenes from the Life*, 99; 103-5.

<sup>336</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 227.



sacrifice – sacrifice that lacks organisation and therefore does not have the desired effect – in *Armed with Madness*, and self-sacrifice in *Ashe of Rings*. While the different kinds of sacrifice do not exist in isolation in the respective novels, there are distinct types that are representative of each novel. The central focus here is on the way sacrifice specifically coheres with the narrative technique to which it is connected.

Butts' use of a variety of narrative techniques alternately represents the creation of community and communal experience as well as the destruction thereof in the depiction of both uninterrupted intersubjective storytelling – a mode of narration where several characters function as one cohesive voice – and the gaps and cracks that appear in the shared narrative flow. As outlined in chapter 1, the function of sacrifice as seen on a structural level is to create a space of intersubjectivity and thereby allow for a communal experience. Effective applications of this function, as well as less successful attempts to employ it, are revealed through the narrative technique employed in *Ashe of Rings*, *Armed with Madness*, and *Death of Felicity Taverner*, with an increasing clarity and self-consciousness of the correlation between narration and intersubjective experience from the first novel to the last. I start this exploration by looking at *Ashe of Rings*, in which ritual sacrifice unexpectedly takes an inward turn towards the self instead of being projected onto an object or scapegoat, but still retains what Butts perceived as the benefit of ritual sacrifice: reinstating the magic of communal tradition and belief.

'[T]hey can't hurt my soul': Ritual Self-Sacrifice in *Ashe of Rings*<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Mary Butts, *Ashe of Rings and Other Writings* (Kingston: McPherson & Company, 1998), 188.

Butts' works suggest that self-sacrifice and ritual sacrifice are not to be placed on two divergent ends of a spectrum, although the latter would appear to be the one most noticeable. In *Ashe of Rings*, the most prominent sacrificial scene depicts the killing of a dog, described as a ritual sacrifice, in conjunction with an attempted rape of the protagonist, Van Ashe, who in this situation is portrayed as performing a self-sacrifice. The scene takes place on the Rings, a hill that is understood to be imbued with mystical and holy significance for the Ashe family, who live on an estate nearby. Instead of conferring a sacredness or holiness onto the characters involved, however, these acts are seen as attempts to defile the Rings; the perpetrators, Judy and Peter, are what could be described as frenemies – friends who are also enemies – of Van Ashe.

Although the slaughter of Peter's Airedale is described in terms of ritual sacrifice it is also rendered as a fairly random event, not properly planned out beforehand but rather thought of in the spur of the moment, according to Judy: 'It [Rings] drinks blood. Give it a drink, and it works. We've given it a drink... We've given it Peter's dog.'<sup>338</sup> The second intended sacrifice – that of Van's purity – is thought out on the spot when she appears on the scene. Far from being a well-planned and regulated ritual, then, these sacrifices do not have the potential to right any wrongs or make order out of chaos, rather the contrary. Van points out the futility of this to Judy and Peter: 'If you take my blood, it won't give you power for ever...'<sup>339</sup> Van, the spiritually superior individual, knows that there are certain laws to which the person performing the sacrifice must adhere in order to attain the desired result.

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<sup>338</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 186.

<sup>339</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 187.

As the murderous pair realise that a human blood sacrifice will not be conducive to their ends, they devise a new plan: for Peter to rape Van. As this intention dawns on Van, she ponders what to do to save herself: 'Move? Run? Run away? ... That's no good. ... Wrap up in the light and lie still. Become part of this place, and they will only find a stone. Anyhow, they can't hurt my soul.'<sup>340</sup> She comes to the conclusion that she, having the upper hand on the spiritual plane, will trust herself to become immersed in Rings, her ancestral grounds. Even if they do hurt her bodily, her soul is immune to any distortion; she is too pure to be marred by their actions.

Paradoxically, this is a simultaneous self-sacrifice and avoidance of sacrifice, as Van willingly surrenders – an attitude which frightens Peter and inexplicably renders Van invisible, thus putting an end to the act. Peter's exasperation turns to fright as he hypothesises that the killing of the Airdale has made the Rings come alive: "Where the devil have you got to? I won't touch that stone. It's alive – we woke it up earlier. I remember. The dog's blood turning into a white poison and moving the stone. Oh, God!" She heard him crashing back, and wondered how she could ever have been afraid of him.'<sup>341</sup> It is as though the self-immolation of Van in combination with the ritual sacrifice of the dog and the sacred nature of the Rings has such power over Peter that he either cannot bring himself to go through with the deed, and therefore claims not to see Van, or really cannot perceive her as separate from the stone, thus making the stone 'alive'.

Two examples of not only sanctification through sacrifice, but also a paradoxical resurrection, are Christ and the Fisher King, who both offer themselves up for the purpose of healing their respective communities, and are later restored to

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<sup>340</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 188.

<sup>341</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 189-90.

the community. The legend of the Fisher King was a popular trope in early twentieth century literature partly due to Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, in which chapter IX is dedicated to the topic. Weston points to the similarities between Christ, the Fisher King, and other deities or semi-deities that are specifically connected with fish, for instance Vishnu in India and Guanyin in south-west China, hypothesising that the connection between fish and a renewal of life comes from an archaic understanding 'that all life comes from the water.'<sup>342</sup>

Giving herself up to the protection of the Rings, the holiest of places in *Ashe of Rings*, Van becomes sexually inviolate – Peter is rendered unable to rape her. Although it is not necessarily 'timidity' that effects Van's purity, it is clear here that Butts equates her bodily immunity with her having a 'pure' mind or spirit, and with sexual abstinence. Andrew Radford's contention that 'Butts refuses to equate the "purity" of her natal habitation with female sexual restraint or timidity,' which is certainly true for Scylla and Felicity Taverner who are both explicitly sexually active characters, seems to be a little out of place here.<sup>343</sup> While she has not been sexually restrained or 'timid' up to this point, she does not engage in any apparent physical encounters after this event.

As has been suggested, the Nietzschean idea of sacrifice given in for instance *Beyond Good and Evil* is not wholly concordant with that which is portrayed in the novels studied, despite references to Nietzsche being strewn throughout Butts' work. Van, in giving herself up to the wilful violence of Peter and Judy, cannot be said to embody the Nietzschean idea of self-sacrifice as a sign of weakness. Van's characterisation does not propose that 'self-renunciation must be ... brought to

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<sup>342</sup> Jessie L. Weston, *From Ritual to Romance* (Cribyn: Llanerch Press 2003), 126.

<sup>343</sup> Andrew Radford, 'Excavating a Secret History: Mary Butts and the Return of the Nativist,' *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* 17, no. 1 (2008): 101.

court,' although it does appear to contain 'sorcery,' since it can make her turn to stone.<sup>344</sup> Nietzsche posits that 'egoism pertains to the essence of a noble soul, I mean the immovable faith that to a being such as "we are" other beings have to be subordinate by their nature, and sacrifice themselves to us.'<sup>345</sup> According to this philosophy, anyone who performs an act of self-sacrifice automatically becomes subjugated. In *Ashe of Rings*, however, the self-sacrificial act is portrayed as empowering; it allows Van to exude a spiritual advantage. Relinquishing the self results in Van becoming empowered.

More importantly, the scene shows how sacrifice can successfully blur the boundaries between violence by one individual upon another and violence upon the self. The event attempts to be both a ritual sacrifice and a self-sacrificial gesture, in which the intended victim offers herself up willingly, but her sacrifice is cancelled out by the earlier act of killing Peter's dog. It further has hedonist implications in that the intended sacrifice has a sexual component, which muddles the distinction between where a willing self-sacrifice ends and hedonism begins.

In 1917 Butts made a note in her diary of a quote by St Augustine: 'Love – & do what you like.'<sup>346</sup> The entry, along with several others written in the preceding months, is about Butts' unwillingness to choose between her two lovers John Rodker, who was to become her first husband, and Eleanor Rogers, who – according to Natalie Blondel – was the real-life counterpart of Judy in *Ashe of Rings*.<sup>347</sup> To complicate things further, Butts had a third love interest at the time, Edwin

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<sup>344</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 64 (§33).

<sup>345</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 204 (§265).

<sup>346</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 93.

<sup>347</sup> Natalie Blondel, 'Biographical outlines,' in *The Journals of Mary Butts*, ed. Nathalie Blondel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 483.

Greenwood, an actor and writer. In her journal, Butts relates a discussion with Greenwood on ‘attempts to resolve the antithesis between good & evil, pleasure & pain’, where Edwin’s ‘deepest philosophy seems to me to be a form of stoicism, even asceticism’, which Butts calls ‘the lost way.’<sup>348</sup> Her own way causes Greenwood to criticise her: ‘Edwin accuses me of hedonism because I accept everything as it approaches me, & if I must choose, choose where there is least renunciation for any part of my nature.’<sup>349</sup> This sounds like an unequivocal rejection of a self-sacrificial attitude. However, she goes on to say that ‘I too have my inevitable asceticism ... a classic asceticism perhaps as against an eastern or a medieval.’<sup>350</sup> Quoting Murray’s *Rise of the Greek Epic*, Butts explains the distinction:

The East took its asceticism in orgies as it were, in horrors of self mutilation, bodily & mental, which are as repellent in their way as the corresponding tempests of rage or sensuality. Greek asceticism, though sometimes mystical, was never insane. It was nearly always related to some reasonable end & sought the strengthening of body & mind, not their mortification.<sup>351</sup>

Instead of choosing between hedonism and asceticism, Butts proposes what her actual ‘yard-stick for all conduct’ is: *sophrosynê*. It is not possible to say whether Butts in her journal promotes either hedonism or asceticism; rather, the journal indicates that there are crossover points between self-sacrifice and self-indulgence, and that Butts was more interested in a way of moderation that is not normally considered in looking at her life and work. The issue of Butts’ apparent hedonism seems to raise a problem for scholarly work that takes her personal life into account,

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<sup>348</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 88.

<sup>349</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 88.

<sup>350</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 89.

<sup>351</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 89.

since she is often perceived as having an extremely indulgent and irresponsible lifestyle. For instance, leaving her daughter Camilla to be taken care of by her aunts is referred to by her otherwise supportive biographer Natalie Blondel as an act of self-indulgence. Blondel is throughout very critical of Butts as a mother and states that ‘it is no exaggeration to say that Camilla’s childhood was sacrificed to Mary Butts’s writing.’<sup>352</sup> It could just as well be argued that it was an act of love and sacrifice to entrust her child to be brought up in a safe and comfortable environment away from Butts herself, who, in the 1920s, had little money, uncertain living conditions, and an addiction to opium.

Judy’s thirst for blood, as opposed to Van’s humility, is indicative of her being a symbol of violence rather than sanctity. The sacrifices that Judy encourages, plans, or executes are all unsuccessful sacrifices, in that they do not accomplish order or make things holy. In contrasting the nature of Judy and Van, as well as the respective ways in which the two characters view and deal with sacrifice, Butts shows not only the two seemingly irreconcilable sides to sacrifice converging in Van’s sacrifice on the Rings, but also that for a sacrifice to be successful, it has to cohere with a wider scheme than that which is made up to suit only one individual – Judy in this case.

Although the main character in *Ashe of Rings* is not explicitly crucified or killed, Van Ashe and her kin are compared to Christ on several occasions. The most striking parallel is with her ancestor Florian Ashe, who was crucified: ‘There was one of us once who was hated. They came and found him there. They took him and made him wear a crown of thorns. ... There they crucified him – or rather they

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<sup>352</sup> Blondel, *Scenes from the Life*, 319.

nailed him onto the wall.<sup>353</sup> When Anthony Ashe, Van's father, tells the story to Melitta, her mother, she asks hesitantly if it was 'quite like the Crucifixion,' to which Anthony responds: 'Like enough.'<sup>354</sup> The words of the long dead Florian Ashe, cited by Anthony, directly addresses the similarity: 'He said to them... *You have forced on me the likeness of our Saviour; so in my own name, I forgive you.*'<sup>355</sup> Unlike Scylla in *Armed with Madness*, Florian Ashe does die on the cross, if not willingly, then at least resignedly. Towards the end of the novel, the likeness to Christ is expressed again, outside of the normal dialogue – without inverted commas – and rather self-consciously, as Van and Melitta decide to stick a knife, the same blade that Judy previously thrusts through the basket of the first-borns of the Ashes, into the stone tower onto which Florian Ashe was once nailed: 'Spear in Christ's side. Oh damn analogies.'<sup>356</sup>

Serge, a white émigré from Russia, is another character that seems to be made into a Christ figure in the novel; '[i]t is [his] function' to be killed by Judy, or so he himself sees it.<sup>357</sup> Van also recognises him as a martyr, since she refers to what Judy has done to him as similar to Florian Ashe's crucifixion: 'It is like a cruel thing I saw done at the foot of a tower.'<sup>358</sup> Despite Serge's apparent willingness to be sacrificed – '[p]erhaps I want to be broken' – Van does not approve of this martyrdom: 'You'll miss spectacular martyrdom... You are looking for your

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<sup>353</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 19.

<sup>354</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 20.

<sup>355</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 20-1.

<sup>356</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 231.

<sup>357</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 81.

<sup>358</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 67.



cricifixion [sic]. It is not *sophrôn*.<sup>359</sup> She suspects that Serge is ‘acquiring merit through a sexual and political martyrdom,’ and therefore resists his sacrifice because it is not made for holy purposes: ‘He was not to be allowed to die.’<sup>360</sup> When Serge falls ill, having caught a chill from being turned out onto the street by Judy, Van comes to his apartment and nurses him back to health, and the image of her putting him to bed is described as ‘a flying *pietà*.’<sup>361</sup> She manages to counteract the trajectory that Judy intended for Serge through her caregiving efforts. She tells him: ‘You died and you are come alive again. You are born again.’<sup>362</sup> Despite her previous statements, this line proposes Serge’s affinity with Christ – also understood as a victim of ritual sacrifice here – having suffered death and been resurrected to life again.

While Serge’s role as a sacrificial figure mainly appears to relate to the war, the sacrifices made by the Ashe family all focus on another object: the survival and maintenance of the Rings themselves. Before Florian’s death, ‘he strained about and said: *I cannot see the Rings*,’ implying that the sacrifice he made was for the Rings, a hypothesis that is strengthened throughout the novel as it is gradually made clear that all the sacrifices made by the Ashes are for the benefit of their place of origin.<sup>363</sup> At the very beginning of the novel, when Anthony ponders the trouble of taking a new wife in order to gain a descendant to which he will leave the estate, he thinks of the marriage as ‘[a] livery sacrifice to this place.’<sup>364</sup> Van’s sacrifices are also ultimately

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<sup>359</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 67; 70.

<sup>360</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 68; 90.

<sup>361</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 90.

<sup>362</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 91.

<sup>363</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 21.

<sup>364</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 7.

made with the intention of regaining the power of the Rings, and, by bringing them back to their rightful owner, reinstating their former glory. The scene where she gives herself up to Peter on the Rings is usually read as a sacrifice with the purpose of purifying the Rings, which were defiled by the love affair between Amburton and Melitta.<sup>365</sup> The end goal of the act is to restore the Rings to their proper state, and the magic of the place is instrumental in helping Van to win over Peter and Judy. She tells them: 'The Rings will betray you, you amateur invocators!'<sup>366</sup> Van is untouchable, as the environment protects her where she lies 'in the cradle of Rings.'<sup>367</sup> Afterwards, Van feels the strength of her ancestral home and senses that the tide has turned: 'The wall's rumbling down that keeps us out of paradise. The house is laughing. I am beautiful. I have the Rings to play with. I have power.'<sup>368</sup> Her self-sacrifice strengthens the Rings, and the Rings give her back the power she has given to them, which allows her self-realisation as the rightful owner of the land at the end of the novel.

Van even personifies Rings, when she says to Serge: 'Love it, Serge, love it. It loves me.'<sup>369</sup> Rings belong to her, and she belongs to them; her mother Melitta thinks of Rings as the creator of both herself and her children: 'Rings that made me. Rings that gave me clean children.'<sup>370</sup> The name Van is not the first name she is given at birth, but rather the name that she is given by Rings; in childhood, her father

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<sup>365</sup> Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth, and Mysticism*, 38. Radford points to Melitta as a 'pollutant' in 'Defending Nature's Shrine,' 142, and further describes Van as a 'redemptive grace' for Rings in 'Excavating a Secret History,' 86.

<sup>366</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 187.

<sup>367</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 189.

<sup>368</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 196.

<sup>369</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 141.

<sup>370</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 203.

teaches her that it is only when she goes to the holy places on the estate that she is ‘called Van.’<sup>371</sup> The sacrifices Van makes that benefit Rings thereby constitute a simultaneous self-realisation for Van, because she is identified with the place for which she makes the sacrifice. In this way, the Hegelian idea of self-sacrifice equating self-realisation comes true even in a narrative such as the one Butts constructs here, which is more readily associated with ritual sacrifice. When Van relinquishes her power to the Rings, and lets them protect her from bodily harm, she is repaid twofold: firstly by managing to avoid being hurt by Peter and Judy, and secondly by re-establishing the purity of the sacred place with which she has an innate affinity.

Through sacrifice, then, Van dissolves the boundaries between self and other, or rather her self and her environment, in order to reset the borders of Rings as her inheritance and thereby reinstate order. This temporary suspension of boundaries is reflected in the narrative technique that Butts first starts to use here, where shifts in the personal pronouns used by the narrator suggest a fluid narrative persona, or a movement from within the consciousness of one character to an intersubjective consciousness, which belongs to one and all simultaneously. I will demonstrate below how this technique is developed in the later novels. First, however, I outline the beginnings of Butts’ use of experiments with narrative form in *Ashe of Rings*.

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<sup>371</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 29.

‘How dare you murder me?’ The Beginnings of Narrative Experimentation in *Ashe of Rings*<sup>372</sup>

*Ashe of Rings* appears to be a work from which Butts herself felt that she needed a little distance; she wrote in her 1933 afterword, eight years after the first edition of the novel, that ‘[o]ne sees now what it is – a fairy story, a War-fairy-tale.’<sup>373</sup> In relation to the Taverner novels, *Ashe of Rings* does come across as more of a fairytale, with its more reader-friendly language, straightforward narrative structure, and happy ending. But even in this early work, there are germs of the experimental techniques that Butts would develop in the later novels.

In some ways, *Ashe of Rings* is less clear than the subsequent works; in *Armed with Madness*, Butts makes use of both single and double quotation marks to distinguish between characters’ thoughts and the words that they actually speak out loud. Here, however, the inner dialogue of characters are sometimes given without inverted commas in the narration, for instance when Melitta’s mother comes to visit the family when Van is a baby: ‘Melitta said: “Please Mother, do come. So long as you let me know before.” Now let Anthony go to the nursery with them if he liked.’<sup>374</sup> The final sentence is in the narrative voice with Melitta as focaliser. This technique is not only reminiscent but more or less a copy of the experimental style first used by Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce; Butts comments in her journal that she was indeed ‘tight on Joyce at the time’ of writing *Ashe of Rings*.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 81.

<sup>373</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 232. Butts writes in this afterword that it has been twelve years since the novel’s first publication, presumably referring to the 1921 publication of the first few chapters in *The Little Review*.

<sup>374</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 25.

<sup>375</sup> Butts, *Journals*, 14.

At other times in the novel however, Butts makes use of the technique that has been discussed at length in the first chapter of this thesis: switching the personal pronoun of the narrative voice: 'She was going up there to commit adultery. On the Rings. She wondered if there was a chance for her to come down reasonably virgin. What do I want? This man, and to be quite pure. Go on, and get it over.'<sup>376</sup> The scene is crucial as it lets the reader follow Melitta's reasoning prior to her infidelity with Maurice Amburton, which is understood to be a defilement of the Rings.

Interestingly, we learn that she chooses the Rings as the place for which to go through with the act because of her wish to remain pure. What she fails to understand is that, instead of the Rings keeping her 'virgin,' she becomes a destructive influence on the Rings, as she pollutes them through her liaison with Amburton. The shift of personal pronoun from 'she' to 'I' is relatively straightforward here, and does not yield much confusion. In the later works, the pronoun shifts become more frequent and marked, with more obscurity surrounding the identity of the speaker than in this example. Rather than being a marker of intersubjectivity through sacrifice here, the shift appears a direct indication of internal focalisation.

There are a few instances of the second person being used in the focalised narration, without inverted commas, but these are generally no cause for interpreting the section as anything but a character thinking to itself. In this example for instance, the 'you' is easily interpreted: 'He [Evans, Van's teacher] thought: A fever runs in these people. If you nurse their imagination, you raise insoluble terrors.'<sup>377</sup> The fact that these are Evans' thoughts is clearly stated, which means that the lack of inverted

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<sup>376</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 32.

<sup>377</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 46.

commas is not confusing or disruptive to the reader. The 'you' is an obvious reference to Evans himself, since he is at that very moment trying to balance his instruction to Van so as not to further cultivate her already overly active imagination.

In another instance of a shift to the second person pronoun, the meaning and purpose of the shift is different, but it is no less clear. The scene depicts Judy and Serge talking about the war in France, of which Judy is an adamant supporter. Serge speaks to her about his pacifist point of view, remarking: "Can't you see that it would be as ridiculous for me to uphold this war as for you not to do so? No?" Oh my dear, your pretty dress is spotted with blood.<sup>378</sup> Serge's thought, while it remains unspoken, is still directed towards Judy. It is apparent that she is the 'you' referred to here; her aggressive, pro-war stance has already been established. The image of a pretty dress covered with blood stains further emphasises Serge's uneasy and conflicted feelings towards her, as he finds her both attractive and heartless. He also addresses Van in his thoughts, as though she is speaking to him within his own consciousness: 'Van, be quiet.... Love... Love, shake me out of this.'<sup>379</sup> In the same way, Serge addresses Judy on another occasion when she is not there, explicitly stating that she occupies him internally: 'You came with the war – you are inside me, playing its infernal tunes. ... How dare you murder me? It's no good. I must have you. It is my function.'<sup>380</sup> The self-sacrificial 'function' of Serge mentioned earlier is here conflated with the infiltration of Judy into his consciousness, emphasising the association of sacrifice with intersubjectivity.

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<sup>378</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 78.

<sup>379</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 78.

<sup>380</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 81.

The play on pronouns reflects the power struggle between characters, as Serge continues his inner dialogue with Judy, which runs in the frame narration without inverted commas, throughout their spoken interaction as an undercurrent of commentary thought: ‘Judy, my love, you are an abominable hell. You are a pitiful, blind lamb. You are my peace. There is no peace. He said: “There is truth, but there is no peace.”’<sup>381</sup> Occasionally, his thoughts turn on himself: ‘Why do I do this? ... Why do I endure this? Then he said: “I am quite strong enough to rape you.”’<sup>382</sup> In this way, the powerplay between the characters is in this instance mainly portrayed from Serge’s side; he controls the narrative from within himself, as he is allowed the preference of being the focaliser here.

Judy does however focalise the narrative on occasion, but despite allowing her this space, the narrative is still clearly not sympathetic towards her. The purpose of her focalisation is not to make her motives understandable or justifiable, but rather it has the function of making her out to be a monster. Her inner dialogue does not unveil any ameliorating circumstance that explains her acts, but only shows her feelings of spite against Van: ‘I’m as jealous of her as hell. She shall decrease. ... We shall ransack Rings: A competence acquired, I might practise virtue.’<sup>383</sup> Judy – a character who has more likeness to a vampire than a human, as she ‘must be fed on blood’ – is thus portrayed as a thoroughly disagreeable character even when she is the ostensible focaliser of a segment.<sup>384</sup> A certain suspicion towards any claim to a neutral omniscience may therefore be levelled at the narrative, which is undoubtedly coloured by a preference for Van’s side of the story.

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<sup>381</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 79.

<sup>382</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 79.

<sup>383</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 73.

<sup>384</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 58.

Van's internal dialogue after the scene on the Rings with Peter and Judy suggests a further move of the narrative voice to one that is situated within the character, but is yet removed from it, as it addresses itself in the second person. The dialogue aims at establishing a narrative around Van's sacrifices and providing her with a rationale for her actions: 'He is my beloved. For him I trod out our jungle. I levelled it and set it for love. He is a grey, maimed, young man walking away. Be cheerful. Why should you embarrass him? ... Van, you saw what Judy and Peter meant. You faced them. It's done and we're alive.'<sup>385</sup> The plural 'we' may of course be read as referring to Van and Serge, but it is also possible to read it as Van referring to herself in the plural – her reference to herself by name makes the latter reading more plausible.

Towards the end of the novel, there is a longer section of internal dialogue, without inverted commas and thus intertwined with the narration, which also includes pronoun shifts between first, second, and third person. Serge is the focaliser, on his way from the train station to Rings, discussing with himself what to do about his situation with Van and Judy. The purpose of such a lengthy quotation as the one below is to show how the shifts fluctuate back and forth between he, you, and I, within one scene containing a sole character. The effect is that of the kind of stream of consciousness that is displayed in *Pointed Roofs* (1915) or *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), rather than the more extreme version of the technique used in *Ulysses* (1922).

He turned his horse into a lane. Ride alone, look down from your horse. ... You wanted to want her, but you don't. Go back to your painting. Of course I shall go back and paint. ... I've not done with Judy yet. He saw her on a green sofa... He heard himself speaking to himself. Must I? Must I? Yes. ...

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<sup>385</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 209.



What shall I say? Hullo, and ride away. They leave me alone now. He left the sunk lane and rode over a field... All the evil on earth is contained in a small house, built anywhere. Once you go in, you pass from curiosity to curiosity; you find something and then you sit down and watch yourself disappear. ... D'you see that red harrow and through it the young blades? And the cushions in Judy's room are those colours, that are waiting for me. Get along with you into that barn.'<sup>386</sup>

The third person narrative voice stating that Serge 'heard himself speaking to himself' means that besides the levels of consciousness that are represented by the three personal pronouns he (self as distanced object), you (self as proximate object), and I (self as subject), there is a parallel understanding of these levels within the character himself. If Serge (he) hears himself (I) talking to himself (you), it is possible for him to be simultaneously aware of occupying both the subject and the object roles at once. The dissolution of strict boundaries around the self as subject is further indicated by Serge's assertion that he sees himself 'disappear.'

*Ashe of Rings* displays a first, tentative step towards the dissolution of a contained, subjective narrative self, through its play with shifts in personal pronouns. Rochelle Rives recognises this dissolution of the self as a typically modernist trait: 'A more reflexive and ethically self-conscious version of Pound's imagism, Butts's impersonal modernism affirms the proximity of subject and object, dispelling fixed identity in favor of a more soluble sense of self.'<sup>387</sup> Dissolving the boundary between subject and object is a fundamental feature of Butts' narrative technique, which results in the same transcendence as the sacrificial act. Once the boundaries are questioned, they can be reset again, but they may not be in exactly the same place as before – things will have changed in the process. As chapter 1 shows, in annihilating

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<sup>386</sup> Butts, *Ashe of Rings*, 214-6.

<sup>387</sup> Rochelle Rives, *Modernist Impersonalities: Affect, Authority, and the Subject* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 146.

the self, the self is also realised, albeit in a different form. This will be further explored as I will show how fluidity of the narrative self increases in the Taverner novels. In the two following subsections, I will look at instances of sacrifice in *Armed with Madness* that have a tendency toward disorder, and show that this is related to the disorganised nature of the narration in the novel.

‘You’re going down the well’: Disorderly Sacrifice in *Armed with Madness*<sup>388</sup>

*Armed with Madness* contains several instances of disorderly sacrifice, and, significantly, the novel also lacks a coherent embedded narrative controlled by the characters. As previously mentioned, these demarcations between the types of sacrifice that are read into the different novels are not absolute; for example, the murder of Kralin in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, to which I will return, can be read as a disorderly sacrificial event, and it is possible to conceive of Scylla’s crucifixion as a form of scapegoating, but neither of these reflections are particularly fruitful. Kralin’s murder is not unplanned, but premeditated and prepared for by a group of people; the intention of Scylla’s crucifixion is not to blame one individual for the evil within a community and then exterminate her, but rather to blame one individual for the problems of another individual. I will return to the details of this event in my discussion below.

A more ambiguous instance from *Armed with Madness*, in many ways due to its disordered nature, is that of Picus Tracy – son of the landowner at a neighbouring estate and Scylla’s lover – as a scapegoat. His motives are called into question during the hunt for the Holy Grail. The group initially turns against him, as it is believed that he has stolen the cup that is the supposed Grail and subsequently made

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<sup>388</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 144.

up a story about it in order to establish it as the holy vessel, thus playing a ‘little game to make you think something of yourselves and let you down,’ as Carston puts it.<sup>389</sup> After the group has confronted him with various accusations, to which he responds that ‘[y]ou are all a pack of old women intriguing against me,’ it transpires that it is actually Picus’ father who has ‘done the lying.’<sup>390</sup> Clarence sums up the situation by stating that ‘[w]e don’t seem to have cleaned up anything.’<sup>391</sup> The blaming and consequent exclusion of Picus does not go as planned because the communal narrative – that is, the representation of the group’s collective ideology – does not support the view of Picus as a scapegoat; therefore stability is not restored to the group.

There are disparate comments made by various characters that indicate a premature intention and desire for an embedded narrative – that is, a discourse or belief system that has validity within the group – to be created. This germ could have grown into a fully formed basis for the scapegoating of Picus, but only if someone had seized control of the story. As it is, these comments do no more than start the process, by initiating a plot to lay the blame of the group’s ‘disease’ on Picus. The most obvious example is a conversation between Scylla and Ross, in which Scylla makes the offhand remark that they will ‘get home with some martyrdom in hand,’ referring to the fact that they have a long walk back ahead of them, but also with the possible intention toward a scheme or story involving martyrdom; Ross’ sinister response to this is suggestive of the secondary meaning: ‘He stood with his head flung up, his mouth stretching into its wild-animal smile. With violent, silent

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<sup>389</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 64.

<sup>390</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 64; 94.

<sup>391</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 65.

amusement, he said: "It's beginning.""<sup>392</sup> If this embedded narrative had not only begun but continued to fruition, a successful sacrifice is likely to have followed.

The scapegoating of Picus is not prepared for and maintained in this novel in the way that the scapegoating of Kralin is in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, despite Scylla distinctly identifying him as a scapegoat by calling him 'Kingfisher.'<sup>393</sup> The difference between the novels, however, is consistency and authoritarian control; the embedded narrative needs to be fashioned according to a coherent and organised structure that paves the way for a justification of the scapegoating. Laying the blame on Picus does entail a certain prologue that is created in conversation between the other characters. Carston's initial dislike of Picus due to his own desire for Scylla leads him to start the accusation, but there is no clear leader of the group who takes charge of and controls the narrative. Carston retracts his attitude after having met Picus' father, but by then he has told Clarence of the relationship between Picus and Scylla, which results in Clarence's hostility towards them both.<sup>394</sup> Felix also feels betrayed because he thinks he has been lied to and therefore throws a book on the fire that may or may not have proved the legitimacy of the cup: 'I burnt the damned thing when Carston told me that you and Picus were playing us up.'<sup>395</sup> Ross is described as inclined towards malice due to an inner deficiency and seems thereby to enjoy the spread of hatred for its own sake: 'In Ross's heart there twisted ache and dislike.'<sup>396</sup> None of them, however, is motivated to pursue the course of scapegoating to its end. The story of Picus as villain is thus left to drift aimlessly

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<sup>392</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 45.

<sup>393</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 59.

<sup>394</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 63; 65; 79.

<sup>395</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 86.

<sup>396</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 91.

through the intersubjective consciousness of the characters; the scapegoating is disorganised and ultimately unsuccessful. If the embedded narrative is disorderly, the sacrificial acts will be disorderly as well. Below, I will return to the issue of how this is displayed through the narrative technique used in *Armed with Madness*.

The crucifixion of Scylla is another failed sacrifice in *Armed with Madness*. While the scene depicts Scylla being tied to an effigy by Clarence, who proceeds to shoot at her with a bow and arrow, the narrative stops short of actually fulfilling the blood sacrifice, as Clarence falls asleep before he manages to do Scylla any mortal harm. The scene points to the uselessness of a sacrifice unfulfilled; Scylla is neither killed nor expelled from the group. Rather, it is Clarence whose status within the community is called into question by the ensuing communal narrative. Picus comments that '[h]is head's all wrong,' and that he 'went off the deep-end again,' emphasising that Clarence's deed is not approved by the group, and that it should be regarded as the act of an individual who has stepped out of line.<sup>397</sup> Jane Garrity argues that 'Butts presents Scylla as a martyr to the cause of racial purity and heterosexual procreativity; the substitutive logic of the novel dictates that she, as a living emblem of the Grail ... must displace the homosexual coupling of Clarence and Picus because it represents only reproductive failure.'<sup>398</sup> While the novel clearly favours the relationship between Scylla and Picus over that of Picus and Clarence, there are no obvious references to reproduction; in fact, Scylla and Picus, while married in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, are not depicted as producing any heirs to either of their family estates. The assumption that Scylla is martyred for the benefit

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<sup>397</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 150; 154; 154.

<sup>398</sup> Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, 213.

of the land, due to her intrinsically belonging to it, and it to her, is rather based on her individual ties with nature, not on her capacity for reproduction.

Scylla's crucifixion is a failure, then, in two ways; she does not die, and the person who attempts to sacrifice her is seen as mentally unstable rather than a saviour and organiser of the community and its narrative. The obvious parallel to what is arguably the most famous image of sacrifice in Western culture is indicative of Butts' tendency to place women at the centre of power and significance.

Clarence's treatment of Scylla towards the end of the story mirrors that of the Romans' handling of Christ, as he ties her onto an effigy and wounds her on the forehead, in the arms and just below the ribs. Commenting on these events in retrospect, Picus explicitly mentions to Clarence that 'you must have thought you were Apollo, or a roman official with an early christian [sic].'<sup>399</sup> Clearly, there is an awareness of the theme of sacrifice displayed within the text, which is expressed by the characters. This overt play with mythology and ritual sacrifice is also shown by having Clarence tell Scylla before her crucifixion that he intends to throw her 'down the well', conjuring images of the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis, Saint Sebastian, and the Mayan sacrificial well at Chichén Itzá.<sup>400</sup> As Scylla is strung up on the clay statue, Clarence shoots arrows at her with a bow and string, which is reminiscent of both Saint Sebastian and Mayans rituals of human sacrifice.<sup>401</sup> In the last moments before Scylla faints, she goes 'into a state, a *clarté* the other side of forgiveness.'<sup>402</sup> This further suggests a parallel with stories of Christian martyrs who

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<sup>399</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 154.

<sup>400</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 144.

<sup>401</sup> Robert J. Sharer and Loa P. Traxler, *The Ancient Maya* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 752.

<sup>402</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 146.

make their peace with their executioners before death, following the figure of Christ himself and his expression of forgiveness toward his crucifiers in Luke 23:34.

Clarence's violence is directed towards Scylla as his romantic rival for Picus' affections. Scylla's involvement with Picus, and Picus' previous involvement with and subsequent rejection of Clarence, is the reason for the violence to which she is subjected. However, it is Scylla who comes out on top of the situation, whereas Clarence is forced to admit to having been 'off the deep-end' and, later, feeling 'shame and anger mounting' and the need to 'have somewhere to hide ... while Picus was with Scylla and she enjoyed the reward of warriors.'<sup>403</sup> Scylla has evidently won this battle; not only by, as Barbara O'Brien Wagstaff suggests, bringing 'about a stronger community by feeling past her fear and Clarence's hatred to "a clarté the other side of forgiveness,"' but through the narrative's silencing of Clarence, and discrediting his version of the story by labelling him as mentally ill.<sup>404</sup>

While this scene depicts Scylla taking on the role as a Christ figure, and a sacrificial object, elsewhere in the novel there are hints to suggest that she should not be seen as a martyr. In a narratorial comment, Carston's notion of Scylla as a martyr as well as 'the naïveté of his cult for women' are described as mistaken: 'He had made a martyr of a person who was not a martyr...' <sup>405</sup> The narrator thereby points away from a picture of Scylla as a figure who might embody the saintly virtues normally connected with the image of martyrdom in general and Christ in particular, which is further emphasised by her character flaws and overt sexuality; the

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<sup>403</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 154; 159.

<sup>404</sup> Barbara O'Brien Wagstaff, 'The Effectual Angel in Death of Felicity Taverner,' *A Sacred Quest: The Life and Writings of Mary Butts*, ed. Christopher Wagstaff (Kingston: McPherson & Co., 1995), 225.

<sup>405</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 55

references to her as ‘sometimes a witch and sometimes a bitch’ add to this.<sup>406</sup> Also, the narrative stops short of actually fulfilling the sacrifice, as Clarence falls asleep before he manages to do Scylla mortal harm. Elizabeth Anderson proposes that Scylla is ‘fluctuating between a desire to support her masculine companions and a resistance to sacrificing herself on their behalf,’ and this does indeed appear to be the case at the outset of the novel, when Scylla has to receive Carston on her own as Felix and Ross go to pick mushrooms on the day of his arrival, but only with reference to a secular, everyday kind of sacrifice, unrelated to any transcendent experience.<sup>407</sup> When it comes to the crucifixion, Scylla is explicitly unwilling to be offered up as a martyr to Clarence, as she thinks when she realises the danger: ‘Run away: Can’t: Where to?’<sup>408</sup> She then lies about marrying Carston in order to divert Clarence’s jealousy, which is focussed on Picus, because ‘[c]ruelty frightened her. ...she shrieked, and flung Clarence off, and ran to the statue.’<sup>409</sup> Unfortunately, Clarence is both quicker and stronger than her.

Rather than point to the martyrdom of Scylla, then, the novel can be read as suggesting Clarence as the scapegoat. Initially, he is described as a ‘martyred ass’ in passing.<sup>410</sup> The scene highlights Clarence’s inability to deal with the pain and frustration he feels. His fury is born from the shell-shock that has afflicted him since the First World War, causing him to experience intense feelings of anxiety. He is described as having a worm inside a nut in his brain, ‘the worm boring and making a

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<sup>406</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 5.

<sup>407</sup> Elizabeth Anderson, “‘The Knight’s Move’: Fluidity of Identity and Meaning in Mary Butts’ *Armed with Madness*,” *Women: A Cultural Review* 18, no. 3 (2007): 249.

<sup>408</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 143.

<sup>409</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 145.

<sup>410</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 24.



wild pain that made a wild dream.’<sup>411</sup> His ‘wild’ dreams prior to the crucifixion are about murdering one version of Picus in order to have the real version of the man: ‘Picus was dead, and he was glad he was dead and it was over. The difficulty was to get rid of the body, which was coming alive somewhere else and following him. ... It wasn’t till the dead Picus was in the sea, that the real one would come out of the hills and play with him.’<sup>412</sup> In yet another of the novel’s twists and turns on the theme of sacrifice, Picus is the one that has to be killed for Clarence and him to fulfill their union. He hopes that ‘[s]ome day Picus would take off his cap to him,’ which further implies a longing for power of the subjugated man, a wish that remains unfulfilled at the end of the novel.<sup>413</sup>

The text comments on Clarence’s helplessness in dealing with this problem by indicating his lack of belief in a higher purpose: ‘Perhaps he was the man who had suffered most from the disbelief and disuse of all forms of religion. ... Incapable of Ross’s and Scylla’s faith that there was a faith, with all its pains and invisibility, unquestioned as air. ... all that he had then was a suspicion that this was the punishment of a neglected set of gods.’<sup>414</sup> Evidently, Clarence is suffering, not only from the shell-shock, but also from the disillusionment that the war had brought to those who had lived through its horrors. As he is unable to deal with the war trauma, his anxiety grows stronger and eventually turns into episodes of psychosis. In order to get over his psychotic state and return to normal, he needs to act out his frustration and inflict pain on someone else. The purpose of harming Scylla is to free Clarence

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<sup>411</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 151.

<sup>412</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 25.

<sup>413</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 27.

<sup>414</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 130.

of his demons; that is, to offer her as a sacrifice to his ‘neglected set of gods’ in order for him to regain his sanity.

However, a victim cannot be sacrificed for the benefit of one individual, as in the case of Clarence wanting to crucify Scylla in order to rid himself of demons, unless the communal narrative supports the act; sacrifice has to be validated by the story that the community tells about itself. None of the other sacrificial events that occur in the novels are upheld and maintained by the discourse of the characters in the way that the scapegoating of Kralin in *Death of Felicity Taverner* is, which is why they fail. The key difference lies in the way that the community perceives itself; it needs a coherent, intersubjective narrative – the embedded narrative for the reader of the novel – that paves the way for a justification of a sacrifice.

It is clear that, in *Armed with Madness*, scapegoating, crucifixion, and other miscellaneous references to sacrificial acts are essentially disorderly in nature. Not being directed with a clear purpose towards a specific aim, the sacrifices are unsuccessful in the sense that they have no structuring effect. This is reflected in the multivocal narration of the novel, which I will explore in the following subsection.

‘I’ve been so awfully misunderstood’: The Multivocal Narrative in *Armed with Madness*<sup>415</sup>

*Armed with Madness* implies a further step taken in the direction to which *Ashe of Rings* points. The increase in concern with community as opposed to the fate of individual characters is indicated by the narrative voice becoming progressively equal in sympathy to all its focalisers, rather than being evidently in favour of one side in an oppositional pair, as with Van and Judy in *Ashe of Rings*. Furthermore, the

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<sup>415</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 38.

purpose of the Grail hunt is to resolve that ‘something in their lives’ which is ‘spoiled and inconclusive like the Grail story,’ that is, to make sense of life in an era of disbelief and postwar trauma.<sup>416</sup>

However, for the Grail to have such a purpose, the community has to establish its meaning in a coherent, shared narrative. As I have suggested, the characters in *Armed with Madness* do not succeed in crafting such a narrative; they all have different purposes and goals for the intended collective narrative, and none of them is given an exclusive leadership role. The result is not only that the scapegoating of Picus is unsuccessful, but that the purpose of the Grail is unclear.

Dudley Carston’s role as an outsider should make him the ideal scapegoat, but for some reason, he never comes close to being regarded as one. Is this because he is completely disassociated from the group? The difference between him and Kralin in *Death of Felicity Taverner* is that Kralin has married into the group and is thereby given power with which to threaten it; he would not have been able to lay his hands on Felicity’s land and her papers, that is, her story, if he had not been her husband. Carston does not promote any narrative of his own, and does not appear to have the power to threaten the Taverner narrative. Only on one occasion is it intimated that he may do damage to them by ‘add[ing] an episode to what Felix calls the family horror,’ gossip, but Scylla takes the matter calmly: ‘At worst he’ll leave and blast my reputation for a bit. What of that?’<sup>417</sup> The story Carston may tell is not one that will do much damage, and it seems probable that it would not be the first time Scylla has such stories told about her. This shows that the question of who is in control of the narrative is crucially linked to sacrifice – had Carston been a contender

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<sup>416</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 67.

<sup>417</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 42.

for control of the narrative, he may well have become a scapegoat, or, had he been successfully in control of the narrative, he may have followed through on and completed the scapegoating of Picus.

Despite Scylla's suspicion that Carston may speak ill of her – a reasonable thing to surmise as he comes to the Taverners 'with elaborations of the best gossip' – the man himself gives no indications of being able to construct a narrative.<sup>418</sup> He claims to 'have no memories,' a dubious statement after learning of his propensity to gossip, and even more so after his threat to 'tell people ... what I think of you.'<sup>419</sup> It is however clear that even if Carston does have something to say, the surrounding milieu is not the right setting for his narrative: 'They listened to him ... At the same time there was something that spoiled his effects. It was the place...' <sup>420</sup> Carston is out of place, and is therefore forced to take on the role of observer rather than that of controlling the narrative. His experience of the English countryside is apart from any that he has had before in either America or Europe: 'That theatre was as another earth, and the plays were not a prologue to his play. ...he did not know his part. ... Lost in a green transparent world, he was blind.'<sup>421</sup> In the end, Carston does a rather good job of contriving his part in the ensuing drama, as he rescues Scylla from Clarence, even though 'it isn't his game here.'<sup>422</sup> But even though he fits into and is attracted to parts of the Taverner lifestyle, he is not convinced of their version of the truth, in particular the holy nature of the cup in the well: 'If he could have believed in their belief of the possibility of a possible sanctity, gone down to them and said:

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<sup>418</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 17.

<sup>419</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 32; 63.

<sup>420</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 17.

<sup>421</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 23.

<sup>422</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 43.

“Here is something precious,” he would have walked into their hearts. But that would not have served him, because he did not want their hearts. ... Wanted scalps.’<sup>423</sup> Even though Carston, like Boris in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, may be able to figure out how to ingratiate himself, unlike Boris he does not have the dexterity of mind or spirit to assimilate to and take full part in the intersubjective group narrative. Instead, he reacts with anger and violent thoughts to their idea of sanctity.

Carston does not have enough previous mythical knowledge to help him find his footing within the Taverner group, which makes him not only angry, but confused and powerless, and thereby unable to pose any threat to the community. He is, however, still interested in engagement with it; when he arrives at the Taverner home, he is content with ‘[a]nything which would give [him] a human scene.’<sup>424</sup> Finding himself within that scene, he is unable to participate fully in it. He is left out of the intersubjective consciousness because he does not have the right frame of mind to be included in it; when the others ‘think of their sins,’ Carston does ‘not think of sins at all,’ at least not until he begins to understand that the others do.<sup>425</sup> When that happens, it gives ‘him a key. To a very old feeling,’ which implies that little by little he is starting to learn about traditions and ways that he is unaware of because of his nationality.<sup>426</sup>

Despite not having the power to drive the persecution of Picus forward, Carston does have a premonition of what is to come. The scapegoating is prefaced

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<sup>423</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 62.

<sup>424</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 13.

<sup>425</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 49.

<sup>426</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 55.

by the words: '*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.*'<sup>427</sup> The sentence echoes through Carston's consciousness when he thinks of Picus, whom he begins to regard as a kind of demon due to jealousy of Picus and Scylla's relationship. However, the sentiment, as mentioned earlier, is not valid or strong enough to base the persecution on, since Carston's martyrism of Scylla is caused by his sexual desire for her, in combination with the 'naïveté' that forms part of his character.<sup>428</sup>

Ross, on the other hand, appears to be a more real danger to the equanimity of the Taverners. He seems to have a presentiment of a sacrifice, when he declares early in the novel that the group should 'BE PREPARED FOR LAMBING – You hear them mewing in the dark ... and out comes the shepherd, with his hands covered with blood.'<sup>429</sup> While the ostensible topic of this statement is that of sheep being delivered of their lambs by a shepherd, the dramatic setting coupled with the wording is suggestive of sacrifice, as the mention of lambs and blood connote the sacrificial lamb, a common trope in Judeo-Christian culture that originates in the lamb of the Passover sacrifice.

It is further intimated that Ross is a rogue member of the group – possibly aiming to cause trouble – not only with reference to his 'wild-animal smile,' and his prediction before Carston's arrival that the Taverners are enjoying a 'last day's peace,' but because of his indifferent attitude to people, which separates him from the group: 'Only Ross embraced his solitude.'<sup>430</sup> He appears to regard other persons as his playthings: 'Eggs hatched. And men? They were there to make him laugh. If

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<sup>427</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 52; 55. Emphasis in original.

<sup>428</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 55.

<sup>429</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 28. Emphasis in original.

<sup>430</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 92.

they found rest in him, he was indifferent as Nature, and in general as kind.<sup>431</sup> The same paragraph sees him being careless with regard to narrative as well, as '[h]e grinned at the old nurse's horror-story' that comes to his mind when he sees Nanna's knitting left behind.<sup>432</sup> The only thing Ross cares for is physical form and visual representation. Being 'a man content with the tangible,' his primary concern is 'the brickness of a brick,' rather than any communal narrative.<sup>433</sup> Ross is amused by the games of Grail hunting and scapegoating, but they have no greater meaning for him and so he does not participate in them wholeheartedly. He is not affected by the same disease as the rest of the group, because of a mysterious, secret knowledge: 'Only Ross was all right... once his strong appetites were satisfied, he did not want anything in human life at all. ...he knew something that [Scylla] was only growing conscious of. And wouldn't tell.'<sup>434</sup> His superiority in being unaffected by war trauma and his consequent disinterestedness in the communal story is possibly one reason why he is not part of the narrative at all in *Death of Felicity Taverner*.

The importance of story in *Armed with Madness* is signalled on several occasions, even though the attempts at making the embedded narrative cohesive and communal are unsuccessful. Carston takes note of the fact that he has been told numerous times that there are certain things he will not understand unless he knows the entire Taverner story, which is interweaved with English national narrative in general and the Grail myth in particular. When he asks questions about what the discovery of the cup in the well entails, Scylla wants him to engage with the narrative, rather than give him straight answers: 'For the third time Carston heard the

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<sup>431</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 45; 5; 109.

<sup>432</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 109.

<sup>433</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 92.

<sup>434</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 9.

sentence: “That’s a long story. You must help me to explain.”<sup>435</sup> In an attempt to start off a joint narrative, Scylla instructs the others to help her shape the story: ‘The best way to get that story out is for everyone to say what he thinks or feels or remembers.’<sup>436</sup> The game is devised by Scylla, but it is quickly over and it does not come to a joint conclusion of the meaning of the cup.

Despite the embedded narrative of *Armed with Madness* not being controlled in the way that it is in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, the novel does establish Scylla as the one who would be appropriate to be in control of that narrative, if anyone. This is implied in the passage cited above, and in other descriptions of Scylla as a character. Already in chapter IV, Felix tells Carston that ‘[s]he doesn’t create situations. She broods them and they hatch. And the birds come home to roost. Some mighty queer birds. Truth isn’t everyone’s breakfast egg. She isn’t happy till it’s hatched. Calls it knowing where you are.’<sup>437</sup> Butts’ play with the bird metaphor here, most often reserved for depictions of Picus, extends to Scylla and her way of handling the ‘truth.’ The situation, furthermore, is not created by Scylla, but only forged by her in its aftermath; the story that she forges needs to be based on events that have taken place, which she then ‘broods’ until they ‘hatch.’

It is also Scylla who explains to Carston why it is important to play the narrative game in order to make as if ‘we know between us pretty well all there is to know’: ‘Swank ... and instinct. To cover quite intolerable pain. ... That’s why we rag all the time. To keep things clean, and because it’s the only gentlemanly thing to

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<sup>435</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 30.

<sup>436</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 29.

<sup>437</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 20.



do.’<sup>438</sup> This description is typical of the postwar condition of the lost generation.

While Scylla indeed does refer to the members of her group as ‘lost,’ she also thinks that they tend to deal with their problem by ‘[s]hov[ing] it off on the war; but that did not help.’<sup>439</sup> Instead, she proposes the game of narrative: ‘A little poetry, a little witchery, a little joke.’<sup>440</sup> As in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, the frame narrative of the novel and the embedded narrative of Scylla are similar, but here it is in the sense that they are both fragmented, elusive, and, it seems, not to be taken too seriously. At this point in time, Scylla is not consciously purposeful in playing the game, but simply engages in it because she enjoys it, and not with the commitment to create stability, as in *Death of Felicity Taverner*: ‘I’m tired to keeping things steady for you. This is my pleasure and my game. ...Picus is giving us an excuse for the sacred game.’<sup>441</sup>

After Scylla and Picus become lovers, Clarence posits that they have become of ‘one voice.’<sup>442</sup> The supposition of their joint narrative position upsets the balance of the group, generating feelings of jealousy in both Carston and Clarence, and a mood of general suspicion which escalates as the accusations of Picus multiply. Picus does not confirm Clarence’s statement, but rather appears to disprove the notion by saying that Scylla has turned the group against him: ‘Scylla’s been talking. You are all a pack of old women intriguing against me. Making my life hell. ... Accusing me. Boring me. Interfering with ME.’<sup>443</sup> It is again pointed out here that speaking with one voice brings the group together toward a common goal in creating

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<sup>438</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 31.

<sup>439</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 31; 9.

<sup>440</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 32.

<sup>441</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 43.

<sup>442</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 65.

<sup>443</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 64-5. Emphasis in original.

a scapegoat. The lack of cohesion, however, can be assumed to be caused by the group not speaking with a fully unified intersubjective voice due to Scylla's reluctance to believe that Picus is a villain. It is not in her interest to 'hatch' a story in which he is blamed for the group's troubles, 'the dis-ease he imparted.'<sup>444</sup> Additionally, the other characters cannot trust Scylla as the chronicler here as they do in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, since they know that her narrative will be biased because of her involvement with the person who is supposed to be scapegoated.

Several of the dialogues in *Armed with Madness* are conveyed with a minimum of explanatory notes as to who is talking, and sometimes it is clearly stated that the person who is talking could be any of the characters present:

Carston heard through the jazz and the slackening rain a voice which might have been a woman's or a man's: 'He doesn't mind using the cup of the Sanc-Grail for whisky and soda,' and another voice, which might have been a man's or a woman's: 'He doesn't mind using for a whisky and soda, the cup we use for an ash-tray, the cup of the Sanc-Grail.'<sup>445</sup>

The lines are not only confused as to who is speaking them, but also in terms of meaning; if the cup is already used as an ashtray, why would it be less respectful to use it for a drink? Furthermore, in a work which is otherwise so pared down and economic with words, it is significant that nearly the same line is repeated a second time. The effect is that of a multivocal chorus of sorts; the repetition coupled with the sense that anyone and everyone utters the words gives an impression of a jointly sung refrain. Butts also uses the multivocal technique in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, where the effect is that of a tapestry of memories of the life of Felicity, as will be seen in the following section. A more overt chorus, which is sung both by Carston

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<sup>444</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 65.

<sup>445</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 37.

and Picus, as well as by the group as a whole, is that of the American song *Oh, Lady Be Good!* (1924); the line ‘*I’ve been so awfully misunderstood*’ is especially emphasised here, again indicating the confusion that dominates the narrative.<sup>446</sup>

Another kind of multivocality occurs when Clarence receives a visit from the shepherd’s wife who tends to him in his little studio, a first person narrator interjects between two lines spoken by Clarence to the woman: “‘You’re early,” he said – “Get some tea.” And I’m in my clothes. “And mind you put it in with the teaspoon.””<sup>447</sup> Presumably, this comment is to be read a thought of Clarence’s, since the woman has just seen him sleeping through the window. A page further on, after Picus has entered the scene, there is another line written in the first person, but seemingly from Picus’ point of view: ‘He had to operate on Clarence, not prick and bewilder. Had to undo his arts, his graces, his wit. Clarence’s first protection would be to turn on him. A man of perverse and subtle mind, he would be quick to distort to save himself. Making me think.’<sup>448</sup> The ‘me’ here is likely to be read as Picus. Both characters are thus used as first person narrators within the same scene, albeit only in one sentence each. In this way, Butts lets the narrative flow seamlessly between the third and first person, and between several characters. Its lack of coherence in *Armed with Madness* is indicative of the lack of a unified narrative between the characters. Interestingly, the paragraph where Picus takes on the narration informs the reader of his need to co-opt Clarence’s thoughts, to ‘undo’ his narrative and thereafter weave an alternative one into his consciousness, and the perils involved in such an attempt.

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<sup>446</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 38.

<sup>447</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 151.

<sup>448</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 152.

Scylla also takes on the role of first person narrator in the text, when pondering her relationship with Picus:

Picus had made love to her. Picus would not make love again, because they had been found out. Picus led Clarence a hard life. No one could go to Picus and say: 'So much for your silly devilries. *Turn ye to me.*' And I even thought of marrying him because of his beauty. I did not catch the joy as it flew. Damn female instincts. Picus should not have pretended it was the cup of the Sanc-Grail. That will do in weaker minds and more violent imaginations than mine and Ross's.<sup>449</sup>

The change from third to first person signals a movement inwards, to a deeper plane of Scylla's consciousness, comparable to the narratorial shifts in person in *Ashe of Rings*. Both novels display this technique, but it is more clearly demarcated in the earlier novel to whom the voice belongs, simply by such signposting as the omniscient narrator explicitly pointing out that a certain character is thinking. The number of characters present in the scene is another factor; in *Armed with Madness*, there are many group discussions in which there are several people talking, whereas most passages in *Ashe of Rings* only feature two characters who interact.

This happens in an earlier passage as well, but here Scylla's first person narration shifts seamlessly to Felix as focaliser of a third person narrator, as they are thinking about the same thing. It is as though the thought travels telepathically from Scylla to Felix:

She would propitiate Felix. How? They will all hate me. Without whom Picus would not have turned creator. Woman's place indeed. Clarence wanted that job. He did the work, and I wear the crown. Not my fault. Chances of the sacred game. Swept off into stadium of the game; which is the pleasure in actions for their own sake. Done for the love of playing. Done for the fun of it. Done for no pompous end. That Felix was just a little nervous about.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 84. Emphasis in original.

<sup>450</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 68.

Without further comment on this relayed thought or feeling, the narration passes to one character from another as a sign of intersubjectivity. As opposed to such shifts in *Ashe of Rings*, it is less clear here where the consciousnesses of Scylla, Felix, and the supposedly omniscient narrator, begin and end. Typically for this novel, there seems to be a purposeful confusion surrounding for example whose the sentiment '[d]one for no pompous end' is.

There are also cases of first person narration in the text where the voice does not appear to belong to any of the characters. One such instance interrupts a discussion about the supposed lie that Picus' father has told about the Grail, in which Scylla brings up Nanna, their old nurse, and the watch she has always kept of the kitchen fire, a symbol of tradition and comfort. The narrator throws in a remark about the Roman goddess Hestia, mistakenly printed as Hesia in the text: 'Hesia is an old goddess – I think she had a name written under her altar not even the Romans might know. And in her case, their lives, the sap of their bodies was nourished at Nanna's fire.'<sup>451</sup> The comment on the forgotten original name of 'Hesia' opens up for the possibility that the misprint of the name is intentional. This first person narrator cannot be part of the group of characters portrayed, as the pronoun 'their' signals somebody commenting on the events from the outside.

A clear example of intersubjective experience in the first of the Taverner novels is a shared moment of remembrance between Scylla, Felix, and Ross, of a visitor who 'fainted at the sight of an egg,' an experience related by an external narrative voice: 'The pleasant memory united them; they became a triple figure, like

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<sup>451</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 94.

Hecate the witch, amused, imaginative.<sup>452</sup> Jointly remembering a past incident merges the three individuals into the shape of Hecate, the Greek goddess of magic, often portrayed in the shape of three amalgamated human forms. Another instance occurs just after the finding of the cup in the well, when ‘[f]ive people at once [are] thinking about a spear.’<sup>453</sup> These brief scenes are suggestive of what is explored more fully in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, where memories of Felicity are shared in order to create and maintain a communal body, as will be shown in the following two subsections.

‘They felt cut-off in the valley’: Scapegoats and Xenophobia in *Death of Felicity Taverner*<sup>454</sup>

As previously mentioned, several scholars have established Kralin as a scapegoat, and most of these readings include a discussion of Butts’ xenophobic tendencies, which is indeed a problematic aspect of the characterisation of Kralin.<sup>455</sup> Andrew Radford suggests that ‘[Kralin’s] macabre blurring of ethnic and sexual categories... makes him antithetical to Butts’s cherished anthropological ideal of “mana,”’ a term used to refer to an inherent form of spiritual power that Butts herself in *Traps for Unbelievers* (1932) defines as ‘that which gives a man or a woman potency in every

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<sup>452</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 6.

<sup>453</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 29.

<sup>454</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 204.

<sup>455</sup> See Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, 234; Radford, ‘Defending Nature’s Holy Shrine,’ 136; Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth and Mysticism*, 86, Ian Patterson, “‘The Plan Behind the Plan’: Russians, Jews and Mythologies of Change: The Case of Mary Butts,’ in *Modernity, Culture and ‘the Jew’*, ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 126-140, and Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 113.

act or situation.’<sup>456</sup> It should be noted that Butts is not very clear in her definition of either mana or magic, possibly due to the sacred nature of these concepts; as Amy Clukey notes, Butts ‘often thematizes the idea that magic is too sacred for discussion.’<sup>457</sup>

While Kralin certainly does embody liminality, with his simultaneous status as an outsider but also as an in-law of the Taverners, he is not portrayed as powerless, but rather the opposite. He is described as possessing a quality referred to as ‘the grey thing,’ an apparently very potent attribute, as it causes Felicity to flee from him in ‘[p]anic-fear,’ Felix considers it to be a ‘real horror,’ and Boris, a Russian aristocrat, connects it with the revolution that forced him to emigrate.<sup>458</sup> The Taverners place Kralin in opposition to Felicity, and thereby establish that he has a different kind of mana from her, but the power he is able to wield over the community shows that he nevertheless has mana. He is a ‘demon,’ while Felicity is a ‘saint.’<sup>459</sup>

When Kralin reveals his plan to take over the Taverner land and estate in order to convert it into a holiday resort, complete with golf links and hotels, he is again immediately targeted as someone to be blamed, not just for Felicity’s death but for all that is wrong with the current state of affairs on a larger scale. He is seen as denying the importance of spirituality and a mutual, consolidating cause, and is thereby not only representative of modernity in the sense that he wants to bring about change, but also by epitomizing the idea that the only value that persists in

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<sup>456</sup> Radford, ‘Defending Nature’s Holy Shrine,’ 129. *Traps*, 40.

<sup>457</sup> Amy Clukey, ‘Enchanting Modernism: Mary Butts, Decadence, and the Ethics of Occultism,’ *Modern Fiction Studies* 60, no. 1 (2014): 94.

<sup>458</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 179; 178.

<sup>459</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 203; 169.

postwar England is monetary. Kralin has many characteristics in common with the Nietzschean Superman, in that he values violence and nihilism highly, and derives his power from these concepts. Kralin is also an individualist, and as such does not have a place within the framework of a community; instead, as a man of independence, 'he multiplies by a thousand the dangers which life as such already brings with it.'<sup>460</sup> His individualism makes him into a perfect scapegoat, as there is absolutely no risk of any member of the community feeling sympathy or compassion for him; he actively works against all that the others represent, and thereby does not deserve to be defended or saved from his terrible end.

The murder of Kralin is ostensibly performed in order to reinstate a status quo and to relieve the Taverner community of its built up tensions. Just as René Girard proposes in his theory of sacrifice, when chaos rises to an uncontrollable level in a society to the point where total annihilation is looming, a scapegoat will be appointed and expelled, which then brings society back to a state of order. Boris refers to the murder as the '[o]ne thing I have put right,' and shiftily tells the others that 'I have made your peace, such peace, with him,' implying that the chaos that threatened their society has passed.<sup>461</sup> The placement of the murder at the very end of the narrative further emphasises its intended resolving function.

However, there are suggestions in the text to the contrary, that the sacrifice does not meet its goal. For instance, Boris' actions during and after the murder indicate that he has committed a crime, not performed a sacrificial ritual. His furtiveness implies the murder's illegitimacy; were it a sacrificial ritual condoned by the community, Boris would not have had to be secretive about it within the group.

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<sup>460</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 60 (§29).

<sup>461</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 358; 361.



Coming back from the killing, he tells them that ‘Kralin is caught on the little island by the tide. ... He is standing on it, shouting.’<sup>462</sup> In actual fact, Boris left him face down in the water, after having picked his pockets. The petty theft of ‘seven pounds, ten shillings’ further emphasises the irreverence of the act; it is not a sacred ceremony, but an offence.<sup>463</sup>

The other members of the Taverner group also signal that there is something not quite right about the sacrifice, firstly because they are absent from the event itself, making it an act of one individual rather than a communal ritual. Their reactions upon Boris’ return from the deed signify nervousness, anxiety, and possibly guilt. Felix ominously whispers: ‘I feel I am going to be hatched... and not out of the right egg or into the right nest.’<sup>464</sup> This is furthermore reminiscent of an episode in *Armed with Madness* discussed above, in which Scylla is described as ‘hatching’ situations by way of her storytelling.<sup>465</sup> Picus tells Boris to ‘be quiet,’ because he assumes him to be hysterical, although he is actually in ‘rapture.’<sup>466</sup> Picus’ focus is on covering up what has been done, echoing familiar phrases from crime fiction, like ‘what we have to do now is to tell the same story,’ a statement that further emphasises the fact that it is not the murder of Kralin that brings the group together, but the story they tell themselves, and others, about it.<sup>467</sup>

Kralin is not necessarily the only scapegoat in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, however. Felicity’s death, while not fitting the Girardian definition of scapegoating

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<sup>462</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 361.

<sup>463</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 358.

<sup>464</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 360.

<sup>465</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 20.

<sup>466</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 362.

<sup>467</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 362.

as neatly as Kralin's, does have certain elements that signify her role as a sacrificial victim. Early in the story, Scylla refers to Felicity as having been cast out of society, like a scapegoat, and comments that it is remarkable that she 'of all people – in the end had been left out. ...she seemed left alone to do first-aid on herself.'<sup>468</sup> Further on, it is intimated that the purpose of Felicity's death was for the Taverners to discover what is rotten in their family: Kralin and his plan to turn Felicity's land into a golf course, and Mrs Taverner, Felicity's mother, who is initially in agreement with Kralin. Mrs Taverner is by birth a Tracy, related to Picus, and has wed into the Taverner family. She is far from aligned with the Taverner narrative however; in fact, it is stated that 'what she disliked was Taverners,' and in addition to her belief in an old-fashioned idea of honour and propriety, this makes her resentful of her deceased daughter.<sup>469</sup> The antagonism of the narrative towards Mrs Taverner is obvious from Scylla's description of her: 'Old Aunt Julia is a notable dowager and an infernal bully. ... Once her activities had to be diluted with a strong dose of sentiment; lately she's reversed gears, become as acid a cynic as she was once a sentimentalist. In both cases, alternate statements of the original bitch.'<sup>470</sup> Perhaps, the Taverners ask themselves, Felicity died so that the community could be cleansed from such influences: 'Suppose Felicity had died to make them look into it, until knowledge made them acquainted with their gift?'<sup>471</sup> Rather than posing as a goddess, Felicity is a tragic but necessary loss to the community that will eventually be cleansed of bad influences and restored to order through her sacrifice.

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<sup>468</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 170.

<sup>469</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 252.

<sup>470</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 171.

<sup>471</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 200.

Felicity serves as a sacrificial victim in a similar way to Christ or the Fisher King; she has to die because the community needs to survive. The reason Boris gives for Felicity's destruction is 'people hating that they should love,' a statement that brings to mind the Nietzschean idea that human nature is incompatible with Christian moral law of loving one's neighbour. Nietzsche comes to this conclusion in §201 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, where he claims that as long as morality is 'useful to the herd [i.e. implemented to enforce controlled behaviour within a community]... there can be no "morality of love of one's neighbour."' <sup>472</sup> The moral laws of society, Nietzsche argues, are instead based on fear, a much stronger drive:

Once the structure of society seems to have been in general fixed and made safe from external dangers, it is this fear of one's neighbour which again creates new perspectives of moral valuation. There are certain strong and dangerous drives, such as enterprisingness, foolhardiness, revengefulness, craft, rapacity, ambition ... these drives are now felt to be doubly dangerous – now that the diversionary outlets for them are lacking – and are gradually branded as immoral and given over to calumny. <sup>473</sup>

Boris appears to be claiming that people's natural response is to hate each other, and as a result, violence will constantly build up in all human communities at any given point in time until a scapegoat is found and destroyed, releasing the pent up violence and bringing society back to a point of orderly equilibrium. <sup>474</sup> *Death of Felicity Taverner* contains not only one, but two different scapegoats, Felicity and Kralin, who serve two separate, if not oppositional, purposes. Felicity's love can only save the community after her death; the function of the murder of Kralin is conversely dependent upon his animosity.

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<sup>472</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 122 (§201).

<sup>473</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 123 (§201).

<sup>474</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 225.

Boris is a further suggestion for an alternative scapegoat in the novel. He, like Kralin, is originally an outsider in relation to the core Taverner group, and his own admittance of guilt in the circumstances of Felicity's death initially labels him as untrustworthy. The intimation of danger to his person is underlined several times, as Scylla and Felix start to suspect that he has been concealing information from them. Boris senses the threat as he goes out walking with Scylla:

He winced as though the stones' worn gold burned his feet. Every superstition in him dictated a penance. ...he did not dare to enter that pure sea. ... He feared the wood. ... Boris felt the sweat start out between his shoulderblades, as lightly and wearily, shoulder to shoulder, they mounted a precipice of flint-sewn chalk just above the village.<sup>475</sup>

The natural environment does not recognise him as one of its legatees, and is thereby dangerous to him. His bad conscience, brought on by the fact that 'he had lately helped kill their cousin,' makes him feel like their country is trying to hurt him.<sup>476</sup> What saves Boris, however, is precisely that conscience: '[He was] glad and ashamed and indignant that his emotions were about to betray him. ... There was virtue still in Boris. ... He was there, in their house, in their hearts: eating their salt after helping to destroy one of them.'<sup>477</sup> Boris throws himself on the sword before the community does it for him. He confesses to his involvement in Felicity's death and sacrifices his individuality and freedom of thought for the benefit of joining the group of the Taverners, an act that affords him the power to take another man's life. He consequently murders Kralin on the behalf of the community to which he has given himself. The guilt in Boris propels him to confess to the part he has played,

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<sup>475</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 198-9.

<sup>476</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 198.

<sup>477</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 198.

and in doing so, conveys the narrative's intersubjective consciousness, to which I shall return:

Was he [Boris] going to tell them? No. Not yet. He had been in Paris part of that time. There were friends, gossips, various threads and all untrustworthy between Felicity and him. Were the others thinking the same thing? (They were.) She [Scylla] tried a direct attack. 'Boris, you were about Paris part of that time. ...are you sure that you heard nothing? (Never mind our feelings ...)' ... 'I do not like to say... Only it may have been that I heard a story of an Englishwoman... Of a sudden brutal break...' To Scylla his story was an admission.<sup>478</sup>

Further on, Boris finally tells the whole story of his involvement with Felicity and their shared lover T'chiquo.<sup>479</sup> It is intimated, but never stated, that T'chiquo's desertion of Felicity in favour of Boris contributed to the circumstances of her death. Boris' guilt over his part in this love triangle, coupled with his animosity towards Kralin's Bolshevik sympathies, eventually causes him to perform the sacrifice of Kralin.

It is possible to read the whole Taverner group in *Death of Felicity Taverner* as scapegoats; they all feel 'pickled' and 'cut off in the valley,' an indication that they have been collectively cast out or at least disconnected from society at large.<sup>480</sup> If that is the case, then it is perhaps less curious that they should be using that same mechanism to keep their own small cosmos intact, safe from the outside world. However, Kralin is not only considered apart from the Taverner group, but from society at large as well; he is certainly not representative of normative society. If the Taverners are outsiders, Kralin is doubly so, both within the family group and in a wider context.

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<sup>478</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 193.

<sup>479</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 205-9.

<sup>480</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 204.

The reason for Kralin's murder is not his inherent status as an outsider, however; it is rather his attempt to control the embedded narrative that make the Taverners perceive him as a hazard. The only way in which he is able to exert power over them is to take narrative control by publishing his own story about Felicity, which would silence or invalidate theirs. Since he does not succeed in persuading any of the others to subscribe to his narrative instead of Scylla's, he has no power over the group. This finally results in his death, and in the perceived righteousness of Boris' act of killing, because that is the only way to prevent Kralin from taking control of the communal narrative.

'Make us speak': The Communal Narrative in *Death of Felicity Taverner*<sup>481</sup>

The creation of the myth of Felicity Taverner is a communal experience, as the story is told and listened to by several people. It is difficult to tell where one character's input begins and another ends; this forms the basis of the intersubjective flow that creates the foundation upon which the Taverner belief, and thereby its community, is built. Both the story of Felicity and the framing narrative of the novel are told by a stream of several consciousnesses, the quality of which sometimes appears to be seamless, and at other times is self-consciously fragmented. This flow is textually represented in the fluidity of the narration by personal pronoun shifts, just as in the earlier novels, but also through the way in which the omniscient narration describes the Taverner group.

One particular scene that points to an intersubjective consciousness being shared by the characters is that in which Boris tells a part of the story of Felicity's life in Paris, which brings tears to everyone's eyes:

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<sup>481</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 167.

Nanna was sitting with them, as she often did. To the torrent of hard clear words a listener might have heard an accompaniment of tears, four cryings, from two women and two men. The words stopped; the crying went on. ... The salt-flood brings temporary relief. The images that formed in the tension before it fade [sic]. As the pictures in their minds – Aphrodite-in-hiding in a room with eight walls, or a ghost on light-sandalled feet crossing sun-white harbour shores. Meanwhile a number of hands shuffled and groped for handkerchiefs. ... It then occurred to them all that though Boris had been illuminating and even truthful ... they did not know very much more about what had actually happened.<sup>482</sup>

The passage is quoted at length to show why it is reasonable to assume that this is a portrayal of intersubjectivity; ‘they’ are crying, shuffling, groping, but – more importantly – thinking, feeling, and inferring the same things based on what Boris has just told them. They have the same mental images, the same ‘pictures in their minds,’ given to them in Boris’ embedded narrative about Paris, which exemplifies that a story can not only be created communally, as I argue that the larger embedded narrative of Felicity is, but also evoke communal feeling by creating a moment of intersubjectivity.

Despite the importance of community for the narrative, Scylla’s function in *Death of Felicity Taverner* is explicitly stated as being the primary mouthpiece and inventor of Felicity’s myth. The issue of having a female take control of the narrative of the group is addressed in the very first pages of the book, however surreptitiously, by noting Scylla’s awareness of the way in which she as a woman is perceived: ‘Scylla paused, knowing that the men were on the look-out for the bias proper to a female cat. Must allow for it and ignore it in her search for the story’s truth: endure it until its finding justified her.’<sup>483</sup> She paradoxically has to make her story trustworthy enough to justify herself as its composer; the power of the narrative will determine

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<sup>482</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 227.

<sup>483</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 170.

whether she will be afforded the power to claim leadership over the group, but only the leader of the group may ultimately determine what its narrative is supposed to be.

Scylla's appointed audience is Boris, for the reason that Scylla believes that he never met or knew Felicity. Upon his arrival in Starn, she tells him that the group needs him as an outsider to propel the invention of Felicity's story forward: 'Let us try and talk about it after dinner. We have been too silent about it. After dinner, listen to us. Make us speak.'<sup>484</sup> Later, Boris is again mentioned by Scylla as the fuel for her narrative: 'Can you bear it if I go on? It is you who will make us remember everything.'<sup>485</sup> When it later transpires that Boris in fact met Felicity in Paris and has additional information about her, which could conflict with the story that Scylla is building, it appears that he runs the risk of being expelled from the community: 'None of them wished, they even feared, to do him wrong. Yet each was prepared to chance it. Accuse him? The brother and sister were on fire ...'<sup>486</sup> Despite a feeling of reluctance to turn against him, both Felix and Scylla are ready and willing to sacrifice their personal relationship with a friend for the benefit of upholding the narrative that supports their community.

Scylla's role is justified early on in the same way, by simply stating that 'since she told stories well, it was left to her to tell him [i.e. Boris, of the story of Felicity]'.<sup>487</sup> She consciously dictates the premises of the myth, as she 'arrange[s] such facts as they knew into a version of the truth,' using Boris, the intended recipient, 'as a truth-elicitor, a mould into which a series of events, full of omissions

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<sup>484</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 167.

<sup>485</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 184.

<sup>486</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 194.

<sup>487</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 168.



and each distinct and white-hot with their charge of emotion, could be poured.’<sup>488</sup>

The tentative nature of her truth claim is straight from the start made visible here, and further on as she overtly comments: ‘I shall have to try round and say a great many things that are not true until I start a truth.’<sup>489</sup> This highlights the fact that it is those who manage to tell the story and tell it well who are authorised to decide what the truth is in the end.

Other members of the Taverner group occasionally try to intervene in the storytelling process by giving accounts or version of parts of the story that are different from Scylla’s. She accepts these when they conform to the overall general picture that she is trying to paint, as when Felix interrupts her to point out that Felicity ‘was distinctly chaste,’ or when Picus throws in small addendums, like the notion that ‘[Felicity’s death] took murder off her mother’s hands,’ which only causes Scylla to look ‘at him with troubled and adoring love.’<sup>490</sup> She discourages them when the interpolations constitute an encroachment on her authorised account of Felicity, for instance when Felix opines that ‘[s]he was a fool ... or how could this have happened to her?’<sup>491</sup> Scylla says nothing, but those watching her can see ‘the nails drawing blood from the palms of her hands.’<sup>492</sup> Her silence in reproving her brother, and the violence of the act with which she shows him that he has done something wrong, emphasises her power over the narrative, as well as its intention to be not a discussion or argument about what Felicity was, but the ultimate truth. Scylla’s is the first and definitive account, and while others may fill in gaps and

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<sup>488</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 168.

<sup>489</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 168.

<sup>490</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 173.

<sup>491</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 172; 169.

<sup>492</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 169.

suggest amendments, she edits their submissions. Thereby the story is formed communally, but according to her approval. It is firmly stated that this should be so in the very first pages of the novel, together with the reason why the story is needed:

[S]he [Felicity] must have her requiem: give occasion for a good story, and so to her survivors some peace, since ballads were no longer within man's capacity. In their house-saga, her story well-told would keep her [Felicity's] memory brighter than earth's freshest grass. The first recital should have her [Scylla] for rhapsodist. Felix later should write it, the family's professional chronicler.<sup>493</sup>

If the story is to bring peace to the community, it needs to be a coherent narrative; it will not allow for any deviations or untoward complexities. *Death of Felicity Taverner* is as multivocal a narrative as *Armed with Madness*, but the former has something which the latter lacks: clarity of intention. Despite intermittent confusion, there remains a measure of control that brings the narrative back to its point of focus when it threatens to veer off course. This control is personified through Scylla's character.

Felicity's character is moulded to suit the needs of the narrative, rather than the other way around. Also telling in this quotation is the use of the concept 'house-saga,' which returns again in Scylla's framework narrative, the metanarrative that lets the audience get a glimpse of the construction behind her story: '( ... No. I can't stop and tell it [a ghost-story mentioned by Felix]. No. Yours are always about vampires, a pleasing thought but limited. We don't have them here.) I must finish Felicity's house, it's important.'<sup>494</sup> The parentheses used suggest an aside or possibly a thought, but as Scylla is addressing both Boris and Felix within them, it could also be read as simply a demarcation of an off-topic statement, that is something that is

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<sup>493</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 168.

<sup>494</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 175-6.

irrelevant to Felicity's story. In any case, the basis for the saga of Felicity is the house, or rather houses, that the Taverner group designate as theirs.

Both Jane Garrity and Andrew Radford refer to Scylla's storytelling in terms of mundane archival work on the one hand – she is described as an 'archivist,' and as keeping the 'parish archive' – and spiritual visions on the other.<sup>495</sup> Garrity also acknowledges Scylla's power to create and change things through her control of the Taverner narrative:

By revising the conventions of historical narrative, Scylla tacitly questions the veracity of historical chronicles that record only public events represented by the lives of heroic men; ... she creates a space for women, the obscure, domestic life, mystical experience, and memory, however much this seemingly inclusive agenda is mitigated by other forms of parochialism.<sup>496</sup>

Radford likewise points to the 'parochialism' of Scylla's narrative, as he distinguishes between regional history versus heritage, claiming that, in Butts' narratives, 'regional history is a rigidly conceived and exclusive discipline that safeguards family secrets ... while heritage and folk knowledge are more expansive and democratic.'<sup>497</sup> It is for this reason, Radford posits, that Kralin is not privy to the master narrative of the Taverners, and thereby remains an outsider. I build on this assumption, but further claim that the need for the scapegoating and destruction of Kralin is ultimately due to his threat to the Taverner narrative about Felicity and thereby to the very existence of the group itself.

If the novel can be thought of as an account of the creation of a Taverner religion, Scylla acts as a priestess of that religion. It is her mission to 'reduce a

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<sup>495</sup> Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, 218; Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism*, 205; 207.

<sup>496</sup> Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, 217.

<sup>497</sup> Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism*, 205.

hideous chaos to a tragic cosmos.’<sup>498</sup> The choice of words here point to the structuring principle of setting up the narrative around Felicity; initially there are only bits of loose information consisting of a variety of memories from the perspectives of different people, but after the work of re-telling those memories, there is a coherent, structured narrative. Scylla thus builds a community by narrating events, and thereby taking them from a place of chaos to being part of a structure. The construction of narrative is directly related to sacrifice through this principle of creating order and community.

Scylla’s persona is in a way parallel to that of Felicity, in that she too is connected to the earth, bodily and spiritually. Andrew Radford has pointed this out and relates it to Scylla’s position in *Armed with Madness*, in which ‘Butts hypostatizes the link between patrician lineage sanctioned by myth and sacred terrain... anticipating her cousin Felicity Taverner, Scylla becomes intertwined with her surroundings.’<sup>499</sup> According to Radford, Scylla is not only a priestess, but a sort of demi-goddess herself. The aforementioned crucifixion certainly points to this. Scylla is not, however, a dead object of myth but a living, acting subject; Felicity’s life story has ended and can therefore be moulded by what others can remember of it to suit their purposes, while Scylla claims the part of creator and orator of the myth of Felicity and as such becomes the leader of the Taverners.

When it comes to the circumstances of her cousin’s life that she knows less of, for instance Felicity’s life in Paris, Scylla hungrily listens to details of what others have to tell, still keeping her stature as the one who knows the entity of Felicity best. Her speciality does not lie in her knowledge of all the details, but in her

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<sup>498</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 174.

<sup>499</sup> Radford, ‘Defending Nature’s Holy Shrine,’ 131.

arrangement of the available information: 'She began [telling the story] slowly, knowing that they had none of them yet arranged such facts as they knew into a version of the truth.'<sup>500</sup> She thinks of her story as both a catalyst and a mould for an outpouring of emotional discharge that will eventually set and 'leave them with a death in [the mould's] proportions.'<sup>501</sup> Ruth Hoberman has argued that Kralin actualises the role of a parallel mythmaker, using the same tools as Scylla, but to a different end.<sup>502</sup> It is possible to link this theory to my earlier suggestion that Kralin, far from devoid of mana or power, simply uses it to different ends than Scylla. However, while Kralin clearly attempts to threaten Scylla's authority by publishing Felicity's private papers, prefaced by Kralin himself, his myth is never intended as a device for creating and maintaining a community, as Scylla's is.

Scylla is, in effect, creating and editing her family history; she is the omniscient narrator of the embedded narrative, who 'arrange[s the] facts' so as to tell her version of the truth, or rather, to make her version into the one and only truth. The omniscient narrator of the frame narrative lets Scylla illustrate the workings, and among them the possible dangers, of allowing one individual to decide what goes in and what stays out of a specific narrative. The illustration makes clear the amount of power that can be wielded over a group of people by controlling their collective narrative. Furthermore, the different levels of omniscience in the novel implicitly poses a question of what omniscient narration really is, and if it can even exist. The technique exposes the dubiousness of truth claims, unveiling the ultimately subjective, fabricated, and controlled nature of any coherent narrative.

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<sup>500</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 168

<sup>501</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 168

<sup>502</sup> Ruth Hoberman, *Gendering Classicism: The Ancient World in Twentieth-Century Women's Historical Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 49

Interestingly, a third narrative of Felicity's life, which seems to scare all involved parties, pops up in the novel: her own papers. The textual evidence of her own writing threatens to overtake and overturn the narrative that has been carefully built up by the Taverners, and further sparks Mrs Taverner's fear of indecency. As Kralin threatens to publish Felicity's diaries and correspondence, the fear of chaos threatens the community to its core, and a decision is quickly made to stop him.<sup>503</sup> Elizabeth Anderson points out that Felicity's 'death has fixed her character; she is no longer present to challenge others' construction of her identity,' but in fact her papers do pose such a threat – if they were not seen as dangerous to the Taverner narrative, they would hardly be worth suppressing.<sup>504</sup> The appearance and suppression of Felicity's paper further problematises the view of Scylla as archivist, since someone who 'garners ethnographic data systematically' should be interested to see Felicity's papers published.<sup>505</sup>

Butts' empowering of two young women to the point where they are allowed to control the family narrative, fashioning themselves as the figurehead of their household and spiritual leader of their family, challenges traditional gender roles. In the nineteenth century, a number of scholars, among them Jane Harrison, believed that matriarchy had, in what was then referred to as primitive societies, been the universal norm. These scholars assumed that the widespread worship of female fertility goddesses throughout ancient civilisations in Mesopotamia, Egypt and China

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<sup>503</sup> Butts, *The Taverner Novels*, 262.

<sup>504</sup> Anderson, 'The Knight's Move,' 249.

<sup>505</sup> Radford, *Mary Butts and British Neo-Romanticism*, 206.

confirmed that women as a group had had more power than men in prehistory.<sup>506</sup> J. J. Bachofen proposes that matriarchy has its fundament in the spiritual superiority of women. His argument is based on a view of cultural evolution as parallel to biological evolution, where matriarchy is considered a primitive stage of human culture that precedes patriarchy. Part of the evidential basis for the theory is the Greek mythical tradition that predates the Hellenic age.<sup>507</sup> Bachofen's work is the first and most well-known theory of matriarchy, and has been continuously referred to since its publication. The matriarchy hypothesis was largely abandoned by researchers in the second half of the twentieth century, and was never particularly popular with scholars in general. There are few archaeologists and anthropologists today who argue that certain evidence points to a possible matriarchal past, but a handful of cultures are sometimes labelled as matriarchal, although the definition of the term continues to be debated.<sup>508</sup> Matrilineal or matrifocal is usually preferred to the more politically charged term matriarchal.

Harrison, influenced by Bachofen, outlines traces of matriarchy in local Greek cults in *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903):

[I]f these mirror the civilization of the worshippers, this civilization is quite other than patriarchal. Hera... reigns alone at Argos; Athene at Athens is no god's wife... At Eleusis two goddesses reign supreme... At Delphi... Apollo... was preceded by a succession of women goddesses... These

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<sup>506</sup> Heather Ingman, 'Religion and the occult in women's modernism,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers*, ed. Maren Tova Linett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 193.

<sup>507</sup> J. J. Bachofen *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 69-207.

<sup>508</sup> See for instance Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Shamanism and the Origin of States: Spirits, Power, and Gender in East Asia* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008).

primitive goddesses reflect... a state of society known by the awkward term matriarchal...<sup>509</sup>

The influence of this theory on Butts' work has been dealt with on numerous occasions. Andrew Radford argues that Butts' idea of matriarchal society as an ideal came from 'Harrison's repeated stress on "the worship of the Mother," which "emphasizes the group, the race and its continuance.'"<sup>510</sup> Jane Garrity writes of the profound impact Harrison's *Themis* (1912) had on the way in which Butts intertwined femininity, nature and the power of regeneration in her thinking.<sup>511</sup> It is interesting to note that Butts not only takes inspiration from matriarchal theories, but utilises them with a twist. She does not leave the reader with an unambiguous celebration of female power, but questions the right with which Scylla exercises that power, as well as problematises its outcomes through the suppression of Felicity's papers and the questionable value of Kralin's murder.

The Taverners choose to make the story of Felicity's death into one of the battle between good and evil, which in this case also implies opposing tradition to modernity, as well as the English to the foreign. It is suggested that the death of Kralin, an outsider by way of ethnicity and beliefs, acts as a ritual sacrifice that will rid the community of sin. His betrayal of Felicity, his promotion of nihilism, his professed intention of modernising the countryside, in addition to the fact that he is Russian and Jewish, make him into the perfect scapegoat. The ritual murder of

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<sup>509</sup> Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 260-1.

<sup>510</sup> Radford, 'Defending Nature's Holy Shrine,' 145

<sup>511</sup> Garrity, *Step-Daughters of England*, 203



Kralin not only protects Starn from the resort he envisions on the estate, but also guards the community from the supposed evil that he represents.<sup>512</sup>

Kralin is never successful in taking narrative control, then, and this is why he becomes the scapegoat. This conclusion appears to go against what Cousineau and Burke argue: that the scapegoat is the protagonist, as Kralin is usually read as the antagonist to Scylla's protagonist. The narrative model that Cousineau and Burke propose does not fit easily onto the second of the Taverner novels, which is markedly different from *Ashe of Rings* and *Armed with Madness* in that it conveys a more defined storyline and specific outcome of the sacrificial act. It is only because the sacrifice of Kralin is facilitated and approved by the Taverner narrative that it has a reciprocal structuring effect on the community. However, it is still possible to read the same function of the scapegoat – to strengthen a community – into the work as that which Cousineau and Burke suggest. Although the reader is not necessarily invited to feel empathetic towards Kralin, his character is not as one-dimensionally evil as many of Butts' critics would have it. As I have shown, Kralin is only vilified on a superficial level; on the meta-level, he is responsible for the rebuilding of a community that had started to disintegrate with the death of Felicity. Since the events building up to it are told as a communal story, the act of killing becomes part of the Taverner myth, and thereby gains the function of implementing order in the Taverner society, as sacrifices are meant to do, although it is not inherent in the murder itself.

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<sup>512</sup> Reso Foy, *Ritual, Myth and Mysticism*, 82-7.

This chapter has looked at the appearance and function of instances of sacrifice in the novels of Mary Butts. While appearing to be warranted by the need to shield a given community from outside forces threatening to infect that community with impurities, the justification for sacrificial acts in Butts is actually created by the embedded narrative surrounding them. It is the story of the sacrificial act that creates the structure upon which a cohesive community can be built, rather than the sacrificial act in itself.

Having outlined instances of sacrifice in *Ashe of Rings*, *Armed with Madness*, and *Death of Felicity Taverner*, I conclude that Butts depicts mainly unsuccessful sacrificial acts, but does occasionally portray a successful one, such as Van's self-sacrifice on the Rings. Furthermore, the texts make it clear why the sacrifices are so often unsuccessful. If the act is in line with the narrative of the society in which it is performed, it is a successful sacrifice; if not, it is unsuccessful. This requirement is not easily fulfilled, which is why the value of the outcome of most of the sacrifices in the three novels is debatable.

Butts seems to be rewriting the story of the passion of Christ in both *Ashe of Rings* and the Taverner novels, letting her female characters be portrayed as restorers of the community through their respective sacrifices. Van's self-sacrifice enables her to reach a state of transcendence, and she is thereby not only connected to Christ by her ancestor's crucifixion, but also through making a sacrifice that would seem to annihilate her, but in reality gives her a greater sense of being, and ultimately more power within her community than she had at the outset, as the estate is restored to her. Scylla's crucifixion, being incomplete, does not in actual fact restore the faith or the community; it is a failed sacrifice. The crucifixion is re-imagined through Felicity's story after her death; despite her not being actually crucified, she is

described as having fallen victim to an outside force that killed her because she was trying to espouse a philosophy of universal love.

The novels of Mary Butts portray a continual negotiation of the values of communal responsibility versus individual freedom by way of a variety of images of transcendence through sacrifice. The issue of the amount of structure needed in human society in order to avoid chaos and disorder is raised in the novels through a dissection of motives behind sacrificial acts and the outcomes in which they result. Only rarely do Butts' sacrifices actually bring about structure; seemingly, only those that can be classified as self-sacrifice, as in *Ashe of Rings*, do. In other cases, it is the embedded narrative about the sacrifice that facilitates structure, not the sacrifice in itself. As I have suggested, the characters in *Armed with Madness* do not succeed in crafting such a narrative, because they lack a common goal. Without a shared purpose of the collective narrative, as in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, the result is not only that the intended sacrifices are unsuccessful, but that the purpose and direction of the narrative as a whole is unclear.

## Chapter 4

### **‘Are you giving yourself to me to make a self?’ Sacrifice and the Ceaseless Creation of the Self in H. D.’s Madrigal Cycle<sup>513</sup>**

The conception of selfhood in H. D.’s prose is unmistakably tied to sacrifice, both as a part of ritual and as self-abnegation. I will argue in this chapter that the experimental narrative pronoun shifts in H. D.’s Madrigal cycle allow for a negotiation between searching for and giving up the self. H. D. opens up a space for multiple subjectivities within the narratives, producing a continuous widening, questioning, and loosening of boundaries between selves and others, which is repeatedly interrupted by the recreation of a defined, demarcated self. In contrast to the works of Sinclair and Butts, this process never seems to end in H. D.’s work, neither within the individual works nor in her oeuvre as a whole.

The creation of the self in H. D.’s prose is accomplished through sacrifice. Self-effacing deeds combined with images of ritual sacrifice suggest ritual and self-sacrifice are, for H. D., inextricably bound together. The focus of this chapter is how the sacrifice of the self is the necessary starting point for the journey of self-exploration undertaken by the protagonists in the four novels of the Madrigal cycle: *Paint It Today* (written 1921, published 1992), *Asphodel* (written 1921-2, published 1992), *HERmione* (written 1926, published 1981), and *Bid Me to Live (A Madrigal)*

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<sup>513</sup> H. D., *Asphodel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 179.

(written 1939, published 1960).<sup>514</sup> The pronoun shifts in the narration of these stories are the linguistic expression of the continuous fluctuation between sacrifice and (re-)creation of the self. Before moving to the works themselves, I outline the conception of self that can be read through the works of H. D., and I specifically consider the role of the persona of the author and of creative writing for H. D.'s notion of self.

**'If I let go (I, this one drop, this one ego under the microscope-telescope of Sigmund Freud) I fear to be dissolved utterly': Psychoanalysis, Gender-Based Sacrifice, and H. D.'s Notion of Self<sup>515</sup>**

H. D.'s prose fiction suggests a state of constant re-imagination, re-evaluation, and re-invention of the self. Subjectivity, or rather multiple subjectivities, is the starting point and the core of H. D.'s creative legacy. While Matte Robinson argues that in her 'late writing, the focus is on self-knowledge,' I suggest that the exploration of

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<sup>514</sup> For those of H. D.'s works where the years of the first composition and the first publication differ widely, both are given in order to show in what context each work may be understood. The years given are suggested by Susan Stanford Friedman in *Penelope's Web* and are generally agreed upon by H. D. scholars. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H. D.'s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 362; 364. For the sake of simplicity, I do not mention here all the known and supposed revisions made after the first composition. *Bid Me to Live* has a particularly thorny history, and is further said to have been first drafted in 1927 in Helen McNeil's foreword to the 1984 Virago edition. Helen McNeil, introduction to *Bid Me to Live* (London: Virago, 1984), vii. I have used Stanford Friedman's estimate here as it was made slightly later than McNeil's (1989) and with access to H. D.'s papers. Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 360. This work is described in 'Dating H. D.'s Writing,' in *Signets: Reading H. D.*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 46-51. The troubled publication history of H. D.'s prose is further discussed by Stanford Friedman in *Penelope's Web*, 20-3.

<sup>515</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud* (New York: New Directions, 2012), 116.

the self is paramount to H. D. throughout her career as a writer.<sup>516</sup> In a corpus of the kind where all characters and plots seem to have their real world counterparts, it is tempting to draw conclusions based on what is known of the events on which the narratives are based; even more so perhaps, when, as in the Madrigal cycle, the same events are presented in a number of different books and approached in slightly different ways from one novel to the next. Her later work also clearly shows the lack of distinction between reality and fiction in her prose; in an early version of the manuscript of *Majic Ring*, H. D. used the names of real people and then replaced them with fictional ones in a later draft.<sup>517</sup>

The attempt to understand and map these narratives paradoxically draws the context in which they were written into the world of fiction, while simultaneously lending the fiction an air of the documentary. Many existing studies of H. D.'s work in general and the Madrigal cycle in particular are focused on reading her life story through the fiction. For instance, Georgia Johnston refers to *HERmione*, *Asphodel* and *Paint It Today* as 'fictional autobiographies.'<sup>518</sup> In *Penelope's Web*, Stanford Friedman includes a facsimile of the first page of the typescript of *HERmione* on which H. D. has scribbled a key to several of the novel's characters, for instance that George Lowndes corresponds to Ezra Pound – it is difficult to withstand the temptation of reading biography into the fiction with such a hint from the author. Johnston's phrase 'fictional autobiographies' points to the issues surrounding

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<sup>516</sup> Matte Robinson, 'H.D. and Robert Ambelain: Doubles in H. D.'s Late Work,' *Anglophonia/Caliban*, 35 (2014), n. 2. Published online 16 December 2014, retrieved on 27 April 2016. <http://caliban.revues.org/238>.

<sup>517</sup> Robinson, 'H. D. and Robert Ambelain.'

<sup>518</sup> Georgia Johnston, 'H. D. and Gender: Queering the Reading,' in *The Cambridge Companion to H. D.*, ed. Nephie J. Christodoulides and Polina Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63.

interpretations of these works as factual, fictional, or somewhere in between the two. Susan Stanford Friedman similarly argues that H. D.'s authorship needs to be identified as situated somewhere between fact and fiction in her suggestion that '[t]he writer, in H. D.'s view, not only creates the self-in-the-text, but more fundamentally constructs the author in the process of writing. The "authors" ... are personae, who originate in and refer back to the historical writer, but are never her equivalent.'<sup>519</sup> The persona of the author as is known to critics and the public has been molded by the autobiographical tint of her work; the stories of Hilda Doolittle and that of her many fictional alter egos have been shaped and maintained simultaneously to the point where the real person and the characters are nearly indistinguishable from one another. Rather than reading the fictional narratives of the Madrigal cycle as based on fact, it is more suitable to read H. D.'s life story as partially fictionalised.

H. D.'s non-fictional works are sometimes nearly indistinguishable from her prose fiction because they deal with the same events, experiences that H. D. re-wrote continually from the 1920s through to the 1950s: travelling to Europe from her hometown in Pennsylvania, deciding to stay and make a life for herself in England, living through the First World War, various love affairs, the births of one still-born child and one child conceived outside of marriage, meeting Bryher, and experiencing paranormal phenomena – the writing on the wall and the man on the boat are two such incidents that recur often. The perceived affinity between the author and her protagonists continues to have a mutual influence on critical works on H. D. even today. Perdita Schaffner's introduction to *HERmione* concludes with the words 'I'll

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<sup>519</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 34.

never escape the past’ and labels the novel as ‘autobiographical’.<sup>520</sup> Cassandra Laity echoes this in her introduction to *Paint It Today*, which is described as a ‘roman à clef... one of three autobiographical novels (including *Asphodel* and *HER*) exploring H. D.’s love for women.’<sup>521</sup> Robert Spoo, the editor of the 1992 publication of *Asphodel*, writes in his introduction that ‘[a]long with *Paint It To-Day* (written in 1921), *Asphodel* represents one of the earliest surviving examples of [H. D.’s] sustained experiments in autobiographical fiction’.<sup>522</sup> This is not only true for the Madrigal cycle, but for later prose work as well. Matte Robinson argues that ‘the conversion of events from the personal, in-time dimension to the “astral” realm... allows H. D. the emotional distance necessary to take stock of the various figures and symbols found throughout her late prose.’<sup>523</sup> Robinson suggests that the supernatural elements in H. D.’s writing – shifting real life events to the ‘astral’ plane – was a way for her to convert autobiography into fiction. This does not explain the Madrigal cycle, however, as supernatural events are few and far between in these novels compared to her later prose fiction.

Since the Madrigal cycle is so preoccupied with the life story of H. D., it is particularly interesting that the novels deal extensively with the topic of sacrifice, because it affirms the connection between (re-)writing the self and letting go of the self through sacrifice. In H. D.’s work, even the authorial self is re-imagined, according to both H. D. herself and to most critics that have done work on her prose

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<sup>520</sup> Perdita Schaffner, introduction to *HERmione* (New York: New Directions, 1981), xi; viii.

<sup>521</sup> Cassandra Laity, introduction to *Paint It Today* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), xvii.

<sup>522</sup> Robert Spoo, introduction to *Asphodel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), ix.

<sup>523</sup> Robinson, ‘H.D. and Robert Ambelain.’



fiction. As Susan Stanford Friedman has previously indicated, H. D. comments on the autobiographical nature of her prose on several occasions, for example in *Tribute to Freud* (1956) – a memoir of her therapy sessions with Freud in the 1930s – where she writes that she wished to ‘free myself of repetitive thoughts and experiences – my own and those of many of my contemporaries’ by putting pen to paper, but that she ‘could not get rid of the experience by writing about it.’<sup>524</sup> She has consciously tried to write her way through the traumatic events of her life in order to rid herself of her obsession with them and cure herself of the trauma incurred, but that thus far she has been unsuccessful: ‘There was no use telling the story, into the air, as it were, repeatedly, like the Ancient Mariner who plucked at the garments of the wedding guest with that skinny hand.’<sup>525</sup> Yet it seems that telling the stories to Freud did not help H. D. either. She kept on writing them and they still bothered her in later life, which is evidenced in *Magic Mirror* (written 1955-6, published 2012), a late roman à clef about the relationship between H. D. and Erich Heydt where the 1915 stillbirth is again recollected and reformulated, and in the non-fictional *Hirslanden Notebooks* (written 1957-9, published 2015), where she writes: ‘It was Erich [Heydt, H. D.’s psychoanalyst at the time] who dredged or dragged the actual emotional content [of the 1915 stillbirth] from the Depth, about the time of the Birth of my third grandchild, June 1956, before I went to America.’<sup>526</sup>

Thus, despite the fact that psychoanalysis was one of the theoretical tools that H. D. used in order to make sense of the nature of the self, she was not undivided in her attitude to its principles. In *Tribute to Freud*, H. D. displays her great respect for

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<sup>524</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 13; 39. Stanford Friedman, *Penelope’s Web*, ###

<sup>525</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 39-40.

<sup>526</sup> H. D., *Hirslanden Notebooks: An Annotated Scholarly Edition*, ed. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Matte Robinson (Victoria: ELS Editions, 2015), 54.

Freudian typology, but also her concern about the pathologisation of sexuality and implicit misogyny in Freudian theory. She is clearly influenced by Freud regarding the belief in an intersubjective consciousness:

He had dared to say that it was the same ocean of universal consciousness, and even if not stated in so many words, he had dared to imply that this consciousness proclaimed all men one; all nations and races met in the universal world of the dream; and he had dared to say that the dream-symbol could be interpreted; its language, its imagery were common to the whole race, not only of the living but of those ten thousand years dead.<sup>527</sup>

‘Universal consciousness’ is for H. D. connected to what she terms the astral dimension in so far as both concepts relate to a non-physical plane of knowledge that is shared across boundaries of time and space. The concept is similar to Sinclair’s understanding of the ‘Absolute’ and Butts’ tacit agreement between opposites that she calls ‘magic in the world.’ All three concepts indicate an intersubjective experience that joins people together across boundaries of time and space.

Although she apparently wanted to free herself from the events of her past, H. D. also seems to have subscribed to the view that suffering is an inevitable fact of life. In *Notes on Thought and Vision* (written 1919, published 1982) – an early formulation of her ideas on the nature of the mind, body, and spirit – she explains why:

There are two ways of escaping the pain and despair of life, and of the rarest, most subtle dangerous and ensnaring gift that life can bring us, relationship with another person – love. One way is to kill that love in one’s heart. To kill love – to kill life. The other way is to accept that love, to accept the snare, to accept the pricks, the thistle. To accept life – but that is dangerous.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 71.

<sup>528</sup> H. D., *Notes on Thought and Vision and The Wise Sappho* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982), 39.

In other words, love and life are the same thing, suffering is an inevitable aspect of both, and the only way to escape it is to turn one's back on life altogether. The second way mentioned in the quotation is not so much an escape from suffering as it is a reconciliation with the fact that suffering cannot be escaped, a philosophy that is reminiscent of Buddhism.

On the following page, H. D. uses the term 'martyrdom' to refer to the previously mentioned 'thistle' of life and love. She states that

...these notes are concerned chiefly with the mental process that is in some form or other the complement of the life process. That is to say this thistle – life, love, martyrdom – leads in the end – must lead in the logical course of events to death, paradise, peace. That world of death – that is, death to the stings of life, which is the highest life – may be symbolised by the serpent. The world of vision has been symbolised in all ages by various priestly cults in all countries by the serpent. In my personal language or vision, I call this serpent a jelly-fish. The serpent – the jelly-fish – the over-conscious mind. The realisation of this over-conscious world is the concern of the artist. But this world is there for everyone. The minds of men differ but the over-minds are alike.<sup>529</sup>

Here, H. D. has set up three pairs of cause and effect: peace is a consequence of martyrdom, paradise is created by love, and death is the inevitable end result of life. She goes on to equate death with over-consciousness, creativity, or 'the highest life,' through the symbol of the serpent, and further concludes that the realisation of the 'world of death' and the 'world of vision' – which is equated with what she calls the 'over-conscious world' – 'is the concern of the artist.'<sup>530</sup> For H. D. this is of great importance to the construction of the self, in particular as it relates to the self as a creative artist; the universal consciousness or the world of the 'over-mind' is a universally shared state of consciousness that relates to artistic creation and spiritual

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<sup>529</sup> H. D., *Notes*, 40.

<sup>530</sup> H. D., *Notes*, 40.

refinement. As suggested above, this is H. D.'s conception of a plane of reality where an experience of intersubjectivity with not only current but past and future selves is made possible.

However, as opposed to the Freudian sublimated consciousness – to which the over-mind seems to correspond – H. D.'s concept retains sexual instinct and sensual awareness. This brings together martyrdom and creativity, both seen as sacrifices of the self, without the need for a separation of sexuality from the self. Similarly to Mary Butts, and opposed to May Sinclair, H. D. found that artistic creation may co-exist with having a sex life, in women as well as men, and that a willingness to sacrifice the self is essential for both.

The self, then, is for H. D. a multifaceted entity, one that cannot really be simplified and turned into a diagnostic model. Being influenced by Freudian psychoanalytic theory, H. D. was both intrigued and made uncomfortable by the formulaic descriptions of the self that 'the Professor' offered. She suggests that Freud was less deterministic in person, however, despite his tendency to categorise and look for recurring patterns: 'There are all these shapes, lines, graphs, the hieroglyph of the unconscious, and the Professor had first opened the field to the study of this vast, unexplored region. He himself – at least to me personally – deplored the tendency to fix ideas too firmly to set symbols, or to weld them inexorably.'<sup>531</sup> At the same time, she is palpably frustrated when she feels misunderstood by Freud, which is expressed matter-of-factly as 'the Professor was not always right.'<sup>532</sup> It also seems to bother her that Freud does not want her to be systematic or to write about her therapy: 'Again, the Professor asked me if I

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<sup>531</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 92.

<sup>532</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 98.

“prepared” for my sessions ... The Professor repeated that he wanted the work to be spontaneous. He does not encourage me to take notes, in fact, would rather I did not. ... I discontinued the notes, at the Professor’s suggestion.’<sup>533</sup> As Meegan Kennedy states, Freud ‘generates and authorizes his narrative of the self’ and considers patients’ own narrative to be skewed due to their illness; ‘the hysteric cannot herself transcend the knots of her narrative.’<sup>534</sup> H. D. was evidently considered by Freud to be unsuited to construct her own narrative due to her tendency to make it legendary and add supernatural elements to it. She comments on their differing views of elements of the supernatural: ‘The miracle of the fairy tale is incontrovertible; Sigmund Freud would apply, rationalize it.’<sup>535</sup> Wishing to be in charge of her own narrative and thereby her own construction of self, H. D. was not comfortable with being classified as a type according to a logical path of reason, with no consideration for anomalies or divergences from Freud’s schema.

In *Psyche Reborn*, Susan Stanford Friedman discusses at length H. D.’s disagreements with Freud in two chapters, one on their divergent views on ‘greater transcendental issues’ – a quotation from *Tribute to Freud* regarding a recurring discussion between them about materialism versus transcendentalism – and the other on the topic of gender identity and creativity.<sup>536</sup> Friedman writes here that H. D.’s ‘purpose in working with Freud inevitably incorporated a desire to understand herself as woman’, a perception that all too often pervades feminist readings and that

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<sup>533</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 185-7.

<sup>534</sup> Meegan Kennedy, ‘Modernist Autobiography, Hysterical Narrative, and the Unnavigable River: The Case of Freud and H. D.,’ *Literature and Medicine* 30, no. 2 (2012): 244; 248, my emphasis.

<sup>535</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 187.

<sup>536</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 13. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: The Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 87-120; 121-54.

unintentionally reinforces a binary conception of gender.<sup>537</sup> Locked in the binary trap, not even an acceptance of ‘androgyny’ can overcome the inherent devaluation of one in favour of the other: ‘Freud’s insistence on the bisexual nature of all psyches proved liberating to people like H. D. who could not limit themselves to the half life of either masculinity or femininity. But Freud’s value-laden perspective did not legitimate such transcendence of traditional gender identities and sex roles.’<sup>538</sup> In this critique of the Freudian valuation of male above female, there is an implicit agreement with what is being criticised in the conviction of there being two sexes, that it would be ‘limiting’ to conform to one of them wholly – it suggests that the reason for H. D.’s prominence as a writer is because she transcends the limitations that are perceived to be inherent in femininity.

Deirdre Anne Pettipiece falls into a similar trap when she notices that H. D. does not fit easily into any of the categories that Pettipiece sets up as binary pairs – male/female, hetero-/homosexual, American/European – an issue she tries to solve by suggesting that ‘at different points in her life, H. D. is one or the other, never successfully “both.” Like her sexuality, H. D.’s nationality shifts but does not stick’.<sup>539</sup> This problem is created by the misconception that all things should be forced into categories, even avant-garde authors whose very purpose it is to not fit into any order. Claiming that H. D. is not ‘successfully’ both American and European or hetero- and homosexual is indicative of a low valuation of being between categories.

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<sup>537</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, 31.

<sup>538</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, 129.

<sup>539</sup> Deirdre Anne Pettipiece, *Sex Theories and the Shaping of Two Moderns: Hemingway and H. D.* (London: Routledge, 2002), 88.

The same problem resurfaces in Friedman's reasoning in *Penelope's Web* about H. D.'s prose in relation to her poetry. The work that H. D. produced before the First World War and rose to fame for was primarily poetry, and this fact – in conjunction with the checkered publication history of her prose – has rendered a common conception of the prose works as inferior in quality. The feminisation of prose and the adjacent historical view of the novel as a lesser form of literature than poetry is brought up by Stanford Friedman in her discussion of a letter from H. D. to John Cournos, a valued friend and confidant during the war: 'Echoing the cultural division of labor into (male) production and (female) reproduction, H. D.'s poet is the primary producer of art, while the prose writer is the secondary reproducer of the poet, merely a means to a poetic teleology. The novelist fills the position of wife, handmaiden and helpmeet to the authentic artist, the poet.'<sup>540</sup> Stanford Friedman writes that it is the idea that the perceived femininity inherent in prose – reproduction, telling a tale, not to mention the history of the novel form – is what makes it seem artistically weaker to H. D. than her poetry. However, it is far more likely that it is simply a matter of H. D. being discouraged from writing prose by those around her; Richard Aldington emphatically instructed H. D. not to write prose in a 1918 letter – 'Prose? No!' he wrote to her in 1918 – and Cournos evidently gave her negative feedback on the prose draft she sent him.<sup>541</sup> His letter to H. D. has not survived, but it can be inferred from her reply that he did not advise her to keep working on the draft: 'You are quite right about the novel and I shall certainly chuck

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<sup>540</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 34.

<sup>541</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 33.

it.<sup>542</sup> She did not consider her poetry to be as self-exploratory as her prose, and she makes apologies for her writing, claiming to be unable to keep her ‘personal self’ out of her prose: ‘I do not put my personal self into my poems. But my personal self has got between me and my real self, my real artist personality. And in order to clear the ground, I have tried to write things down – in order to think straight, I have endeavoured to write straight.’<sup>543</sup> This echoes her later declaration in *Tribute to Freud* that she tried to use writing as a way to ‘free’ herself of ‘experiences – my own and those of many of my contemporaries’ – clearly referring to the traumatic events of the war years.<sup>544</sup>

Stanford Friedman notes the apologetic tone of the letter to Cournos and suggests that H. D. ‘adapts a rhetoric of duplicitous self-effacement that reflects their different positions within the gender system.’<sup>545</sup> While I agree that H. D. is being self-effacing, there is nothing in the letter to suggest that she is being rhetorical or dishonest. On the contrary, the problematic history of the creation and publication of her prose, in addition to the letter in its entirety, strongly suggests that the criticism is internalised and that she did indeed ‘chuck’ several novels that were not considered fit for publication in her lifetime.

I would argue that it is possible to think of H. D.’s prose as a subversion of the dichotomy of the whore/Madonna complex, given the strong feminist potential of her work. Containing such latent possibilities, the prose venture must have produced

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<sup>542</sup> Letter from H. D. to John Cournos, 9 July (no year given, but 1919 is suggested in Stanford Friedman, *Penelope’s Web*, 34). MS Eng 998.1 56, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>543</sup> H. D. to Cournos, 9 July.

<sup>544</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud*, 13.

<sup>545</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope’s Web*, 34.



ambivalence within H. D.; she repeatedly abandoned her prose, only to be drawn back to it again, in a never-ending game of trying ‘to clear the ground’.<sup>546</sup> H. D. writes to Cournos that ‘the novel is not intended as a work of art’, and intertwines compliments to him with further self-criticism: ‘You are and have been for a long time, a symbol of strength to me. ... Your knowledge of my strength helps me as well as your knowledge of my weakness. ... Don’t take my novel seriously, dear John, though the fact that you have done so is another proof of your good faith.’<sup>547</sup> Not only is H. D. apologetic – she seems almost ashamed of the ‘personal self’ that has crept into the narrative, which she feels ought not to be taken ‘seriously’. The letter epitomises her difficulties as a woman writer, but her continued work and its subsequent publication shows the gradual acceptance of such subversive works of fiction, be they regarded as art or not.

Writing through the trauma could have been an empowering way of being in control of the story for H. D. In the authorial position, she wielded a power over past events, as she could tell the story from whichever perspective she wanted and omit or change details that she found unimportant or detrimental. However, the struggle to gain control over her own narrative was affected by the problematics of male–female power relations, and impeded by feedback given by various male contemporaries – a factor that is likely to have played a part in H. D.’s many edits of the manuscript of *Bid Me to Live* and her decision not to publish *Asphodel*. H. D. thought of *Asphodel* as an ‘early edition’ of *Bid Me to Live* and left instructions, both in a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson and on the manuscript itself, to destroy it. *Bid Me to Live* was first drafted in February – March 1939 and subsequently went through edits later

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<sup>546</sup> H. D. to Cournos, 9 July.

<sup>547</sup> H. D. to Cournos, 9 July.

that year, and then again in various periods during the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>548</sup>

It should be noted that Marianne Moore gave H. D. favourable feedback on *Paint It Today* in a 1921 letter: 'The expressing of the inexpressible is carried to a high pitch of perfection; the whole thing is poignant – literally filtered through a rainbow. It is surely the spectrum of a consciousness.'<sup>549</sup> As shall be noted further on, the problematic type of feedback that H. D. received from male contemporaries and friends was fictionalised in several of the Madrigal novels and is particularly noticeable in *Bid Me to Live*.

The demands for women's sacrifice due to male–female power relations also factor into H. D.'s fictional works. For instance, in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (written 1946-7, published 2007) Delia's lack of self-definition increases as she gets more involved and obsessed with Lord Howell and he, in turn, becomes dismissive of her. She is asked by him to give up her involvement with spiritualism; he thinks that he has a prerogative to be involved in that world and tries to use his status as a decorated war hero to oust Delia as his rival. He increasingly treats her with contempt, prompting her to suppose that he thinks of her as a 'being of a lower order' – although he explicitly says that she is not – because he suggests that her relayed messages from the beyond are false.<sup>550</sup> He is, in effect, trying to devalue her work so that she will give it up.

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<sup>548</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 141; 364.

<sup>549</sup> Quoted in Annette Debo, *The American H. D.* (Iowa City: The University of Iowa Press, 2012), 55. Debo writes that Moore continually encouraged H. D. in her prose writing, and that H. D. felt understood by Moore due to their shared cultural background.

<sup>550</sup> H. D. (as Delia Alton), *The Sword Went Out to Sea (Synthesis of a Dream)* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 32.

Already in her early career, H. D. took an interest in the sacrifice of women for the benefit of the community; in 1919, *The Egoist* published what is in its title called a translation of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* by H. D., which should really be termed an interpretation, since '[a] literal, word-for-word version of so well-known an author as Euripides would be useless and supererogatory' as the writer herself put it.<sup>551</sup> It is significant that H. D. took a specific interest in ancient Greece because of what the remains of that culture (as she knew it) meant to her; Elizabeth Willis argues that '[m]ore than anything, H. D.'s war experience solidified the importance of the transhistorical aspects of her work, with an emphasis on poetry's capacity for "spiritual realism" in the context of political history.'<sup>552</sup> While it is certainly true that H. D. used her interest in Hellenism to deal with war trauma and similarly used her war experience to conjure up historical events in her imagination, it was not only the war that served as a connection between H. D. and Hellenism. It may have come to strengthen a fascination that was already there before the start of the war, the existence of which is clear from her early Imagist poetry: one example being the four poems 'Hermes of the Ways', 'Incantation', 'Oread', and 'Priapus,' all published in *The Egoist* in February 1914. As previously argued by Claire Buck, the mingling of aesthetics and spirituality that H. D. recognised in Hellenism is outlined in *Notes On Thought and Vision* and later in *Paint It Today*, where Midget tells Althea of a statue of Artemis that is a work of art as well as a representation of a revered and powerful goddess: 'H. D. takes this view [as found in Jane Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*

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<sup>551</sup> 'Choruses from Iphigenia in Aulis,' *The Egoist* 2, no. 11 (1915): 171. This is from an excerpt published in the magazine four years before the entire play was printed in book form.

<sup>552</sup> Elizabeth Willis, 'A Public History of the Dividing Line: H. D., the Bomb, and the Roots of the Postmodern,' *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 63, no. 1 (2007): 102.

(Bradford: Moonraker Press, 1978), 10-1] that Greek drama and myth had their origins in religious ritual as the basis for her own ideas about the role of contemporary art.’<sup>553</sup> It is arguable that this aesthetic not only derives from Hellenism, but from the age of Decadence during which H. D. was in her formative years. Cassandra Laity posits that ‘H. D. constructed a female Romantic myth of origins from Decadent monologue or lyric songs of deviant desire’ in *HERmione*.<sup>554</sup>

H. D.’s *Iphigenia in Aulis* asks the question of who will need to be sacrificed in the war in order for the gods of victory to be placated. At first, Iphigenia does not go to her sacrifice willingly, since she is not initially given the sense of being sacralised either before or after the killing. Rather, she thinks of herself as being left in disgrace and cast aside after the rite:

And like a little beast  
...  
They will leave you  
With stained throat ...  
And we ask this – where truth is,  
Of what use is valour and is worth?  
For evil has conquered the race,  
There is no power but in base men,  
Nor any man whom the gods do not hate.<sup>555</sup>

This transformation of ritual sacrifice into a murder that does not so much cleanse the community as vilify it, and ultimately place a curse upon it, is a signal that the ordering principle of sacrifice has gone awry. The ritual ceremony that was intended to bring peace and stability has become an oppressive power structure that attempts

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<sup>553</sup> Claire Buck, *H. D. and Freud: Bisexuality and a Feminine Discourse* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf), 1991, 77.

<sup>554</sup> Cassandra Laity, *H. D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 42.

<sup>555</sup> H. D., *Choruses from the Iphigenia in Aulis and the Hippolytus of Euripides*. Translated by H. D. (London: The Egoist Ltd, 1919), 17.

to force order back into place through the performance of a violent and destructive sacrificial rite, of which, it appears, the victim does not approve: 'O I am miserable: / You cherished me, my mother, / But even you desert me. / I am sent to an empty place.'<sup>556</sup> The resemblance to Christ's sense of being forsaken on the cross is evident. It appears that it is necessary for the victim to approve to make the act into a sacrifice here, or at least that the sacrifice is worth more where the victim is ready and willing to go to her death, as the narrative is rejecting the sacrifice in this instance.

However, as Achilles steps in to defend Iphigenia, an act of heroism that she understands may rob him of his life, she decides to go with dignity and even readiness to her slaughter. This affords her the respect and affection of the community, who realise what she is prepared to give up for them, something that she almost appears to assume: 'Hail me now. ... For I come to do sacrifice, / To break the might of the curse, / To honour the queen, if she permit, / The great one, with my death.'<sup>557</sup> She also states her forgiveness of the community that has brought its calamity on her:

Hail, land of my birth.  
Hail Mykenae, where I once dwelt – [calling upon the city of Perseus] – you  
brought me to the Greek light  
And I will not hold you guilty  
For my death.  
*Ch.* Your name will never be forgotten,  
Your honour will always last.  
*Iph.* Alas, day, you brought light,  
You trailed splendour  
You showed us god:  
I salute you, most precious one,  
But I go to a new place,

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<sup>556</sup> H. D., *Choruses from the Iphigenia in Aulis*, 19.

<sup>557</sup> H. D., *Choruses from the Iphigenia in Aulis*, 21.

Another life.<sup>558</sup>

The community, in the voice of the Chorus, promises that her sacrifice is not in vain and that she will not be forgotten. The ‘new life’ promised to Iphigenia is reminiscent of Christian martyrdom in the sense that her death for a higher cause will be rewarded with a good afterlife. It also evokes war sacrifice, if giving your life for your country can be considered the most honourable death imaginable.

In the long poem *Helen in Egypt* (written 1952-4, published 1961), H. D. re-writes the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Janice S. Robinson’s reads scapegoating into Iphigenia’s fate and comments: ‘A difference between Girard and H. D. is that Girard does not regard woman as the sacrificial victim, while H. D. sees her as the perpetual object of man’s violence.’<sup>559</sup> While it is interesting that Robinson sees the parallel between H. D. and Girard, she loses sight of H. D.’s complexity when writing sacrifice as a concept, not just as an archaic act of violence; a woman is not just an object of violence, but becomes a subject in her own right if that violence is sacrifice, in which case the act is not only the destruction of Iphigenia as an object but also the creation of her as a subject. Sarah Graham’s article ‘Falling Walls: Trauma and Testimony in H. D.’s *Trilogy*,’ which also deals with H. D.’s later poetry, similarly reads sacrifice as an act of pure violence, using *Trilogy* as an example of the expression of H. D.’s ‘traumatised poetic.’ Based on a reading of *Iphigenia in Aulis* and the biographical information on H. D.’s experiences of trauma in both world wars, Graham posits that H. D. considers sacrifice a ‘threat’, which is a

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<sup>558</sup> H. D., *Choruses from the Iphigenia in Aulis*, 22.

<sup>559</sup> Janice S. Robinson, *H. D.: The Life and Work of an American Poet* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), 376.

one-sided approach to sacrifice that does not acknowledge its potential for self-realisation.<sup>560</sup>

Robinson further posits that '[i]n her translation H. D. presents herself as both Iphigenia and Helen...she, Iphigenia, is being sacrificed so that the Greek (the poets) may instead have Helen, the ideal impersonal presentation of H. D., through her poetry.'<sup>561</sup> Again, this points to a highly problematic distinction between H. D. the autobiographical, personal prose writer and H. D. the 'impersonal' poet – or perhaps between Hilda Doolittle the human being and H. D. the symbol of Imagism – that is mingled with the idea of H. D. as either lascivious or sexless. In Robinson's reading, Iphigenia is a passionate, almost hysterical woman and Helen a cold, senseless marble statue to be worshipped, which simply boils down to an understanding of H. D. from a Freudian and male perspective, as these figures neatly fit into the two sides of the whore/madonna complex.

In *Bid Me to Live*, working with a Greek classic is fictionalised – Julia Ashton is making a translation in much the same manner that H. D. went about interpreting *Iphigenia* – and here the very translation process is described in terms of sacrifice:

She was self-effacing in her attack on those Greek words, she was flamboyantly ambitious. ... She was bargaining with each word. She brooded

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<sup>560</sup> Sarah Graham, 'Falling Walls: Trauma and Testimony in H. D.'s *Trilogy*,' *The Journal of the English Association* 56 (2007): 307. Other work on H. D.'s later writing includes Elizabeth Anderson's essay 'Burnt and Blossoming: Material Mysticism in *Trilogy* and *Four Quartets*,' which finds that H. D. and T.S. Eliot portray redemption through two divergent aspects of the relationship between the spiritual and the worldly. The essay does not deal with sacrifice or martyrdom, but provides insight into the syncretic mysticism of H. D. Elizabeth Anderson, 'Burnt and Blossoming: Material Mysticism in *Trilogy* and *Four Quartets*,' *Christianity and Literature* 62, no. 1 (2012): 121-142.

<sup>561</sup> Robinson, *H. D.*, 100.

over each word, as if to hatch it. Then she tried to forget each word, for “translations” enough existed and she was no scholar. She did not want to “know” Greek in that sense. ... She was arrogant and she was intrinsically humble before this discovery. Her own. Anyone can translate the meaning of the word. She wanted the shape, the feel of it, the character of it, as if it had been freshly minted. ... She wanted to coin new words.<sup>562</sup>

As in *Death of Felicity Taverner*, where Scylla’s control of the narrative allows her to plan and condone a scapegoating in order to bring structure to her community, Julia connects sacrifice with being in charge of storytelling, but in a different way. Here, it is the immersion of the self into the story that in the end allows her to assume power over it. Julia tries to immerse herself completely in the Greek language in order to be able to make it her own. To effect this, she must be ‘self-effacing;’ it is as though the words will not let her master them unless she is prepared to offer herself as a victim of the words. The paradoxical nature of being both arrogant and humble at the same time reflects the ambivalent quality of her sacrifice, since she is giving up her self only to gain ownership of the Greek words and thereby, paradoxically, retrieve a sense of pride in herself.

The most significant point for my thesis is that these accounts – fictional as well as real – of struggling for power in a gender hierarchy, and having to make adjoining sacrifices, are centred on the process of constructing a narrative; even the ‘spiritual work’ done by Delia Alton may be considered creative in the sense that it enables her to conjure up hitherto unknown worlds and, as the supposed author of *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, put these images into writing. For H. D., creating a narrative entails the creation of a subject, a narrator, a self. This entity may be destabilised and elusive, as H. D.’s narrators often are, but its existence is still palpable and – more importantly – in charge of the narrative.

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<sup>562</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 162-3.



**‘The state she had been in was a deadly crucifixion’: Sacrifice and Narrative Negotiations of the Self in the Madrigal Cycle<sup>563</sup>**

The protagonists and intermittent narrators of the Madrigal cycle all seek out various ways in which to shape their respective identities throughout their narratives. In fact, the perennial dynamic of discovery and loss of the self is the driving force behind the movement in the novels, for when H. D.’s characters lose themselves, they paradoxically also find their true inner selves. In the course of the growth of these characters, they frequently stumble in the attempt to find themselves. While they search for identities in the mythscape of ancient Greece, they are simultaneously told by others who they are or what they should be. This invariably triggers a downward spiral into self-doubt and depression, which sometimes culminates in a complete nervous breakdown. Similarly to May Sinclair, H. D. portrays the difficulty of both carving out a true identity for oneself as a woman while maintaining a normative role in early twentieth-century society. It is only in solitude, in nature, through writing, and – for H. D. – in lesbian love affairs that the characters find peace of mind and a space where they are allowed, unapologetically, to be themselves.

It is through writing that H. D. explores the creation of the self as a subject, and sacrifice enables her to express the tensions between the establishment and the inevitable destruction of that subject. Matte Robinson states that, in *Vale Ave* (written 1957, published 1982), “‘we’ burn on the altar that is ‘love,’ suggesting that love consumes something as a sacrifice. Most literally, what is sacrificed is the first person plural, and, it follows, also the singular.”<sup>564</sup> In this section, I will pick this discussion up where Robinson leaves it, and look at how the pronoun shifts in

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<sup>563</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 113.

<sup>564</sup> Matte Robinson, *The Astral H. D.* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 127.

the narrative voice that occur in the four novels of the Madrigal cycle create the space for a negotiation of definitions of the self.

‘[S]he is HER and I am HER’: The Circular Formation of the Self in *HERmione*<sup>565</sup>

H. D.’s preoccupation with the self is perhaps never so obvious as in *HERmione*, in which the eponymous character constantly appears to question her individuality, notably in the declaration on the very first page that “‘I am Her,” she said to herself... “Her, Her, Her.””<sup>566</sup> The statement is repeated throughout the text, as though Hermione has a need to constantly remind herself of her identity: ‘I am Her. I am Hermione.’<sup>567</sup> Hermione is searching for selfhood through a community of creativity or spirituality; to create her self as a subject, she must also be validated as such by others. Before she gets to the point of meeting people with whom she feels an artistic or spiritual connection, she is dependent on her fiancé George because he appears to be the only one who understands her until she meets Fayne Rabb, the first ever female object of her passion. *HERmione* portrays several instances of frustration with being unable to express to others the affinity she feels with some people; one example is where Hermione is talking with a girl called Nellie – with whom she feels no particular connection – who asks her about Fayne Rabb: ‘How to get it across to Nellie for she is HER and I am HER.’<sup>568</sup> Here, Hermione thinks of herself and Fayne as so intimately related that they are one and the same person, a phenomenon that is expressed even more clearly in *Paint It Today*, as I will show below.

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<sup>565</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 131.

<sup>566</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 3.

<sup>567</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 29.

<sup>568</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 131.

*HERmione* is mainly told in the third person – as are the other three Madrigal novels – but first person narration breaks through intermittently, beginning just after the first expressions of disassociation with the self: ‘...she was not Hermione, she was not any more Her Gart, what was she? ... I am Her Gart, my name is Her Gart. I am Hermione Gart.’<sup>569</sup> There is no doubt a clear identification of narrator with character here, and in this novel the relationship is not further obscured by shifts between first and third person narration.

Hermione’s sense of identity and sense of self, however, are repeatedly questioned, and, with them, the identity and self of the narrator. This does not mean that there is any confusion as to the centre of narrative gravity, since the memories, thoughts, and feelings remain recognisable to the narrator/character, both as ‘her’ and ‘I’ even if neither perspective succeeds in identifying her self as ‘Her’ or Hermione:

Her negated Her and all the poems I slaved over, copied out and out were no use. Were all the poems no use? Some poems are useful one way, some poems another (she ran to catch the trolley) and I used one poem. “*Thou has forgotten,*” she chanted in an undertone as she slid into a side seat, “*O summer swallow*” and I’m glad it’s empty this time. “Do not spit on the floor” she read and “Wear Washable Whalebone” and “Extra, Extra, Extra” a boy shouted and “All about the big fire” above the rumbling wheels. I’ll be late. Eugenia will be furious.<sup>570</sup>

Hermione feels that her self as an object, the third person pronoun and the short version of her given name, will suffocate or negate her as a subject. The poetry she produces, or re-produces by copying, is threatened by the object self. It is significant that the text also points to her name as restrictive: ““Hermione is a gull name...you read beautifully” cut up and across the heavy thing that she now saw was destined to

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<sup>569</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 4.

<sup>570</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 160.

entrap Her. I will be caught finally, I will be broken. Not broken, walled in, incarcerated. Her will be incarcerated in Her.<sup>571</sup> Her, short for Hermione, is only distinguishable from the word 'her' through context or when it is placed mid-sentence, creating a muddling effect for the reader, who has to stop and consider the sense of sentences that include both the name and the pronoun: 'Her ankles, concentrated terror (that scythe shadow) impelled Her Gart... Her negated Her...' <sup>572</sup>

The continuous wordplay on the short version of Hermione's name and the third person singular feminine pronoun increases the sense that an identity based on words is not a real, stable form of self, but that the self must constantly transform and change, as sacrifice too suggests. It is suggested by Matte Robinson and Demetrios P. Tryphonopoulos that the constant reiteration of Hermione's name is a way for her to merge her subject and object selves.<sup>573</sup> I propose that, rather than being a strategy for overcoming the opposition between experiencing the self as a subject versus object, the textual repetition of 'HER', 'Her', and 'her' – the continuous play on the word as given name and pronoun – expresses the sensation of fear as well as that of freedom involved in sacrifice, because it entails both the risk of losing the self and the simultaneous chance of strengthening the self. It acknowledges the never-ending dialectic or negotiation between subjectivity and objectivity, and enables the realisation of the impossibility of ever merging the two for a lengthy period of time. Moments of convergence do occur, but these are brief, flighty, dream-like flashes of transcendence: 'For the moment, holding to the

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<sup>571</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 215.

<sup>572</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 22; 160.

<sup>573</sup> Matte Robinson and D. M. Tryphonopoulos, 'HERmione and other prose', *The Cambridge Companion to H. D.*, ed. Nephie J. Christodoulides and Polina Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 132.

moment, I know this. I was a wire, connecting me with such things in my incandescence...wire flared out. Hermione will say all that was some dream.<sup>574</sup>

Hermione tries to re-establish a connection with her old self and identity through words and works of fiction. Considering the fact that her parents have taken her name from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, she identifies with the work itself: 'I am out of the Temple Shakespeare. I am out of *The Winter's Tale*. ...I am out of this book.'<sup>575</sup> *The Winter's Tale* is mentioned only briefly, but it has a number of intertextual parallels on various planes. In the play, Queen Hermione is suspected of being pregnant with a child that is not her husband's, although she – as opposed to H. D.'s Hermione in *Asphodel* – turns out to be innocent of adultery. It may be inferred that the use of *The Winter's Tale* indicates that Hermione is not to be considered as being guilty of any crime, since her husband starts having an affair long before she becomes pregnant with Vane; the rules applied in society do not apply to Hermione in this case, as she does not appear to consider herself to be in the wrong by having a relationship with Vane. Shakespeare's character ends up calling the child Perdita, which is what H. D. named her own daughter, who was the result of an extramarital affair with Cecil Gray.

When losing hold of her self, Hermione describes herself as spinning in '[c]oncentric circles' and thereby being 'smudged out.'<sup>576</sup> The twirling is reminiscent of the whirling dervishes of sufism, who meditate by performing a spinning movement that allows them to let go of themselves in order to experience absolute

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<sup>574</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 215.

<sup>575</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 32.

<sup>576</sup> H. D., *HERmione* 73. Elizabeth Anderson also takes note of 'the spiralling motions of *Trilogy*' in her article on H. D. and dance: 'Dancing Modernism: Ritual, Ecstasy and the Female Body,' *Literature & Theology* 22, no. 3 (2008): 355.

reality. This portrays a conflict that consists of the longing for an individual self and simultaneously realising that it does not exist away from community – the self can only be found as part of a larger whole. It is also reminiscent of the idea of circular or ritual time; the suspension of reality through gyration is reimagined through the circularity of narratives that take place on several different planes yet belong within the same storyline, such as *The Sword Went Out to Sea*. Historical circularity is also effected in the Magna Graeca novels *Hedylus* and *Palimpsest*, as well as in the long poem *Helen in Egypt*, where by rewriting historical events with a feminist spirit, H. D. recuperates a wounded female history. Circularity is thereby both indicative of losing control and regaining it.<sup>577</sup>

Another such twirling incident can be found in the short story ‘Kora and Ka’ (1930). In this story, as in much of H. D.’s prose, the first person narrator shares its identity with the protagonist John Helforth, yet the character is sometimes described in the third person, as separate from the narrator. In the first pages of the story, the narrator presents itself as the conscious self or the spiritual self within Helforth: ‘I am that sort of shadow they used to call a Ka, in Egypt. A Ka lives after the body is dead. I shall live after Helforth is dead.’<sup>578</sup> The mind of Helforth, who is deeply traumatised by the war and has grave doubts about his own identity and existence, is described as ‘[treading] a ferris-wheel’: ‘His mind rotated ... ground round and round, till Helforth forgot man, men, women. Helforth forced Helforth to go on in

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<sup>577</sup> For an analysis of circling and spiralling in *Trilogy* (written and first published as three separate volumes in the 1940s, first published as one volume 1973), see Susan Gubar, ‘The Echoing Spell of H. D.’s *Trilogy*,’ in *Signets: Reading H. D.*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 297-317.

<sup>578</sup> H. D., *Kora and Ka with Mira-Mare* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 9.

ferris-wheel of iron circle'.<sup>579</sup> Here, the spinning movement is again indicative of losing grip of oneself and splitting the self into object and subject: 'If he lets go the hold that I have over Helforth, Helforth will begin the old tread wheel ... [that] will crush me beneath it'.<sup>580</sup> The narrating persona is in danger of being destroyed by Helforth's gyration; it is caught in the bind of being a part of him, yet perceiving itself as separate entity due to Helforth's mental instability: 'There are two things that mitigate against me, one is my mind, one is the lack of it'.<sup>581</sup> Just as in *HERmione*, the ability to eradicate or distort the self in a sort of spiritual centrifuge is considered with both anxiety and anticipation, even though both texts seem to settle on regarding it as a perilous exercise.

The danger of having an unstable conception of self is also expressed as an anxiety with regard to names for H. D. and her narratives. Just as her fictional alter ego is named Hermione Gart, Julia Ashton, Midget Defreddie, and so on, so did Hilda Doolittle – or Hilda Aldington under which she sometimes published during her marriage – wish to fragment her own name and authorship with a plethora of pseudonyms: John Helforth is the intended pseudonym for *Nights* (written 1935, published 1986), Helga Dart is the name used for the author on the typescript of *Paint It Today*, Delia Alton for *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, and Helga Doorn, which was used on the title page of the *HERmione* manuscript as well as her screen name in for example *Borderline*, the 1930 film made with Bryher and Kenneth Macpherson.<sup>582</sup> Stanford Friedman further elucidates on the topic of alter egos as

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<sup>579</sup> H. D., *Kora and Ka*, 15.

<sup>580</sup> H. D., *Kora and Ka*, 14-5.

<sup>581</sup> H. D., *Kora and Ka*, 9.

<sup>582</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 35; 41; 42. A longer discussion of H. D.'s alter egos and pen names can be found in this volume on pages 35-46.

indicative of both intradiegetic and extradiegetic differential selves in H. D.'s writing:

The writer, in H. D.'s view, not only creates the self-in-the-text, but more fundamentally constructs the author in the process of writing. The 'authors' of her poetry and prose are different – the one visionary, the other personal. They are personae, who originate in and refer back to the historical writer, but are never her equivalent. Fabricated, but not false, each 'author' has her own voice and serves a special function within the evolution of the living woman writer. H. D.'s self-reflexive construction of these 'authors' is characteristically modernist, analogous to Yeats's self-conscious theorizing about masks and to Pound's statement on poetic identity in 'Vorticism'[1914]: 'In the "search for oneself," ...one gropes, one finds some seeming verity. One says, "I am" this, that, or the other, and with the words scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing.'<sup>583</sup>

Both Helforth and Alton also appear as fictional characters in *Kora and Ka* and *Sword* respectively. It may be more useful to think of these as heteronyms – such as those used by Fernando Pessoa – rather than pseudonyms, since Helforth and Alton are 'characters' in their own right who have characteristics that are separate from those of H. D.

Hermione's attention is directed to the word 'AUM' when she looks at a book that stands beside *The Winter's Tale* on the shelf and thinks that it could be *The Mahabharata*, an ancient Indian epic, or 'one of those translations,' presumably meaning a translation of an Eastern classical text into English.<sup>584</sup> When Hermione realises the sacredness invested in the word, she is instinctively scared of its implications: 'I am the word AUM. Hermione dropped the volume. This frightened her. God is in a word. God is in a word. God is in HER. She said, "HER, HER, HER. I am Her, I am Hermione... I am the word AUM." This frightened her.'<sup>585</sup> The

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<sup>583</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 34-5.

<sup>584</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 32.

<sup>585</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 32.



syllable □, commonly transcribed as Aum or Om, is considered by Hindus to be the holiest of all syllables. It is a representation of God or Brahman, the absolute reality or world soul. It is as though Hermione unconsciously knows about the sacred nature of this syllable that links words, narration and the sacred. It is not like any other name, word, or syllable, and it has to be treated with more respect than other, more mundane words. The deep sense of significance that comes over her is too much to bear at this stage; she tries instead to repeat her given name so as to keep herself grounded and present in corporeality. Finding her true identity in Aum is a suggestion that her real, inner self is not made up of the physical person whose name is Hermione, but rather of the intangible soul, which is part of a greater whole: an entity with a sacred name that may be designated as the world soul, absolute reality, or supreme existence. This notion is present in Hinduism and various versions of philosophical idealism, but also in Daoism, a belief system H. D. apparently was familiar with: it is mentioned briefly in *Notes on Thought and Vision* (1919) as the ‘philosophy of the Tao.’<sup>586</sup> It is hardly surprising that H. D. knew about Daoism since she was acquainted with Arthur Waley, a translator and scholar of Chinese poetry and religious texts.

Clearly, names are meaningful but also interchangeable for H. D., as can be seen by the many different names the protagonist is called in any one novel of the Madrigal cycle, and in *Asphodel*, where Fayne Rabb is referred to as Josepha on at least two occasions.<sup>587</sup> The character of Fayne Rabb is presumed to be modelled on Frances Gregg, the first woman with whom H. D. fell in love. Josepha was Frances Gregg’s middle name and the Gregg character in *Paint It Today* is called Josepha. It

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<sup>586</sup> H. D., *Notes*, 42.

<sup>587</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 13; 16.

is possible, then, that this is only a slip of the pen in so far as H. D. had Gregg in mind when writing the passage. She had not prepared the manuscript for publication; if she had, these two name changes may have been taken out. Robert Spoo, the editor, does not comment on this slip in his 1992 introduction.

Hermione's whole self cannot be found in only her given name, then, because it is more complex; different aspects of her are associated with different names. Her search for an identity in words thereby concludes with the discovery of something so momentous as to be both incomprehensible and even frightening; although Aum is a word, it is a sacred word that contains the power to create change: a religious or magical incantation.<sup>588</sup>

In comparison with the other Madrigal novels, *HERmione* displays a more subtle – or perhaps less anarchic – form of narrative experiment, which, although its events take place before those in *Asphodel*, makes it palpable that it was written several years later. In the initial pages of the novel, which have already been discussed, the premise of the pronoun shifts is laid down and there is no mistaking that the narrator throughout is to be read as the protagonist, as the first person pronoun is occasionally dropped into what is otherwise mostly a third person narrative, always referring to Hermione. The following example shows the brevity and relative insignificance of the shifts, making it easily overlooked and seemingly meaningless: 'Minnie had married Bertrand Gart. My brother Bertrand Gart. Hermione hid her brother in her gesture...' <sup>589</sup> These pronoun shifts have more in common with May Sinclair's style than with the shifts found H. D.'s earlier work in so much as they do not generate any greater confusion as to the identity of the

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<sup>588</sup> For an analysis of repetition as subversive incantation in H. D.'s poetry, see Gubar, 'The Echoing Spell.'

<sup>589</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 15.

narrator. However, they do still question the boundaries of the individual self.

Towards the end of the novel, Hermione experiences an increased sense of chaos, which is noticeable both in the narration, as it shifts increasingly more often, and in the storyline, as the friendship between her and Fayne Rabb move towards a definitive break. Hermione feels as though she is being punished by the gods to run a marathon towards a determined, deadly end:

You are doomed Hermione for the message you carry is in forgotten metres...run, stripped across snowbanks, fly downward with pulse beating and pummelling veins at either side of a burning forehead; beating, beating, run, run Hermione. Pheidippides run, run. You have a message but you are doomed Hermione. ... No god asks too much...humanity is in a god's touch. ... the message-bearer next in line has turned against you...dead, dead or forgotten. Hecate at crossroads, a destruction...you have a double burden...run, run Hermione, run for yourself and Fayne Rabb.<sup>590</sup>

Hermione feels left alone with the weight of a burden that belongs to both her and Fayne – condemnation to a life on the margins – because Fayne is about to acquire a husband, just as Hermione has forsaken all thought of ever marrying her fiancé. The ‘message’ in the passage is the narrative of Hermione’s sexuality, which does not suit the time and place in which she has been condemned to tell – and live – her story. Her sacrifice, then, is to tell it anyway, despite the burden it entails.

‘[Y]ou can’t kill your *self*’: The Chasm and the Self in *Asphodel*

While *HERmione* is a tale of adolescence written decades after the time when its events are supposed to have taken place, *Asphodel* is an account that roughly covers the period 1912-1919; it was composed only two years later. The novel charts the continuation of Hermione Gart’s life as she travels to Europe, settles in England,

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<sup>590</sup> H. D., *HERmione*, 220.

marries Jerrold Darrington, and lives through the First World War, which ultimately causes her marriage to fall apart. As in *HERmione*, the pronoun shifts occur throughout and are intermittent, sometimes occurring abruptly and sometimes within long paragraphs, interspersed with imperative clauses and sentences: ‘...my husband’s an officer... she counted on her fingers... Lie with your head propped up... for you need all this Morgan le Fay. Don’t sing, eat. Gather twigs and burn them. Pray to your near gods for God lacks in inventiveness and this has happened – this has happened.’<sup>591</sup> The rambling, winding nature of these paragraphs, written in a stream of consciousness style, are different compared with those looked at in *HERmione*, which are much shorter and more staccato in rhythm.

The second person is also used more in *Asphodel*, particularly in the second half of the novel. Here, the reader can never be quite sure whether the narrator is addressing herself, her unborn child, her partner Beryl – all three of whom are or might be referred to as Morgan le Fay – the reader, or some otherwise unknown entity. In the novel’s first half, it is more clear when the second person is used to whom it refers, for instance in inner monologues of the joint narrator and protagonist – that is, not within inverted commas – addressed to fellow characters: ‘She had felt the peace of nothingness and she supposed she must now pay. The woman pays. She had paid. She was paying. O Darrington, where are you? I sent you away. You were the one person who could understand this. ... Someone, something wanted her to write. For writing and life were not diametric opposites.’<sup>592</sup> This passage clearly mixes third person stream of consciousness with the first person, not unlike the more conservative pronoun shifts seen in May Sinclair; it is as though the narration zooms

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<sup>591</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 167.

<sup>592</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 76.

in on the character who, for a brief moment, acts as a subjective first person narrator. Another instance is during a music performance by Walter Dowel, one of Hermione's Paris friends and a great pianist, during which a long internal monologue of Hermione's is recounted and where more than one other character is addressed in the second person:

It's almost as if you, Clara, understood what I was, am going through. ... But you are stronger than I and O Walter poor little Walter they started you when you were three. ... If I weren't so sorry, didn't feel you so much Walter, I couldn't myself sit so still here... But you Walter, they put you to school when you were three and don't you see, all my life it's killed me, this that they didn't teach me something when I was three. But it doesn't matter. Things don't just happen and if I can't play it makes it better for you, for just this moment. I am crucified for you and you for the thing beyond me that is getting through to you. Is this your own music Walter?<sup>593</sup>

Interestingly, the mention of crucifixion – referring to Hermione's lack of practical or artistic skill, which is perceived to be relative to Walter's in the sense that if she is unable to play, his ability can be allowed to shine – shows that a religiously coded symbol of sacrifice is used to describe a rather ordinary, everyday occurrence of sacrifice. The selfless attitude taken up by Hermione is mingled with a tone of irony, as though she begrudges Walter his role as focal point for the admiration of others here.

There are several other instances in *Asphodel* where religious sacrifice is conflated with secular sacrifice. Walter Dowel is described as 'a great white sacrificial ox' by Jerrold Darrington because his wife Véréne had gone mad around the time of the end of the war and been put away in an asylum.<sup>594</sup> That Darrington thinks of Dowel as the victim in these circumstances, under which it would perhaps

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<sup>593</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 28.

<sup>594</sup> H. D., *Asphodel* 193.

have been more natural to consider the unfortunate situation of his institutionalised wife, points to his attention to the plight of men in wartime, whether they be soldiers or civilians. It begs the question of whether Darrington is thinking of himself; his own wife, Hermione, has suffered nervous breakdowns during the war, one of which caused her to miscarry Darrington's child. At the point in time when the conversation about Dowel takes place, Hermione is pregnant again, but by another man, Cyril Vane, with whom she has struck up a relationship while Darrington was fighting in the trenches. Darrington's expression of empathy towards Walter Dowel suggests that he feels himself to be an unwilling victim of the situation in which he has ended up: a soldier who has risked his life for his country, only to first be robbed of what he thought was going to be his first-born child, and subsequently of his wife's affection.

A white bull – which is, just like the white ox, a symbol of the threat of involuntary sacrifice brought on by war – also appears in the narrative. Jane Harrison writes of the ancient Greek sacrificial bull in her work *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1912), where it is postulated that the offering is crucial for not only the survival of the community and state, but for the individuals within it, as they all get their portion of meat, symbolic of luck and strength. However, in *Asphodel*, the bull is not going to be sacrificed; rather, the intimation is that it will make Hermione its victim: 'Make sacrifice. The white bull that lowers after me seeks to slay me.'<sup>595</sup> This is part of a piece of stream-of-consciousness-like first person narration that immediately precedes the part where Hermione has to tell Darrington that she is pregnant. Hermione feels, like Darrington, that she is the victim of the circumstances of war. After her initial miscarriage, her husband takes a mistress while home on leave, who

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<sup>595</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 151.

later moves into their lodgings. This is what drives Hermione to move temporarily to Cornwall where she then becomes pregnant by Vane. Here, Hermione is victimised but without fulfilling the restoration originally intended by ritual sacrifice.

The white bull image is foreshadowed a little earlier in the narrative in a play on words, as Shirley, a friend of Hermione's who is in love with Walter Dowel, shoots herself with a 'white bullet.'<sup>596</sup> Shirley has several similarities with Hermione: she is clever, but unsure of herself, and her love for Walter cannot be fulfilled as he is already married. Hermione is palpably shaken by the news of Shirley's suicide, to the point where she feels that it disrupts her carefully constructed self-image as a sensitive soul: 'Herself, the immaculate image, the saint, the spirit, had been shattered for her. Forever. A white bullet had so shattered it. Intuition and fine feeling had not been fine enough to sense this.'<sup>597</sup> Hermione feels that she has let her friend down by not realising how depressed she was, by not helping her. At the same time, she condemns Shirley – or predicts that Shirley will be condemned by the gods – for 'dropping out:' 'Plato says we are servants of the gods. No servant can neglect his work. To kill oneself is to drop out, lacking in service.'<sup>598</sup> While Hermione feels that Shirley has neglected her service to the gods, the suicide is described as having been executed in a manner of an organised and premeditated ritual, with an emphasis on purity of both mind and body:

Little May day communicants going to church in long veils and long frocks  
and white slippers and hands crossed over prayer-books. Brides of God.  
Little wise virgins. Virgins. Shirley was a virgin. ... It was so clean. They

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<sup>596</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 104.

<sup>597</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 105.

<sup>598</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 104.

said she had planned it all so carefully. ... So clean. Not anything horrible. So clean under her breast. All gone. That is true love.<sup>599</sup>

The clean nature of the shot that kills Shirley and the ordered setup of the suicide invokes a sense of ritual, which is further strengthened by the association made to the ritual of First Communion, in which one hands oneself over to God in a state of purity, symbolised by wearing white garments, and is allowed to receive the eucharist for the first time.

Interestingly, in *Asphodel*, Christianity is defined as the ritual of remembrance for its own primary sacrifice, the Holy Communion. When asked what a Christian is, Fayne Rabb responds: 'A Christian is a person who goes to communion.'<sup>600</sup> She does not justify her definition further, only explains that if she had not gone every Sunday her mother would not be happy with her. The implication is that communion almost trivialises sacrifice due to its regularity and the relative ease with which you can become a good Christian: simply partake in the ritual of remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, and you will be saved.

However, in a sequence of *Asphodel* portraying Cornwall, Hermione seems to be saved by the natural surroundings as a form of holy communion: 'Was there ever such green? Flowers that are (it must be) rose-campion, little flowers along the edge of a field; the fields are small, small, simply imagination come true. This is reality. Heady gorse, thick with its yellow makes ridges and lumps of pure gold and I must be somewhere else. I haven't died for I am substantiated,' says Hermione; she is not physically dead.<sup>601</sup> The quotation suggests, like the ritual of communion, that

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<sup>599</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 101; 104.

<sup>600</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 12.

<sup>601</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 149.



dying does not necessarily mean physical death if it is part of a process of transubstantiation. It is interesting to note that H. D. mentions rose campion, which – as has been mentioned above – is in English folklore a symbol of death, in particular of the mother.

As early as 1915, May Sinclair made the connection between imagist poetry and transubstantiation in an effort to characterise the innovations being made by the group of young poets led by Ezra Pound: ‘The Victorian poets are Protestant. For them the bread and wine are symbols of Reality, the body and the blood. They are given “in remembrance.” The sacrament is incomplete. The Imagists are Catholic; they believe in Trans-substantiation. For them the bread and wine are the body and the blood. They are given. The thing is done.’<sup>602</sup> For Sinclair, the imagist poetry of H. D. imparted a ‘*frisson* of immortality impending’ – a sense of sacrality and transcendence – but also a literal image that would have different effects upon different readers, depending on the preconceived notions of the reader.<sup>603</sup> Bearing this in mind, the particularly poetic prose sequence quoted above may be read as Hermione being made immortal, not just through nature, but by journeying to ‘somewhere else’ in both space and time – the Cornish natural landscape being a timeless milieu that stands in stark contrast to central London. It is also the place where she becomes pregnant a second time.

Shirley sacrifices herself for the good of Walter Dowel’s marriage – a sacrifice that is proclaimed to be indicative of ‘true love.’ Here, then, is a negotiation of the distinction between service and sacrifice that seems to involve a question of motive. If Shirley really wanted death, she was neglecting her service to the gods,

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<sup>602</sup> May Sinclair, ‘Two Notes,’ *The Egoist* 2, no. 6 (1915): 89.

<sup>603</sup> Sinclair, ‘Two Notes,’ 88.

but if she was prepared to make a sacrifice and die for the sake of somebody else, the Dowels, she is made holy, like a martyr or a soldier would be.

As has been exemplified above, *Asphodel* is not solely preoccupied with its protagonist's self-destruction and -realisation, but that of her surrounding set of characters, as there are multitudinous references to crucifixion and sacrifice of various people. The latter part of the novel is also to some extent concerned with the self of the Bryher figure Beryl, who – like Shirley – is suicidal. According to Hermione, Beryl is obsessed with her self, its creation and its destruction, which seem to go hand in hand:

She [referring to Beryl] was too young to talk about self, self, self – what was self? Self was a white carnation in a tall, green tumbler, (you can't kill your *self*) self was a lotus-lily folded in the mud, self was the scent of pot-pourri across the fumes of beech bark burning in an elegant room and the polish on the floor and the net of gilt that was the sun, that was the curtain before the window that caught the sun, self was the sun caught in a drawing room curtain, caught now in a curtain that was too heavy.<sup>604</sup>

Hermione uses the second person within brackets to pose a statement simultaneously to herself, to Beryl, and to the reader, which negates the possibility of self-sacrifice in the sense that it is impossible to wipe your self out by way of committing suicide. Hermione seems to say that the self, once found, is indestructible, or at least that it is not possible for oneself to eradicate one's self. It would require the lack of recognition from others, just as the creation of the self requires the acknowledgement of a community or an other. It is impossible to be a self in isolation; although Hermione tries to construct a self independently, she finds that there are parts of her self that are created by others, the influence of which she is unable to combat or even fully understand: 'Hermione had determined to sink into her own self-made aura.

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<sup>604</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 177.

Herself [sic] had woven herself an aura, a net, a soft and luminous cocoon but somehow daemon eyes drew out of her all those things, all these other things.’<sup>605</sup>

Struggling to hold onto her self-made self, Hermione realises that there is no escaping the definitions of others; they create her as much as she does herself, and she cannot protect herself from becoming what others make of her. Even though she tries to define her own self and preserve it in the face of others, ‘...holding herself in so many layers, so carefully housed,’ she becomes ‘confused and blurred by the cocoon state she was in. Self. What is self?’<sup>606</sup> The difficulty of answering the question of what self is stems from the difficulty of negotiation between the subjective and objective selves that are created simultaneously, one from within, through the self-reflective gaze, and the other from without, through a multitude of external gazes, which can be in conflict between themselves as well as with the self-reflective gaze.

When H. D. writes that the ‘[s]elf is a lotus bud slimed over in mud,’ it is tempting to think that the value implicit in the statement that Hermone’s self-reflective gaze needs protection from the ‘daemon eyes’ of others means that the lotus bud is the self-made self and the mud is the self created by others, and that the self-made self would be better off without being covered in slimy mud. However, mud is generally necessary for flowers to grow; while it is not meant to cover the bud, it is not going to kill the plant or stop the bud from developing into a flower. The use of the word ‘slimed’ further suggests that the mud sticks to the bud, that the two are not to be separated without some measure of force that could potentially harm the bud, and that the slimy mud makes the bud less visually appealing.

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<sup>605</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 185.

<sup>606</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 179.

The slimy bud also offers another reading: a slightly unpleasant, albeit fairly realistic, image of a newborn child. The Madrigal cycle displays a curious and problematic relationship between creative writing and childbearing – both are present, but indirectly, as neither is ever described as it takes place, nor is there any rendering of what went on in the mind of the protagonist at the time of either event. Donna Krolík Hollenberg claims that the Madrigal cycle ‘revealed the tension between creativity and procreation [H. D.] was experiencing’ and that it was not until the Second World War that ‘she began to use the symbol of the child both to suggest the human potential to re-create the self and to critique the institution of motherhood’, thereby turning on its head the traditional idea of artistry as incompatible with motherhood.<sup>607</sup> I suggest that H. D. does this already in *Asphodel*, where the child Hermione is pregnant with – that she calls ‘small le Fay’ in reference to her own doubling of Morgan le Fay earlier in the volume – is overtly said to usurp Hermione’s self, whilst containing the possibility to regenerate it: ‘Small le Fay, you are more a self than I am, but I am giving myself to you to make a self. Are you giving yourself to me to make a self?’<sup>608</sup> This quote implies not only an acknowledgement of the physical sacrifice that pregnancy entails, but a reciprocity in the sense that motherhood will possibly afford Hermione a new identity.

It is not motherhood, however, that is the focus of H. D.’s fictional renderings of procreation – it is pregnancy and childbirth. The first pregnancies in

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<sup>607</sup> Donna Krolík Hollenberg, *H. D.: The Poetics of Childbirth and Creativity* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 6. Other work on the topic of motherhood as artistry and vice versa in H. D. includes Vincent Quinn, ‘H. D.’s “Hermetic Definition”: The Poet as Archetypal Mother,’ *Contemporary Literature* 18, no. 1 (1977): 51-61, and Albert Gelpi, ‘Re-Membering the Mother: A Reading of H. D.’s *Trilogy*,’ in *Signets: Reading H. D.*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 318-35.

<sup>608</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 179.

*Asphodel* and *Bid Me to Live* result in stillbirths; the second pregnancies that culminate in the birth of healthy babies terminate the narratives. Neither Hermione nor Julia are ever narrated as mothers, only as mothers-to-be, or – rather – as pregnant and labouring women. The significance of this is that it is not the long-term, durational story of a life devoted to motherhood that H. D. wishes to tell, but the physical battle of women's childbearing, one that can be compared and related to men's soldiering. Stanford Friedman suggests that 'H. D. paralleled war and pregnancy as public and private versions of an underlying patriarchal structure [and] proposed women's procreative power as a counterweight to men's violence, as a regenerative force in the (re)birth of both individual and society' in *Asphodel*.<sup>609</sup> H. D. did not, then, focus on the sacrifice of the mother – a more traditional trope in war literature, as I discuss in chapter 1 – but rather on the sacrifice of the pregnant, childbearing woman, who renounces herself bodily to bring life to another person.

Another example of sacrifice and pregnancy/childbirth being overtly compared in *Asphodel* is when Hermione considers whether or not it is her fate to become a mother, a thought that appears to terrify her. In a long paragraph of stream of consciousness, she initially thinks of the Virgin Mary as analogous to herself, but she also ponders Christ's refusal of the drink he was offered before his death – a passage that is normally interpreted as Christ's unwillingness to dull his experience of the sacrifice he was about to make – and connects this willingness to suffer with childbirth:

George said there needn't be any children. Must I ever, should I ever have one? George Lowndes said I would look like Maria della something or other... Incense to numb out your pain but Christ wouldn't take the sponge (O why, why didn't he?) they offered him. Chloroform I read in the Materia

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<sup>609</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 184-5.

Medica doesn't always help though sometimes – don't let me scream. Don't let me die. Perhaps it's my Hell and must we all pass through it to get to meadows thick with water lilies?<sup>610</sup>

The implication is that the bodily trauma of childbirth should be gone through gracefully, without screaming or otherwise displaying the abhorrence Hermione expects to feel at the mortification of the flesh, just as a soldier is expected to run bravely into the firing line. Hermione prays that she will not express the depth of the suffering that she expects to experience through childbirth, but the underlying sentiment is that she would rather not experience such a thing at all, as the initial thought is about avoiding pregnancy and the question of whether she 'must' at some point in her life have a child. She concludes by asking if we all have to experience suffering to get enjoyment, employing an explanation of sacrificial economy to answer the question of why suffering appears to be a fact of life.

After her miscarriage, Hermione again describes pregnancy as a sacrifice comparable to crucifixion, or possibly even worse, considering the drawn out, tortuous experience of pregnancy:

The state she had been in was a deadly crucifixion. Not one torture (though God that had been enough) but months and months when her flaming mind beat up and she found she was caught, her mind not taking her as usual like a wild bird but her mind-wings beating, beating and her feet caught, her feet caught, glued like a wild bird in bird-lime.<sup>611</sup>

She mainly feels the restriction through the imposed rest-cure she appears to have been under, where she has not been allowed to read, write, or see her friends.

Additionally, she is pained by her inability to talk about the unnecessarily cruel

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<sup>610</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 13.

<sup>611</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 113.

process she has had to endure without being considered a woman who cannot accept her sacrifice gracefully.

...there were no words to tell it in. How tell it? ...men will say she was a coward, a woman who refused her womanhood. No, she hadn't. But take a man with a flaming mind and ask him to do this. Ask him to sit in a dark cellar and no books... but you mustn't. You can't. Women can't speak and clever women don't have children. So if a clever woman does speak, she must be mad. She is mad. She wouldn't have had a baby, if she hadn't been.<sup>612</sup>

Clever women, it seems, must endure more suffering through the sacrifice of motherhood than others. The unspeakability of the sacrifice is partly due to the unspeakability of women – in particular clever women, who will be seen as mad if they do speak – and partly to the unspeakability of the trauma of childbirth.

The extent to which the Hermione in *Asphodel* considers herself to have suffered through marriage and childbirth is clarified by her comparison of her situation to that of Christ, and the almost embittered tone over not having died in childbirth: 'Hermione had had her share of suffering and if she took more than her share of suffering the world would topple over for you can't arrogate virtue to yourself, you can't suffer more than Christ – and she had suffered. Dead, resurrected, but she had come to the wrong place. She belonged in heaven after Phoebe [Hermione's newly born daughter] – and she wasn't in heaven.'<sup>613</sup> Hermione thinks that after all that suffering, she should have died and been rewarded for her suffering in the after-life. In this way, her view of her own suffering is similar to that commonly known to have been the feeling of many surviving soldiers of the First World War, who thought that they should have died on the battlefield – so called

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<sup>612</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 113.

<sup>613</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 200.

survivor guilt. While shell shock was of course diagnosed and treated medically, there are not enough clinical studies of the illness from the time of the war to evidence the number of First World War soldiers affected by survivor guilt. However, it is clear from first-hand accounts and literary re-imaginings of the war that survivor guilt was an issue for many after the end of the war.<sup>614</sup> Everyday life after the trenches seemed empty and futile and survivors were thereby left with a sensation of hopelessness.

The problem with the suffering of Hermione is that she does not have the right to feel wronged; ‘this suffering of Hermione’s was illegitimate. You don’t take more than your share of suffering any more than you take more than your share of happiness...’<sup>615</sup> Hermione has, it seems, willingly chosen to take on more suffering than was her lot, which is true of soldiers of the First World War if we see their position as analogous to Hermione’s, and it is certainly true of Christ.

Towards the end of *Asphodel*, it is becoming clear to Hermione that she went through a major change in the years of the First World War. The trauma of going through a stillbirth has such a profound impact on Hermione in *Asphodel* that she comes to view it as on a par with facing the guns in France: ‘Men were dying as she had almost died to the sound (as she had almost died) of gun-fire. Guns, guns, guns, guns. Thank God for that. The guns had made her one in her suffering with men – men – men’.<sup>616</sup> The direct comparison of the suffering of soldiers with her own is

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<sup>614</sup> Marc-Antoine Crocq and Louis Crocq, “From Shell Shock and War Neurosis to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A History of Psychotraumatology,” *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 2, no. 1 (2000): 47–55. Brian Murdoch, *German Literature and the First World War: The Anti-War Tradition. Collected Essays* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 169.

<sup>615</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 199.

<sup>616</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 114.



indicative of an urge to make male and female sacrifices valued equally. Stanford Friedman similarly points out that '[t]he parallels between birth and war pervade [*Asphodel*'s] structure and imagery.'<sup>617</sup> Hermione further expresses a wish to sacrifice herself; she thanks god that her stillbirth took place under the noise of gunfire, and thereby being allowed to feel that she 'had not suffered ignobly like a woman.'<sup>618</sup> Having suffered to the background of the same noise as the men on the battlefield, she feels that her sacrifice is legitimated through its connection to the war. Hermione draws another parallel between battle scars and pregnancy towards the end of her second gestation, which coincides with the end of the war. Significantly, her statement that 'honourable wounds, dishonourable wounds, it's all one to God so long as you are wounded,' could be interpreted as meaning that her own sacrifice is dishonourable, as the child is a product of an extramarital relationship with Vane.<sup>619</sup> However, the comment could also be read as an ironic take on the inevitable condoning, not to say encouragement, of violence during wartime. Is the sacrifice of a soldier always as honourable as the propaganda machine would have it? It is not difficult to conceive of the sadness involved in labouring to bring a child into the world in the midst of millions of men fighting each other to death.

When Darrington visits Hermione after the war and sparks the hope that they will resume their life together, she starts to refer to her 'pre-chasm' self, meaning the Hermione that existed before 1914. Her husband's physical touch is that of the old world that is no more, which she finds comforting, but also stifling: 'She was

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<sup>617</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web*, 185.

<sup>618</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 114.

<sup>619</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 184.

smothered and kisses recalled her to worlds away, pre-chasm.<sup>620</sup> She tries to bring her pre-war self back in order to bring Darrington closer, but soon realises that this is an impossibility for her, however much she may want it: 'Hermione pulled threads to get something of that pre-chasm into her speech ... Things that had existed in one dimension, that couldn't any more so exist. ... Get across the chasm to the other side for there are dreams still the other side, ivory, bronze.'<sup>621</sup> The pre-chasm dreams are those of marital bliss, family values, and romantic love with Darrington. However, these are now relics clad in ivory and bronze; they are no longer alive and can therefore not be got at in real life. Instead, Hermione has to move on, 'sensing ... that she would land, finally, safely, be thrown ... up on dry land, onto a new post-chasm world.'<sup>622</sup> She has opened up a new part of her self, the post-chasm Hermione, that cannot be denied or held back.

The characters who are not able to move on, who prefer to stay in the pre-chasm era, are made into examples of what happens if one is unwilling to move with the times: they perish. Ironically, despite Hermione's predilection for the ancient past, the post-war message delivered by her appears to be change or die. Her friends Vèrène and Shirley both fall victim to the cultural chasm caused by the war. When she realises this, she understands that the same fate will befall her unless she continues to progress: 'Vèrène went mad since she couldn't (it was evident) march with events. Shirley shot herself since she couldn't march forward. ... One must roll in, on with the tide, with the times, or be crushed under the wave ground to death in the trough and the great drag back that would be the inevitable aftermath of the war

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<sup>620</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 195.

<sup>621</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 193-4.

<sup>622</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 195.

and all it stood for.’<sup>623</sup> The narrative goes on to denote Vèrène and Shirley as ‘victims’ of this historical movement, implying that they have fallen into and been swallowed up by the chasm, being unable to bridge it. The only way for Hermione to survive, then, is to sacrifice her pre-chasm self and go forward in the hope of finding a new self. The following subsection will look at a narrative self-development that is portrayed as taking place during and just after the chasm in *Bid Me to Live*.

‘I myself, I myself, I myself’: Fighting for the Self as a Subject in *Bid Me to Live*

*Bid Me to Live*, edited over the course of at least two decades, bears a strong resemblance to the other Madrigal narratives, but is far more readable as it is slightly less challenging in its experiments with form. The intermittent pronoun shifts come throughout the novel, but there is an additional overarching shift between a first and second part of the book. The first is primarily narrated in the third person and outlines a story of war and marriage – in which the two seem more alike than anyone would care to think – and the difficulties with which Julia Ashton is forced to relinquish and recreate her self, as a writer, wife, and mother. The third person narrative that dominates initially is indicative of Julia’s struggle to find her own voice and to establish herself as a subject in her own right. In the second part, Julia takes over more and more as the first person narrator, even though there are still shifts back to the third person. The second person is interspersed throughout the whole book.

The very first pronoun shift looks – as many others – like reported speech, but it is not within inverted commas and does not occur in a scene; it is more like an echo of a remembered dialogue:

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<sup>623</sup> H. D., *Asphodel*, 194.

So-and-so knows someone who has a cottage; won't you take it, Frederick?  
As if she, Julia or he, Rafe or someone who had met Bella's mother before  
they gave up their studio in Paris had this right, this power – they were rich,  
in their way. Take so-and-so's cottage, they have a cottage, a sort of lodge I  
believe, and it's empty and they asked me and Rafe to go there before he  
went to France...<sup>624</sup>

It seems here as though the communal narration is at the core of this story, as the pronoun shifts are suggestive of a cacophony of voices that could belong to anyone. However, only a short while later, the protagonist's self-preoccupation seen in *HERmione* and *Asphodel* re-surfaces: '...why should she give in now, go, as they urged her, back to America, go, as they suggested, into the country? *J'y suis*. I myself, I myself, I myself. This is my room.'<sup>625</sup> The importance of place in this occurrence of the first person narrative voice is indicative of the re-shaping of Julia's American self as British, an identity that has been assigned to her through her marriage. Her husband not only usurps her nationality, but her name as well: 'Mrs Rafe Ashton. That is my name.'<sup>626</sup> Throughout the novel, it is painfully clear that Julia has built her self-image on the foundation of the husband. Being forced to sacrifice her marriage, Julia first loses her self and then regains it, all the while negotiating her subjective space in the text through pronoun shifts. The second part of the narrative, which takes place after she has physically become estranged from her husband and is living in Cornwall with another man, sees her re-establish a new sense of self as well as be in control of the narrative by mainly using her subjective, first person voice to tell the story.

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<sup>624</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 8.

<sup>625</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 10.

<sup>626</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 11.

In a clear reference to the subject being made a sacrifice by the circumstances, the narrative voice equates the physical death of Julia's child in utero in 1915 with the demise of Julia herself: 'Then 1915 and her death, or rather the death of her child. Three weeks in that ghastly nursing-home and then coming back to the same Rafe. Herself different.'<sup>627</sup> Julia's self falls victim to the circumstances, both of war and marriage. Victimhood is ever-present in the novel; already in the very first pages, victim and victimiser are set up as an oppositional pair: 'Victims, victimised and victimising. Perhaps the victims came out, by a long shot, ahead of the steady self-determined victimisers. They escaped; the rowdy actual lost generation was not actually their generation.'<sup>628</sup> This implies that the terminology of victimhood is sometimes used to denote something rather different than what one might assume – it is indicated here that there is a discrepancy between those that call themselves victims and those who perform sacrifices passively and involuntarily.

There seems to be a connection between lack of self-definition, self-sacrifice, and the proximity of male authority that pervades all of the three novels hitherto looked at in the Madrigal cycle. Hermione is clearly rattled by identity crises at the points in her life when she is the most intimate with Lowndes or Darrington, and Julia is extremely dependent on the approval of both Rafe and Rico – also called Frederick or Frederico, a writer friend of the couple, based on D. H. Lawrence – as a wife and as a writer. Rico's critique of her writing is paternalistic and domineering, yet a slight tinge of jealousy is discernable between the lines as he acknowledges Julia's ability to know something she should not – how a man feels: 'Stick to the woman speaking. How can you know what Orpheus feels? It's your part to be

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<sup>627</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 24.

<sup>628</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 7.

woman, the woman vibration, Eurydice should be enough. You can't deal with both.'<sup>629</sup> According to Rico, man and woman are completely separate creatures, so it is natural for him to assume that a woman cannot portray a man's psyche. The reverse, however, does not apply, as he tries to write about women himself. Julia questions this quietly to herself in her own mind, wondering why, 'if he could enter, so diabolically, into the feelings of women, why should she not enter into the feelings of men?'<sup>630</sup> The thought directs attention to the inherent misogyny that Julia encounters as a woman writer.

The problem of being a woman writer is further illustrated by Rafe chiming in to give his wife feedback without having been asked for it, which he is eager to do in a moment of jealousy over Julia's friendship with Rico. Julia does not want him to read the draft and responds evasively as to its whereabouts: 'He was shuffling books, papers, on the table. "Where is it?" "What?" ... "Is this it?" "I don't know. Those are all discarded pages."' <sup>631</sup> When Rafe finally does read it, his comments are '[n]ot so good,' '[a] bit dramatic,' and, the worst of all insults, '[i]t's Victorian.'<sup>632</sup> Julia apologetically replies that she 'saved [the draft] only for the other-side of the page, the paper. I kept it for the other-side of the page, for the paper'.<sup>633</sup> Self-effacement is, despite moments of internal rebellion against the hierarchy in which she lives, deeply ingrained in Julia.

In *Bid Me to Live*, the struggle of Julia to stay connected with her husband Rafe through the sacrifice of her own needs is evident. The breakdown of the marital

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<sup>629</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 51.

<sup>630</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 62.

<sup>631</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 52.

<sup>632</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 53; 54.

<sup>633</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 54.

relationship is in this narrative primarily caused by Rafe's love affair, which is the result of Julia's unwillingness to have sex with her husband following a miscarriage. Julia feels that she has not made as great a sacrifice as her husband in the war and she is constantly torn by feelings of jealousy on the one hand and guilt on the other.

Here, it is not the case that the protagonist wishes to draw a parallel between her own suffering and that of her husband, but it is not necessarily true that the author 'is not arguing that female civilians suffered more than male soldiers, nor is she agitating for direct comparisons' between the two, as Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick argues.<sup>634</sup> The comparison of the sacrifice of the mother with that of the soldier is plainly illustrated by the narrator by way of Julia and Rafe's respective likenesses to saints: 'Yes, he was Saint Anthony; what kind of saint was she, or who? Claire? Mated, unmated, two saints living in separate walled-in seclusion, would find the same answer in the up-rising incense, in a cold lady-chapel at dawn, as they found in a cold studio living-room in Bloomsbury...' <sup>635</sup> H. D.'s reference to Saint Claire implies a biographical significance; the story of Saint Claire seeing pictures of church mass on the walls of her room is similar to a visionary episode in H. D.'s life that recurs in her writing: seeing pictures and writing on a wall in a hotel room in Corfu. The quote also implies the desexualisation of Julia, who is 'mated' – married – yet chaste, or 'unmated', just like a nun who is considered to be mated with God.

The narrative shows Julia moving back and forth between self-annihilation and self-assertion in relation to the love triangle. After having initially made it easier for Bella and Rafe to see each other privately by helping to cover up the affair, she

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<sup>634</sup> Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick, *Modernist Women Writers and War Trauma and the Female Body in Djuna Barnes, H.D., and Gertrude Stein* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2011), 63.

<sup>635</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 18.

begins to feel that she can no longer handle the emotional strain: 'Bella and Rafe made it outrageously obvious that they only wanted to sneak off and be together, leaving her with the lovely wifely part of camouflaging love-affair for husband-on-leave. No. This was the last time.'<sup>636</sup> But since Rafe is an officer on leave, Julia has to allow for the special circumstance of war. Each time he goes out to France, the question of whether or not he will return again looms large. He feels that his sacrifice – risking life and limb at the front – earns him the right to be unfaithful to his wife when he is on leave: 'I won't come back, you might allow me a little fun', he says to Julia, but she feels as though it 'was someone else speaking. It was not Rafe speaking' when she recalls the words.<sup>637</sup> It seems as though Rafe the officer has taken the place of Rafe the poet, to whom she got married. Confronted with 'not so much a losing as a lost-battle,' she ultimately suggests that the husband and mistress use the couple's flat for their rendez-vous rather than Bella's, a proposition that leads to her walking in on them one day: 'Something went still in her and she knew they were there on the other side of the room, actually in bed together. ... "I didn't expect to get back so soon ... I'm sorry – " sorry?'<sup>638</sup> Julia's apology, and the narratorial questioning of it, is a snapshot of the bind she is in; she feels the need to apologise for having created an awkward situation, but clearly she is the wronged party and should not have to apologise for returning home to find her husband with his mistress.

Julia and Rafe are both unfaithful, but Julia's affair with Vane, resulting in motherhood, is a continuation of her initial renunciation of her marriage. Rafe

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<sup>636</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 70.

<sup>637</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 49.

<sup>638</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 49; 117.



acknowledges that Julia's acts have been for his benefit; he comments on their final separation with a note of gratefulness towards her for letting him be with his mistress without making things difficult by creating tension: 'I want to thank you for all this. I realise what you have done for me.'<sup>639</sup> Even so, he does not seem to fully understand the reasons why Julia has had to accept his infidelity, since she needs to spell out for him that she had to abstain from sexual intercourse following her miscarriage because she was told by the doctor that it would be life-threatening for her to become pregnant again before the end of the war. Just as Hermione in *Asphodel*, Julia sees her own part in the situation and does not wish to blame anyone for the disintegration of her marriage. In her explanation of why she refused him her bed, Julia tells Rafe: 'I thought you understood. I didn't want to worry you about it. It was not your fault.'<sup>640</sup> Not having explained the reason for why she refused her husband's intimacy at the time, Julia does not feel the need to blame Rafe for what has happened – their marriage is simply another casualty of the war.

While Julia accepts responsibility for her actions, which could be read as her being made a scapegoat for the demise of her marriage, the narrative also indicates that this experience is part and parcel of her role as a woman, one that she shares with Bella, her husband's mistress: 'She and Bella were simply abstractions, were women of the period, were WOMAN of the period, the same one. ... Bella was shot to pieces, with nothing to show for it...'<sup>641</sup> The two women have fallen victim to the circumstances of the war, but are not scapegoats in the structural sense of the word, because there is no blame placed on anyone in the narrative. The events of the novel

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<sup>639</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 129.

<sup>640</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 133.

<sup>641</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 103.

are an outcome of chaos – the lack of any defined scapegoat lets the breakdown of order continue on until Julia becomes pregnant by her lover in Cornwall, when she can be blamed for the ultimate demise of the relationship with Rafe; the marriage will never recover from her having a child with another man. The role of the two women may have more in common with ‘the abstract painted horror of a flayed saint’ that Julia sees in the Louvre because of the numb emptiness of their shared suffering: ‘they were past feeling anything; she was.’<sup>642</sup>

Away in Cornwall, Julia comes to terms with the demise of her marriage. She feels whole, healed, and made holy by her new, natural surroundings:

If she thought of Rafe, it was with a sort of gratitude. ... Now she was glad the whole bright rock-landscape was clouded, with this cold, healing mist, as if someone had breathed a cold, healing breath; the very Holy Spirit had breathed on this. She was enclosed in crystal. She was perfectly at one with this land. Everything that had happened back in London had been bound to happen. It had been necessary. Those who had precipitated its happening were each separately blessed by her. She wanted to lay flowers on an altar.<sup>643</sup>

Julia wants to perform a ritual sacrifice – laying flowers at an altar – to commemorate what triggered these events: the physical sacrifice of her stillborn child, Rafe’s mistress Bella, and Rico, who aided in driving a wedge between husband and wife in various ways. The nature of the peace she feels within – being ‘filled literally now with that divine Spirit...beatified as a Yogi in a mountain temple’ – is such that it extends not only to her and the events that have recently taken place, but to the physical objects that surround her: ‘Beads of moisture settled on the sleeve of her old coat. Her coat was sanctified by it, this was another story of

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<sup>642</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 37.

<sup>643</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 145-6.

a fleece.<sup>644</sup> Drawing a parallel to the Golden Fleece the narrator again emphasises the connection between past and present sacrifice, making it clear that there are literal, physical implications of a spiritual development, and vice versa.

Ritual sacrifice recurs in the narratives as a basic component of the human condition through the ages. For many of H. D.'s characters, not least for Julia Ashton, it is a prerequisite for understanding their present that they familiarise themselves with the past. Travelling to the past via the mind creates a space where dream and reality – past and present – meet and mix to the point where it is uncertain which is which:

Did the past and the future blend (or would they) in one eternal circle of the absolute, of final beauty? That prayer they quoted (from Plato, was it?), *And may the inner and the outer be at peace*. Here, certainly there was no peace, or peace so hardly won in these rare moments of fulfilment that they became worlds ahead; as he said, as Rico said, "You are entangled in your own dream." Was, or wasn't it the dream that mattered?<sup>645</sup>

In dreaming of ancient Greece, the H. D. avatars re-write or re-discover a secret history, a forgotten genealogy, a female lineage and spiritual tradition. The preoccupation with the place of women in history sometimes causes scholars to discuss H. D.'s work as a feminist revisionary project.<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 147.

<sup>645</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 72-3. Emphasis in original.

<sup>646</sup> See for instance Susan Stanford Friedman (as Susan Friedman), 'Psyche Reborn: Tradition, re-vision, and the goddess as mother-symbol in H. D.'s epic poetry,' *Women's Studies* 6 (1979): 147-160; Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *H. D.: the career of that struggle* (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1986); Susan Edmunds, "'I read the writing when he seized my throat': Hysteria and Revolution in H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt*," *Contemporary Literature* XXXII, no. 4 (1991): 471-495; Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Creating a Women's Mythology: H. D.'s *Helen in Egypt*,' in *Signets: Reading H. D.*, ed. Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 373-405; Lara Vetter, 'Review

Importantly, ancient Greece is also where H. D.'s characters find a space for a negotiation of individuality versus community via sacrifice. The very first lines of *Bid Me to Live* make it clear that sacrifice is a fundamental concept not just for the characters in this novel or for the English during the First World War, but for people throughout history: 'Oh, the times, oh the customs! Oh, indeed, the times! The customs! Their own, but part and parcel of the cosmic, comic, crucifying times of history.'<sup>647</sup> Sacrifice is portrayed here as an inevitable, almost natural part of life. In another instance, the time frame of the war is pointed out: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty. But could this truth be beautiful? Maybe it was. They had shouted of honour and sacrifice for two years, three years now. This was winter or early spring but seasons revolved around horrors until one was numb...they were past feeling anything...'<sup>648</sup> Even though the temporal reference to two or three years is quite specific, the sentences that frame it are suggestive of timelessness – the timeless nature of concepts like truth and beauty – or circular time, with the recurring four seasons. It is as though time has lost its meaning in the sense that it is no longer reliable as a tool with which to measure the duration of something; since time 'revolved around horrors', it appears that it is impossible to conceive of a time when the horrors end. Interestingly, it is in the timelessness of the Cornish milieu that the tattered Julia finally begins to mend: 'It would take her a long time to get over these past years, and here was space and time to do it.'<sup>649</sup>

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article of *Majic Ring, The Mystery, and The White Rose and the Red*, *English Studies* 94, no. 1 (2013): 57-63.

<sup>647</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 7.

<sup>648</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 37.

<sup>649</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 157.

As Julia finally takes control of the narrative voice, she addresses Rico and releases herself from his criticism of her writing: ‘My work is nothing. But, Rico, I will go on and do it. I will carve my pattern on an altar because I’ve got to do it. You jeered at my making abstractions of people – graven images, you called them. You are right. Rafe is not the Marble Faun...you are not Orpheus. You are human people, Englishmen, madmen.’<sup>650</sup> Despite her newfound confidence in herself, she still ultimately credits Rico with bringing her to life and addresses him with respect and servility, despite (or perhaps because of) his disrespectful treatment of her work: ‘You said I was a living spirit, but I wasn’t living until you wrote to me, “We will go away together.” We have gone away together, I realise your genius, in this place. I would like to serve your genius, not only because it is personally, your genius, but because it is part of this place.’<sup>651</sup> Julia may now be the subjective narrator, but she is still caught in a world of entrenched gender hierarchy.

‘Do I become somewhat mystical in contemplation of this Midget...?’ De-Narrating the Self in *Paint It Today*<sup>652</sup>

*Bid Me to Live*, *HERmione*, and *Asphodel* all share the more or less certain identification of the narrator with the protagonist. In *Paint It Today*, that supposition can be called into question, as the pronoun shifts keep the reader in suspense by continually signifying different things. The shifts keep negotiating the space and identity of narrator and protagonist throughout the narrative, while sacrificial motifs provide a suggestive backdrop for the play on pronouns. The narrative voice changes

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<sup>650</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 164.

<sup>651</sup> H. D., *Bid Me to Live*, 183.

<sup>652</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 63.

between the use of ‘I,’ ‘she,’ ‘you,’ ‘we,’ and ‘they,’ and the referents of the pronouns switch as well, as I will exemplify below. Furthermore, the narrative voice self-consciously comments on both the distance and the nearness of itself to the protagonist. The novel is most often read as an unfinished, almost unripe, work – a youthful ‘homoerotic novel of passage’ or ‘search of a “twin sister”’ – and it is often overlooked in terms of its experimentality in narrative technique.<sup>653</sup>

Like the previously examined novels by H. D., and indeed the two Sinclair novels in chapter 2, *Paint It Today* is concerned with the development of the self of a young woman in relation to the expectations of the surrounding world that become to some extent internalised in her psyche. The novel might be considered a very abridged version of *HERmione* and *Asphodel*, but one that focusses on other aspects of the story, most prominently the lesbian theme. The protagonist – here named Midget Defreddie – is a young girl who breaks free from her family, moves to England, and pursues romantic relationships with women. As a result of trying to become her own person, Midget’s mother is the target of an attack of hostility that has obvious undertones of Greek mythology, psychoanalytic theory, and, of course, sacrifice, as Midget imagines herself as Orestes:

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<sup>653</sup> Cassandra Laity, introduction to *Paint It Today*, xviii; Christina Walter, ‘From image to screen: H. D. and the visual origins of modernist impersonality,’ *Textual Practice* 22, no. 2 (2008): 301. Apart from two texts by Susan Stanford Friedman – her introduction to the publication of the first four chapters of *Paint It Today* in *Contemporary Literature* 27, no. 4 (1986) and a piece in *Signets* co-written with Rachel Blau DuPlessis: “‘I had two loves separate’: The Sexualities of H. D.’s *HER*’ – I have only been able to find one article where *Paint It Today* is mentioned as an example of an early experiment with narrative persona, and then very briefly in a subclause: Brian Richardson, ‘Linearity and Its Discontents: Rethinking Narrative Form and Ideological Valence,’ *College English* 62, no. 6 (2000): 688. Gary Burnett mentions that it ‘begins with and is largely concerned with questions of aesthetics; the very aspiration of “Paint It To-day” is immersed, for H. D., in the problems of both artistic utterance and self-definition.’ Gary Burnett, *H. D. between Image and Epic: The Mysteries of Her Poetics* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), 22.

How did Orestes feel when he held the knife to slay his mother? ... 'Your mother has betrayed your father,' spoke the present to Orestes. 'Your mother, your mother, your mother,' the present said to Midget, 'has betrayed, or would betray, through the clutch and the tyranny of the emotion, your father, the mind in you, the jewel the king, your father gave you as your birthright. Look,' said the present, 'and choose. Here is a knife, slay your mother. She has betrayed or would betray that gift.'<sup>654</sup>

The imagined ritual sacrifice of the mother is brought on by her injunction for Midget to go back to America when Midget is just finding her place in the literary world in London. The symbolism contained within the image is not only telling of an early familiarity with psychoanalytic theory, but of the idea that the tropes of ancient myth have relevance for contemporary human culture and society, which is evident from much of H. D.'s work, both in poetry and prose. It is also pertinent that the sacrifice of the mother appears to be required for Midget to be a person in her own right.

Initially, as in the excerpt above, it seems as though the narrator is external to the protagonist Midget, but retains very intimate information about her and her inner life; one might even think of this voice as akin to a Victorian omniscient third person narrator in parts: 'I do not wish to belittle the Josepha incident. It colored Midget's life; it colors it still.'<sup>655</sup> However, the preceding sentence makes the narratorial identity more ambiguous: 'Josepha had shown her or she had shown Josepha what love was or could be or become if the earth, by some incautious legerdemain, should be swept from beneath our feet; and we were left ungravitated between the stars.'<sup>656</sup> The 'we' here may of course be read as referring to humankind, but it is also

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<sup>654</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 42-3.

<sup>655</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 22.

<sup>656</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 22.

possible that the 'we' points to the 'I' of the narrator and Midget together as one, leading to the inference that they share an identity and are only separated by time. In another instance, 'we' is again used ambiguously: '...we have not yet reached the fervor of dark eyes and our setting is blue. Here we have power to choose, we magicians, we failures, we ourselves, our very selves, poets and lovers. Although in a sense, we have not chosen this blue scene, it has rather chosen us.'<sup>657</sup> This 'we' might be the narrator and Midget, the narrator and narratee, all humankind, or the whole set of characters in the novel including the narrator.

The 'we' interpreted as narrator and narratee is evidenced a little further into the novel, when Brindel is first mentioned: 'Brindel, whom we are going to hear of later, said to Midget...'<sup>658</sup> This 'we' must certainly refer to a self and other who are on the extradiagetic level, and is addressed to those receiving the narrative in a manner that conveys a sense of conviviality with the narrator. Further ahead, however, there is a 'we' that seems to undo the certainty of that identification:

...we are defrauded of the best. We have our lovers, but we do not have them in the proper setting. We are all exiles, we and they. The more joy to us, true, the greater share of glory when we meet unexpectedly in some blind alley, a little sordid...we would all shout at the incongruity of us all, you and I and my lover and the ragged children and white Aphrodite and bronze Hermes and a Pan or two to divert the children... We measure, or should measure, our capacity for life, (the depth in us for living) not by our power of attracting but by our power or possibility of being attracted.<sup>659</sup>

Here, the possibilities are again opened up to multiple interpretations, as the passage first implies a 'we' that could incorporate all humankind, then one that is intradiagetic and suggests that the narratee could be a character in the story, and then

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<sup>657</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 23.

<sup>658</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 48.

<sup>659</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 60-1.



back again to a more inclusive 'we.' What is particularly pertinent here is that is the stress on love and attraction; it emphasises the feeling of being as one. Even in separation there is togetherness – everyone is exiled, it is hinted, from Paradise – and the 'incongruity' is considered to be a joint characteristic; we are joined together by our differences.

The pronoun 'we' is indicative of intersubjectivity when the narrator is its referent, since it refers to more than one subject. In using this pronoun, the narrator more than suggests the shared narration of a collective; it is explicitly expressed in the use of the first person plural. If 'we' are the centre of narrative gravity, then the communal subjective voice will develop and be as one through the formation of the narrative in a unified (as unified as any self can be) way.

To be part of a collective 'we' also means, of course, that a stable, individual identity – or the self – has to be sacrificed. *Paint It Today* is possibly the best example of how H. D. tries to negotiate this realisation – that the self has to be flexible and may even be negated in order to be part of an experience of intersubjectivity – through shifts in narrative voice. A few pages into the novel, the narrator admits to sharing an identity with Midget as it is explicitly stated that Midget is 'more or less, myself.'<sup>660</sup> Jean Gallagher among others has pointed out 'that H. D. often associates classical statuary with lesbian sexuality, particularly lesbian sexuality understood as both homoerotic and autoerotic.'<sup>661</sup> It is no wonder that *Paint It Today* may be understood as such, since the narrator and the protagonist may be read as one and the same, or as two separate entities. The narrator remains identified with Midget as she retains the first person singular while describing a

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<sup>660</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 24.

<sup>661</sup> Jean Gallagher, 'H. D.'s Distraction: Cinematic Stasis and Lesbian Desire,' *Modernism/modernity* 9, no. 3 (2002): 419.

scene in an Italian forest, just as a traditional first person narrator would describe an event that has taken place in the past: 'I was very glad at that time for my companion... He was not a bit annoyed when I sat on the paving stones.'<sup>662</sup> Here, there is no questioning the fact that Midget and the narrator are one and the same. However, just like the initial omniscient third person narration is turned on its head, so is the conventional first person account only a few pages later: '...I will not let *I* creep into this story. I will not let *I* go on banging the tinkling cymbal of its own emotion. You and I are out of this story, are observing and (if you will let *I* still intrude by way of speaking out opinions) I think, myself, that Midget really was a lucky girl.'<sup>663</sup> The return to the third person is explained by the necessity to keep subjective emotions out of the narrative. The narrative voice therefore expresses the need to open up the gap between itself and Midget again, and in doing so implicates a 'you' in addition. As the 'you' is 'out of the story' here, it cannot be identified as Midget, but might signify the narratee, or even be a self-reflexive 'you' and refer to the narrative voice itself.

Ritual sacrifice is invoked again towards the end of the novel, where the distance between Midget and narrator is emphasised again as the former is considering a statue of Jason in the Musée du Louvre: 'White lily of the valley. That is what I should, were I Midget with her magic gift of seeing through the present into the past or the future, whichever she may call it, place at the feet of these two heroes...'<sup>664</sup> The narrator proposes that she would lay lilies-of-the-valley on the ground before the Greek statues, like an offering. If it has been suggested before that

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<sup>662</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 24-5.

<sup>663</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 26. Emphasis in original.

<sup>664</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 64.

the narrator and Midget are one and the same, and that they are only separated by a distance in time, this passage appears to contradict that assumption, since the narrator claims she (or he?) does not have Midget's psychic vision. As with the initial suppositions regarding the 'we,' the previous statements made about the 'I' are challenged here, in a paragraph that states what sacrifice the narrator would make were she and Midget one and the same.

The constant negotiation of space between narrator and protagonist naturally blurs the boundary between the two, and the demarcation is further clouded by the narrator's self-reflection: 'Myself [sic] who was an unformed sort of nebulous personality shall have no name. You might have called me Midget if you were very stupid, but I was not Midget.'<sup>665</sup> The nebula of the narrative self is indefinable, or was; the past tense indicates that the narrator's present state may be more distinct, although the previously stated confusion in the text as regards its identity suggests otherwise.

First, it is stated that Midget is 'myself' and then that 'I was not Midget' – yet there has been no other perceived change in the narrative voice. This is a case of what Brian Richardson calls 'denarration,' that is, when the narrative voice factually contradicts itself and thereby 'draw[s] attention to what could be called, after J. L. Austin, the performative nature of the articulation of a fictional world.'<sup>666</sup> One of the foundations of fiction is the suspension of disbelief – in order to understand a fictional narrative, one needs to accept the premises given by the narrator as true – and if the narrator turns back on itself and negates a premise previously given, the reader is not only made confused and possibly suspicious as to the reliability of the

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<sup>665</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 25.

<sup>666</sup> Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006), 91.

narrator, but aware of the ‘performance’ on the page. In a sense, it is akin to breaking the fourth wall, as it is intended to make the audience self-aware as audience.

The denarrated text also has affinities with religious or mystical texts, which are often paradoxical in nature. One example with which H. D. may have been familiar is the famous first lines of the *Daodejing*: ‘The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way / The names that can be named are not unvarying names.’<sup>667</sup> The narrator of *Paint It Today* is well aware of this and self-consciously discusses the mysticism involved in her own narration: ‘Do I become somewhat mystical in contemplation of this Midget contemplating Jason and Jason’s friend, hurling his disc? That may be. But I belong to a curious race. I lived before the black cloud fell. I am living still. And while the cloud was on us, I looked and wondered and looked and did nothing to help one way or the other.’<sup>668</sup> The self-criticism that concludes this quotation is again a reminder of the war and its implications for the self-image of one of H. D.’s narrators, as well as a peculiar offhand admission of survivor guilt.

The ‘you’ here might refer to a universal ‘you’ (as in ‘one’), the narratee, or be a self-reflection. A fourth possible conclusion is that the ‘you’ means all of the above; since the narrator’s personality is nebulous, shifting, and apparently without any borders or rules, it is conceivable that the narrator can be identified as several personalities or identities in one narrative consciousness. The narrator is also

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<sup>667</sup> Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Tê Ching and its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 141. Arthur Waley’s translation is used here due to the likelihood that H. D. would have come across this version, if any. Translations and interpretations of the *Daodejing* are notoriously varied due to the mystical nature of the original text, not to mention the complexity involved in understanding the concept of the dao itself – here translated as ‘The Way’ but in various other translations given as ‘nature’, ‘truth’, ‘law’, etc. David K. Jordan, ‘Ten Translations of the *Dàodé Jīng*,’ published 16 March 2005, accessed 31 May 2016. <http://pages.ucsd.edu/~dkjordan/chin/LaoJuang/DDJTenTranslations.html>

<sup>668</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 63.

narratee, protagonist, and possibly every other imaginable identity; it is an intersubjective narrative consciousness. Amusingly, it is not a universal consciousness without internal struggle – since it has previously stated that Midget is ‘myself,’ it is calling itself stupid and undoubtedly contradicting itself in the quotation above. It is vital to point out that this struggle is never resolved in H. D.’s work. Despite Paul Smith’s claim of *Helen in Egypt* – that ‘idealist and mystical consciousness gives way to the recognition and acceptance of the subject’s split condition’ – it is clear from most of H. D.’s writing that there is an ongoing negotiation between material and transcendent experience, not least in the late works *Majic Ring* and *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, and that the transcendent experience is still highly relevant for H. D. in her later years.<sup>669</sup>

Another instance of the ‘you’ in the very same paragraph suggests, however, that there is a differentiation between the narrator and the narratee, pointing instead towards the identification of the narratee as Josepha, the first woman with whom Midget falls in love: ‘Josepha had called her a white sword flower. But if you had looked carefully, you would have seen there was no sword in my face. Possibly if you had looked again, you would have realized it was in my heart.’<sup>670</sup> Implicitly addressing Josepha, the narrator again identifies with Midget, as it is presumably her that Josepha ‘had called a white sword flower.’ Clearly, it is not for anyone to say who the narrator and character are, at least not without the narrator putting up a fight, if not even the beloved Josepha may define her without contradiction.

Not only is the distinction between the narrator and protagonist uncertain, but there is also evidence that other characters within the story can affect or alter

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<sup>669</sup> Paul Smith, ‘H. D.’s Identity,’ *Women’s Studies* 10 (1984): 335.

<sup>670</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 25.

Midget's consciousness. Raymond, her former fiancé, is one of these: 'She seemed to be arguing with herself quite clearly about something the Raymond person had jabbed into her consciousness.'<sup>671</sup> The permeability of Midget extends to Raymond, if not in as great an extent as to the narrator, and lets him 'jab' things into her consciousness. It is difficult not to draw a parallel to H. D.'s relationship with Ezra Pound – on whom Raymond is modelled – who is portrayed as an insistent and violent manipulator of the author's fate in the memoir *End to Torment*; he 'drags' H. D. where he wants her, 'pushed,' 'banged,' 'pounding' with a stick to get his way, and is 'injected' and 're-injected' into her life continually.<sup>672</sup>

The lack of secure and stable borders of consciousness in all of H. D.'s *Madrigal* protagonists – and indeed in the author herself – is what enables that which is the theme at the heart of much of H. D.'s prose: creativity and madness. These two facets are bound up with the theme of sacrifice and self-development for H. D., as her protagonists are motivated by one and held back by the other in their constant re-negotiation of the boundaries of self. The exhilaration of losing oneself in a meditative, creative flow teeters on the edge of an unstoppable descent into mental illness, the fear of which is ultimately the fear of losing the self forever. Running the risk of losing the self permanently seems to be a sacrifice required for creativity. The protagonists' time travels, concern with spiritual energy, and deep connection with other human beings, feed into the creative process in some way, yet also cause intermittent collapses, as the boundary between dream and reality is dissolved in the process. All of these things are made possible through the sacrifice of the self – the individual consciousness, partitioned off from others by clear boundaries of the

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<sup>671</sup> H. D., *Paint It Today*, 34.

<sup>672</sup> H. D., *End to Torment* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1980), 4; 8; 11.

beginning and end of the self – for the benefit of being able to open oneself up to an intersubjective conscious.

If the conclusion of a narratological analysis of *HERmione* is that the narrator/protagonist is in a state of turmoil as regards identity, but that the centre of narrative gravity remains intact as it is possible to identify the protagonist with the narrator throughout the novel, then the outcome of a similar look at *Paint It Today* should indicate that the centre of narrative gravity is lost here because there is incoherence as to who the narrator identifies as or with. But does the continuous creation of personae necessarily result in a loss of the centre of narrative gravity? In *Paint It Today*, the contradictions suggest so, but then the question must be asked whether it would be at all possible to write or read such a narrative. There may exist a sense of discontinuity, memory loss, reconstruction or destruction of the physical body, reinvention of the self, and even rebirth of the self, and still the centre of narrative gravity within a consciousness could remain intact, according to the definition of the term as outlined in chapter 1 of this thesis. But, then, how do we know that it is one and the same narrator throughout the narrative? It is felt through a coherence in tone, style, and address; even if there are indices that suggest a multifarious narrative voice, that voice is nonetheless the same throughout the novel. Since the narrative consciousness in *Paint It Today* is coherent and easily understood as one and the same for the reader, despite its many explicit identity crises, the conclusion must be drawn that the centre of narrative gravity is intact.

The relevance of sacrifice for the many pronoun shifts in *Paint It Today*, then, is that the initial wish to dispose of the mother in the manner of Orestes is seen to be symbolically fulfilled, as Midget negotiates her self through the defining moments of life. She gives up the self, rediscovers the self, and puts her self at risk

in every moment of intersubjectivity. Rather than half-heartedly mimicking a sacrifice made by someone else without making the narrative surrounding it into her own, like Sinclair's Harriett Freen, or using her personal narrative by making it into a communal one for the purpose of justifying an actual blood sacrifice, like Butts' Scylla Taverner, Midget accomplishes what Sinclair's Mary Olivier aspires to: freedom of the self through sacrifice.

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This chapter concludes that sacrifice in H. D.'s Madrigal cycle is necessary for creative production, because sacrifice produces intersubjectivity, and artistic creation requires an intersubjective space. Psychoanalytic theory combined with an esoteric religiosity make up the basis for H. D.'s syncretic idea of intersubjective space. Using pronoun shifts in her fiction to trouble and toy with the binary pair of subject and object, she forms an intersubjective space, a community of selves, within the narrative that is similar both to Mary Butts's polyvocal, intersubjective narrative consciousness and to epiphanic moments of intersubjectivity in May Sinclair.

The four prose works analysed here evidence on the one hand a preoccupation with both ritual and everyday sacrifice, and on the other a constant re-imagination, re-evaluation, and re-invention of the self. This sustains the hypothesis that sacrifice enables both destruction and construction of the narrative self. Similarly to Mary Butts and May Sinclair, H. D. negotiates the realisation of the self through sacrifice by way of experimental shifts in narrative voice. H. D. also reflects on the power of creativity in the formation of the self, as do the two authors previously discussed. In the Madrigal cycle, although creative production is seen as necessary for the development of the self, it is also portrayed as dangerous, because it contains a possible detrimental effect in cases where the centre of narrative gravity



is lost and the self no longer has any power or control. Narrative positions shift continually as the self is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed in the novels.

## Conclusion

Sacrifice, although conventionally thought of as a pre-modern phenomenon, is a highly relevant concept in modernity. The narratives looked at in this thesis evidence the correlation between early twentieth-century experimental writing and the theme of sacrifice through formal experiments that effect the dissolution of the self as a centre of narrative gravity and create an intersubjective, communal narrative conscious that contains both self and other, just as sacrifice generates a possibility for the self to be simultaneously obliterated and affirmed by the community.

Sacrifice through religiously coded ritual, scapegoating, war, motherhood, and feminism creates a possibility for the individual to succumb and be merged with the collective, whilst paradoxically being reinforced as an individual. Unconventional shifts in the personal pronoun used by the narrative voice bring the negotiation between individual and community to a syntactical level.

Having established the importance of investigating sacrifice in the context of modernist culture, I have looked at the works of three authors, specifically chosen for their prominence in the interwar period and relative obscurity in literary scholarship today: May Sinclair, Mary Butts, and H. D. These three women share the tool of pronoun shifts in producing experimental narrative. I have argued that this is part and parcel of their interest in sacrifice, as it demonstrates on the page the assimilation of the subject self – the ‘I’ – into something that is other – a ‘you’, ‘she’, or ‘we’. Sacrifice as a narrative strategy thus has two expressions: thematic and stylistic, the co-agency of which is conducive to the reading of sacrifice as a central concept in the works.

The formal experiments that relate to sacrifice on the grammatical level are, as I have shown, pronoun shifts that mark various plateaux of the narrator-protagonist's renunciation and realisation of the self. Further research into the formal aspects of using sacrifice as a narrative strategy might include looking at the intertextual level, where the stories told within each individual authorship are strikingly similar to one another, in some instances to the point where the same lines occur in several different works and the main difference is the naming of the characters. These repeated occurrences of events connected with sacrifice emphasise the similarities between ritual and the narratives, even when the context is suggestive of non-transcendental, everyday sacrifice.

Sacrifice is so important in these early twentieth-century works because it responds to the issue of the relationship between self and community, a problem which became increasingly acute in the First World War and its aftermath. The narrative pronoun shifts show a suspicion towards a hegemonic narrator and a linearly ordered narrative – a typically modernist challenge and normally understood as promoting individual freedom over the strictures of society – but they also herald the dissolution of the self and its immersion into a community. Most importantly, the centre of narrative gravity – the subjective narrative consciousness – is destabilised through fragmentation and does not allow for being put together again without the now known threat that dissolution can (and probably will) happen again at any time. A typology of person shifts in narrative voice would need to be established in order to further research in this area, building on a joint understanding of linguistics and narrative theory. This cross-disciplinary work lays the ground for further work in both abovementioned disciplines, but also has potential for branches of the medical humanities that strive to understand how self-reflective narratives are constructed.

The point that these – formally modernist – texts are making in their use of sacrifice, appears to be an oddly postmodern one, if by postmodernism we mean the self-conscious deconstruction of objective truths and metanarratives, as they pronounce the death of the subject and simultaneously assures its reconfiguration in ever-changing constitutions. Even Butts' novels, where the social group is seen to be dependent upon its metanarrative, are indicative of a suspicion towards and consciousness of the fabricated nature of such metanarratives. The pronoun shifts not only suggest misgivings towards a structured hegemony – they show that there is no way out of such a hegemony that is not equal to chaos, illustrated in these works as a breakdown of meaning and understanding, most effectively shown through the denarration in *Paint It Today*. Paradoxically, the sacrifice of the self entails a reconstruction of the self enabled by the collective that – through its absorption of the individual self – reconstitutes the self, which is still identified as belonging to an individual, but is now enriched and augmented by its bond with others.

The implications for the larger modernist project, then, is the postmodern aspect of modernist works that show an interest in sacrifice without proclaiming its position in a value system, that is, without saying that sacrifice is inherently a good or a bad thing. The works studied here, though they project a preoccupation with the individual self, are not indicative of an interest in saving the self from having to make sacrifices. Rather, they suggest that without sacrifice, there is no self.

Many other modernist writers show an interest and concern with sacrifice, as has been suggested in chapter 1, so a selection had to be made not just on the basis of the texts themselves and their context, but on the state of the field of research today. In order for this thesis to be significant and make an original contribution to knowledge within the field of literary studies, it was imperative to look beyond high

modernism to find out new things about modernist fiction that will challenge readings of individual works as well as perceptions of the movement as a whole. In order to do so, we need to look to the works that are on the edges of modernism and see what they might tell us.

My conclusion is not only significant for further research into literary modernism in terms of a revaluation of its relation to concepts that are traditionally thought of as having pre-modern connotations, but also for the wider implications of the role that sacrifice plays in contemporary society. It is imperative to deepen the understanding of the concept and its consequences for human behaviour, particularly with regard to contemporary world politics and international relations. In order to make sense of the existence of human sacrifice today we must widen or re-define the traditional, western view of modernity, so that the reality of such phenomena as suicide bombers is not dismissed as being simply anachronistic, horrifying, and inexplicable. Naturally, there are multiple reasons why sacrifice is still a significant part of society, but if those reasons are to be understood, we cannot remain entrenched in the view that sacrifice is inherently archaic.

On the back of the evidence laid out in this thesis, I propose that despite these works' historical status as modernist, they in fact illustrate the death of the subject, which is more closely associated with postmodernism. However, they also effect the recreation of the subject through sacrifices made for the benefit of a physical or spiritual community. In doing so, they transverse the binary opposition of self and other, which calls for either a re-evaluation of these works as modernist or of the distinction between modernism and postmodernism. There are many fertile areas of further research into the concept of sacrifice in other modernist works, but it would also be of relevance to consider sacrifice in the postmodern era in future research.

Writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Don DeLillo, and Salman Rushdie spring to mind as potentially suitable for such a project, which would further develop the idea that the concept of sacrifice is germane to an understanding of contemporary society. All three writers' concern with the apocalypse and the fragmentary nature of the subjective self, in combination with Vonnegut's treatment of sacrifice in war, DeLillo's work on terrorism, and Rushdie's re-formulation of traditional religious narratives, would make for an interesting future project.

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