Rethinking the Real: Modernist Realisms in *Close Up* and *Life and Letters To-day*, 1927-1939

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Sarah May Ling Chadfield, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the work of the POOL group – Kenneth Macpherson, Bryher, H.D., and Robert Herring, with the addition of Muriel Rukeyser – in terms of the modernist realisms that were emerging in the context of the journals *Close Up* (1927-1933) and *Life and Letters To-day* (1935-1950). Starting from the premise that the modern age was concerned with representing new forms of reality, it is argued that writers' invocations of 'the real' signal those points in modernism where meanings coalesce.

The thesis has four chapters. The first three argue that the real was a central concept in *Close Up*: Macpherson and Bryher believed that films had the potential to capture 'real' psychology, and often expressed this through idiosyncratic psychoanalytic readings of cinema; while H.D. thought that film, like other artworks, could loosen the binds of a singular reality and allow access to multiple realities simultaneously. These ideas were articulated and reconfigured in their writings for both journals and their other works from the period.

The final chapter examines Robert Herring's editorship of *Life and Letters To-day*, and argues that the group's understanding of the real changed in the context of the 1930s. With the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Herring attempted to shock his readers' conscience by publishing often-graphic first hand accounts of the fighting. The young poet Muriel Rukeyser provided the journal with its first eyewitness account from Spain, a text that demonstrates the challenges of writing a personal account of political events while asserting their historical significance. Across these four chapters this thesis aims to show that modernism and realism were in dialogue, and that critical understandings of the POOL group are enriched by bringing these terms together.

‘I like pictures’, people say, ‘but I like to see the *real* thing’. Meaning the play. Well, to borrow a phrase from the back of the dictionary, *chacun à son goût*, only don’t let us get into a metaphysical discussion of reality.

Kenneth Macpherson, 1927.

Contents

Introduction

Modernist realisms: Interactions Between Modernism and Realism

This section maps out the term 'modernist realisms', the central critical lens of this thesis.[1] It begins with a brief overview of realism in relation to other systems of knowledge before outlining the way 'realism' and 'modernism' have been understood in recent literary history. While modernism has at times been seen as involving a decisive break from earlier realist movements, I show that modernist experiments with form, designed to capture the various experiences of life in the modern age, nevertheless reveal an inherently realist impulse. I then examine the way in which the medium of film informed these debates. By exploring the critical implications of placing modernism and realism together, this section lays the ground for the rest of this thesis, in which I show various forms of modernist realism, or more broadly claims concerning the 'real', at work in the output of the POOL group.

Terry Lovell outlines three major theories of knowledge: empiricism, conventionalism and realism. In order to situate realism, I will begin by outlining some of the assumptions of empiricism and conventionalism. Empiricism posits

[1] The term is suggested in Esther Leslie's chapter 'Interrupted Dialogues of Realism and Modernism: "The fact of new forms of life, already born and active"', in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. and intro. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 125-41. Leslie's discussion of modernist realisms considers the fate of realism in experimental works, particularly from the political Left.

a real world that is 'independent of consciousness and theory'.[2] However, that world is only accessible through the knowing subject and the perceptive apparatus that constructs its sense of the world. Because empiricism reduces ontology to epistemology –'what is to what can be known' – the notion of an objective reality is fundamentally flawed and when scrutinised, comes undone.[3] Lovell notes that early, rationalist critics of empiricism approached this difficulty in a positive manner by proclaiming 'an active and necessary part for the mind in the construction of knowledge'.[4] For the rationalist 'knowledge was not a reflection in consciousness of the real world, but something actively constructed through the use of mental constructs – concepts, theories, methodological rules etc'.[5] All empiricist theories have to account in some way for this difficulty, that the data of sensory experience is filtered through the limitations and syntheses of a perceptual system (a fact which, as Jonathan Crary shows, became increasingly apparent to nineteenth-century science).[6] Earlier forms of empiricism responded by 'treating theoretical terms as coded summaries of empirical knowledge', that is as a form of neutrally inductive knowledge; and subsequently 'as convenient or necessary fictions, useful in generating empirical knowledge, but not in themselves entailing any reality-claim'.[7]

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[2] Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality*: *Aesthetics, Politics, Pleasure* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), p. 10.
[3] Ibid., p. 11.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 12.
[6] See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1993).
[7] Lovell, p. 12.

At the other end of the spectrum, conventionalists claim that humans construct reality in their attempts to describe it: '[e]xperience is never directly given, conceptless' so there is no such thing as a 'neutral observation language'.[8] For Kant, famously, '*the understanding does not draw its (a priori) laws from nature, but prescribes them to it*'.[9] For Thomas Kuhn, writing in the wake of Poincaré's modern conventionalism, 'sense-perception itself depends on theory' and so 'knowledge cannot be validated by an appeal to experience because the very terms of our experience presuppose certain knowledge-claims, and beg the questions which they are supposed to resolve'.[10] For Kuhn, the sciences have ruling paradigms – particular interpretations of reality – that are generally accepted within certain disciplines until new paradigms replace them: 'like dictators, each is overthrown in due course and replaced after the coup by a new despot.'[11] In conventionalism then, as Lovell notes, 'the world is in effect constructed in and by theory. Given that there is no rational procedure for choosing between theories, relativism is the inevitable result. '[12]

Modern epistemological realism in Lovell's account sits somewhere between empiricism and conventionalism: it 'retains the empiricist insistence that the real world cannot be reduced to language or to theory, but is independent of both, and yet knowable'; however, it also accepts the conventionalist view 'that knowledge is socially constructed and that language,

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[8] Lovell, p. 14.
[9] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, rev. edn., trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), §36, p. 72.
[10] Lovell, p. 15.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

even the language of experience, is theory-impregnated.'[13] Realism manages these competing claims by theorising reality as 'a multi-layered structure, consisting of entities and processes lying at different levels of that structure, including the surface level of the empirical world'. [14] In realism there is a causal connection between the '"deeper" ontological levels' and the material world and so 'we can use sense-data, experience and observation in constructing knowledge of the structures and processes of the real'.[15] Lovell goes on to explain that as 'neither the underlying structures nor the connections between these structures and the empirical world are themselves experienced [...], [t]he connection can only be reconstructed in knowledge.'[16] Realism establishes the importance of human subjectivity in gaining access to truths which nevertheless remain independent from that construction.

Epistemological realism is thus attentive to both the surface of perception and to deeper hidden truths. Part of the difficulty in writing about realism is that the concept is then incredibly expansive. As Raymond Williams has noted, the word 'real' has had a 'shifting double sense' since its first usage to describe the 'real presence' in the Eucharist: as well as describing the concrete being of the material world, the real has also been used in opposition to the 'apparent' to describe underlying realities (spiritual, psychological, political and historical) that are not immediately accessible to human perception.[17]

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[13] Lovell, p. 17.
[14] Ibid., p. 22.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1990), p. 258.

Realism in art takes epistemological realism as its basis – a belief that there are underlying truths that exist beyond human construction of them – but what these are remain the subject of debate, as are the best methods of representing them. Although here, as elsewhere, I draw a distinction between ideas about what constitutes the real, and realist methods of representation, of course the two cannot be separated. Indeed any form of realist representation is implicitly staking a claim about the real. In this thesis, I use the term 'real' to refer to the '"deeper" ontological levels' that are believed to exist, and 'realism' to refer to methods of representation (whether writing or film) keyed to that idea.

Realisms have a shared set of concerns, but successive versions are often defined in opposition to those which preceded them. As Lovell suggests, each realism 'has arisen in specific historical circumstances, and each takes its meaning as much from the practices to which it was opposed, as from practices common to all realisms.'[18] The break between nineteenth-century realism and modernism illustrate how two different ideas about the real produced different texts. Both nineteenth-century realism and modernism were trying to grasp '"deeper" ontological levels' but the emphasis on what they considered these to be, and the best way to represent them, diverged.

That said, the opposition between the literary movements of nineteenth-century realism and modernism is often founded upon a caricature of nineteenth-century realism. Describing popular perceptions of realism, Rachel Bowlby notes that it is seen as modernism's 'dingy Victorian relation' and that when it does get mentioned, 'it is usually in the form of a passing,

[18] Lovell, p. 64.

knee-jerk dismissal of it as something self-evidently without interest, not to say a bit dumb.'[19] She continues, '[n]owhere is this clearer than in the regular scorn for realism's crudely "linear" narratives, its naively "omniscient" narrators, and – worst crime of all – its facile assumptions of linguistic "transparency," all of these being qualities that are quite untransparent and unanalysed in their own meaning but essentially damning in their aim.'[20]

Of course, any examination of nineteenth-century realism reveals a movement far more complex than the version that would merit the sweeping dismissal that Bowlby describes. Pam Morris, for example, explores the way in which realism developed within the contexts of different countries: predominantly France and England, although she also touches upon Russia and America. In France, Morris notes that the country's realist writers 'espoused the new authority of science with its disciplined observation of empirical reality', but they were also 'in sympathy with romantic writers' rejection of classical decorum and their attitude of rebellion towards state authority and bourgeois materialism and respectability'.[21] Coupled with a political backdrop of intense change, realism emerged as a radical rather than a conservative force.

For Morris, the realism that developed in England during the same period was of a different nature to that which had emerged in France. For a start, it was far less radical, in part because 'the larger field of national power politics was also less turbulent'.[22] A more 'evolutionary form of social and political

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[19] Rachel Bowlby, Foreword to *Adventures in Realism*, xi-xviii (xi).
[20] Bowlby, Foreword, xi-xii.
[21] Pam Morris, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 53.
[22] Ibid., p. 76.

change resulted in a literary field in Britain that was relatively less polarised and interpenetrated by wider struggles for power'.[23] Morris notes that another key difference was English realism's relationship to romanticism. Without the oppressive influence of the Academy, which French writers railed against, English romantics had instead positioned 'themselves in opposition to Jeremy Bentham's [...] rational philosophy of utilitarianism, understood as hostile to the truths of imaginative creativity and the sympathetic heart'.[24] As Romantic writers like William Blake and William Hazlitt believed utilitarianism was a bleak philosophy of statistical facts that was used to justify a punitive attitude to the labouring poor', later realist writers in England were far more 'wary of identifying the aims of the novelist with those of the scientist in the way that Balzac, Flaubert and Zola had done'.[25] Morris also notes that women novelists were more prevalent in the development of English realism – most notably Austen, the Brontës, Gaskell and Eliot – a fact which we might see as shifting the genre towards the representation of consciousness via free indirect discourse. Even a cursory overview of Morris' descriptions of French and English realism thus shows the complexity of the movement and the injustice of its reputation for representational naiveté. Accounts of American literary realism have similarly stressed its complexity, and indeed the contradictions of any

[23] Morris, *Realism*, p. 77.
[24] Ibid., p. 78.
[25] Ibid.

account of realism as a transparent medium which does not itself manipulate the 'real'.[26]

Virginia Woolf's 1924 essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', draws on the more caricatured notion of nineteenth century realism, as she attempts to illustrate modernism's decisive break with that legacy. Woolf imagined observing a woman, Mrs Brown, on a train from Richmond to Waterloo. Woolf parodies the way Arnold Bennett would represent Mrs Brown, which she characterises as a nineteenth-century attempt at a photographic impersonality.[27] According to Woolf, Bennett's prose would document every detail: 'the way in which the cushion bulged between the buttons; how Mrs Brown wore a brooch which had cost three-and-ten-three at Whitworth's bazaar'.[28] Woolf claimed that this was the style of Bennett's novel *Hilda Lessways*, where he began by 'describing accurately and minutely the sort of house Hilda lived in, and the sort of house she saw from the window' to make the reader 'believe in the reality' of the eponymous character.[29] Woolf believed this method was inadequate in conveying the shifting values and perspectives

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[26] See Michael Davitt Bell, *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[27] For a discussion of Woolf's essay in relation to modernism's contradictory construction of a 'pre-photographic' and pre-realist realm, see Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 244-46.

[28] Virginia Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 13.

[29] Ibid., p. 17.

of lived existence. She asked: 'who are the judges of reality? A character may be real to Mr Bennett and quite unreal to me.'[30]

Woolf argues that in *Hilda Lessways* 'we can only hear Mr Bennett's voice telling us facts about rents and freeholds and copyholds and fines' – suggesting realism's origins in possessive individualism and a world of objects.[31] For Woolf, the writers of her generation were engaged in a different project to the Edwardians: they were trying to create a new reality, which embraced the subjective experience of the individual. According to Woolf, whilst the Edwardians 'have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things', Georgian writers were attempting to capture 'life' in a more internal and vitalist sense.[32] These Georgian writers believed that '[a]t whatever cost of life, limb, and damage to valuable property Mrs Brown must be rescued, expressed and set in her high relations to the world'.[33] The Edwardian literary conventions associated with Bennett had been abandoned and the Georgian writers were faced with the task of 'smashing' and 'crashing' to create their own form: '[g]rammar is violated' and 'syntax disintegrated'.[34] Specifically, Woolf lists, 'Ulysses, Queen Victoria [Lytton Strachey's biography] and Mr. Prufrock – to give Mrs Brown some of the names she has made famous lately'.[35] According to Woolf, the necessity to represent a different type of reality, and the need to

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[30] Woolf, p. 10. Erich Auerbach focused on Woolf's novel *To The Lighthouse* in 'The Brown Stocking', the final chapter of his canonical *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).
[31] Woolf, p. 16.
[32] Ibid., p. 18.
[33] Ibid., p. 20.
[34] Ibid., p. 21.
[35] Ibid., p. 22.

develop a style in which to do this, required a radical departure from what had come before.

In this inevitably rudimentary, survey of nineteenth-century realism and modernism it is easy to see why these movements were seen as having opposing concerns. Indeed Woolf herself pitches the modernist project against realism – at least as embodied in Bennett and the other Edwardian novelists.[36] Morris, comparing the opening of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* to Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* emphasises the differences between realism and modernism. Morris notes that 'no objective perspective is offered the reader of *Mrs Dalloway* from which to understand and evaluate the characters referred to or the social world evoked' so the narrative perspective 'remains almost entirely within the subjective consciousness of Clarissa Dalloway'.[37] Clarissa Dalloway is then 'too fluid, multiple, changing, and amorphous to become a fully comprehended object of the reader's knowledge'.[38] This notion of the real has implications for representation: 'Mrs Dalloway's thought process is not explained rationally to the reader in the way the narrator of *Daniel Deronda* explains the gambling psychology of the wealthy London tradesman, rather, in *Mrs Dalloway*, the rhythm and sound of words are utilised to directly suggest something of the actual texture and flow of inner feeling.'[39] Morris notes that, 'Modernist writers wrote out of a troubled sense that 'reality', whether material or psychological,

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[36] See e.g. Pam Morris, 'Woolf and Realism', in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, ed. by Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 40-51.
[37] Morris, *Realism*, pp. 14-15.
[38] Ibid., p. 15.
[39] Ibid.

was elusive, complex, multiple and unstable, but they still believed that the aim of their art was to convey knowledge, by some new aesthetic means, of that intangibility.'[40] The modernists, then, 'did not, by and large, reject the very possibility that literary art could produce some form of knowledge of reality, however elusive and uncircumscribed the real had come to seem'.[41]

Many modernist writers were attempting to capture the reality of subjective experience, but they were also seeking to apprehend other realities that were emerging from the period. Marshall Berman described modern life as a 'maelstrom' fed from many sources: scientific, industrial, and technological developments; urban growth and changing ways of living; increasingly powerful nation states; and all within the 'ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market'.[42] For Berman, this modern world is a place where, as Marx said, 'everything is pregnant with its contrary' and 'all that is solid melts into air'.[43] This image of a shifting modernity is almost axiomatic.

For Raymond Williams, this fluctuating and contingent version of the modern was evident in the new ways that the metropolis was being represented in the early twentieth century. Williams notes a distinctive shift from the metropolis as a subject to be treated in writing, to a modern mimetic relation which resulted in a focus on form. Williams notes the 'very openness and complexity of the metropolis' where 'there was no formed and settled

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[40] Morris, *Realism*, p. 17.
[41] Ibid., p. 24.
[42] Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), p. 16.
[43] Ibid., pp. 35-6.

society to which the new kinds of work could be related'.[44] As a consequence, '[t]he relationships were to the open and complex and dynamic social process itself, and the only accessible form of this practice was an emphasis on the medium: the medium as that which, in an unprecedented way, defined art.'[45] Williams' argument reinforces Woolf's claim that the violation of grammar and syntax was a response to a particular set of conditions that severed links to previous literary movements which emphasised stability.

Realism was not just a question of aesthetics but was also of political importance because of its association with Marxism. Lovell argues at length that Marxism should be considered a realism because it rests 'upon the belief that there are underlying forces and relationships which structure human interaction and determine the social dynamic and history'.[46] Lovell continues to explain, that '[b]ecause of the particular form which these social relationships take under capitalism, these underlying forces are not immediately visible to those who act in these social relationships'.[47] But it is the very hiddenness of that reality that has caused one influential vein of thinking on realism – most powerfully associated with Louis Althusser as mediated by Catherine Belsey – to dismiss classical realism as reactionary, as a mirroring of bourgeois ideology and

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[44] Raymond Williams, 'Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism', in *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 37-48, (p. 46).
[45] Williams, 'Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism', p. 46.
[46] Lovell, p. 67.
[47] Ibid.

capitalist modes of production, rather than their unmasking.[48] How are we to judge these competing claims?

Throughout the 1930s there was intense debate about which method of representation would reveal to the masses the reality of their state. Ernst Bloch, defending expressionism from the charge of fascism, believed that 'capitalist social relations prevent us being complete individuals' and so 'Modernist art, in re-mediating that fragmentariness, produces a historically authentic mirror of experience'. [49] The result is 'an art of the real'.[50] In response, Georg Lukács argued that nineteenth-century realism was the most 'real' form of literature because it could capture a deep reality that a record of surface impressions could not access. In line with the theories of epistemological realism, according to Lukács, the realist's goal was to 'penetrate the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society'.[51]

Realism occupied a central place in Lukács' literary theory. Rodney Livingstone notes Lukács' romantic anti-capitalist stance. This was, as Livingstone suggests, 'a wide spectrum of opposition to capitalism, ultimately tracing its roots back to the romantic movement: 'a plea for a universe governed by qualitative values as opposed to the logic of rationality and the

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[48] Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen 1980), pp. 56-57.
[49] Leslie, 'Interrupted Dialogues', p. 126.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Georg Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance' [1938], in *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 28-59, (p. 38).

cash nexus'.[52] Once Lukács had lost faith in the proletariat's ability to change the world on their own, he turned to realist literature to demystify and de-reify. Livingstone notes then that Lukács' later view of realism is a form of essentialism: 'the crucial fact for Lukács is that what we see is only appearance, whereas the great novelist reveals "the driving forces" of history which are invisible to actual consciousness.'[53] For Livingstone, Lukács' 'commitment to realism is a commitment to the "world in common" of those who are awake. It is a sustained appeal to all progressive thinkers to abandon their residual private worlds. Realism is then not a substitute for political action: it is the structure of consciousness that accompanies it.'[54]

For Bertolt Brecht, Lukács' reversion to earlier forms of writing was anachronistic. Brecht believed that '*popular art* and *realism*' were 'natural allies' because the masses were against the barbarism which they suffered and that in turning to the people, it was of paramount importance to 'speak their language'.[55] However, Brecht's definition of this language was considerably broader than that of Lukács, who advocated the modes of nineteenth-century realism. Like Bloch, Brecht believed that experimental forms were more suited to capture present day reality. Brecht was critical of any definition of 'popular'

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[52] Rodney Livingstone, intro. to Georg Lukács, *Essays on Realism*, trans. by David Fernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980) p. 4.
[53] Ibid., p. 12. Lukács' shift from his earlier and more positive views of modernist fragmentation (for example in *The Theory of the Novel*, 1920) was of course related to political pressures following the 1932 declaration of Socialist Realism as the official mode of the party.
[54] Livingstone, p. 21.
[55] Bertolt Brecht, 'Popularity and Realism' in *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 79-85, (p.80).

or 'real' that looked to former usages of the terms. In an implicit criticism of Lukács, although Brecht does not name him, he notes that

> with the people struggling and changing reality before our eyes, we must not cling to 'tried' rules of narrative, venerable literary models, eternal aesthetic laws. We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men in a form they can master. We shall take care not to describe one particular, historical form of novel of a particular epoch as realistic – say that of Balzac or Tolstoy – and thereby erect merely formal, literary criteria for realism.[56]

For Brecht then, realism was not a static term but one which changed depending on the historical moment. As such, the real needed new forms to represent it: '[n]ew problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change.'[57] For Brecht these new forms could be popular. Brecht specifically illustrated this using examples from the theatre. He noted:

> Piscator's great theatrical experiments in which conventional forms were constantly destroyed, found their greatest support in the most

[56] Brecht, 'Popularity and Realism', p. 81-2.
[57] Ibid., p. 82.

> advanced cadres of the working class; so have my own. The workers judged everything according to the truth of its content; they welcomed every innovation which helped the representation of truth, of the real mechanism of society; they rejected everything that seemed theatrical, technical equipment that merely worked for its own sake – that is to say, that did not yet fulfil, or no longer fulfilled, its purpose.[58]

For Lukács it was of utmost political importance for realism to be associated with particular forms; Brecht argued the same about more experimental methods: '[i]f we wish to have a living and combative literature, which is fully engaged with reality and fully grasps reality, a truly popular literature, we must keep step with the rapid development of reality.'[59]

It is clear from this brief examination of Woolf, and the political positions of Bloch, Lukács and Brecht, that realism continued to be debated intensely in modernist discourses. The next two sections of the introduction will explore further examples of this during the period when *Close Up* and *Life and Letters To-day* were in circulation. But the importance of realism continued beyond modernism: in the 1960s Alain Robbe-Grillet proposed that – if realism is defined broadly – the new novel is always realist, as it seeks to re-construct the novelist's reality. He believed that realism is 'a flag under which the enormous

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[58] Brecht, 'Popularity and Realism', p. 83.
[59] Ibid., p. 85.

majority – if not all – of to-day's novelists enlist'.[60] This is not of course to suggest that novelists were working in a harmonious way, towards a common aim. In fact:

> Realism is the ideology which each brandishes against his neighbour, the quality which each believes he possesses for himself alone. And it has always been the same: out of concern for realism each new literary school has sought to destroy the one which preceded it; this was the watchword of the romantics against the classicists, then of the naturalists against the romantics; the surrealists themselves declared in their turn that they were concerned only with the real world.[61]

In Robbe-Grillet's acute formulation, the text is the point which articulates the concerns of the writer and this 'reality' is something worth fighting against others for. The real is that which asserts itself as urgent to all new artistic movements; that which they seek to bring to visibility.

For Robbe-Grillet, the new work actually brings a new reality into being: '[t]he style of the novel does not seek to inform, as does the chronicle, the testimony offered in evidence, or the scientific report, it *constitutes* reality.'[62] To illustrate this, Robbe-Grillet describes the process of trying to depict the

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[60] Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'From Realism to Reality', in *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp. 157-168, (p. 157).
[61] Ibid., pp. 157-8.
[62] Ibid., p. 161.

flight of gulls for one of his novels. He used the opportunity to visit Brittany to observe the birds but found that those he saw did not matter to him as much as the ones he already imagined. The gulls in his mind '[p]robably they came there, one way or another, from the external world, and perhaps from Brittany; but they had been transformed, becoming at the same time somehow more real *because* they were now imaginary.'[63] Robbe-Grillet then suggests an interrelation between the new work and reality: 'I do not transcribe, I construct.'[64] The writer is caught in a two way process: he is returning to reality in order to reinvigorate the novel, but in doing so the novel becomes a constitutive element in constructing a new reality. Considering modernist works as real not only recognises the points of potential solidity in the flux, but also suggests that writers' articulations of these urgent realities was a way to hold on to them and bring them into the world.

We need to consider at this point the question of the medium in which the 'real' is transmitted. In almost all philosophical traditions, the written word cannot access reality directly: it is secondary, conventional, even destructive.[65] The word is always inexact and mediated. In the modern period the possibilities of realism were radically influenced by developments in technological media in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This thesis not only examines writers but, more specifically, writers who were profoundly engaged with film.[66]

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[63] Robbe-Grillet, p. 162.
[64] Ibid.
[65] The case against this pervasive view (as in 'The letter killeth', 2 Corinthians 3:6) is of course one burden of Derrida's earlier writing.
[66] For some of the background issues here, see Andrew Shail, *The Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), and Julian

To begin this discussion of photography and film, I will take the real as the apparent obviousness of the physical world. The camera is in a very different position to the word to capture this. With the invention of the camera, commentators had heralded photographs as direct, causally-mediated impressions of the world: a way for empiricism to solve the problem of a subjective, mediating, perceiving consciousness. In the opening years of the twentieth century, American philosopher and mathematician Charles Peirce wrote a taxonomy of different classes of sign, in which he identified an indexical sign as that which has 'an existential bond between itself and an object'.[67] Examples of such signs, given by Peirce, include weather vanes, which point in the direction they are physically moved to by the wind, and the barometer. Photography was similarly seen as indexical:

> Photography, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that in certain respects they are exactly like the objects they represent. But this is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature.[68]

Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[67] Charles Peirce quoted in Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), pp. 123-4. Laura Marcus discusses the importance of the indexical sign in realist film in 'Cinematic Realism: "A recreation of the world in its own image"', in *Adventures in Realism*, pp. 177-92, (p. 180).

[68] Peirce quoted in Wollen, pp. 123-4.

To Peirce, photographs did not simply say something about the world; they were a direct imprint of it. The physical relation between the sign and the world was, to Peirce, proof of the former's authenticity; although, of course, a photograph is still a sign and the relation between a sign and that which it represents is never one of identity. However, the relationship between object, light, and photographic plate appeared reassuringly unmediated by human consciousness to many early proponents of photography. Anna Atkins, now recognised as the earliest woman photographer, famously experimented with placing botanical specimens on light-sensitive paper in order to create exact reproductions of their shape as the paper was exposed.[69] The images avoided the subjective influence of the human hand and were therefore seen as scientific in their exactness. This direct, albeit technologically-mediated, correspondence between the object and the representation was a key part of photography's fascination.

The idea that photography was unmediated led to its widespread use as social record, linked once again to the idea of an exposure of a hidden 'real'. In the 1930s documentary photography became increasingly popular because of the camera's perceived ability to show the reality of poverty in rural states in America. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) had been launched by the Roosevelt administration in 1935 in response to the Great Depression. The photography unit of the Farm Security Administration's Historical Section, headed by Roy E. Stryker, was the source of many now-canonical photographs of rural poverty: '[i]ts remit was to produce and collect photographic evidence

[69] Pete Turner, *History of Photography* (Twickenham: Hamlyn, 1987), p. 62.

of the living and working conditions of the middle and southern states, and to document the rural rehabilitation afforded by New Deal reform projects.'[70] The photographs collected by the various photographers (including Dorothea Lange, Jack Delano, Walker Evans, Edwin Rosskan, Ben Shan, Carl Mydans, Arthur Rothstein and Russell Lee) were sent to publications and often formed the basis of photo-essays. [71] Lange and Evans claimed that they did not arrange the compositions of the shots but simply took photos of what was already there. Similarly, Stryker subscribed to the idea of the photograph as a frame which gave form to 'formless reality'. This fantasy of the camera was as old as the medium.

In photography, pictures were seen to simply capture the world. The equivalent 'realist' method of representation in the cinema was to record unscripted, unstaged moments in long, uninterrupted camera shots that effaced the presence of the creator and recalled Peirce's indexical sign. In recording the material world, supposedly without a mediating consciousness, photography and film might unintentionally capture previously unseen phenomena. This process of rendering-visible was explored by Walter Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', with his observation that 'the enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of

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[70] Catherine Gander, *Muriel Rukeyser and Documentary: The Poetics of Connection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 10.
[71] Ibid., p. 10 and p. 12.

the subject'.[72] Here, the image has both an artistic and a scientific value, as the camera reveals 'structural formations' that the habitual spectator has failed to register. Just as *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* 'isolated and made analysable things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception', so the camera has made physical reality similarly worthy of excavation.[73] When 'an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man' it reveals an 'optical unconscious' which, once discovered, alters human perception:

> Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling.[74]

The explosion metaphor is apt: the camera destroys the lumber of nineteenth-century realism; it throws open the possibilities of previously familiar scenes, enabling new explorations.

Initially it seems as though Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious is compatible with realist conventions. The photo or film might be an unmanipulated recording of the material world, yet through the audience's

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[72] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 211-244, (pp.229-30).
[73] Ibid., p. 229.
[74] Ibid.

heightened attention during the viewing process, elements that would go unnoticed in everyday life could be revealed. However, the issue is again more complex: what of the filmmaker who actively wants to emphasise unnoticed elements and so uses filmic techniques to alter the viewer's experience? Benjamin notes that, 'with the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended'.[75] These techniques are often associated with formalist practitioners and have at times been read as anti-realist because of their 'capacity to manipulate reality, that is, to rearrange and thereby reconstitute the profilmic event'.[76] Here, then, formalist techniques are employed to enable a different way of perceiving the material world as captured by the camera: that is, to break through the surface of a received and unquestioned 'reality'. Once again, representing the real might require formalist experimentation.

Critics have explored the overlap in these ways of thinking about film. For the Hungarian film critic Béla Balázs, the use of formalist techniques was crucial to re-learning lost modes of perception. Both Laura Marcus and Gertrude Koch have argued that Balázs' ideas 'probably inspired Benjamin's speculations on the relationship between the "optical" and the psychoanalytic unconscious' as their conceptions of the camera's effect on perception are comparable.[77] Balázs regarded film as a means of 'relearning the long-forgotten

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[75] Benjamin, p. 229.
[76] Noel Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 7.
[77] Laura Marcus, introduction to 'Part 6: Cinema and Psychoanalysis', in *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, ed. and intro. by James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 240-46, (p.242); Gertrude Koch, 'Béla Balázs: The Physiognomy of Things', trans. by Miriam

language of gestures and facial expressions'; films were supposed to retrain the human eye to see what they had been missing through their habitual sight.[78] For Balázs, the camera 'will show you the adventures and the ultimate fate of the cigar in your unsuspecting hand, and the secret – because unheeded – life of all the things that accompany you on your way and that taken together make up the events of your life'.[79] The camera is assigned an almost magical property: through providing a renewed focus, it imbues even the mundane with a wider significance. Our lives, for Balázs, had been fragmented to the point where they could no longer be read in totality without the aid of film.

Malcolm Turvey groups Balázs with the film theorists and makers Siegfried Kracauer, Jean Epstein and Dziga Vertov, labelling them 'revelationist' theorists. Turvey argues that they all share a fundamental skepticism about the human ability to see reality. In contrast to flawed human sight, they believed that the camera could objectively capture reality as it really was; the camera thus represented a means to correct human vision. Turvey begins with the realist-versus-formalist divide and suggests that his four 'revelationists' at first appear as realists according to traditional criteria, in that they see the purpose of film as recording reality without manipulating it. However all four also go on to celebrate techniques, such as the close up, parallel editing and montage, that would be considered key to manipulating reality in a formalist style. And so, for

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Hansen, in *New German Critique: An Interdisciplinary Journal of German Studies*, 40 (1987), pp. 167-77, (p. 171-2).

[78] Béla Balázs, 'Visible Man, or The Culture of Film', in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates & Arguments*, ed. by Marc Furstenau (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), pp. 69-79, (p. 70).

[79] Ibid., p. 75.

Balázs, Kracauer, Epstein and Vertov, the goal of recording objective reality and the use of formalist filmic techniques go hand in hand. They all:

> celebrate these techniques, including the cinema's capacity to record reality, because they better enable filmmakers to reproduce reality as it is, not because they enable filmmakers to avoid 'merely' reproducing reality, as they did for Rudolf Arnheim and other modernists.[80]

Consequently, Turvey argues that Balázs, Epstein, Vertov, and Kracauer should be considered neither realist nor formalist although they share features with both.[81] Already then, in this survey of the revelationist theorists, reality is not something that yields itself readily to understanding. As we have seen, the camera not only reproduces the world with the exactness of Pierce's indexical sign, but plays an active part in emphasising some aspects of this world through filmic techniques. Once again realism emerges as a shifting, 'mediated' means of representation, nether fully empirical nor ideal.

Thus far, in the discussions of photography and film, I have assumed that the material world is the real that the photographer or filmmaker is seeking to represent, although the notion of a stable world that can be recorded is problematised by both mediums (as it is even more by the related medium of the X-ray). However, in seeking to capture the real, the photographer or

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[80] Malcolm Turvey, 'Balázs: Realist or Modernist?', in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates & Arguments*, pp. 80-89, (p. 88).
[81] Ibid.

filmmaker might focus on underlying realities which are conceived as hidden from sight. Just as in literature, some filmmakers have seen exposing social, economic, psychological, or imaginative structures as the essence of realist cinema. Capturing these differently-conceived 'realities' might mean abandoning unscripted, unstaged moments altogether, and introducing 'artificial' elements such as narrative or settings. The introduction of these elements would then serve to render a particular unseen aspect of reality more clearly than if the filmmaker had recorded non-actors in their own environments. This type of realist film is in the curious position of claiming to reflect the world the audience inhabits whilst perhaps appearing unrecognisable to them.

In outlining the ways in which modernism and realism have been understood, and how they might be seen as interrelated projects, I have aimed to show that each offers the other important perspectives. Taking Robbe-Grillet's claim that every new work is realist, the modern period offers realism new sets of ideas for the real and new possibilities for representation, both in forms of writing but also in the advent of photography and film. The relation between writing and film was complex and multidirectional as writers often sought to mimic filmic techniques in an attempt to represent the world in prose. I argue that, just as modernism offers realism new types of reality and forms of representation, modernism also benefits from realism as it focuses these formal innovations around particular types of meaning. The real reveals the points which were taken to be urgent, important and worth fixing in the artworks. These notions of modernist realisms underpin the discussions in this thesis.

Close Up

Having outlined the ways in which modernism and realism cast light on one another, this section aims to ground this interplay in the particular context of the cultural movements of the Weimar Republic. I then examine Sergei Eisenstein and G.W. Pabst, the directors most influential to the POOL group to show the way they were situated in this culture. Throughout this section I begin to outline Macpherson, Bryher and H.D.'s conceptions of the real, and the forms that they adopted to articulate these realisms.

When H.D., Bryher and Macpherson started *Close Up* they were mainly based in Switzerland, where they had access to a range of often-uncensored films from different countries. However, they also spent several months a year in Berlin from 1927 to 1932.[82] The Weimar Republic was established in July 1919 after Germany's authoritarian monarchy collapsed in the wake of World War One. The early years of the Republic were characterised by 'perpetual economic and political turmoil, by social disorganisation and disillusion'.[83] Indeed, fear of the revolutionary masses led to the constitution being ratified in

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[82] Bryher, *The Heart to Artemis: A Writer's Memoir* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 2006), p. 254. The group regularly visited the Weimar Republic during the periods that Kracauer categorised as the end of the stabilized period and the beginning of the pre-Hitler period. Kracauer defined the periods as The Archaic Period (1895-1918), The Postwar Period (1918-1924), The Stabilized Period (1924-1929), and The Pre-Hitler Period (1930-1933). Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), v.

[83] Hal Foster with Rosalind Krauss and others, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), p. 208.

provincial Weimar instead of Berlin.[84] But the end of the war brought about not only the end of the monarchy, the onset of hyperinflation and the constant threat of revolution; it also meant that allegiances in Europe shifted. John Willett suggests that Germany was forced to look to Russia as a result of its severed relations with the rest of Western Europe.[85] Willett notes that between 1921 and 1922 there were no less than five new sets of political ties created between the two countries, aside from those already in place through the Comintern and the KPD (The Communist Party of Germany).[86] There was also a new willingness on Russia's part to let citizens travel abroad and this increased traffic between Berlin and Russia almost overnight.[87] These factors had a profound impact on the Berlin art scene. While other countries still held Paris as their cultural centre, new movements that were emerging in Soviet Russia heavily influenced the Weimar Republic. [88]

During this period, Russian artists were engaged with ideas around realism, contesting and redefining them. After the revolution in 1917, movements such as Constructivism and Futurism emerged, which used anti-realist forms in the pursuit of representing 'reality', a new reality that had come into being after the dissolution of the pre-revolutionary status quo. By the early 1920s, Soviet constructivism in Russia was suffering from internal arguments and debates,

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[84] Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and 'New Objectivity'* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), p. 3.
[85] John Willett, *The New Sobriety: Art and Politics in The Weimar Period 1917-33*, p. 13. This section outlining the culture of the Weimar Republic is indebted to Willett's book.
[86] Ibid., p. 72.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., p. 13.

with the Inkhuk (Institute of Artistic Culture) finally deciding that members should go into productivism, creating textiles, furniture, clothing, stage design, photography, photomontage, typography and film tinting.[89] This created new waves of Russian influence in Berlin as many Russians who opposed the move towards methods of production left for Germany: Wassily Kandinsky, Antoine Pevsner, and Naum Gabo were amongst those who arrived in Berlin.[90] The latter two had produced a Realist Manifesto in 1920, which proclaimed that the kinetic rhythmic movements of man were his true reality. Ilya Ehrenburg and his painter wife Kozintseva also arrived in Berlin by way of Paris. Ehrenburg later wrote the novel *Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney*, the basis for Pabst's film of the same name.[91] A Berlin constructivist movement began with Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, Werner Graeff, Hans Richter, and Kurt Schwitters.

Just as there had been artistic traffic between Russia and Germany in literature and painting, there was also shared traffic in the film industry. This was largely because the political activist Willi Münzenberg had created the Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe (IAH), or Workers International Relief, in 1921. Although the IAH's chief purpose was to raise money from communist

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[89] Willett, p. 74.
[90] Ibid., pp. 74-5.
[91] An English translation of the novel was advertised several times in the pages of *Close Up*. See e.g.: 'Of Importance to the Epicure of the Film: The Love of Jeanne Ney', advert in *Close Up*, 5.6 (1929), p. 446. It reads: 'Ilya Ehrenburg, whose works are appearing in practically every European language, is one of the most conspicuous of the younger post-revolutionary school of Russian novelists. "The Love of Jeanne Ney" – of which the "pirated" and inaccurate film version caused something of a sensation last year – is a rapidly moving novel of Bolshevik intrigue, the action of which takes place in Russia and Paris.'

organisations in order to help famine-stricken areas in Russia, alongside this political remit, it also aimed to promote cultural ties between Germany and Russia. In practice, many of these ties were around the film industries in both countries. When the Russ cooperative studio in Moscow got into financial difficulties, the IAH, (under its Russian title, Mezhrabpom) came to its aid to create Mezhrabpom-Russ, the studio responsible for films such as *Aelita* and *Cigarette-Girl from Mosselprom,* and that gathered a strong team of directors, including Vsevolod Pudovkin. Münzenberg also took over a German production firm called Prometheus, which he used to distribute Russian films. Consequently, Germany imported far more films than its Western European counterparts: it allowed twelve Soviet films to be shown up to February 1927, in comparison to three in Britain and three in France during in the same period.[92] Prometheus also gave Soviet films the titles by which they became known abroad, such as *Storm over Asia,* and *Bed and Sofa*.[93]

When H.D., Bryher and Macpherson came to Berlin in 1927, they were able to watch many films that were not available anywhere else outside of Russia. All of them wrote about these films in *Close Up*, and Bryher's book *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* discussed four directors in detail and referenced over a hundred Soviet films, including many by Mezhrabpom-Russ. In Chapter 2, I discuss Bryher's account of Pudovkin's film *Mother* from this book. With so few Soviet films imported to Western Europe, H.D. was not exaggerating when she explained the significance of the Berlin film world: '[t]he Germans hold the key

[92] Willett, p. 142.
[93] Ibid.

really [to the art of film], are the intermediaries between Russia and the outside world that still believes Red to be a symbol of murder and destruction.'[94] In fact, a repeated refrain in *Close Up* was that mindless censorship was preventing Russian films from being shown in Britain, despite their artistic merit.

The Russian director most influential to the group's thinking was undoubtedly Sergei Eisenstein. Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* had arrived in Berlin in the spring of 1926. Although the film was initially banned, when it was finally released it was so popular that it ran at one Berlin cinema for the whole year.[95] Eisenstein perfectly embodied one type of modernist realism from the time. He was a 'realist' director – in that he wanted to represent the new reality of post-revolution Russia and awaken the masses to their position in society – and he employed experimental methods, like the Constructivists and Futurists. In the Russian journal *Lef,* the Futurist poet and playwright S.M. Tretyakov marked out the realist positions that Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov occupied. While both Eisenstein and Vertov had similar aims, they had very different methods of achieving them. Tretyakov created a scale in order to measure the differences between their styles of filmmaking depending on the 'deformation' of the 'raw' elements.[96] Tretyakov explained 'deformation' as 'the arbitrary

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[94] H.D., 'An Appreciation', *Close Up*, 4.3 (1929), pp. 56-68, (p. 62).
[95] Willett, p. 143.
[96] S.M Tretyakov extract in *Realism and the Cinema: A Reader*, ed. by Christopher Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul for BFI, 1980) p. 117. Tretyakov also gave a series of lectures about realism in Berlin in 1931 in which he explained that something as revolutionary as the Five Year Plan lay outside of the nineteenth-century realists' scope and that a writer trying to capture Soviet reality would have to revolutionise both his subject matter and his literary techniques. The resulting works of art were intended to not just describe the revolution but to use it as an event to alter the structure and

distortion and displacement', of the world as it is filmed, and created three categories, '*in flagrante*, *scripted* and *played*', to reflect the different levels of deformation in operation [original italics].[97] In this scale, Eisenstein was 'scripted' because his scenarios were constructed and he chose people to play roles who had 'the appropriate faces, habits and movements'.[98] This meant that although the people in his films were acting, they were almost playing themselves. In contrast, Tretyakov saw Vertov's kino-eye as an example of the most objective type of filming, *in flagrante* because he did not create filmic scenarios, or use actors.

Eisenstein believed that the filmmaker should actively construct their film through the use of the shot. For Eisenstein, the shot was not simply the material that the camera happened to record. Rather, it was 'a locus of formal elements such as lighting, line, movement, and volume'.[99] From these elements, the filmmaker should construct his own meaning using narrative and – as Tretyakov identified – actors, rather than allowing the natural sense of the scene to dominate the audience's experience. The most important aspect of a film for Eisenstein was a combination of the elements in the shot and the response these elements evoked from the audience: his theory was 'a relation between mind and matter; it was a question of audience experience'.[100]

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understanding of writing itself. Hugh Ridley, 'Tretjakov in Berlin', in *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic,* ed. by John Bullivant (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 150-165, (p. 151).

[97] Tretyakov extract in *Realism and the Cinema*, p. 117.

[98] Ibid., p. 118.

[99] James Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction*. (London; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976) p. 50.

[100] Ibid., p. 51.

Eisenstein's criticism of Vertov's kino-eye film theory was that it recorded material without organising it into a discernible scheme. Eisenstein asserted that Vertov's films belonged to '*primitive impressionism*', one of art's '*least valuable expressions in ideological terms,'* because it went no further than '*fixing the audience's attention'* without in any way evoking a response from them [original italics].[101] For Eisenstein, more was needed than just observing phenomena to engage the audience: '*[i]t is not a 'Cine-Eye' that we need but a Cine-Fist.*'[102] Eisenstein and Vertov agreed about what reality was, but fundamentally disagreed on how best to represent it: Eisenstein believed that manipulating the filmic material would awaken the masses to their position in society; whereas Vertov, in line with the idea that reality contains hidden truths that the camera can reveal, believed that filming unmanipulated reality was the way to achieve a similar awakening.

Close Up was the first journal to print Eisenstein's writing in English and, over the course of its six-year run, published seven of his articles. Eisenstein even sent the journal a photo signed, 'To K. Macpherson – Editor of the Closest Up to what cinema should be, with heartiest wishes.'[103] Throughout this thesis, I return to Eisenstein's method of cinema making when discussing the POOL group's understanding of realism. The group was strongly influenced by Eisenstein's use of real locations, his casting, and the way he constructed shots

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[101] Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Problem of the Material Approach to Form', in *Selected Works, Vol.1, Writings, 1922-34,* ed. and trans. by Richard Taylor (London: BFI, 1988), pp. 59-64, (p. 62 and 64). The italics in the quotations taken from this essay are all original.
[102] Ibid., p. 64.
[103] Eisenstein, Frontispiece, *Close Up*, 4.1, (1929).

in order to evoke a reaction from the audience. Though they were not trying to awaken the masses to class consciousness, they were hoping to convert readers to cinema's potential as an art form.

Alongside the movements interested in representing the new realities of the modern world was 'a new naturalism' which the Berlin art magazine *Das Kunstblatt* believed had arisen from the ashes of Expressionism.[104] In 1923 the director of the municipal gallery at Mannheim, G.F. Hartlaub, began soliciting works for an exhibition that would display a clear-cut attitude to what he termed 'a positively tangible reality'.[105] Hartlaub wrote that this realism 'was related to the general contemporary feeling in Germany of resignation and cynicism' but that, more positively, it expressed enthusiasm for representing 'things entirely objectively on a material basis without immediately investing them with ideal implications'.[106] While the impulse behind the exhibition might have seemed rooted in disillusionment, it was precisely this that Hartlaub saw as its power. The exhibition eventually took place in the middle of 1925, and was called 'Die neue Sachlichkeit', widely translated into English as 'The New Objectivity' or 'New Sobriety'. Willett emphasises that the quality of the term 'sachlichkeit' in German implied 'objectivity in the sense of a neutral, sober, matter-of-fact approach, thus coming to embrace functionalism, utility, [and the] absence of decorative frills'.[107]

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[104] Willett, p. 84.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Kracauer, p. 165.
[107] Willett, p. 112.

In the first of Hartlaub's exhibitions, there were 124 pictures by thirty-two artists, working broadly under two different groups.[108] While some of the stylistic features of these groups were not entirely new, Hartlaub's exhibition now united them under a common name. The first of the groups was 'coolly uncomplimentary social commentators' like Otto Dix, Georg Grosz, Rudolf Schlichter, Georg Scholz, Karl Rössing, Anton Räderscheidt, Heinrich Maria Davringhausen and Karl Hubbuch.[109] The second group was composed of those connected to the critic Franz Roh and worked under the label of Magic Realism, which was much closer to metaphysical painting. This group included the painters Georg Schrimpf, Carlo Mense and Alexander Kanoldt.[110] Despite Hartlaub's grouping of them, fundamental conflicts were observable in the two group's social philosophies: for the former, the 'truth of the machine' was important, while for the latter, 'the truth of craft and antiquity' dominated.[111] Thus certain differences were inevitable: one suggested an enthusiastic embrace of technology – and particularly 'Americanism' and 'Fordism' – while the other adopted a stance in opposition to these processes of industrial mechanisation and rationalisation.[112] Hartlaub's show had influence far beyond Mannheim, later travelling to Dresden and other middle German cities including Dessau, the Bauhaus' new home.[113] Richard W. McCormick argues that New Objectivity was the characteristic movement of the Weimar Republic, especially

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[108] Willett, p. 112.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Hal Foster et al., p. 209.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Willett, p. 112.

during the period of stabilisation 1926-29. McCormick sees Weimar's New Objectivity movement as of even greater significance than Dada or Expressionism, which he believed had already peaked in the 1910s.[114]

New Objectivist ideals were also shaping the Berlin film industry. In the context of the cinema, New Objectivity signalled realistic stories and settings alongside 'a technical virtuosity in camera work, optical printing, and editing that was not completely subordinated to the story'.[115] New Objectivist cinema is at the core of McCormick's reading of the gender dynamics that shaped the Republic: particularly the New Woman and the ensuing crisis of masculinity. He sees the camera, and its efforts to document the anxieties of modernity 'objectively' and 'soberly', as a method of regaining male mastery at a time when it was under threat. The camera is a tool not only of documentation, but of control and domination. In McCormick's account, New Objectivist sensibilities became widely expressed across various realms of Weimar culture.

In his seminal work *From Caligari to Hitler*, Kracauer identified the Austrian director G.W. Pabst, who was making films for the German production company Ufa, as one of the main proponents of New Objectivist film. Kracauer believed that '[r]eal life was his true concern' and that he began to represent it in his 1925 film, *Joyless Street*, which emphasised the pauperisation of the middle classes in Vienna during the years of post-war inflation.[116] Kracauer notes the film 'contrasts tough profiteers and destitute middle-class people; expensive restaurants sparkling with light and dim-lit homes visited by hunger;

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[114] McCormick, p. 41.
[115] Ibid., p. 53.
[116] Kracauer, p. 167.

noisy effervescence and silent withdrawal into sadness'.[117] He admired the qualities of realism that Pabst achieved, despite his evident penchant for melodramatic endings: '[t]he ghastliness of this world is displayed in scenes that seem to record unstaged events.'[118] In particular, Kracauer notes the queue for the butcher's shop where 'nothing is stylised' and there is a 'desire to watch the course events take of their own accord'.[119] The subject matter and images were realist, even if at times the plots took a turn toward the fantastical.

Pabst too was an important influence on the POOL group in the mid to late 1920s. H.D., Bryher and Macpherson had liked *Joyless Street* so much – especially the performance of the young Greta Garbo – that they identified watching the film as the moment when they realised that cinema was an art form. H.D. later said that the film was her 'never-to-be-forgotten premiere to the whole art of the screen', and that 'G.W. Pabst was and is my first recognised master of the art.'[120] They were not just fans; they were also friends with the director. In 1927, Bryher and Macpherson met Pabst in Berlin. Macpherson's early letters to H.D., which he was writing at a rate of almost one a day, described the meeting and conveyed some of their excitement:

> Arrived, and Sat down meekly, curling our tails gracefully round our back paws. […] He is a god like little demi-god. Just our Fido [Bryher's nickname in the group] gone fat, rubicund and gayer, and

[117] Kracauer, p. 167.
[118] Ibid., p. 168.
[119] Ibid.
[120] H.D., 'An Appreciation', pp. 62-3.

> a sweeping Germanic hospitality and generosity and cordiality that you just sink into like a warm feather bed. I had him in a corner most of the evening, and he showed me photographs of his work by the million, including many from Joyless Street, with Garbo looking quite out of this world altogether.[121]

Macpherson and Bryher formed a friendship with the 'god-like' Pabst and visited the Babelsburg Studios to see the sets for his next film, *Abwege* (Crisis). In breathless enthusiasm, Macpherson wrote to H.D., 'oh, oh, oh, what equipment, and such a feeling of the movies. Sheer life to the Dog [Macpherson's nickname, along with Rover]'.[122] There was even some hope that Pabst might cast H.D. in one of his later films, after her acting in the POOL short film *Foothills* had impressed him.

Pabst was instrumental in the group's developing interest in psychoanalysis. He introduced Bryher to Hanns Sachs – who she and H.D. nicknamed Turtle – in November 1927.[123] Sachs was a member of Freud's inner circle but had moved to Berlin to advise Pabst on *Secrets of a Soul*, a film that attempted to represent the dangers of repression, as well as the restorative potential of psychoanalysis. (I will discuss this film more in Chapter 1.) Bryher

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[121] Macpherson to H.D., 1927, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 12, Folder 415, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. From hereafter correspondence from the Beinecke Library will be referenced with names, date (where marked), collection, box number and folder number.

[122] Macpherson to H.D., 27 October 1927, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 12, Folder 415.

[123] Celena E. Kusch, *H.D. International Society*, (2014) <https://hdis.chass.ncsu.edu/hdcircle/bryher/> [Accessed: 19 August 2016].

and Sachs began analysis shortly after they met and continued for the next five years, albeit with some breaks and interruptions.[124]

Throughout the journal's run Macpherson, Bryher and H.D. remained profoundly influenced by their encounters with the artistic culture of the Weimar Republic. Their favourite directors created films in line with the Republic's 'nameless double trend' which was 'one part Abstract-Constructivist, [and] the other concerned with 'real' down-to-earth things'.[125] These dialogues between modernism and realism suggested the possibilities of the modernist realisms that would preoccupy the group. In each of the chapters on *Close Up*, I seek to illustrate the ways in which Macpherson, Bryher and H.D. responded to the realisms of the period in their readings of film, whilst also developing their own work. The films Macpherson and Bryher enjoyed were ones that they believed illustrated 'real' psychology. As I will explore in Chapter 1, privileging a film's ability to show realistic psychology meant that Macpherson united an array of very different filmic practices as 'real'. Indeed, his own experiments produced a range of films – from the experimental to the conventional – which were all realist according to Macpherson's schema. While Macpherson hoped that the films he advocated would convert others to his ideas of film as art, Bryher seems to have had wider aims. Her readings of film also emphasised their ability to illustrate 'real' psychology. For Bryher this had a social function as when audiences recognised their own psychology on screen they were not

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[124] Their sessions ended in 1932 when he was forced to move from Berlin to Boston as Europe became increasingly fascist. Maggie Magee and Diane C. Miller, *Lesbian Lives: Psychoanalytic Narratives Old and New* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1997), p. 7.
[125] Willett, p. 94.

only granted insight into their own behaviour, but also realised that other cultures shared the same psychic dramas.

Although H.D. was also influenced by Eisenstein and Pabst, she developed a different understanding of the real. H.D. thought 'real' films were ones whose images recalled other artworks, thereby creating a dense fabric of associations and visual echoes. This focus on images as intertexts meant that the films she liked most were constantly pointing beyond themselves, thus awakening the viewer to multiple levels of reality. H.D.'s film writing develops a style of prose that focuses on successions of images rather than relating the plot. I argue that H.D.'s other prose writing in the period experiments with this form, as she embeds abstract images as a way to discuss experiences that open interpretative possibilities.

Close Up occupied a peculiar period in cinematic history: the journal had started the year in which the first feature-length talkie, *The Jazz Singer*, was produced. The timing of the publication of *Close Up* represented an embrace of the medium of silent film, and all its possibilities, just as the moment for it was passing. The growing popularity of talkies steadily eroded much of what the group valued about the cinema: their notions of the real were all based on communicative practices that were not limited by language. Macpherson grew tired of editing the journal and told H.D. in a letter in 1933 about 'the absurd bottomless boredom of pasting and sticking up a *Close Up* which has nothing to say about films'.[126] He continued to complain that it:

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[126] Macpherson to H.D., 1933, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 12, Folder 419.

> drains not energy so much as any impetus of the mind – you know. One gets nagged by percussions and repercussions brought on by knowledge that everything's tumbling to ruin and what voice has anything left to say about films being art when there's no chance of it for another ten years at least![127]

When the journal folded shortly after, Macpherson had already begun to distance himself from H.D. and Bryher. They all lost interest in film, and Macpherson lamented in 1934 that '[s]uch appalling films are around now. Appalling. They have slopped back for no reason, since talkies are barely here, fifteen years or more.'[128]

[127] Macpherson to H.D., 1933, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 12, Folder 419.
[128] Macpherson to H.D, 1934[?], The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 12, Folder 420.

Life and Letters To-day

While *Close Up* has attracted a lot of critical attention, *Life and Letters To-day* is almost absent from current scholarship about the POOL group. This section outlines how *Life and Letters To-day* began, before examining the way in which the journal's film writings moved away from the modernist realisms that shaped *Close Up*. I then consider the way this change in their approach to film was representative of a general shift in the journal towards an editorial stance that consciously foregrounded variety. I aim to show that the climate of the mid 1930s, although only shortly after the end of *Close Up*, produced a very different type of publication with very different concerns around the real. Finally, I outline how the group came to meet Muriel Rukeyser in 1936. Rukeyser, a young Left, political poet was more aligned with the zeitgeist of the period. Her trip to Spain to cover the People's Olympiad provided the journal with a pivotal contribution.

Life and Letters started seven years before Bryher bought it. The journal was the project of the architect Oliver Sylvain Baliol Brett (later Viscount Esher), and had Desmond MacCarthy, Bloomsbury associate and literary critic, as editor. MacCarthy established a well-respected publication that included Virginia Woolf, Cyril Connolly, and Aldous Huxley amongst its many contributors. Hamish Miles and R. Ellis Roberts then each took over the editorship for short periods between 1934 and 1935 before Bryher bought it in 1935.[129] In her

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[129] Jane Goldman, 'Desmond MacCarthy, *Life and Letters* (1928-35), and Bloomsbury Modernism', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume I: Britain and Ireland 1880-1955* ed. by Peter

letters to H.D. in that year, she began to discuss whom she might ask to be editor. She was obviously reluctant to get Macpherson involved, telling H.D. 'I don't know what Kenneth will say but he hates routine work, it bores him'.[130] She explained 'one must have some one who will run it seriously and in great order'.[131] It seems that Bryher's experience of working with Macpherson on *Close Up* had not always been easy. Although they remained married until 1947, by the time the new journal started Macpherson was living in the United States. Officially he acted as *Life and Letter To-day*'s New York correspondent, but his contributions were rare. Macpherson remained in contact with H.D. and Bryher, telling them in a 1940 letter 'I wish you were here, then I wish I were there', but his correspondence trailed off over the years.[132]

Instead of Macpherson, Bryher offered Robert Herring, known in the group as 'Bud', the role of editor. Herring was co-editor of *Life and Letters To-day* between 1935 and 1937 alongside Dorothea Petrie Townsend, Bryher's childhood friend, and sole editor from 1937 until 1950.[133] Herring became

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Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 428-51, (p. 428).

[130] Bryher to H.D., 17 April 1935, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 109.

[131] Bryher to H.D., 27 April 1935, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 109.

[132] Macpherson to H.D., 17 July 1940, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 12, Folder 422.

[133] From early in their shared editorship, the pair feuded. Herring's letters to Bryher shed light on a relationship characterised by bickering and competitiveness. Like many of Bryher's friends Townsend was undergoing analysis during this period, which may have accounted for some of the difficulties. When Townsend got married in 1936, her involvement in the journal dwindled until she finally decided to leave. As Townsend seems to have had a less active role in the running of the journal, and she did not write editorials, I only make passing references to her in this thesis.

friends with Bryher, H.D. and Kenneth Macpherson during the late 1920s when they approached him to write for *Close Up*. He was, during that time, a literary critic at *The Mercury* and the film critic for *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Glasgow Herald*.[134] In fact, it was Herring who introduced Macpherson to Paul and Eslanda Robeson – and later starred alongside them as the pianist in *Borderline*.[135]

Herring's discussions of cinema in *Close Up* had been influenced by Macpherson and Bryher's readings of films. In his article 'So Blue', a review of *Wolf's Clothing* starring Monte Blue, he emphasised the film's ability to represent psychological states. Herring explains that after Blue is knocked over in an accident he awakes to a series of bizarre incidents: '[h]e finds a rich ring on his finger, rich clothes around him. Here is his chance. He dresses and goes down to dance with Patsy Ruth, jewelled and sequinned.' [136] Herring suggests these unexplained riches might be a fantasy, and '[m]anifestation of [Blue's]

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[134] During his career Herring also wrote several novels; two volumes of film criticism; a good deal of verse, including a collection of poems; a play; and edited Richard Brinsley Sheridan's and Oliver Goldsmith's plays for Macmillan's *English Literature* series. Herring was also pursuing a writing career outside of his criticism and journalism: he wrote a travel book about Spain, *The President's Hat* (1926), and the novel *Adam and Evelyn at Kew* (1930). The latter was met by some unfavourable reviews, with Arnold Bennett describing Herring as 'not a good novelist, by reason of a fatal lack of narrative gift' in the *Evening Standard*. Herring went on to write *Cactus Coast* (1934), a novel set in a fashionable European resort, which was published in an edition of a hundred by Darantière. Like H.D.'s novels printed by Darantière at that time, Bryher almost certainly financed *Cactus Coast*.

[135] Robeson wrote to Herring in late 1928 after his article 'The Week on Screen: Negro Films', in *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 December 1928, p. 11. Herring immediately wrote to Bryher to suggest that Robeson write for *Close Up*. This did not materialize but after starring in *Borderline* both Paul and Eslanda stayed in touch with the group.

[136] Robert Herring, 'So Blue', *Close Up*, 2.4 (1928), pp. 36-41, (p. 37).

inferiority'.[137] At the end, the film reveals that Blue was in fact left in a coma after the accident, and had only dreamt all of the strange events. Herring delights in the ending because it confirms that his interpretation was right: what seemed to be the plot of the film was in fact an extended enactment of Blue's psychological states. He tells the reader:

> See it several times. Watch the detective, remember the ring. Don't you see? Your mind was stimulated quite out of proportion to the apparent significance of the story the first time. […] Because your sub-conscious got it the first time; you will see it *all* the second.[138]

Herring argues that on a subconscious level, the audience recognises Blue's experiences as wish-fulfilment, but this is not definitely confirmed until the end. They must then go back to the film to reinterpret events they thought they had understood. Herring declared the film a triumph because 'we realised we were watching a mind, lithe and alert, a mind that started where we started and gave form to what we hadn't given form'.[139] Thus he claimed the film should not be seen as a farce or a thriller but as a 'piece of fine characterisation, expressed by means of psychology'.[140] Herring thought *Wolf's Clothing* was all the more important because it was a mainstream Hollywood release.

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[137] Herring, 'So Blue', p. 37.
[138] Ibid., p. 40.
[139] Ibid., p. 36.
[140] Ibid., p. 40.

Herring's film writings were also in dialogue with H.D.'s. In *Close Up* he writes of film as inherently 'magic'. He explains: 'even [in] the worst photoplays there is the reality of light and of movement, and so there is a little magic everywhere you see a cinema'.[141] This magic comes not from what is represented – the particular plot, characters, and scenery – but from the medium of film itself. The audience is:

> stimulated by it [light] and able automatically to discount incident and player without noticing it, and accept instead without knowing it the drama of movement and patterns. Images if you like, in which it doesn't matter, essentially whether it's a woman or a chair there. It's the space they occupy, the light they make manifest by being there. That's what it's got. It's abstract. [142]

For Herring images in films are inherently shifting and malleable, constantly taking on new significances in the viewer's mind. That films might have 'echoes, undertones, ripples and layers' was an idea H.D. explored, as I will show in Chapter 3. [143] For Herring then, as for the others, cinema represented psychological states realistically but also connected to something more mystical. Film links the unconscious and magic as, though they are not accessible to normal vision, film can externalise them both.

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[141] Robert Herring, 'A New Cinema, Magic and the Avant Garde', *Close Up*, 4.4 (1929), pp. 47-57, (pp. 49-50).
[142] Ibid., p. 50.
[143] Herring, 'Film Imagery: Pudowkin', *Close Up*, 3.4 (1928), pp. 31-9, (p.32).

James Donald explains that the type of cinema that *Close Up* promoted had been falling out of fashion even during the life of the publication. He noted that in the first International Congress of Independent Cinematography in 1929, art cinema had already begun to emerge as a marginalised category from the mainstream industry. A year later at the second, and final, meeting, the Congress recognised that 'the Avant Garde as a purely aesthetic movement had passed its climax and was on the way to concentrating on the social and political film, mainly in documentary form'.[144] Although it is true to say that documentary cinema was becoming increasingly popular, it is important to recognise that *Close Up* discussed a wide range of films, including mainstream and documentary pictures, but they proceeded to *read* these films in a narrow range of ways. Macpherson, Bryher, H.D., and Herring resolutely read films as demonstrating psychological and mystical states that might be understood across national boundaries, rather than through any political doctrine. This was most notable in the group's readings of Russian films, which they insisted were simply universal stories. Laura Marcus discusses Marxist film critic and occasional *Close Up* contributor, Harry Alan Potamkin's response to Bryher's apolitical analysis of Russian Films in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. In Potamkin's review for *Experimental Cinema*, edited by Seymour Stern, he complained:

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[144] James Donald, introduction to 'Part 1: Enthusiasms and Execrations', in *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, pp. 28-35, (p.32).

> Bryher's book is a plea for the recognition of the Russian cinema by England. She stresses not only the artistic merit of the Soviet kino, but urges that vital cinema upon the British intelligence as quite in accord ideologically with the social sentiments of the free Briton. This would seem to characterize Russian ideology as reformative in its outlook, a quite acceptable middleman's social philosophy. This sums up the Russian social attack as entirely harmless.[145]

The types of interpretation that the writers in *Close Up* applied to films, rather than the films themselves, were out of step with the time.

In *Life and Letters To-day*, this narrow range of interpretations and concerns was considerably expanded. Each issue included articles discussing general questions around film, such as the advent of colour. This was followed by a long review section, written by Herring. His judgements were now far more varied. The POOL group's desire to win readers over to film as an artform and to show how film could externalise psychological states gave *Close Up* an evangelising zeal that was here considerably softened.

Eisenstein continued to contribute to POOL's new publication. *Life and Letters To-day* printed three essays in ten instalments with the last appearing in 1939. Like Herring, Eisenstein was at a transitional stage in his career. By the mid 1930s he was redefining his practice so that his work could fulfil the demands of social realism. The first article, 'Film Form, 1935 – New Problems',

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[145] Harry Alan Potamkin quoted in Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 341.

outlined the direction that Soviet film had taken in the years since *Battleship Potemkin*. Eisenstein believed that Russian films were becoming similar to films from the West, losing their original epic quality by following the individual, such as his character Marfa Lapkina in his 1929 film *The Old and the New.* But Eisenstein argued that these new and individually-focused films could still draw on the techniques pioneered by the earlier, more formally experimental, generation of Soviet cinema: there was the possibility of rendering inner monologues; the use of a part to symbolise a whole; and the actor who was at once himself and another, prompting the possibility for games between the subject and object. Eisenstein's earlier film experiments were by this time falling out of favour as the Soviet policy of Social Realism became increasingly hegemonic. In this article, Eisenstein seemed to need to renegotiate his relationship to realism so that he could retain some of his former ideas but under the demands of the new politics. Eisenstein concluded by stating that: '[t]here are of course, individual shades of opinion within the comprehensive conception of the single style: Socialist Realism.'[146] His other essays that appeared in *Life and Letters To-day* were on teaching film direction, and the role of montage in 1938.

The British filmmakers of the GPO unit, established in 1933 by John Grierson and later led by Paul Rotha, featured regularly in the journal's discussions of film. This new group had come to define the documentary movement. In fact, the term 'documentary' had been introduced by Grierson to

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[146] Eisenstein, 'Film Form, 1935 – New Problems', *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.2 (1935), pp. 167-75, (p. 175).

describe Robert Flanery's *Moana* in 1926. The Anglicisation of the French word incorporated an important new aspect: 'the creative treatment of actuality'.[147] The group around Grierson and the GPO had started with a similar set of influences to *Close Up*, but took them to different conclusions. They too admired the great Russian filmmakers, but placed greater emphasis on their political significance. Herring was sometimes quite critical of the GPO's efforts, complaining that Grierson and Stuart Legg's *BBC The Voice of Britain* was 'nothing new, nothing vital, everything middle-class and familiar' and that 'the subtle distinction between a news-reel and a documentary had not been made'.[148] However, he was more positive about the unit's short film *Coal face*. Herring explained that the film, presented at the Film Society was an experiment in sound: '[i]nstead of music being used as a background to commentary, both music and commentary were composed together, and the effect claimed – of "incorporating commentary more clearly in the body of the film" – is really achieved.'[149] He notes '[i]nteresting use is made of an interesting poem by Auden, specially written, and chanted by female voices as the miners return to the surface after their seven-and-a-half hours' shift.'[150]

The member of the GPO unit who was most visible in the journal was probably the least typical. Len Lye wrote several articles and a short story for *Life and Letters To-day*. In his review section, Herring shows himself to have

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[147] Gander, p. 3.
[148] Herring, 'Reviews of Releases', *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.1 (1935) pp. 202-7 (p. 206).
[149] Herring, 'Reviews of Releases', *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.2 (1935) pp. 185-192 (p. 191).
[150] Ibid.

been enamoured of Lye's films, which were often experiments in animation and colour. Herring described his work as though it was able to capture a 'real' essence or emotion, in a way that echoed some of his ideas from the years of *Close Up*. When reviewing *Rainbow Dance*, Herring said:

> First, it is unlike any other film, it is also unlike most other things. Unlike them, too, it relates. You can't say it 'says' or it 'shows' as plays, poems 'say' and a painting, say, 'shows'. Those are, saying and showing, shorthand at second-hand for the thing itself- the thing behind the shock which gets into thought that finally gets into words. Rainbow Dance is that thing. That is the nearest I can get to saying what it does – authentic sight-shocks.[151]

Herring describes Lye as though his ideas are simply transferred through consciousness without language or effort. In reviewing Lye's earlier films *Colour Box* and *Kaleidoscope*, Herring said '[t]hey got into layers of the mind not usually reached by movie, and in that did three things; reassured us that another felt as we did, stopped us from feeling him another and made us grateful, thus happy, thus acceptive, because anyone did feel that way.'[152]

Not only was the tone of the film section different from *Close Up* in *Life and Letters To-day*, but cinema in general occupied a different position in the new journal**.** It was absorbed into a wider framework and was seen as one of

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[151] Herring, 'Film in Focus', *Life and Letters To-day*, 15.5 (1936), pp. 175-82, (p. 181).
[152] Ibid., p. 180.

the least important sections. It was by no means the focus of the journal and Herring even suggested that it was included because of his personal interest in the medium, but that when they needed to make space, it would be the first to be cut.[153]

These changes in how film was treated mirrored larger changes in the publication. In his first editorial, Herring explained that the journal had expanded the title to *Life and Letters To-day* to differentiate it from its previous existence. He continued that they had chosen 'to-day' over 'modern' as the modern was 'so often the mode of a yesterday that never had a tomorrow'.[154] *Life and Letters To-day*, then, was set against an earlier idea of modernism from its inception. *Close Up* was the ideal modernist little magazine with a relatively short run, and monthly issues of around 70 pages.[155] It was conceptually unified by its exclusive focus on film, and because the writers' close personal relationships fostered shared understandings of the medium. In contrast *Life and Letters To-day* was far more diverse in focus and contributors. Although Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible encourage studies of periodicals to avoid 'strip-mining', engaging in the practice for a moment provides an impressive array of famous names: Franz Kafka, Dylan Thomas, Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Len Lye and Muriel Rukeyser – who I will turn

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[153] Herring, 'Editorial', *Life and Letters To-day*, 18.11 (1938), pp. 1-2, (p. 1).
[154] Herring, 'Editorial', *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.1 (1935), pp. 1-2, (p.1).
[155] *Close Up* became a quarterly publication at the end of 1930 in response to the demise of silent films and Kenneth Macpherson's dwindling interest in the publication. Even as a quarterly, it was seldom longer than 100 pages.

to shortly – were dispersed amongst many less well-known writers.[156] The journal was also long and sprawling, running for fifteen years, initially as a quarterly with issues of around 200 pages, and then as a shorter monthly.[157] Examining *Life and Letters To-day* is a way to look at the modernism of the 1930s and to think about how by that time, the project for the same group was looking very different from even a few years earlier.

By 1935, fascism was well established in Europe. Mussolini had set up his legal dictatorship of Italy in 1925 and Hitler had promptly ended the Weimar Republic after being voted into power in Germany in 1933. These political upheavals reverberated through the art of the period: the writers who would come to be known as the 'Auden Generation' helped create a new emphasis on 'responsible' writing. Aware that the times had changed, H.D. expressed concern to Bryher about how her writing would be received in this cultural milieu. Bryher's reply drew a distinction between writers pre-1925 and the young writers of the new generation:

> 1.) Writers pre say 1925 should concern themselves with art as they understand it and concentrate upon doing what they should themselves produce. It is fatal and absurd to suggest that they sit down and turn out proletarian literature.

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[156] Introduction to *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches* ed. Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) pp. 1-18 (p. 4).

[157] In a reversal of *Close Up*, *Life and Letters To-day* moved from a quarterly to a monthly in September 1938.

> 2.) Young writers, or actors or painters, have equally no right not to be politically minded.[158]

H.D. was clearly a pre-1925 writer, and the letter was intended to reassure her. But Herring, who was a mere four years older than Auden, was not so comfortably placed to ignore political developments in Europe. And yet, Herring did not want to treat politics explicitly when the journal began. Peter Marks points out that the move to the left in the 1930s was by no means uniform and was expressed in different ways by different groups.[159] The POOL group expressed it through using *Life and Letters To-day* as a platform for a diversity of opinions and aesthetics. This, Herring hoped, was in itself a response to fascism.

However with the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, it seemed necessary for the journal to become more explicitly political in its outlook. While previously there were passing references to political events and Herring sought to position the journal in implicit opposition to fascism, in 1936 he began to devote editorials to political events, and to encourage donations to particular causes. He also began to publish war reportage, commissioning a variety of writers (albeit all left-leaning) to share their experiences of Spain. Herring felt it was important to publicly voice support for the Popular Front, and *The Left Review* pamphlet *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War* from 1937 was

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[158] Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and her World* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1984) p. 231.

[159] Peter Marks, 'Art and Politics in the 1930s: The European Quarterly (1934-5), Left Review (1934-8), and Poetry and the People (1938-40)', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume I*, pp. 623-646, (p. 625).

signed by contributors to both *Close Up* and *Life and Letters To-day*. Amongst them were Mulk Raj Anand, Oswell Blakeston, Kay Boyle, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Havelock Ellis, Nancy Cunard, Sylvia Townsend Warner, as well as Herring himself.

Because of the cultural and political climate, Bryher's two journals had very different relationships to the real. When Macpherson called film 'real' in his editorials for *Close Up*, he was referring to the way the medium could reveal human psychology to spectators. In contrast, the 'reality' of the political situation in Europe was always encroaching on *Life and Letters To-day*. In an article from *The Left Review* in 1935, Stephen Spender succinctly articulated this position: referring to Yeats' comment that '[w]e can no longer permit life to be shaped by a personified ideal, we must serve with all our faculties some actual thing', Spender noted that '[t]he "actual thing" is the true moral or widely political subject that must be realised by contemporary literature, if that literature is itself to be moral and serious.'[160] Thus Herring had a very different task as editor than that of Macpherson in *Close Up*. While Macpherson was attempting to expand his readers' understanding of the medium and the range of films they enjoyed, Herring wanted readers to actively engage with the Republican cause and was attempting to shock them into action. In Chapter 4 I explore Herring's response to the Spanish Civil War in more depth, and discuss how his editorial policy changed in reaction to the developing political contexts in the run up to the Second World War.

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[160] Stephen Spender, 'Writers and Manifestos', *Left Review,* 1.5 (1935), pp. 145-150, (p. 145).

The term 'POOL group' is commonly used for H.D., Bryher, Macpherson and Herring, although the extent to which they imagined themselves as a 'group' is difficult to say. They certainly did not refer to a POOL group in their letters to one another, and instead tended to call their friends 'the bunch' when they mentioned them in collective terms. In criticism, the POOL group is most often taken to mean the writers, filmmakers and analysts associated with *Close Up* because the journal was their most well known publication.[161] In this thesis, I too use the POOL Group to refer to H.D. Bryher, Macpherson and Herring.

More unusually, I also discuss Muriel Rukeyser alongside Herring in the fourth chapter of this thesis. Rukeyser was a key presence in the early years of *Life and Letters To-day*. In the article 'New American Poetry' in the first issue of the journal, Horace Gregory called Rukeyser 'the most consistently matured poet' of a new group of young left practitioners.[162] In combining left-wing politics with an interest in experimental forms, Rukeyser unites some of the core 'realities' to be explored in this thesis, from the political to the aesthetic. In

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[161] The 1997 *Close Up* anthology uses the POOL group frequently to refer to those associated with *Close Up*. The anthology includes selections from the journal organised both thematically and by author, and covers the transition from silence to sound, the group's relationship to psychoanalysis as well as the contributions of H.D. and Dorothy Richardson.

[162] Horace Gregory, 'New American Poetry', *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.1, (1935), pp. 28-32, (p. 32). Gregory had known Rukeyser since 1933 when she sought his advice about her first collection of poetry. When *Theory of Flight* was published, Rukeyser dedicated the book to him and Marya Zaturenska, a fellow poet and Gregory's wife. Chris Green, *The Social Life of Poetry: Appalachia, Race, and Radical Modernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 165. Several undated letters from Rukeyser in Horace Gregory's archive suggest the older poets eventually drifted away from Rukeyser, a fact she frequently references whilst reiterating that she misses their friendship and that the distance set between them has been a 'torment'. Rukeyser to Gregory, undated, The Horace Gregory Papers, Correspondence, Box 11, Bird Library, Syracuse University.

fact, Clive Bush suggests this hybrid quality – she was too experimental for the left, and too left for the aesthetes – as a major reason why Rukeyser did not achieve more recognition in her lifetime.[163] *Life and Letters To-day* published 10 of her poems between the years 1936 and 1940. A consideration of her poetic style and characteristic concerns from this period illustrates the different, and enriching, perspective she offered to the POOL group.

The poem 'Burning Bush', published in *Life and Letters To-day* in 1936, might be read to explore the way in which certain experiences can prepare the individual for bearing witness to political events:

Faced with furnace demands during its education,
the strictest spirit must take them all; it needs
to break down shame; but gasping into a pillow
later to nobody anywhere, claims I Love You.
                It plays long tricks
upon itself – the stealthy girl locks doors,
the woman listens in single high rooms for music,
hears climbing elevators as the picket walks
in a dead street before tallest skyscrapers
                far on the sidewalks;
all horrors enter all beds to purify
the critical spirit in a city of change,

[163] Clive Bush, *The Century's Midnight: Dissenting European and American Writers in the Era of the Second World War* (Witney: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 381.

twisted in flames, blazing among the secrets,

breaking the taut life with their harsh I Have You.

It burns and never speaks

only is educated, when it assumes bright horror,

nourished against the time it hears its name –

until it is called will stand, witness to fire,

training a flame upward along its vine.[164]

In the poem, Rukeyser describes a spirit that must endure trials in order to become educated. The heat is figured as a painful but necessary part of the speaker's education. The poem culminates by describing the spirit as a 'witness to fire' and in witnessing the speaker is able to channel it in a different, possibly revolutionary, direction. The poem itself – with its abstract images and politically suggestive scenes – thus stages an ambiguous drama between *witnessing* and *doing*. Although this poem draws on the biblical image of the burning bush, here the bush is not a conduit for God's voice: even at the end of the poem 'it burns and never speaks'. The strangeness of this dislocated burning bush does not provide a clear interpretative moment. There is no instruction from God, no divine message; as poetry, the scene opens the possibilities of language. The content of the poem, the spirit's education, explores the process of preparation but the form also enacts it, so that learning to read poetic language is in itself a preparatory activity for political engagement.

[164] Muriel Rukeyser, 'Burning Bush', *Life and Letters To-day*, 15.6 (1936), p. 73.

When Rukeyser came to Europe in 1936, Gregory, who had become her mentor, organised introductions to Bryher, Herring and Petrie Townshend, and through them Rukeyser met many prominent figures from the London literary scene.[165] Rukeyser was associated with the 'bunch' for the duration of her stay in London. She wrote to Marya Zaturenska, a fellow poet and Gregory's wife, to say she found Herring 'really very nice and attractive', but was slightly less sure about H.D. calling her both 'alarming' and 'fascinating', and a 'vision of what beautiful imagists turn into, cum schoolteacher'.[166] Still, Rukeyser enjoyed spending time with the pair, including an evening at the ballet to celebrate the anniversary of the beginning of *Life and Letters To-day*; she described the evening as 'a high point' and as a night with 'sheets of glamor coming down over everything'.[167]

For a few months, Rukeyser was on the periphery of the group. Bryher was already a fan of her poetry, which she described as 'by far the most interesting, of any of the newer groups which I have read'.[168] H.D.'s letters to Bryher also initially praise Rukeyser effusively. H.D. tells Bryher that she had 'a

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[165] In a letter to Rukeyser, Herring adds in a final paragraph, 'I thought you might like H.D.'s address so that you can get in touch with her.' Herring to Rukeyser, 25 June 1936, The Muriel Rukeyser Collection of Papers, The Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

[166] Rukeyser to Gregory, 8 July 1936, The Horace Gregory Papers, Correspondence, Box 11, Bird Library, Syracuse University.

[167] Ibid. Bryher was in Switzerland during Rukeyser's visit. Rukeyser also relates meeting Eliot in this letter, an event she characterized as disappointing: 'for, although it all went pleasantly enough, there was really nothing to come for, and I was awfully stopped short.' The meeting was 'all mummified and years away from dancing all night at the Savoy and getting up after an hour's sleep to drive to Cambridge to hear Eliot on Elizabethan Dramatists'.

[168] Bryher to Rukeyser, 3 July 1936, Manuscript Box: Annie Winifred Ellerman, The Berg Collection.

very exciting talk with your left-wing revolutionary poet', whom she later called 'Leo-ish' in approval (Leo was one of H.D.'s many nicknames for Bryher).[169] H.D. felt they related to one another as Rukeyser had left Vassar just as she had left Bryn Mawr and both had close poet friends in Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore, respectively. But by early July, H.D. asked Bryher not to invite Rukeyser to Kenwin, Bryher's modernist villa designed by the architect Hermann Henselmann, because although the bunch approved of Rukeyser and were trying to promote her work in London, H.D. wanted to spend time alone with her daughter in Switzerland. H.D.'s final assessment is equivocal: she enjoyed the frisson of mixing with the young left poet but also found the experience disconcerting. She writes, '[d]on't know. She may be fundamentally very, very real and sincere, certainly did me a world of good… anyhow. But that is distinctly, that.'[170] It seems H.D. found Rukeyser both too political and too independent. Guest reflects that Rukeyser might have aroused some jealousy in H.D. as she was similar to Bryher: they shared a fascination with flying, an interest in history, and both possessed a strong social conscience.[171] Guest concludes that 'Muriel was probably too dynamic for H.D', who 'preferred the seemingly frail, the innocently needy'.[172]

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[169] H.D. to Bryher, 28 June 1936, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 14, Folder 571.
[170] H.D. to Bryher, 7 July 1936, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 15, Folder 572.
[171] Guest, p. 235.
[172] Ibid.

In 1936, Herring asked Rukeyser to go to Spain to cover the People's Olympiad; a week later she set off on 18 July.[173] The Games coincided with Petrie Townsend's wedding so none of the editorial staff were available, although Herring knew it was crucial that someone connected to the journal attend. In his letters, Herring explains his decision to ask Rukeyser: '[t]he difficulty has been that one wants to know whoever goes is sympathetic […] You, I think, would be excellent – if you would go.'[174] Intended as an alternative to the Nazi Olympic Games being held in Berlin, the Olympiad did not take place as days before the opening ceremony, the Nationalists staged a coup on the Republican government and the Civil War began. Rukeyser was amongst those on the last train to approach the Barcelona area after the fighting began. She left Spain on 23 July, arrived in Sète, France, a day later and returned to London on 27 July. On Rukeyser's return, Herring wrote an appreciative note, signing off with a drawing of a cartoon fist in the air to show his support of the Popular Front. A further postcard was sent to Rukeyser once she was back in New York to thank her for her 'Iberian adventure'.[175] For Rukeyser, it was much more than just an adventure: the trip was a formative experience that she continued to write about for the rest of her life. For *Life and Letters To-day*, Rukeyser's article 'Barcelona, 1936' appeared at a pivotal moment. As I have suggested, the

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[173] As Herring's papers were lost in a house fire, Rukeyser's responses were probably burnt. Some of Herring's letters to Rukeyser have survived. They are now in The Berg Collection. Rowena Kennedy-Epstein, Introduction to *Savage Coast* (New York, NY: The Feminist Press, 2013) vii.
[174] Herring to Rukeyser, 15 July 1936, The Muriel Rukeyser Collection of Papers, The Berg Collection.
[175] Herring to Rukeyser, 8 August 1936, The Muriel Rukeyser Collection of Papers, The Berg Collection.

Spanish Civil War marked the moment that Herring decided to explicitly engage with current political events. Rukeyser's contribution was the first piece of war reportage that they published.

In selecting Muriel Rukeyser alongside H.D., Bryher, Macpherson and Herring, I have inevitably neglected others who could also be considered part of the group's wider set such as Oswell Blakeston, Marc Allégret, and Havelock Ellis. The actor Paul Robeson and his wife Eslanda might also be added to this group, as might the analysts Hanns Sachs, Barbara Low and Walter Schmideberg. There are some clear limitations to my selections: most notably, I have omitted Dorothy Richardson from this study because her film criticism has been written about well and extensively, and because I wanted to talk about the group's development in the 1930s and that required looking at them in a different way.[176] Also, this thesis only examines the early years of *Life and Letters To-day*; excavating the later years of the journal is beyond the scope of this project, which seeks to examine the way in which POOL's project changed in the interwar years.

Thus far I have attempted to explicate the term 'modernist realisms', and to outline the cultural and political currents that were shaping discussions of the real in the late 1920s and 1930s. In what follows, I will draw on these

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[176] See Susan Gevirtz, *Narrative's Journey: The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1996); Laura Marcus, *Tenth Muse*, particularly pp. 350-59; Marcus' introduction to 'Part 4: Continuous Performance: Dorothy Richardson' in *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, pp. 150-59. More recently, see Jenelle Troxelle, 'Shock and "Perfect Contemplation": Dorothy Richardson's Mystical Cinematic Consciousness, *Modernism/Modernity*, 21.1 (2014), pp. 51-70.

contexts while examining the POOL writers' configurations of the real in their works.

Chapter Summaries

In the **first chapter** I examine Macpherson's use of the real in his editorials for *Close Up*, where his desire for psychological realism, and his privileging of the idea, extends to all parts of his understanding of film: to the type of shots he preferred, his championing of location shooting, and his desire for film to remain silent. I then examine the POOL group's short films *Wing-Beat* (1927), *Foothills* (1928) and *Monkey's Moon* (1929) and argue that, although they employ very different techniques, they are all realist according to Macpherson's understanding of the term. Finally, I examine the POOL group's 1930 film *Borderline* and argue that it is the logical conclusion of Macpherson's realism. The negative contemporary reception of the film has shaped current criticism, which has tended to present it as anti-narrative and difficult. However, Macpherson's response to his critics in his penultimate editorial shows that he thought the film was an accurate representation of 'life'. As Macpherson hoped to convert readers to his understanding of film, the negative critical reception of *Borderline* was more than just an indictment of that project; it was a rejection of his entire approach to the medium. I argue that only in understanding the centrality of realism to Macpherson can the project of *Borderline*, and his subsequent disillusionment with the medium, be understood.

In the **second chapter**, I turn to Bryher's understanding of the real. In her 1927 novel *Civilians* Bryher tries to record the realities of wartime Britain and in doing so, provide a critique of the irrational behaviour she believed had led to the war. By 1929, in her book *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, Bryher began to use psychoanalysis as a diagnostic tool to examine the behaviour she had documented in *Civilians*, and as a means of solving the ills of society. It is as though by explicating the behaviour of film characters, she believed she could teach audiences about their own psychology. The chapter finally turns to 'Manchester', a novel that Bryher published in *Life and Letters To-day* in serial form, to examine the character Ernest North and to show how Bryher continues to develop the notion that psychoanalysis enables one to see more than others. I end the chapter by considering the difficulties in positioning oneself as having 'vision'. When Bryher shared the novel with members of the group, their responses reveal the inevitable failures of sight in such a project.

The **third chapter** will consider the way in which H.D. understood the real. While Macpherson and Bryher both turned to psychological realisms, H.D. sought to combine the aesthetic with spiritual realities. The films which H.D. liked most, and called real, were ones whose images she could interpret as echoes of Greek myths and other artworks. For H.D., film images were universal enough to loosen the possibilities of interpretation. This way of seeing films superimposes realities on one another, so that every image is generative of others.

The chapter then examines *Nights*, a novel written in two parts in 1931 and 1934, to show that H.D. continued to develop the style of writing employed

in her film reviews and labelled it 'lightning realism'. Finally, this chapter examines H.D.'s short story 'Ear-ring', which appeared in *Life and Letters To-day* in 1936. While her writing in *Close Up* and her novel *Nights* treated the possibilities of multiple realities as a desirable state, Madelon Thorpe begins the story finding this same state completely overwhelming. However, by the end of 'Ear-ring', Madelon realises that this multiplicity, articulated in abstract images, is the impetus behind new art. The use of the image in H.D.'s film writing and her 1930s prose demonstrates how her writing continued to develop some of the ideas behind her earlier imagist poetry.

The first three chapters focus primarily on versions of the real in *Close Up*, tracing them through Macpherson, Bryher, and H.D.'s other works from the period and, in the case of Bryher and H.D., into *Life and Letters To-day*. In this introduction, I have argued that *Close Up* was a very different journal to *Life and Letters To-day* because Herring felt compelled to respond as editor to the political events of the period. In the **fourth chapter** I begin by examining the way in which Herring responded to the politics of the period by creating a journal with a wide variety of contributors. However, with the beginning of the Spanish Civil War he decided they needed to become more explicitly political. In order to do this he applied the same principle of variety and included articles about Spain. These articles, and some of his editorials demonstrate the difficulty of discussing politics and of trying to capture a political reality that will inspire readers to act. The chapter traces the way in which Herring finally retreated from his attempts to get people to see the reality of Spain and instead returned to an idea of art as the reality that could resolve political problems.

The chapter then discusses Muriel Rukeyser's contribution 'Barcelona, 1936' and examines the way in which the Spanish Civil War presented difficulties even for someone who was associated with political writing. Rukeyser's article focuses on recording the external events that she witnessed to the point that there is no longer a sense of a viewing subject. I then consider her novel *Savage Coast*, which reworked the same events and wrote Rukeyser back into the account as the character Helen. In *Savage Coast*, the real is both Helen's personal response and the events that surrounded her. This more fluid sense of the real reveals both the anxieties of representing the Spanish Civil War but also a possible mode of representation that might be able to capture the event.

Macpherson's Psychological Realism

> *The cinema is more than a 'whim', more than peoples' entertainment. Without question it is the most forceful and dynamic means of artistic expression in existence, artistic in its best and ultimate sense. I do not mean by that precious or stylised or going off into fancy isms which generally belong to the swan-song stage of an art or art epoch, but straight-from-the-shoulder, vital slices of life. Again I qualify, not spectacular slices of life necessarily, but your life and my life.*[177]

In his typically polemical style, Macpherson explains in this extract that cinema is an art that is able to cut through the excesses of other movements. He believes film can, as he says, capture 'vital slices of life' that would be recognisable to the audience. Throughout *Close Up*, Macpherson described the films he admired as 'real' until the term became shorthand for his approval. Although it seems like a throwaway comment, Macpherson's repeated usage of the term builds towards a coherent, if unusual, theory. At the heart of this was Macpherson's belief that the best films had characters that displayed realistic psychology; however his theory quickly moved beyond characterisation until it extended to his whole aesthetic of film.

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[177] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 2.2 (1928), pp. 5-16, (p. 10).

Macpherson is not a writer of the stature of H.D. or Dorothy Richardson, nor was he as prolific. Consequently, he has not benefited from literary reclamation projects intended to expand the established canon of modernism. In fact, he remains largely unknown. The 1997 *Close Up* anthology published 9 of the 11 articles H.D. wrote for the journal, all 20 of Dorothy Richardson's contributions, and only 3 out of a possible 61 of Macpherson's editorials. This relative lack of scholarly attention has led to misunderstandings about his ideas, which have extended to the journal itself. For example, Michael North writes of the tension inherent in the journal's claim that film is a universal language. He notes that the universality of film is premised on Macpherson's belief that the recording equipment could take in everything. This, North argues, is in conflict with what a language must do in order to be comprehensible, which is to focus on the specific information necessary for communication. North explains: '[t]he more faithfully a recording preserves every sense impression within its scope, the less legible is the result, [as] information [is] drowned out by insignificant noise.'[178] To highlight this conflict, North points to the fact that *Close Up* added explanatory captions to the film stills they printed when, if films were indeed a universal language, this should have been unnecessary.

However, although he was fascinated by the medium, Macpherson did not believe that because film recorded everything it was easily legible and universal. Instead, he thought that the best film was realist. This is an important distinction as believing film has the potential to be 'real' is less naïve than

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[178] Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-century Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 93.

North's reading suggests. As I have outlined in the introduction, realism is a mode of representation; it is not transparent. Macpherson then subscribed to a fantasy about realism, in which complex, highly constructed films work in the service of representing something that is supposedly common to everyone. In the pages of *Close Up*, Macpherson spends much time deconstructing which elements of a film are real, and slating films that fail to live up to his standards.

Taking one strand of Macpherson's thinking, as in North's case, does not allow for the complexity of the group's ideas. However, the nature of a journal lends itself to the kind of reading that overlooks patterns of coherency. *Close Up* did not have a manifesto and thus Macpherson's editorial article 'As Is' performed the function of one, outlining his understanding of films and mapping out the parameters of the journal. 'As Is' was the opening piece from the journal's beginning until it moved to a monthly format in 1930 and he began to lose interest in the venture.[179] The editorials emerged month-by-month and inevitably in this mode of writing, his ideas developed and changed. The introduction of the sound film is a good example of this: most of the time, Macpherson despairs about the advent of sound, referring to the introduction of talkies as the equivalent of brutish Rome attacking intellectual Greece.[180] But when Hitchcock's *Blackmail* came out, he acknowledged the potential of the new technology. In his discussion, Macpherson seems to vacillate between nostalgia for silent film and acknowledging the artistic potential of sound films, if they were done in the right way. Reading Macpherson on a month-by-month

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[179] Only two further issues contained the piece and it no longer headed the magazine.
[180] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 5.1 (1929), pp. 5-11, (p. 6).

basis means that the overall coherency in his ideas can be lost in seeming contradictions.

I argue in this chapter that Macpherson's use of the real is nevertheless consistent throughout his film writing and the group's filmmaking. After examining Macpherson's editorials at the beginning of the chapter, I explore the POOL group's short films, examining the range of styles that his notion of the real could support. In reading the short films, it is apparent that the POOL group were not striving for avant-garde difficulty, as is often assumed about their practical projects. At the end of the chapter, I turn to *Borderline* and argue that the film is 'realist' according to Macpherson's understanding. In the face of negative reviews, he became annoyed that critics did not recognise that it was 'life'. Because Macpherson's understanding of the real is idiosyncratic it is easy to see why, in *Borderline*, it results in a film that does not look coherent to viewers. As outlined in the introduction, there are difficulties in any definition of realism. But *Borderline* is the logical end point of Macpherson's understanding of the term. When *Borderline* failed, it was not just the failure of a film but an indictment of Macpherson's entire philosophy behind films. He had believed that the right films would convert viewers to his cause. Having now made one, he was faced with more criticism that ever. With sound established by then, which meant that much of his understanding of film would have to change, and his continuing issues with censorship, it is not surprising that the negative critical reception of *Borderline* marked the end of his interest in the medium of film.

The Centrality of Realism: 'As Is'

As suggested by the opening quotation, realism was a particular concern to Macpherson because of the nature of the medium of film. While the best film might show 'straight-from-the-shoulder, vital slices of life', all films demanded a different kind of spectatorship from the audience. Macpherson believed that, as the audience gave more attention to the screen than to everyday life, anything 'false' was strikingly obvious: cinema 'is so starkly new, so penetrating that any blur or falsity becomes more obvious, and seemingly exaggerated, than in life itself, where again our muddle hinders observation'.[181] The result was that 'platitudes which can be swallowed in actual life, translated into logical screen action become ridiculous'.[182] For him, this was especially problematic in characterisation in films. He explained, '[t]he usual heroine being the usual ideal of Womanhood, is usually insufferable, and in reality no one would tolerate such a silly ass for five minutes.'[183] Macpherson disliked moralistic character types, such as the blonde, 'who tastes Strong Drink for the first time, and says Ugh!! She always does'.[184] He explained that, '[n]owadays a girl either likes or doesn't like strong drink, but she certainly knows all about it.'[185] It is easy to see the absurdity of some of the cinematic conventions that Macpherson pokes fun at. In one editorial, he complains: 'Mary Pickford in white socks and a tucked dress hardly covering her thighs is a symbol of niceness. Mary Pickford in black

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[181] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 1.3 (1927), pp. 5-15, (p. 6).
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid., pp. 8-9.
[184] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 3.4 (1928), pp. 5-9, (p.6).
[185] Ibid., p. 6.

velvet knickers and a lace collar is the spirit of childhood. She is *nice*, she is a *nice* woman, she is a *good* woman [original italics].'[186] Instead of this recourse to crude characters, Macpherson thought that '[i]f the psychology is right the morale doesn't matter a tinker's cuss'.[187]

Macpherson's use of realistic psychology as the organising principle in his classification of films led to him mixing elements that, in traditional understandings of film, would be seen as opposing. For instance, if the psychology was realistic Macpherson did not think that the genre of the film mattered. In discussing German films where the '[t]he people are *alive*', he claims:

> the actual stories, which are so frequently cheap or maudlin, hardly matter, since life itself is not without such stigma. Even their high moralistic approach and parable does not matter, because the things that happen to their people are so much less important than the way their people are affected by them.[188]

For Macpherson, then, characters can find themselves in ridiculous scenarios as long as they respond to them in believable ways. Thus, any type of film could portray plausible psychology and the films he advocated were often driven by their storylines. Macpherson reasoned that because they were not difficult to

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[186] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 1.2 (1927), pp. 5-17, (p. 11). The italics in Macpherson's editorials are all original.
[187] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.3, p. 10.
[188] Ibid., p. 11.

watch, these films would not only satisfy discerning critics, but would also entertain wider audiences. In responding to the Russian film *The Peasant Women of Riazani*, he said: '[p]eople may not want to think, people *won't* think, but they *will* be entertained' [original italics].[189] Good films almost tricked the audience into appreciating what Macpherson considered to be high art because they found themselves unexpectedly enjoying the experience.

Macpherson also believed that films were more likely to have realistic psychology if the people they represented made them, and if they were shot on location. He explained

> Every one who has seen the East, *par exemple*, must laugh or groan (according as to how seriously he takes his films) when he sees what is done to the East in America, in English, in German, French, in any films but films belonging to and made in the East.[190]

Macpherson was passionate about nations creating their own films because he believed that it would improve international understanding. When he discussed film as a universal language, it was not that all films were the same and equally easy to read, but rather that films from different nations might educate others about their ways of life. So, while he began by advocating realistic psychology, the schema for films as 'life' was more nuanced as psychological realism was most achievable if films were anchored in their anthropological milieu and

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[189] Macpherson, 'As Is', 3.4, p. 9.
[190] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.3, p. 12.

locally made. He said that America could not recreate Europe as 'it is not possible for one race to try to reproduce the other'.[191] Equally then 'Europe […] could not have given *The Big Parade*' because '[t]hese things do not just *happen*. There is the whole of race consciousness back of them. We can no more produce the nuances of American consciousness than America can produce ours.'[192]

One of the ways in which Macpherson expressed this belief was in advocating a black cinema industry: he believed that black directors needed to make films about black people's experiences. He wrote an article for Nancy Cunard's *Negro* anthology, 'A Negro Film Union – Why Not?', arguing exactly this and repeated the ideas in the pages of *Close Up*.[193] In Cunard's anthology, Macpherson called for an 'Inter-State Academy of Cinema, run on exactly the same principles as the State School of Cinema in Moscow'.[194] In this school, 'teachers and pupils would work in vibrant, conscious *rapport* with the exact ethics of social renewal. From this core the ideology and methodology of a truly forensic race polity would be discerned.'[195] This 'would develop the quintessential Negro Cinema, saturated with the unique recognisable and inimitable characteristics of its creators'.[196] Macpherson hoped that black directors would bring the same 'quality' that he believed he had seen in black actors to their filmmaking. These directors

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[191] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.3, p. 15.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 5.2 (1929), pp. 85-90.
[194] Macpherson, 'A Negro Film Union – Why Not?', in *Negro*, ed. by Nancy Cunard (New York, NY: Negro Universities Press, 1969), pp. 335-38 (p. 336).
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., p. 338.

> would use it [the 'quality'] freely, consciously and unconsciously, and with the same certainty and power as, in consciously controlled work, he alone is capable of manipulating in rhythm, movement, histrionics, music – the dynamic arts, in short, and cinema is nothing if not dynamic. To go further – in his skill as a hunter, courage as a warrior, his magic as a witch-doctor, his genius as a sculptor or his prowess as a lover![197]

Macpherson called the creation of such a film school a 'big step forward in the humanising of the human race'.[198] Despite the progressive tone of his final line, Macpherson's fetishized description of black exoticism is difficult for the modern reader (if allied, in its time, to the cultural pluralism and racial nationalism of the Young America critics and some European movements).[199] Nevertheless the article provides an insight into his notion that people represented in films should also be responsible for the production of them. For Macpherson, only by opening filmmaking up to diverse groups and letting them represent 'life' would the general public be able to learn about other countries and races, and recognise everyone's shared psychology.

But Macpherson's criteria for realism meant lots of different films could be discussed as 'real'. The films that Macpherson lists show how different films

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[197] Macpherson, 'Film Union', p. 338.
[198] Ibid.
[199] See George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), ch.1.

that captured 'life' could be: *The Big Parade* was an American film, directed by King Vidor, that recounted the First World War from an American perspective; *The Emden* was a German war film that used documentary footage; *Grass* followed a tribe as they guided their herds to new pastures; *Chang* was about 'man's fight for life in the Northern Siamese jungle'; and *Voyage to the Congo* was more objectively ethnographic.[200] Although *Grass*, *Chang* and *Voyage to the Congo* were filmed in Iran, Thailand and Central Africa respectively, they were directed by western filmmakers: *Grass* and *Chang* were by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, while *Voyage to the Congo* was by Macpherson's friend and collaborator Marc Allégret, who also published a photo-book on the Congo with his lover André Gide in 1929. It is not entirely clear if Macpherson thought that the white, Western conception and direction of these films was acceptable because they featured people native to those places, or if they were an intermediate step to filmmakers in those countries creating their own representations. He noted that they achieved what he hoped a black cinema would: '[s]uch films as *Chang* and *Voyage to the Congo* promote curiosity and a desire to be more acquainted with the countries and customs seen. Additionally, they excite pleasure, sympathy and understanding.'[201] Like Bryher, Macpherson thought that the project of these films was at least in part educative. These films 'create respect and sympathy and often admiration, and they help us understand more than we could learn from twenty books'.[202]

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[200] Mordaunt Hall, 'The Screen', *The New York Times*, 30 April 1927, p. 25.
[201] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.3, p. 16.
[202] Ibid., p. 14.

Macpherson's understanding in this respect is part paternalistic, part progressive.

Alongside this schema for representing 'life', Macpherson generally favoured realist filming methods. He thought of the medium as an indexical imprint of reality, which allowed access to the world in a way that other mediums did not.[203] Macpherson notes:

> In the film we see the thing for ourselves, we do not have to rely on anybody, the camera records what actually is there, it has no propagandistic feeling, no prejudice, no preference. It sees everything, it sees twenty pages of print in twenty turns of the handle. And the same virtually applies to such films as present their story straight, whether made in studios or from nature.[204]

Because of this, Macpherson did not like abstract shots. He wrote that '[t]o prefer smears and splodges' is 'a denial of the essential poetry and beauty of objective things, and a hankering after half worlds or dream worlds which any sufficiently scientific analysis would reveal to be inferior in every way to the world of fact'.[205] Though this praise for realist filming techniques might seem to

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[203] Virginia Woolf refers to the potential for the cinema to be 'more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive in daily life' because '[w]e behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it'. This is a similar fantasy to Macpherson's that the cinema removes subjectivity. Virginia Woolf, *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 3 July 1926, pp. 381-83, (p. 382).
[204] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.3, p. 14.
[205] Macpherson, 'As Is', 2.2, pp. 13-14.

directly contradict his use of montage sequences in *Borderline*, Macpherson considered montage to be a form of continuity, not disruption. He explained that viewers did not take into account '[t]he fact that the montage of the films […] had been adopted primarily to convey the necessary implications of the stories they were telling' and so 'the startling anachronism arose that montage, which is continuity, was emphatically not continuity'.[206]

Instead of using abstract shots, Macpherson thought that realist shots could appear abstract if they were a point of focus. He explained that objectivism easily became symbolism in films and that: 'there is abstraction enough for the most abstract mind in any film that is true to life and reproduces or suggests life.'[207] Macpherson chose to illustrate this with a scene from Pabst's film *The Love of Jeanne Ney*:

> Pabst's cheap hotels, or the mere fact of his rain sodden landscape in Jeanne Ney are the nearest to pure abstraction that we have. Because somehow they are so true as to cease to be objective they become states of mind. The mind that sees in abstractions will see down endless vistas, layer on overlayer, and state of mind on state of mind.[208]

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[206] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 5.6 (1929), pp. 447- 454, (p. 450).
[207] He explained: 'It is true that objectivism judiciously displaced from "rigid context" becomes subjectivism, becomes associative symbolism, with an allied hold on actuality and vision.' Macpherson, 'Introduction to "The Fourth Dimension in the Kino"', *Close Up*, 6.3 (1930), pp. 175-84, (p. 179). The quotation in the sentence is from Macpherson, 'As Is', 2.2, pp. 11-12.
[208] Macpherson, 'As Is', 2.2, pp. 11-12.

Macpherson describes the way in which realist scenes can become dislocated from their immediate context and almost representative of states of mind. In language almost identical to H.D.'s mysticism – the 'layer on overlayer' – Macpherson explains that this way of seeing opens up endless possibilities in film. I will turn to H.D.'s use of this language when discussing realist films more in Chapter 3.

Although Macpherson began by calling for realistic psychology, the implications of representing this went far beyond characterisation to include location shooting, national film industries and the types of shots he preferred. Macpherson notes in one editorial, '[a]nd so we have to see that this business of psychology is a very deep and important matter.'[209] It certainly was in his understanding of film and the medium's potential.

Macpherson's desire for realism was also the basis for his anger at the censorship laws of the time. He returned to the topic in several of his editorials and, along with other contributors, regularly complained about the board's seemingly arbitrary decisions. In one editorial, Macpherson called the censorship laws the equivalent of London County Council knocking off 'the famous hands of Rima without so much as breathing a word of their intention to him, simply because the hands were not in accordance with their artistic concepts?'[210] He complained that, in the case of film, '[a]ny cheap nonentity in official status can at will work desperate havoc with beautiful work, snipping

[209] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.3, p. 15.
[210] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 1.6 (1927), pp. 5-16, (p. 5).

wildly in every direction.'[211] In a later editorial he included a list of all of the material that censors would not allow to be depicted in British films. Some is fairly expected: '[r]eligious rites and ceremonies treated with irreverence'; '[s]tories and scenes which are calculated and possibly intended to foment social unrest and discontent; '[t]he nude, both in actuality and shadowgraph'; '[s]wearing, or language in the nature of swearing'; '[e]mbraces which overstep the limits of affection or even passion, and become lascivious'; and 'suggestive and indecorous dancing' are but a few.[212] However, others were more inexplicable. For example, '[s]cenes connected with childbirth', and '[s]ubjects dealing with venereal disease' were also banned even though they might have an educative purpose. A secondary list that Macpherson printed spanned to the seemingly ridiculous, banning for example: '[w]omen fighting with knives.'[213]

In contrast to the defensiveness of England, Russia was using the cinema as a tool for educating the masses:

> Russia is now using the cinema and using it to educate its people, to make them see sensibly, to make them understand, to refute the mediaeval falsehoods on which civilisations are built and broken. In other words, the cinema is in the hands of men intelligent enough to realise that sane knowledge of sex, hygiene, government and religion is a foundation that does not collapse when the building is

[211] Ibid., p. 6.
[212] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 4.2 (1929), pp. 5-16, (pp. 10-12).
[213] Ibid., p. 13.

> all but finished; that myths of sorcery and patched up feudalism will not meet the needs of a new world.[214]

It appeared to Macpherson that British censorship rules were actively interfering with the industry's ability to produce 'real' films: '[l]et us begin to get it right now. Lies have been stuffed into us for so long, or what is worse, truth pruned, preened and pepnotised [sic], that finally we deserve a little truth in the raw.'[215] Not only Macpherson but the entire POOL group found war films one of the most exasperating genres in this respect, as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. In one editorial, Macpherson discusses a proposed film on Edith Cavell and warns, '[s]he was shot. It was ghastly enough and terrible enough, but if we must have wars we must have murders.' [216] He thought it was crucial that war films conveyed this reality because to say anything else would be a lie and such a lie 'would help repeat another Cavell story and all the butchery over again'.[217] For the POOL group, the fact that the cinema promoted sentimental versions of the war was one of the reasons people failed to understand the severity of actual conflicts.

The censorship laws created a bind: audiences were forbidden from viewing so many situations that only films with a narrow range of storylines could be made. Macpherson felt that if people knew that there were great films being made in other countries then they would have higher standards. Since

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[214] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.6, p. 10.
[215] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.6, p. 11.
[216] Ibid., p. 12.
[217] Ibid.

they could not, they continued to want unchallenging films to daydream through. In a later editorial he complained: 'it is useless blaming vulgarity on the Hollywood film alone. It is perhaps impossible to make a film under the *present censorship regulations* without resources to it. For serious consideration of any problem affecting life is practically forbidden.'[218] Censorship actively prevented films that Macpherson deemed to be real.

It is easy to see why, with this understanding of film and its potential, Macpherson was so enamoured by Russian filmmakers. Soviet films seemed to perfectly embody the type of cinema he was advocating. As mentioned above the Russians were using film for educative purposes, and their style of filmmaking almost exactly accorded with Macpherson's ideas of the real: they were made by Russian directors, shot on location, and the 'actors' were ordinary people playing themselves. Although the stories were often political, Macpherson did not read them in that way. Just as he accepted melodramatic films if they represented moments of accurate psychology, the political stories in Russian films were simply frameworks for portraying states of mind.

Pabst was also an exemplary realist according to Macpherson's definition. The director offers an important context for reading Macpherson's editorials. In 1926, Pabst had collaborated with Dr Karl Abrahams and Dr Hanns Sachs, two members of Freud's inner circle, on his film, *Secrets of a Soul*. The film was heavily influenced by psychoanalysis and aimed to take the reader into the mind of the main character. *Secrets of a Soul* showed Martin Fellman, played by Werner Krauss, develop an aversion to knives after a neighbour kills

[218] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 6.4 (1930), pp. 251-53, (p. 252).

his wife. Fellman's cousin had written to say he was returning from his travels and had sent the deeply symbolic gifts of a knife and a fertility statue. In a dream sequence at the centre of the film these events are replayed and reconfigured. The experimental dream sequence, rooted in the storyline but emphasising the symbolic nature of every day events must have appealed to Macpherson and accorded with his theories. After seeking help from an analyst, Fellman is able to see that his childless marriage has led him to be jealous of his cousin and wish to kill his wife. His neighbour's murder had prompted this psychic crisis. Once he discusses the desires and fears that were impermissible to his conscious mind, these problems are resolved and the film closes with Fellman and his wife and their newborn child. The idea that film might illustrate the unconscious underlined all Macpherson's writings in *Close Up*, and *Secrets of a Soul* was a key influence on *Borderline*, which I will discuss at the end of the chapter.

It was not just Pabst's focus on psychology that would have appealed to Macpherson, Pabst was also employing the Russian method of using non-professional actors. In discussing Pabst's 1927 film *The Love of Jeanne Ney*, Macpherson noted, as Kracauer had, that the scenes in his films were like life. For the opening scene, 120 real White ex-officers who had kept their uniforms were given alcohol and told to carouse. Macpherson explains: 'Pabst supplied vodka and women, waited and then calmly photographed.'[219] Pabst also used location shooting and so was able to show 'a Paris that is not the Paris of the

[219] Macpherson, '*Die Liebe der Jeanne Ney* and its Making', *Close Up*, 1.6 (1927), pp. 17-26, (p. 21).

Films, a place of Moulin-Rouge, cheap caberets, carnival streamers, apache dancers and views of Rue de Rivoli'. [220] In abandoning artificial sets, 'Paris suddenly became real, Paris suddenly *was* Paris. It was almost a shock to realise *Paris could exist on the films*.'[221] Pabst also used lighting that was as natural as possible (they were in Paris for 6 weeks with only 10 working days because they were waiting for the right conditions) and included 'real life' details like a broken mirror and an iron basin.[222] Indeed Robert Herring, in his *Films of the Year 1927-1928*, specifically noted the presence of a 'cask and bent lampshade' in the film.[223]

Macpherson and the other *Close Up* contributors took great pleasure in adopting the role of interpreter and explaining the way in which different films were real. As Frank Kermode explains in *The Genesis of Secrecy*, the interpreter's job is 'to penetrate the surface and reveal a secret sense; to show what is concealed in what is proclaimed'.[224] Macpherson adopted this role of interpreter, as the films that he claimed were 'real' did not appear particularly realist because of his idiosyncratic schema. In discussing Von Stroheim's *Greed,* Macpherson said, '[o]ften banal, always dreary, it was so much more than a play, it was life, an amazing quality of realism. And what cynicism.'[225] *Greed* (based on Frank Norris' naturalist novel *McTeague*) tells the story of the downfall of McTeague, a dentist who marries his friend Marcus's girl, Trina. In

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[220] Ibid., p. 24.
[221] Macpherson, '*Jeanne Ney'*, p. 24.
[222] Ibid., p. 25 and Willet, p. 146.
[223] Robert Herring, *Films of the Year 1927-1928* (London: The Studio, 1928) p. 5.
[224] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1979) x.
[225] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 1.1 (1927), pp. 5-15, (p. 12).

an act of revenge, Marcus reports McTeague for practising without a license. As McTeague and Trina slowly descend into poverty, she refuses to spend any of her money to improve their quality of life, despite having won £5000 in a lottery. They become estranged and McTeague, driven mad by his wife's frugal ways, murders her. McTeague flees from the police and hides in the desert with Trina's lottery winnings. The final scene of the film is a confrontation between McTeague and Marcus. They are in the desert, fighting for Trina's lottery winnings even though they are both going to die from exposure and dehydration. Macpherson read the film as containing moments of 'realistic' psychology, even if they were embedded in a fantastical plot. He followed his assertion that *Greed* had 'an amazing quality of realism' with a summary of the realistic elements:

> Those dreadful beds with brass knobs, trams seen through upstair windows rattling this way and that over crossings, a common street […] lives pecking and picking like hungry sparrows, awfully aware of turmoil and cross purposes. Repressed unhappy people, awful families doing what awful families do, bank holiday picnics in the suburbs, ceremonial visits, too many ill trained children yowling and quarrelling and being slapped.[226]

It is surprising that these are the elements that Macpherson discusses, simply because they were by no means the most obvious in a film driven by the

[226] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.1, p. 12.

suspense of its plot. In fact, Trina's 'awful family' are quite endearing and humorous when they appear on screen. They seem intended to provide comic relief rather than to portray a Freudian dysfunctional family. Macpherson's understanding of realism was very particular. Macpherson noted, '[t]o realise what cinematography can and will mean is a full-time occupation. People are needed, *we* are needed, CLOSE UP is needed to bring facts to the people.'[227] Indeed, only *Close Up* would have been able to explain these particular facts because they did not align to standard understandings of the real.

Although *Close Up* was a source of sometimes minatory interpretation, Macpherson nevertheless believed that audiences would effortlessly connect to realistic films. He explained:

> In fact, the kind of film we advocate is the kind of film that any normal intelligent person could understand. The straight, clear intention of St Petersburg, Jeanne Ney, Bett und Sofa is not stylised and excrescent. These films are superb because they are true to life, because they say something we know, because they move us, because their beauty is a beauty we recognise, and their greatness is a greatness we can comprehend.[228]

Macpherson's insistence on the readiness with which the 'real' film would yield itself to understanding did not mean that those films engendered a passive

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[227] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.2, p. 6.
[228] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 2.4 (1928), pp. 5-11, (p. 10).

audience. Macpherson believed that unrealistic films were 'dope' and passive escapism. This could be seen when '[p]eople stagger to the movies [...], to get away from themselves, from problems they have gnawed to bits, and worries worn shapeless'.[229] By contrast, Macpherson contended that when watching realistic films, '[p]eople become alert. They come to life.'[230] Films which showed the real therefore implied a different mode of spectatorship: '[s]omething vital flashes before them, something they recognise, and you can sense the switch-over to receptivity; just as if a light had been, so to speak, turned on.'[231] Thus the audience were awakened through their involuntary emotional and intellectual reaction to the stimulus on the screen. He claimed: '[w]e are not watching something happening to somebody else, we are experiencing our own reaction to something which has been dissected and spread out for the precise purpose of our comprehension, and unconscious participation.'[232] 'Realistic' films are Macpherson's ideal: they are comprehensible *and* they challenge the audience to be active and alert.

But there is an uneasy elitism that runs throughout *Close Up*. Although Macpherson's hoped films would connect with viewers and have an educative effect, he also regularly complained about the censors and so, by extension, those who did not expect more from the cinema. In his very first editorial, he called the public 'narrow and illiterate' in passing, thereby drawing attention to

[229] Macpherson, 'As Is', 3.4, p. 8.
[230] Ibid., p. 6.
[231] Macpherson, 'As Is', 3.4, p. 6.
[232] Macpherson, 'As Is', 5.6, pp. 451-2.

their inability to read films.[233] He also divided the audience into sections. He noted that, '[e]ighty per cent of any cinema audience has learnt only to want its Lya de Putti, its Tom Mix, its May McAvoy, regardless of the film in which they happen to appear.' [234] That left only twenty per cent who already saw films as artworks. Macpherson believed he could convert a further 30 per cent so that half of all filmgoers were on his side. This meant that, when he said that 'really good art IS commercial, and the mob has a curious nose for what is good – that is, what is *real*', the 'mob' he was referring to was only 50 per cent of cinemagoers, at most.[235] So while these 'real' films were supposed to be easy to watch and have transformative effects, when Macpherson called them commercial, they were only commercial to the half of cinema audiences who could be trained to read these films.

Experiments in Realism: *Wing-Beat*, *Foothills*, and *Monkey's Moon*

According to Macpherson's understanding the main criteria for 'real' films were: characters that displayed realistic psychology, even if it was set within an unrealistic story; location filming; and ideally film production undertaken by those represented on camera. These principles guided Macpherson's filmmaking. The group completed three short films in all: *Wing-Beat* (1927),

[233] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.1, p. 10.
[234] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.2, pp. 6-7.
[235] Ibid., p. 9.

Foothills (1928), and *Monkey's Moon* (1929).[236] These films have been mostly neglected in discussions of *Close Up*, in part because of the difficulty of accessing them.[237] I read these films through an article about *Wing-Beat* (written by H.D.) and a synopsis of *Foothills* (most likely written by Bryher), both from the Beinecke Library archives. Reading *Wing-Beat* and *Foothills* through articles provides a particular critical perspective as the writers emphasised those aspects of the films they thought to be of particular significance. By contrast, a copy of *Monkey's Moon* was recently rediscovered and posted online so while this is now more widely available, there is no equivalent document that describes their aims and ambitions for the film. These short films, made before the POOL group embarked on *Borderline*, reveal the range of films that could be made under Macpherson's idea of the real.

Wing-Beat was created with *Close Up* contributor Marc Allégret and was the first of the group's forays into filmmaking. H.D.'s admiring unpublished review captures, in her distinctive writing style, some of her excitement. She begins by explaining she had seen it at 'a private performance in a tiny way-side cinema' which gave it a 'personal glamour' and emphasised its 'lyric

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[236] Anne Friedberg, Introduction to 'Part 5: *Borderline* and the POOL Films', *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, pp. 212-20 (p. 212). While *Wing-Beat* and *Foothills* only exist in fragments in the Museum of Modern Art's film archive, *Monkey's Moon* was recently recovered and has been made available online [Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09S3knF75v0] (Accessed: 19 September 2016).

[237] This chapter discusses the films through reading an unpublished article about *Wing-Beat* and a synopsis of *Foothills*, both from the archives at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

qualities'.[238] She described the experience as a 'glimpse into some quattrocento atelier' as 'here was the work in the making, made to the initiate'.[239] The group clearly hoped that *Wing-Beat* would be an antidote to some of the mainstream films that Macpherson criticised in his editorials. The film was named *Wing-Beat* because H.D. believed that it would be 'like a wild bird caught in a barn' 'if it were released suddenly, without warning in the usual fetid and closed atmosphere of the usual picture palace.'[240] H.D.'s descriptions speak to the tensions in their ambitions for the film: *Wing-Beat* is both an artisanal product created for 'the initiate', and yet this gives it the power to shock and revitalise the cinema experience in the 'usual picture palace'.

This sense of the film's vitality is continued throughout the review. H.D. describes it as carrying with it the 'hint of the woods, the hills.' [241] In his editorials, Macpherson had often complained about staid characters behaving in ridiculous ways, along with the mindless censorship that prevented more psychologically complex pictures from being created. In a similar vein, H.D.'s article sets the living quality of *Wing-Beat* against 'the vast areas of the consciousness outlined and stuffed and set with stiff beaks and dead branch and stuffed cotton wool cluster of berries or fruit to collect dust and to moulder under glass cases.'[242] Her film-bird, by contrast, had not yet been 'devitalised

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[238] H.D., 'Wing-Beat', The H.D. Papers, Series II. Writings 1918-1977, Box 43, Folder 1102, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, pp. 1-7 (p. 1).
[239] Ibid.
[240] H.D., 'Wing-Beat', p. 1
[241] Ibid., p. 2.
[242] Ibid.

and disembowelled', presumably a reference to the censor.[243] For H.D. the film is almost pure energy: it is 'a formless pulse and beat of light'.[244] Later she continues this expansive presentation of the film's possibilities, '[i]ts beat and pulse shall be they say, the beat and pulse of the waters, of the seas, of the trees and of sunlight across desert spaces and of the hearts of men.'[245]

It was precisely Macpherson and Allégret's *inexperience* as filmmakers that allowed them to create such an energised film:

> The young, thank God, are not satisfied with stuffed birds in cages, will not (thank god) accept the worn out and outworn creed and tradition that sent their older brothers to infamous butchery of one another and of the arts and of all glamour and beauty.[246]

In the POOL group's writings, artistic truth-telling often stands in clear opposition to the 'outworn creeds' and attitudes that lead to 'butchery'. With such a view, even an apparently niche production like *Wing-Beat* could have direct political consequence.

H.D. emphasises that *Wing-Beat* was linked to Macpherson's notion of realism: the filmmakers' 'aim is with the living, and their concern is simply with

[243] Ibid.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid., p. 4.
[246] H.D., 'Wing-Beat', p. 2.

the flight and beat and pulse of living creatures.'[247] This meant abandoning tired conventions and character types:

> No more, they say, outworn creeds, of cow boys and curls, of cabarets and chasms, of vamps and vandals. They are done with the world of the apache, of the world of the demi-monde as demi-monde. They want the world, not the half-world, the world and all its [sic] stands for. (M. Allégret has informed me that some of the best films are refused by buyers because they have not a 'dancing' in them.)[248]

H.D. argues: '[m]en and their nerves and their desires and where men and their desires lead them are the things that matter. Not the things extraneous to men, the cabaret, the chasm, the bronco, the blond wig', which 'aren't all of life'.[249]

Wing-Beat, unlike the crude caricatures served up by mainstream cinema is 'a world of reality', keenly focused on psychological states. She explains that the only action in the film is 'of subtle "stills", […] an action of thought etched in fine distinguished line on the fine distinguished features of Mr Macpherson and of H.D., the writer, poet-critic who has taken part in this film'.[250] When H.D. does discuss the narrative, it is only as a framework for psychological insight:

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[247] Ibid., p. 4.
[248] H.D., 'Wing-Beat', p. 4.
[249] Ibid., p. 6.
[250] Ibid., p. 5.

> The excellent nervous quality could hardly be bettered than in the gramophone scene when young Mr E.L Black works up Colin (his elder film brother) to a frenzy of nervous irritation over - nothing. A gramophone, a box of spilled cigarettes, an ordinary London weekly and shadows working back and forth across the pages of the paper that Colin has snatched up in a moment of mental turmoil in order to find some half moment's distraction from his inner seething vision, and you have it.[251]

Rather than explain the circumstances surrounding the scene, H.D. focuses exclusively on the characters' mental states. For her, the film stripped everything back to fundamental truths about human behaviour. In H.D.'s telling, its theme is 'nervous crises that have nothing to do with cabarets, with underworlds'.[252] The group were clearly hopeful about what the film might achieve: it 'is a beginning of (I am certain) a vast upheaval in the art of the cinema, if Mr Macpherson and M. Allégret (and their tiny band of adherents) will go on as they have begun, determined for one thing only, the best'.[253] The makers of *Wing-Beat* hoped to effect this 'vast upheaval' by new and more direct communication with its audiences' minds. In the first issue of *Close Up* an advertisement for the film showed Macpherson in character, with the caption:

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[251] Ibid.
[252] H.D., 'Wing-Beat', p. 5.
[253] Ibid., p. 6.

'[a] film of telepathy. The feeling of "something about to happen" pervades the whole, reaching a climax at the point from which this "still" is taken.'[254]

Although H.D. suggests *Wing-Beat* had the bare bones of a plot, it was not the focus of the experimental film. *Monkey's Moon*, POOL's final short, made in 1929, similarly had little narrative: filmed in the grounds of Kenwin in Switzerland, it follows two monkeys that escape from their cage and are eventually recaptured. Instead of presenting a complex narrative, the film attempts to capture the monkeys' non-human psychology, with a range of non-standard camera angles and fast cuts. The film alternates between third-person shots of the monkeys and others in which the audience inhabits the monkey's perspective, making for a disorientating viewing experience.

One of the effects of this perspective is to defamiliarise the human figures in the film. Seen from below, humans appear as a menacing tangle of disembodied limbs, dominating the scene. At one point, a monkey's lead becomes caught on a rock. The camera focuses on the ground as the screen fills with the looming shadow of hands, which finally enter the shot and take hold of the monkey. Significantly, though this capture is represented in a terrifying manner, the hands then calm the monkey and stroke it. The sense of threat offered by humans exists only from the monkeys' perspective, which is fully inhabited by the film. In *Money's Moon*, the aim of capturing psychology extends to non-human protagonists, and the POOL group adopt stylistic techniques fitted to their subject.

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[254] *Close Up*, 1.1 (1927).

Throughout the film, the camera lingers on elements of the scene, as though mimicking the monkeys' attention: a dandelion, an insect on its back, a dripping tap, a watering can, and petals falling from a flower. This is the world of the miniature which humans, living on a different scale, frequently miss. But these apparently trivial items not only suggest the limitations of human attention, they also take on other significances in the film. In his editorials, Macpherson frequently discussed the way that ostensibly representational shots could become symbolic images. In *Monkey's Moon*, the image of the insect is one such example. While the monkeys are free, the insect struggles to turn itself over, but rights itself and flies away as the monkeys are returned to their cages. The film presents the opposition between freedom and containment as operating at multiple scales. Not only is the plight of the insect an inverted mirroring of the monkeys', but there are parallels with the humans too. At the end of the short film, as the rain becomes heavier, one of the monkeys is seen through the bars of its cage. This is followed by a shot of bars across a window, or possibly a balcony, suggesting similar entrapment. A comparison is set up between temporary captivity (the insect does eventually fly away), the monkeys' enforced captivity, and the human's unacknowledged captivity.

Both the first and final short films produced by POOL focused on psychology rather than narrative. *Foothills*, made between these two experimental shorts, was intended to be more conventional, judging from a synopsis in Bryher's archive. *Foothills* is described as a one-man film, made in a small studio and '[u]nlike most of the One-Man films made to date, it does not

attempt abstractions, freak effects, or incoherency, but is a simple story, simply told, of life in a small Swiss village'.[255] Macpherson advocated such simple presentation of the story, and avoidance of 'abstractions', in his editorials. The synopsis also notes that *Foothills* was shot on location: '[t]he locations are genuine beauty spots of Switzerland, none of the artistes are professionals, one of the roles is actually played by a Swiss peasant.'[256] The film was clearly influenced by Eisenstein and Pabst's use of location sets and non-professional actors to break down the boundaries between the world of the film and that inhabited by its audience.

The film follows Jess, played by H.D., a city woman who is 'no longer young, and has an air of town sophistication about her'.[257] Jess has arrived in a small village in the mountains and has taken a room in one of the houses. Her independent, modern ways cause comment from the people in the village. Jean, played by Macpherson, works in the house. They form a connection, and spend an evening in one another's company, but Jess comes to think that village life is too quiet. A young 'man-about-town', who turns out to be Jess' fiancé, arrives and seems to convince Jess to return to the city with him. In a conventionally happy ending, Jess changes her mind and instead leaves with Jean. She takes off the engagement ring that the man-about-town gave her, and as she embraces

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[255] Bryher, 'Synopsis of Foothills', The Bryher Papers, Series VIII. Film, Box 170, Folder 5674, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, pp.1-2 (p. 1).
[256] Ibid.
[257] Bryher, 'Foothills', p. 1.

Jean the camera pans upward to a label on a suitcase that says, 'Hotel Danieli, Venice'.[258]

Evidently, the narrative drive and conventional ending of *Foothills* had more in common with commercial films of the time than *Wing-Beat* or *Monkey's Moon*. In fact, Macpherson acknowledged that the plot was similar to F.W. Murnau's 1927 film *Sunrise*.[259] Robert Herring had complained that *Sunrise* showed 'no psychology, no insight, nothing we have been waiting for'.[260] *Foothills* was intended to redress this and the narrative sought to delve into the psychological states of its characters. Early in the film, the synopsis describes Jess wandering to the window as 'impressions come back to her of the life she has left behind. This is confused with fragmentary impressions of travel, but the indication is that there has been some love affair.'[261] Based on these descriptions, *Foothills* seems to have used a very conventional narrative as a framework upon which to build more complex psychological scenes.

Macpherson was also clearly hoping to attract a wider audience with the film. H.D. told Bryher in a letter:

> [T]he lamps apparently are excellent for CLOSE UPS but for distant work the film is all clear but vague but clear. K. says no good for commercial purposes, all out of doors is BEAUTIFUL and all CLOSE UPS are perfect. […] But K. will want to start re-working in about a

[258] Ibid., p. 2.
[259] Friedberg, p. 213.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Bryher, 'Foothills', p. 1.

> week, I believe […] The fault is in no way his and MOST of the film is lovely but a technical blunder. K. will be too upset to write to you fully, I'm afraid.[262]

The reference to 'commercial purposes' belies the image of the POOL group as indifferent to popularity and the realities of the contemporary film market: for all his inexperience, Macpherson hoped to create not just aesthetically valuable but commercially viable films.

In their use of location filming, and concern with states of mind, all three of the short films produced by POOL can be seen as embodying key aspects of Macpherson's theories of realist film. However, the final products of these starting assumptions were very different: *Wing-Beat* and *Monkey's Moon* were less concerned with plot, whereas *Foothills* was intended to have an entertaining, simple narrative. Together, they demonstrate the breadth of styles of filmmaking that could be supported under the label of realism, as Macpherson understood the term. It is necessary to understand these short films before turning to *Borderline*, which builds on the POOL group's earlier projects.

Reading as *Borderline* 'Realist'

Borderline was written and directed by the POOL group in 1929 and released in 1930. It is the culmination of Macpherson's ideas about psychological realism

[262] H.D. to Bryher, 5 March 1928, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 13, Folder 546.

and is almost exactly the type of film that Macpherson advocated for. I believe that, because the implications of Macpherson's realism have not been properly explored, there are a number of misunderstandings about the film. Critics often assume that the group wished to abandon narrative conventions and that they did not want films to be popular. Instead I argue that from the POOL perspective this is a realist narrative film that they hoped would have appeal to a wider audience: some of the 30 per cent that Macpherson was trying to win over.

The film's narrative would have been politically contentious, tackling race, homosexuality and neuroses in their story of an interracial love triangle in a small town in Switzerland. The white couple, Thorne and Astrid, are driven by destructive impulses while, Pete and Adah, the black couple, have 'dominant integrity' but suffer discrimination.[263] At the opening of the film, Pete is absent for reasons unknown and Thorne and Adah have been having an affair. In her jealousy, Astrid summons Pete to the guesthouse where they are all staying. Upon his arrival, Pete and Adah reconcile. At the climax of the film, Thorne attempts to leave Astrid and she takes a knife and threatens him. They grapple, there is some confusion, until Thorne falls on Astrid and accidentally kills her. Meanwhile Pete punches someone in the bar for calling Adah a 'nigger'. The film ends with Pete receiving a letter from the mayor asking him to leave the town, while Thorne is acquitted for Astrid's murder. The politically contentious material is heightened by an ending which is unsatisfying, both because Pete is

[263] H.D., 'Borderline: A POOL Film with Paul Robeson', in *Close Up, 1927-1933: Cinema and* Modernism, pp. 212-20, (p. 221).

punished and Thorne remains free, and because the viewer never finds out where Pete goes or what happens to him.

The group went to some lengths to plan the plot and, according to Macpherson, began by creating over a thousand drawings to storyboard the scenarios.[264] When the film was released, they clearly wanted the audience to understand the narrative as they provided them with a pamphlet, written by H.D., that explained the basic storyline.[265] The strategic use of intertitles, particularly at the beginning of the film, also helped the audience to orientate themselves in the filmic world. The opening shot of Astrid, looking overwrought and anxious while making a phone call, is followed by the manageress, played by Bryher, answering the phone. The audience see the manageress shout to the barmaid and then the barmaid goes to Pete's room and the intertitle, 'Astrid on the 'phone' is shown. When the action cuts back to Astrid, where Adah is now leaving the room Astrid and Thorne share, Astrid announces, 'Pete is here!' Adah replies, '[w]hat do you mean? Where?' and Astrid responds, '[a]t the….' And then the next shot is of the bar. The film then cuts back to Astrid and Adah, as Astrid tells her, '[y]ou must go back to Pete and leave Thorne.' The provision of such cues helped to establish the dynamics of the characters' relationships and to provide continuity in the narrative.

As I have argued, Macpherson had a lot invested in narrative film, partly as a framework for psychological realism but also because he thought that the

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[264] Ibid., p. 238.
[265] As Laura Marcus notes, Hanns Sachs had provided an accompanying pamphlet to *Secrets of a Soul*, which may well have been the inspiration for H.D.'s explanatory monograph. Marcus, *Tenth Muse*, p. 327.

best cinema should be both art and entertainment, and narrative was a way of achieving this. And yet, in contemporary criticism the POOL group is often seen as anti-narrative because *Borderline*'s plot is complex. Judith Brown notes that '[n]arrative opacity is predictable enough, given the film's aesthetic and intellectual interests.' Brown even goes as far as to suggest that '[t]he members of POOL - notably Macpherson, H.D and Bryher - wanted to rid the film of the conventions of narrative logic, yet understood that it would not be readily accessible to the average viewer'.[266] Susan McCabe articulates a similar sentiment when she says that '[t]he short "libretto" outlining the plot, passed out at initial screenings of the film, belies the film's experimental method.'[267] Rachel Connor too notes that 'the film set out to subvert the methods of narrative cinema and, for this reason, POOL had to distribute an explanatory pamphlet […] at the film's first screening.'[268] The tendency of these readings to oppose narrative and 'experimental method', and thus assume that *Borderline* eschewed the former in favour of the latter, emphasises the importance of accompanying the film with an understanding of the POOL group's theoretical positions as mapped out in *Close Up*. Most of the films that Macpherson championed – *Battleship Potemkin*, *Mother*, *The End of St Petersburg*, *Nju*, *Bett und Sofa*, *Greed*, *Jeanne Ney*, *Joyless Street* – were narrative films.

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[266] Judith Brown, 'Borderline, Sensation, and the Machinery of Expression', in *Modernism/Modernity*, 14.4 (2007), pp. 687-705, (p. 671).
[267] Susan McCabe, 'Borderline Modernism: Paul Robeson and the Femme Fatale', *Callaloo*, 25.2 (2002), pp.639-53, (p. 644).
[268] Rachel Ann Connor, *H.D. and the Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) p. 23.

Instead of being anti-narrative, I would argue that the plot of *Borderline* was meant to provide an entertaining framework that would allow for the characters' complex mental states. The group then used what H.D. called 'clatter montage' – quick successions of images inserted into the narrative – to render these internal states visible to the audience. Macpherson, remember, considered montage to be a technique of continuity. Throughout the film then, this cutting technique is utilised, not to take away from the storyline, but to show the characters' psychology. For example, after Astrid asks Adah to leave Thorne and return to Pete, Adah asks, 'And leave Thorne to you?' The film then cuts to a shot of Thorne, looking threateningly at the camera and punching the air in frustration. Thorne is a borderline neurotic character and here his aggression is directed indiscriminately at anyone near him. In fact, as he looks directly at the camera, his aggression is even directed at the audience. The film then cuts back to the scene with Astrid and Adah. Adah now smiles and leaves, suggesting that she is happy to leave Astrid to deal with Thorne's violent behaviour. The parts of the film that use cutting to convey character psychology, though some of the least legible to the viewer, are 'real' because they are not stock character tropes like the blonde who first 'tastes Strong Drink'. Instead, these are supposed to be characters who are complex, faulty and immoral.

The same technique that revealed Thorne's inherently aggressive nature is used to show Pete's 'dominant integrity'. When Pete and Adah first meet again after Astrid has summoned him to the guesthouse, he is shown, almost in profile, with the sky behind him. The film then cuts to Adah, her back against a

wall as she coyly looks at Pete. The story of Pete and Adah's reunion is then interrupted by a panning shot, going from left to right, of the sunrays beaming across the countryside. This is followed by a panning shot, now from right to left, across the hills. The film cuts back to Pete and Adah looking at one another in profile. Whilst Thorne and Astrid are associated with images of interiors to highlight their repressions, Pete and Adah are cast as natural, transcending the everyday cares of mundane life. Adah and Pete finally hold hands and walk away together. Clearly such representations of race, though seemingly progressive at the time, are highly problematic. As I noted earlier in the chapter, Macpherson's belief in a black cinema was linked to some questionable views.

The use of hands in *Borderline,* in the montage sequences and as the focus of tight close ups, is one of the recurring tropes in the film. Like the insect in *Monkey's Moon*, the use of hands is a good example of how the real, taken out of context, can become symbolic. Judith Brown reads the film's obsessive return to images of hands as a way to 'bring the viewer back to the work of art, the hand of the artist, and to a fantasy of desire unmediated by the cold technologies of twentieth-century film'.[269] Whilst her focus on sensation in the montage of *Borderline* provides a useful reading of the film, it seems unlikely these images would constitute a symbol of the loss of the touch of the artist, considering that Macpherson frequently praised the objectivity of the camera in *Close Up*. In fact, this was one of the attractions of the medium: he noted that '[i]n the film we see the thing for ourselves, we do not have to rely on anybody, the camera records what actually is there, it has no propagandist feeling, no

[269] Brown, p. 692.

prejudice, no preference'.[270] H.D.'s accompanying pamphlet also suggested a more complex relationship between the artist and the camera than simply seeing the camera as cold and inhuman. She described Macpherson, at work, filming *Borderline*:

> He just goes on, his cadaverous frame getting more thin, his grey-steel eyes getting more glint and fire […] Like watching a young gunner alone with his machine gun. It is as if one knew all the time the sniper would at the last get him.[271]

This obsessive young artist who battles against time and his own human fragility in pursuit of mechanical perfection is awe-inspiring. Furthermore, in the process of creating the artwork, Macpherson becomes mechanical himself as he takes on the attributes of the machine in his 'steel-grey eyes'. Later in the pamphlet H.D. casts Macpherson as finally merging with the camera: 'Kenneth Macpherson, at work, is a hard-boiled mechanic, as if he himself were all camera, bone and sinew and steel glint of rapacious grey eyes.'[272] The description of the machine as both a source of admiration and artistic dedication is a far cry from H.D.'s views in an unpublished review of *Responsibilities and other poems* by W.B. Yeats in 1916, where she lamented her generation's aestheticisation of the war. She said: '[t]he guns they praised, the beauty of the machines they loved, are no more as a god set apart for

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[270] Macpherson, 'As Is', 1.3, p. 14.
[271] H.D., 'Borderline', p. 225.
[272] Ibid., p. 226.

worship but a devil over whom neither they nor we have any more control.'[273] At one stage, H.D. might well have viewed developing technology with suspicion and mourned the loss of the hand of the artist, but by 1929 POOL's project had moved far beyond those ideas. Indeed, the artist's hand would only introduce a subjective mediating agent into a process that gains its power precisely from a fantasy of this absence.

Instead, the use of hands is twofold. In an editorial about the potential of a racial cinema Macpherson discussed the actor Stepin Fetchit. Noting the way in which the actor moves, Macpherson said:

> Something has been given us here, set (if you will) in a physical symbol, though you might with equal truth call it a mind symbol of a psychic symbol. Something which we know without any further need to bother, that we are only at the outer edge of seeing. Fetchit waves loose racial hands and they, like life, touch everything that the world contains. They are startling with what nobody meant to put into them, but which is all too there – histories, sagas, dynasties, Keatsian edges off things make a voiceless trouble back of the eye and the recording mind. Only afterwards are you really beset by them. They are not Fetchit's hands, they are the big steps we have not yet taken. First of all these so utterly not incantationish gestures are unselfconsciousness, perfectly inherited greatness of race and

[273] H.D. 'Responsibilities', *Agenda H.D. Special Issue*, 25.3-4 (1987-8), pp.51-53, (p. 53).

> race mind. It only begins here. We can scrap every trained toe waggle of a ballerina for the very least of these movements. Making this greatness articulate for the cinema is the fascinating pioneer work of somebody.[274]

Macpherson clearly decided that 'making this greatness articulate' was his pioneering work. The use of hands is at once about symbolising the mind, and about 'race mind'.

The hands are also used to further illustrate the characters' psychological states. In the scene when Astrid is spouting racial hatred to Bryher and the barmaid, she is shown in profile, with her hands curled into claws, frenetically gesturing. The film then cuts to her hands pounding the table. After the intertitle, '[t]hey are niggers, my dear!' the hands are again cut into the shot, this time from slightly different angles. The barmaid asks, '[w]ell, why not?', and this is followed by a shot of H.D looking at the camera, then another profile shot. Finally, the audience is shown a close up of her hands dropping in defeat. In contrast to Astrid's anxious movements, Pete's hands are often in complete stasis. Reading the images of hands further confirms Astrid's neurosis and Pete's psychic peace. Hands are supposed to be both the characters' states of mind and their race mind.

But, more than this, I would argue that the persistent return to images of hands is a way to convey the universality of the psychological states of the characters. In *Close Up*, Macpherson regularly discussed the way in which the

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[274] Macpherson, 'As Is', 5.2 pp. 87-88.

audience would recognise psychological states that they themselves were familiar with in their every day life. The abstract images of hands provide a way for the audience to recognise their own psychology on screen without the distinguishing features of a face that might prevent them from identifying with the emotions fully. Though Astrid's overblown declarations of racist hatred are hopefully not a source of identification for the audience, the transference of this hatred into the symbolic gestures of her hands makes the emotion recognisable from their own experiences of frustration. In the accompanying pamphlet, H.D. emphasised the universality of the characters' states of mind: Astrid and Thorne 'live as such people do the world over, in just such little social borderline rooms as just such couples seek in Devonshire, in Cornwall, in the South of France, in Provincetown, United States'.[275] The group clearly thought that they were representing universal problems in the film.

Borderline's narrative framework and its emphasis on psychological states was Macpherson's attempt to put his theory into practice. As outlined in the previous section, the POOL group had already experimented with representing psychology in different forms in their previous shorts. But *Borderline* was clearly intended as a larger, more commercial project than *Wing-Beat*, *Foothills* or *Monkey's Moon*. Aside from being a feature-length film, the choice of Paul Robeson for the leading role suggests a desire for a wider audience than they had previously attracted. Robeson was just beginning his film career following his international success on stage and, at the time of *Borderline*, had only appeared in one previous film, the African American

[275] H.D., 'Borderline', p. 221.

filmmaker Oscar Micheaux's 1924 *Body and Soul*. Robeson's presence in the POOL film seemed to guarantee that it would draw attention.[276] The film was also distributed internationally: *Borderline* was first shown at *cine-club* and film society screenings - at the Academy Cinema in London in October 1930, the Second International Congress of Independent Cinema in Brussels in November 1930, at a *cine-club* in Catalonia in January 1931 and the Rote Muhle in Berlin in April 1931.[277] The choice of venues suggests that POOL hoped for specialist but nonetheless wide appeal. Macpherson believed all along was that the right kind of film would persuade the thirty per cent of unconverted filmgoers that film was an art. *Borderline* was the only film the group made that could possibly test this belief.

Despite some positive reviews from abroad upon *Borderline's* release in 1930 – apparently the UFA director Paul Czinner said that it was one of the greatest films he had ever seen – the film had an almost unanimously negative reception from the English press.[278] Instead of entertaining the audience, the reviewers found the plot incomprehensible. Although Macpherson's understanding of realism was coherent to him, the resulting film clearly baffled viewers. *The Manchester Guardian* declared that:

> The average spectator will yawn and wonder what the deuce it is all about. The journalist, asked to write about this hour-long pattern of

[276] Friedberg, p. 218.
[277] Friedberg, p. 220.
[278] Guest, p. 198.

> flowing pictures, can only deplore his inability to describe in a few clear words the content and meaning of a dream.[279]

The Daily Film Renter reviewer similarly complained that he needed H.D.'s 'absurdly highbrow' accompanying pamphlet to make any sense of the film as '[w]ithout its aid, I confess to you frankly I wouldn't know in the least what *Borderline* was about'. [280] Even in the pamphlet, H.D.'s prose style was difficult to understand. The reviewer continued, 'having read it, I realise that it is a very psychological something or other – but just what I still don't know!'[281]

The frequent use of close up and montage was not seen as continuity but rather as highly disorientating: another review complained that 'what the screen showed was just a meaningless jumble of close-ups, cut-ins and so forth, with a couple of very masculine women, a cat who got a fish out of a jar and all that sort of thing, meaning rather less than nothing'.[282] The scene with the cat appears when Pete and Adah are first reunited and he follows her through the village as she playfully leads him on and hides. Alternating between these shots might have been intended to depict the psychology of the chase, and to question who was chasing who in this scene. Although the images could be read in this way, the likelihood of viewers being able to interpret these scenes on a first viewing was slim. The very nature of the cinema, in which a film plays

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[279] J.S., '"BORDERLINE" An Experiment in Silent Films', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Oct 1930, p. 8.
[280] 'Wardour Street Gossip', *The Daily Film Renter,* 14 October 1930, p. 5.
[281] Ibid.
[282] E.A. Baughan, 'Robeson as Film Player: A High-brow Amateur Picture by Our Film Critic', *News Chronicle*, 14 Oct 1930, p. 3.

quickly and cannot be revisited without another full viewing, made it almost impossible for viewers to be able to apply such interpretations, even if they had wanted to.

The combination of both a complex narrative, and montage sequences amplified the difficulties and appeared discordant. The reviewer from the *News Chronicle* said, 'Kenneth Macpherson, the director of the picture, has ideas, and here and there is able to express them. But his film is a fidgety mixture of symbolism and realism.'[283] *The Observer*'s film critic, C.A. Lejeune, noted a similar problem:

> For the sake of every jot of real endeavour in the commercial studios, for every urgency of real achievement among the amateurs, we must be honest in our contact with an altogether warring picture in which fragments of every school, every thought, every symbolic language, strive and destroy one another.[284]

She continued, 'the film is formlessness – urgent perhaps, but urgent in a chaos, lacking that single broad stream of creation, whether of theme, or mood, or simply rhythm, along which any work of art must travel towards its implicit end.'[285] For Macpherson, 'real' character psychology was the unifying force but

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[283] Baughan, p. 3.
[284] C.A. Lejeune 'THE CRITIC AS CREATOR "BORDERLINE"', *The Observer,* 19 Oct 1930, p. 20.
[285] Ibid.

for other viewers, it seems that the film contained too many different styles and references to be coherent.

In fact, the response of most of the reviewers was to assume that the film was not intended for audiences like them. *Borderline* was widely judged to be 'a film conceived for the intellectual picture public, rather than for the popular crowd'.[286] It was further described by one reviewer as 'not intended to be a contribution to the entertainment side of the film industry'.[287] The group's elitist self-fashioning made *Borderline* appear to be open to the fiercest examination, with Lejeune specifically drawing on this before beginning her critique: 'when a man like Kenneth Macpherson of *Close Up*, directs a film like *Borderline* towards an exclusively intelligent audience, there can be no give-and-take.'[288] Lejeune's review, as a well-known and respected critic, must have been especially hard for the POOL group to read, as Macpherson would have counted her in the elite 20 per cent guaranteed to enjoy the film. The critics, without Macpherson's philosophy around psychological realism, unable to follow the complicated narrative and unable to read the images were left completely baffled.

Macpherson vehemently refuted the critics' judgements in his following month's 'As Is'. He explained that instead of dealing with 'externalised observation', he planned to 'take my film into the minds of the people in it'.[289] He continued that he wanted:

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[286] 'Borderline on Monday: First Paul Robeson Film', *Bioscope*, 8 Oct 1930, p. 45.
[287] J.S., p. 8.
[288] Lejeune, p. 20.
[289] Macpherson, 'As Is', *Close Up*, 7.5 (1930), pp. 293-298, (p. 294).

> To take the action, the observation, the deduction, the reference, into the labyrinth of the human mind, with its queer impulses and tricks, its unreliability, its stresses and obsessions, its half-formed deductions, its glibness, its occasional amnesia, its fantasy, suppressions and desires.[290]

Now that no one, not even the supposed 20 per cent, could follow *Borderline*, Macpherson despaired that his representation of life was unrecognisable. He claimed that critics did not understand the complexity of life because they were used to simplistic representations. According to him: '[f]ilm, stage and literature have made bed-rock of the false principle of *complete enaction*. There is no complete enaction in life.'[291] Instead there are 'hundreds of layers, inferences and associations, enmeshing everything into everything'.[292] If *Borderline* was confusing then, it was because it more closely resembled life than other artworks:

> But the film, to me, and to anybody who bothers to think twice, is *life*, and breathes with the breath of life, and life is not simple, and life cannot be kept within the shallow limits of form or formulae. Borderline, then, whether you like it or not, is life.[293]

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[290] Ibid.
[291] Macpherson, 'As Is', 7.5, p. 297.
[292] Ibid., pp. 297-8.
[293] Ibid., p. 296.

In claiming that *Borderline* is life 'whether you like it not', Macpherson was insisting that the critics did not understand life. The problem was specifically with the English, who did not recognise their own unconscious: '[t]he Englishman rejects too much of his emotional being, and is embarrassed if he has to be brought face to face with it.'[294] For Macpherson, the critics were too simple:

> Comprehensibility. What is it? A demand for concessions. Simplicity, what is that? A demand for concessions. Simplicity is for children. Simplicity is for tired people. […] Everything is made more ordinary, more shallow, more trivial for these souls who demand facile understanding.[295]

As Macpherson's interest in realism has not been fully explored, contemporary criticism has typically read *Borderline* as undermining narrative conventions of the time by employing avant-garde, formal experimentation. They do not take into account how much Macpherson had invested in narrative, realism and what he understood as continuity. When *Borderline* failed then, it was not just that Macpherson's film had failed: it was his whole theory of what constituted good film. It was an indictment of his ability to win over 50 per cent of filmgoers, or even appeal to the 20 per cent within that that should have

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[294] Macpherson, 'As Is', 7.5, p. 297.
[295] Ibid., p. 295.

already been appreciative. Macpherson is positioned at once as a critic of passive audiences, and as a director trying to court their favour.

Bryher: Uncovering the Real

> *It was as if her whole being were concentrated into an eye. As if she saw straight through people and action and conditions. Their falseness; their rightness.*[296]

This quotation from Bryher's novel *Two Selves* articulates a belief that privileged individuals might see 'reality' more accurately than others. In an idea reminiscent of Vertov's kino eye – which is 'compared to the microscope, the telescope and the x-ray, all of which made visible things previously invisible' – Bryher's Nancy is described as at once surveying and recording surface impressions, and penetrating through the apparent to underlying structures.[297] Nancy is like a seer in Bryher's novel, somehow able to intuit events in the future. But her quasi-mystical vision is also connected to a deep sense of responsibility. This chapter explores the link between being able to see the real, and the need to convey this insight to readers in Bryher's writing in the late 1920s and 1930s.

In this chapter, I begin by arguing that Bryher's 1927 novel *Civilians* documents her characters' personal irrationalities in order to comment more broadly on the flaws in society that had led to the First World War. In doing so, Bryher positions herself as someone who, like Nancy, is especially skilled at

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[296] Bryher, *Two Novels: Development and Two Selves*, ed. and intro. by Joanne Winning (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p. 213.
[297] Dziga Vertov, 'The Birth of the Kino-Eye', *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. by Annette Michelson, trans. by Kevin O'Brien (London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1984), pp. 40-42, (p. 41).

apprehending the real. By 1929 in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, Bryher had turned to psychoanalysis, albeit an idiosyncratic version of it, to further diagnose the problems she had identified in *Civilians*. I suggest that psychoanalysis not only offered Bryher a means of articulating these problems, but also their potential resolution: she believed that analysis would allow others to understand their motives and actions and that this in turn might lead to societal change.

Finally this chapter considers the novel 'Manchester' (1935-6), in which the character Ernest North possesses superior powers of vision and perception. He uses this insight to correct the problems of those around him: he saves his ageing secretary from looming unemployment, and psychoanalyses a troubled actress in order to connect her to her unconscious thoughts. I end this chapter by arguing more generally that 'Manchester' reveals some of the problems with Bryher's notion of the real. When the novel was finished, Bryher sent copies to friends in her circle. Their responses – mostly unfavourable – suggests the difficulties of using psychoanalysis as the 'absolute truth'.

Constructing Reality: *Civilians* and *Close Up*

Before Bryher wrote *Civilians*, she focused on her own personal experiences in her fiction: *Development* and *Two Selves*, her first two novels, are thinly veiled accounts of her childhood, her stifling experience of school, and the First World War, up until her meeting with H.D. in 1918. Bryher's project in these autobiographical novels was to find a language suited to these events, thus

proving her capabilities as a writer and gaining entrance to a community of like-minded people. For Amy Lowell, who wrote a preface for *Development*, Bryher had been successful on all fronts. She praised Bryher's 'gift for words' in describing things 'actually seen' and, noting the rich, terse prose style she had adopted, linked the young writer to her own imagist project: '[s]unset carved the eastern islands out of grape-blue darkness with a gold knife.'[298] Lowell's preface, and the way she draws Bryher into her own movement, is itself proof that Bryher was beginning to find her way into a network of writers. Bryher's third novel, *West* (1925) sees her finally amidst the community that she so desired.[299]

By the time Bryher wrote *Civilians* her conception of her literary project had changed dramatically: Bryher was no longer trying to write her way into a literary coterie. In *Two Selves*, Nancy explained that, despite her visionary powers, 'she could do nothing unless she wrote a book that everyone would read. Then she could persuade them perhaps, tell them what she knew, get them to be interested'.[300] Bryher now, like Nancy, seemed to want to prove the accuracy of her ability to recognise problems in society. She opened *Civilians* with the statement: '[t]he characters and incidents in this story are NOT fictitious.' In stating this, a claim absent from her autobiographical novels,

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[298] Amy Lowell, Preface to *Development and Two Selves*, p. 9. Joanne Winning notes in her introduction that 'Lowell reads Nancy as an Imagist born. She has, from the first, "all sorts of intuitions and understandings" that lead her to view colour and words in imagist terms' (xviii).
[299] Susan McCabe writes about this period of Bryher's life in 'Let's Be Alone Together: Bryher's and Marianne Moore's Aesthetic-Erotic Collaboration', *Modernism/Modernity*, 17.3 (2010), pp. 607-37.
[300] Bryher, *Development and Two Selves,* p. 213-4.

Bryher signalled that she would be focusing on the possibilities of socio-political realism as her central theme.

Civilians follows a collection of characters in England during the First World War and documents their sufferings. Without exception, all of the characters that have been left behind face hardships. One of the main characters, Matilda Bennett, a sixty-year-old former governess, is sacked from her job teaching German at the novel's beginning because she cannot keep abreast of modern developments in the school. Although Matilda fears she will not find war work at her age, she is eventually employed to censor letters. But finding work is only the start of Matilda's problems. In the office, she struggles to keep up and her values are markedly different from her colleagues. In fact, she spends most of her time judging the other women she works alongside and worrying about what she perceives as their lapsed morality. At the end of the novel the armistice is announced and Matilda finds herself, once again, out of work. With little prospect of finding employment, she wonders if it would be better if she died of influenza.

The other main characters have similarly bleak lives: Alice is in a miserable marriage with Edmund, who keeps her busy with children so that he can pursue his own interests and have affairs; Louise becomes pregnant after being seduced by a soldier who she never hears from again; Mrs Potts, a landlady who cheats her tenants out of their rations, is devastated to see Clarence, her son, return from the war drunk and abusive; Mr Stubbs spends most of the novel worrying about people questioning his exemption from the draft on medical grounds. There is only one character, Sylvia, who reflects on,

and is critical of, society. Over the course of the novel, Bryher moves between these characters as they occasionally cross paths: Matilda and Sylvia work in the same office and, along with Mr Stubbs, board in Mrs Potts' house; meanwhile Louise and Alice are in the same maternity ward when they give birth. At these points of intersection, the characters do not change one another's circumstances; they simply continue with their atomised lives as before.

Bryher's method of moving between stories creates a narrative perspective of cool detachment. Unlike the self-consciously literary language of *Development*, *Two Selves* and *West*, Bryher sought a style that would clearly express her vision to a broader public. She writes in clipped sentences and straightforward description, without allusion or metaphor. Bryher's style strives for the supposed impassivity of the camera eye.[301] However in revealing common experiences that are repeated across different characters' lives, this manner of surveying also reveals structural problems in society. Bryher's vision is always twofold, like Nancy's camera eye, and her x-ray vision: surface observation always hints at depth; the depths are only visible when they come to the surface. In opening the novel with the claim that '[t]he characters and incidents in this story are NOT fictitious', Bryher was at once showing individual problems and trying to excavate the social conditions that had caused them.

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[301] *The Manchester Guardian* reviewed *Civilians*, alongside Macpherson's novel *Gaunt Island*, early in 1928. The reviewer, only identified by the initials P.J.M., praised both writers for 'fashion[ing] themselves into the likeness of a three-guinea camera', and noted that 'the Pool group are deeply interested in the kinema'. P.J.M., Reviews section, 'New Novels: Adventurous writers', *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 January 1928, p.7.

Bryher's presentation of soldiers shows this interrelation at work. The soldiers in *Civilians* all exhibit the same essential attitudes and patterns of behaviour. When Edmund is on leave to see Alice, who has just given birth to their second child, he leaves the hospital almost as soon as he arrives because he finds the smell of disinfectant overwhelming and he is disappointed to find Alice in an old nightdress. On the bus Edmund is shown admiring his major's uniform, and looking for a woman to spend the night with. As he tries to attract the attention of a woman sitting next to him, he is pleased that '[y]ou could do things in wartime you couldn't do in peacetime'.[302] Similarly, Clarence refuses to change when he returns home after the armistice because '[g]irls aren't half so hot if you're not in uniform'.[303] Notably, none of the soldiers in *Civilians* have actually been in battle. Edmund tells Alice that 'we've been working out there day and night' although acknowledges to himself that his job 'was boring but it wasn't dangerous'.[304] In a similar vein, Clarence explains to his mother: 'I'm going to take things easy. We've been standing up to the bloody shells for you (he forgot he hadn't crossed the Channel) and we're going to loaf around while you clean up.'[305] He then proceeds to vomit on the carpet, before forcefully taking his mother's money so he can continue drinking with friends. Likewise, the unnamed soldier who seduced Louise lied and told her he was about to go to France because he 'got so tired of that mangy little country hole he had been

[302] Bryher, *Civilians* (Territet: POOL, 1929), p. 73.
[303] Ibid., p. 136.
[304] Ibid., p. 67 and p. 73.
[305] Ibid., p. 136.

stuck in ever since he got a commission and those beastly gunnery papers and the forms and everybody nagging him'.[306]

The cumulative effect of these character studies is a wider perspective on the war and its impacts. Bryher suggests that, to the soldiers in the novel, the main value of a uniform is as a costume to aid in the seduction of women. In *Civilians*, war fever and government recruitment propaganda lead men to perform the roles of soldiers and believe unquestioningly in their own heroism. The soldiers are not alone in this theatrical attitude to war. The civilians too see the war as an act. The novel opens with Alice denying there will be a war and accusing the press of 'yellow journalism' and warmongering.[307] When she realises that Edmund will have to go, she fools herself that he will be back by Christmas, and then by spring. Similarly, when Matilda watches the recruits marching past school, she thinks: '[p]robably they would never face fire […] The drill would do them good and the outdoor life. A play, a picnic, war.'[308] The girls in the school tell one another: '"I like war" […] "It's exciting…"'[309] If the men are playing parts when they dress up as soldiers, the civilians are just as guilty for engaging in the same charade. Bryher presents a society where everyone is united by their inability to conceptualise the enormity of the war, and its consequences for the country.

Sylvia, the Bryher-like figure of the novel, is the only character who can see what the war means. She reflects:

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[306] Bryher, *Civilians*, p. 56.
[307] Ibid., p. 2.
[308] Ibid., p. 19.
[309] Ibid., p. 20.

> Fifteen hundred men a day, according to the latest casualty lists. And still there were people. The mind refused to cope with the idea of numbers. […] Fifteen hundred men a day… to say nothing of the navy or of… civilians. And still the war went on.[310]

She recognises the human cost of the war, and the underlying causes of the conflict: grandchildren were dying for the mistakes of their ancestors. Sylvia is also keenly suspicious of authority figures. In the park, she watches new recruits being bullied by a sergeant. While the crowd take pleasure in the spectacle – a nursemaid whispers 'delightedly' that 'he'll kill them or make them into soldiers' – Sylvia questions both the reasoning behind the sergeant's methods and the efficacy of the training.[311] Bryher herself would never depart from a deep scepticism of duty towards 'father and […] fatherland' and Sylvia concludes: '[d]uty, idealism, the words make me shiver. They're dirty words.'[312] For Bryher, seeing the real leads naturally to a deeply critical view of society.

Civilians was published in the same year as Bryher's two articles for *Close Up,* 'The War from Three Angles', and 'The War from More Angles'. In the first, before Bryher turns to the films, she explains that the first accurate portrayals of the war in literature had come from America. She argues that the length of the war meant the English and Germans did not have the spirit or

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[310] Bryher, *Civilians*, p. 117.
[311] Ibid., p. 40.
[312] Bryher 'Films for Children', *Close Up*, 3.2 (1928), pp. 16-20, (p. 17); *Civilians*, p. 118.

strength to create art afterwards. In contrast, Americans, who had been involved in the war for months rather than years, maintained their individuality and were able to look upon the events critically. Bryher refers to John Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers,* E.E. Cummings' *The Enormous Room*, and Stallings' writing for stage and screen.[313] All three of these writers were notable for moving away from a sentimental view of the war but Dos Passos and Cummings, writing in 1921 and 1922 respectively, appeared early enough to have influenced Bryher's thinking.

Although the plots of Dos Passos and Cummings' novels were markedly different, Bryher's novel was embarked on a similar project: to show the behaviours that developed in wartime, but also the determining factors that caused them. Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* also surveyed different characters as their lives crossed paths, and in doing so levelled similar criticisms as Bryher. For example, Dan Fuselli begins the novel following orders blindly in the hope of being made corporal, thus earning the pride of his sweetheart. Accordingly, he is desperate to get to the front line so that he can prove himself. He thinks, '[o]h, when we're ordered overseas, I'll show them', and then pictures 'long movie reels of heroism' as he falls asleep.[314] Later, after violently grabbing a woman and kissing her, he says to a friend, '[i]t's great to be a soldier […] Ye kin

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[313] Bryher was referring to Laurence Stallings' plays, written in collaboration with Maxwell Anderson, *What price Glory?, First Fight and The Buccaneers* published in 1926. Stallings also wrote the novel *Plumes*, which was the basis for the film *The Big Parade*.

[314] John Dos Passos, *Three Soldiers* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1997), p.13.

do anything ye goddam please'.[315] Dos Passos was pointing to the same structural problems of unquestioning entitlement as Bryher in *Civilians*.

Cummings' memoir/novel similarly presented individuals' actions as expressive of broader trends. At the opening of the novel, the narrator is arrested on suspicion of espionage. Transferred as a prisoner to La Ferté Macé, the guards treat him as a friend until each time they approach anywhere official, when they promptly rebutton their uniform and change their manner. Cummings sought to expose the unthinking behaviour that the war encouraged: mindless authority dehumanises both those in charge and those who they seek to control. His narrator states that, in war, treason is 'any little annoying habits of independent thought or action'; and indeed, he and his friend draw the attention of the government because they refuse to say they hate all Germans.[316] Like Bryher, Cummings' narrative depicts duty and idealism as dangerous constructs, and privileges those who see through them. With their scepticism of sentimentality and official platitudes, these novels were important forerunners of Bryher's vision of war in *Civilians*.

But the war novel was typically associated with male writers. Both Cummings and Dos Passos had joined the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps in 1917 and, unlike Bryher, had first hand experience of the front. In the late 1920s a series of highly influential anti-war novels began to be published in Germany, most famously Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) in 1929. Kurt Pinthus writing for *Das Tagebuch* in

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[315] Dos Passos, p. 32.
[316] E.E. Cummings, *The Enormous Room* (New York, NY: Boni and Liveright, 1922), p. 100.

that year identified Remarque as a leading exponent of New Objectivist literature, a movement that sought to discard the effeminate decadence of Expressionism and cut to the raw truth. Pinthus argued that writers – by which he meant male writers – had become critical of the war because they had come of age:

> Remarque and [Ludwig] Renn no longer provide visions, lamentations and accusations, and outcries and demands but objective factual reports, as far from heroicization as from outrage. A sun-drenched meadow and the most terrible military slaughter are presented in the same style and as objects of nearly equal gravity. This is no longer the adolescent rebelling against the experience of inhumanity, but the man, the common man, reporting all but indifferently from a distance, which alone conveys the hardening reality of the immediate.[317]

For Pinthus war reportage, or writing that exposes reality, was a masculine phenomenon. Richard W. McCormick argues that New Objectivity was implicitly gendered by many of its diverse practitioners:

> One element that unites most of these amorphous elements is the gendering of New Objectivity: the gender of the subject who

[317] Kurt Pinthus, 'Masculine Literature', in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 518-520, (p. 520).

> seemingly produced it, the subject it glorified, and to whom it was addressed was obviously, explicitly, indeed defensively *masculine*.[318]

McCormick notes that New Objectivity has continued to be read in this way by later critics. The canonical studies of New Objectivity – by Siegfried Kracauer, John Willett and Peter Sloterdijk – do not interrogate the gendered dynamics of the movement and ignore its roots in masculine anxieties about the New Woman during this period.

While sharing similar modes of recording and critiquing with the great American and European anti-war novels, Bryher's *Civilians* is also a departure from these works in its foregrounding of gender concerns and women's experiences. In particular Bryher elucidates the failure of the education system for preparing women for the realities of modern life. Before she leaves the school, Matilda recognises that her own lessons are meaningless. Indeed, she has had to learn the information she teaches 'as painfully as the girls the night before the lesson'.[319] She tells the students to '[d]raw a map to show what part of England is suited to the cultivation of wheat' but privately she wonders:

> But where did it lead? Knowing all the coal fields, all the farms of Britain would not get one a post or keep one alive. A certain practical knowledge… what were the girls doing in this school… she must drag the questions out to-day this once, because it was useless

[318] McCormick, p. 47.
[319] Bryher, *Civilians*, p. 17.

> to pretend these lessons got them anywhere. So harsh, so mechanical.[320]

After Louise has had her baby she sees her romantic fantasies were childish and notes that even if she saw the soldier on the street they would not recognise one another. She admonishes herself for being 'such an idiot' and believes she 'had only got what she deserved'.[321] But she also wonders: '[w]hy hadn't anybody told her? Told her straight about things. Instead of suggesting, suggesting, suggesting all the time. Which meant nothing and gave her no facts to rely on in time of need.'[322] Sylvia, too, laments how little autonomy was granted to women: '"[t]he good old days. […] When women didn't presume to interfere with business and didn't set themselves up because of a smattering of education. All a girl needs is to sew well and cook well." The voices went on. All the voices heard day in, day out, for twenty years.'[323]

Through the characters' reflections, Bryher shows an education system hopelessly out of date. Matilda keeps providing the same education as the one that has left her unable to adapt. Even as she recognises that her students need practical knowledge, she is part of a system that reproduces the problem. Louise, instead of being taught critical thinking, was taught a gamut of useless facts by rote; furthermore, the prevailing morality meant she did not receive the sex education that could have changed the course of her life. Later in the

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[320] Bryher, *Civilians*, p. 17.
[321] Ibid., p. 147.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid., pp. 118-9.

novel, Sylvia's colleague summarises the position of women succinctly: '[t]hey're [men] spoilt you mean, and we're not. They get all the education, the pay and the jobs. I do all of Haystack's work for him but do I get his salary?'[324] The injustice experienced by Bryher's female characters is one of the aspects of the real that the novel seeks to capture, and in so doing to articulate a broader social critique. In *Civilians*, the fact this novel is 'NOT fictitious' is an accusation and a challenge.

In part, Bryher aimed to educate her readers. Bryher's own education was not traditional, as her father's wealth had enabled their family to travel freely. Bryher's early years were spent between England, France, Italy, Egypt, Spain, Switzerland and Algeria. It was not until the age of 14 that this lifestyle abruptly ended and Bryher was enrolled in the girls' school Queenswood, a place that had a lasting effect.[325] Bryher described school as 'a violation of the spirit'.[326] Having lived most of her life outside of England and with no friends her own age, Bryher found herself 'flung into a crowded boarding school to sink or swim alone'.[327] She described how she 'kicked and spluttered in an agony of bewilderment and very nearly sank'.[328] In later years, Bryher expressed some surprise that the experience did not drive her to 'insanity or suicide' and said that 'it was as crippling for a time as a paralytic stroke'.[329] Bryher's early

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[324] Bryher, *Civilians*, p. 131.
[325] It was at Queenswood that Bryher met Dorothea Petrie Townshend, who would later persuade her to buy *Life and Letters To-day*.
[326] Bryher, *Heart to Artemis*, p. 139.
[327] Ibid., p. 140.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Ibid.

experiences clearly shaped the critique of formal education articulated in her writings; practical knowledge about the 'real' world was more important.

This critique found expression in the narrative strategies deployed by Bryher in *Civilians*, as well as in its explicit themes. One of the consequences of her objective writing style is that the reader accesses the world of the novel through the characters, who directly express information about themselves. Everything in *Civilians* is externalised: almost no thoughts pass through the characters' minds that they do not consciously know. For example, Edmund and Alice both see themselves and their relationship clearly. Edmund admits he joined the Territorial Army as 'an excuse to get away from the wife in the evenings' and he wants '[a] baby a year' so that Alice does not 'have time to fuss' over why he came home late at night.[330] After visiting Alice in the maternity ward, he thinks: '[p]ity Alice took a baby so hard. But it gave her something to think about. And that was what women needed.'[331] Shortly after he tells himself: '[w]omen had to be kept in their place' and that Alice 'would put on airs, if he didn't keep her occupied with a family.'[332] Following Bryher's distinctively externalised presentation of motivation, Edmund recognises his own faults and has full understanding of his actions.

Although Alice is ignorant of Edmund's infidelities, she understands the dynamics of their relationship. During an argument she declares '[y]ou want children and then you hate me for what happens when I have them'.[333] And

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[330] Bryher, *Civilians*, p. 2 and p. 73.
[331] Ibid., p. 72.
[332] Ibid., p. 73.
[333] Ibid., p. 5.

when Edmund reveals he is already planning a third, despite severe complications with their second child's birth, Alice protests, '[o]h there can't be a next time, there mustn't be.'[334] She wonders, 'did he want her […]? Except as a mother. Somehow when they had married she hadn't thought of love as being a mother.'[335] The tendency of characters to verbalise their deepest anxieties results in a peculiar combination of self-awareness and powerlessness: the characters inhabit often-bleak situations but also seem to be aware of the problems that led them there.

Occasional hints of unrecognised motives behind the characters' words and actions are used as an opportunity for Bryher's authorial intervention. In Clarence's exchange with his mother quoted earlier he says, '[w]e've been standing up to the bloody shells for you (he forgot he hadn't crossed the Channel) and we're going to loaf around while you clean up.'[336] To point up the hypocrisy of Clarence's behaviour, Bryher inserts an aside to tell the reader that he had not in fact seen active service. In the few instances when characters are not conscious of their actions, an authorial voice is present to clarify the discrepancy between their behaviour and their thoughts. For the reader, the effect is the same: the characters recognise their behaviour but are powerless to change.

Even Sylvia cannot change the conventions that trap women. All she can do is make sure that she achieves the best, but nonetheless compromised, result for herself: she finds a soldier to marry so that she does not have to

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[334] Bryher, *Civilians*, p. 63.
[335] Ibid., p. 64 and p. 71.
[336] Ibid., p. 136.

return to her family home after the war. She announces to her work colleagues: '[h]is name's Joseph. Thought I was never going to work him up to it. Last night was my last chance. Guess he's sorry this morning.'[337] She is not marrying for love but because she believes, '[h]e'll treat me decently'.[338] The most enlightened character in *Civilians* can choose among a narrow range of options, but cannot fundamentally change the possibilities open to her.

The reader is made to feel like Bryher: frustrated that irrational behaviour goes unchanged when it is so painfully obvious. Thus the reader's role in *Civilians* is participatory: Edmund and Alice, Matilda, Louise, and Clarence are object lessons that the reader can learn from. Alongside Bryher's diagnostic of individual choices, she also presents the broader social picture that frames what choices are available. In watching the characters fail to help themselves, Bryher uses the novel to enable readers to learn about the world in ways that might be practically of use. *Civilians* was both a tale of caution, and an attempt to provide an education that might address social problems.

Perhaps inspired by the success of *Three Soldiers* and *The Enormous Room*, Bryher sent the manuscript of *Civilians* to American publishing houses. She began to receive rejections in late spring 1927. Houghton Mifflin found it to be 'a vivid impression of the bad old days of the War' but believed that it would not appeal to the American market.[339] Boni & Liveright similarly described the novel as 'an intelligent, honest and often a beautiful piece of work' but noted

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[337] Bryher, *Civilians*, p. 129.
[338] Ibid., p. 130.
[339] 7 April 1927, The Bryher Papers, Series II. Writings 1909-1973, Box 77, Folder 3015.

that Bryher's novel arrived too late to capitalise on the wave of popular interest in anti-war writings. [340] The publishers responded: '[f]our or five years ago, we should not have hesitated to publish this book, but at this time there is so little interest in America in a theme of this kind, that we feel it would be very unwise for us to undertake its publication.'[341] Although in Europe anti-war novels were emerging as a popular new genre, in America their time had already passed. Bryher finally financed the publication herself, using Darantière, the Dijon printer who would publish many of H.D.'s novels in the coming years.

Bryher's judgments of war films were conditioned by the same concerns that animate *Civilians.* Indeed, the films she considered authentic shared certain characteristics with her own fiction: both sought to record the frequently sordid experiences of individuals caught up in conflict, and to use those impressions to articulate deeper analyses of the causes of war. In the first of her articles on war films Bryher discussed *The Big Parade*, from America; *Mons*, from Britain; and *The Emden*, from Germany. Of these, King Vidor's vision in *The Big Parade* appears closest to Bryher's. The film tells the story of Jim Apperson, a wealthy young man, who joins the army because his sweetheart, Justyn, wants to see him in uniform, and his friends and family encourage him. After going to France, he is billeted at a farm in Champillon where he meets Melisande, who becomes his lover. When the troops get called to the front line, Jim is brutally cured of his romanticised view of war: two of his friends are killed, while he is injured and taken to hospital. Returning home to America, Jim discovers Justyn has been

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[340] 28 May 1927, The Bryher Papers, Series II. Writings 1909-1973, Box 77, Folder 3015.
[341] Ibid.

having an affair with his brother, and is alienated from his family by their inability to understand his experiences. Jim finally returns to France to reunite with Melisande. Although Bryher dismissed the romantic ending as 'extremely stupid', she thought that the film was otherwise 'authentic'.[342] She admired the courage of Vidor and the filmmakers:

> how had they dared put across in a picture meant for multitudes… so much scorn of war, so much stripping of what people in general like to regard as heroism… the reckless unthinking plunge into an army, the actual dirt and horror and tyranny behind all warfare.[343]

She especially liked the opening, that part of the film that most closely resembled *Civilians*: 'the sweeping of everyone into something that they did not clearly understand, the enlistment through sheer mass hypnotism, the unthinking but definite cruelty of many women seeing war as romance instead of reality.'[344] Bryher's assessment of the film could equally be a synopsis of her own novel.

By contrast, the other films discussed in Bryher's article display a notably different vision. Bryher dismissed *Mons* as:

> full of the kinds of sentimentality that makes one shudder, a sentimentality that Hollywood even would not dare offer to a

[342] Bryher, 'The War from Three Angles', *Close Up*, 1.1 (1927), pp. 16-22, (p. 18).
[343] Ibid., p. 17.
[344] Ibid.

> Middle Western audience… mixture of a Victorian tract for children and a cheap serial in the sort of magazines one finds discarded on a beach.[345]

The photography added to the quality of sentimentality. She recounts one of the film's absurd scenarios, when two wounded soldiers in a barn fight off a whole section of the German cavalry. She explains: '[t]his may have been a true story. The point is, that as it was photographed, it gave the impression of a caricature.'[346] When one of the soldiers cannot continue, his friend wheels him along. Bryher says, '[t]he whole incident was preposterous and unpleasant. Not in itself, but in the way it was photographed and handled.'[347] This contrasts with Bryher's positive assessment of the technical handling of *The Big Parade*, in which the 'clear photography' contributed to the 'authentic feel of the film'.[348] For Bryher, authentic modes of looking show the story without too much comment and display a critical attitude. *Mons* did neither.

The Emden too fell short of Bryher's ideal. The film was about 'life at sea during war, the sinking of ships, a naval battle' and Bryher suggests the director 'seemed not to know whether to drag in a weak story or to trust to *The Emden* itself, dashing from captured ship to captured ship towards its eventual fate'.[349] For Bryher, the film's lack of a driving narrative led to a fatal loss of momentum. *The Emden* is judged to have failed for almost opposite reasons to *Mons*: where

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[345] Bryher, 'Three Angles', p. 19.
[346] Ibid., p. 20.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid., p. 17.
[349] Ibid., p. 21.

the latter was sentimental and over-determined, the former lacked the narrative drive necessary to bring the audience along with its critique. She describes *The Emden*'s as almost too neutral: '[b]ut the battle at the end, very realistic, the broken machinery, corpses, fragments of bodies, builds up too heavy and monotonous a picture for the mind to retain a sharp enough impression of tragedy.'[350] The repetitiveness of this documentary style of filming meant '[t]here was the heavy growling weight of resentment and despair behind it, not the constructive criticism of those early bits of *The Big Parade*, that war is a foolishness made by mob hysteria'.[351] Throughout her reviews Bryher consistently judges the authenticity of films by how closely they adhere to her own vision, and therefore positions herself as the arbiter of the real.

Apprehending 'Absolute Truth': *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*

The growing influence of psychoanalytical models on Bryher's thought would change the way she conceived of social problems, as well as her view of the best method of resolving them. Angelique Richardson has described the psychoanalytic movement's roots within earlier debates around psychology and human development:

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[350] Bryher, 'Three Angles', p. 21.
[351] Ibid.

> Psychology, which had been developing apace over the course of the century, was too engaged with philosophical questions about the mind to subscribe to any theory of total hereditary determination of behaviour and, as the hereditarians and environmentalists reached stalemate, psychoanalysis emerged as a new explanatory model, a means of resisting biology that threatened to sweep all before it.[352]

Bryher had been interested in psychology since she met Havelock Ellis in 1918; for her, psychoanalysis represented a new way of understanding psychology and its potential.

However, Bryher's deep engagement with psychoanalytic ideas did not imply rigid adherence to doctrine. In fact, Bryher was critical of much of the movement, especially its patriarchal view of women's roles. She felt that it was 'too much founded on the Victorian idea of the family'.[353] She continued:

> I know that Freud himself was very happy with his family, that there is always the tendency to re-create childhood.
> … The Victorian idea of a female marrying and be[ing] content with that and pups [children], simply is lamentable to-day… Yet analyse analytical writings and at least three quarters are based really on the

[352] Angelique Richardson, 'The Life Sciences: "Everybody nowadays talks about evolution"', in *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 6-33, (p. 27).
[353] Quoted in Magee and Miller, p. 26.

> nice Victorian picture of an old gentleman, his wife, and half a dozen pups all taking a walk in the woods on Sunday.[354]

Bryher borrowed the movement's terminology and its structure of the psyche to articulate the behaviours that she observed but, as I will discuss, her interpretations were not conventionally Freudian.

Bryher met Freud himself in 1927 when she visited Vienna because she felt like going on an 'adventure' but she was analysed by Hanns Sachs.[355] Sachs was a key influence in Bryher's applications of psychoanalysis. As a lay analyst, he was the most willing to adapt the movement to artistic culture. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the POOL group had met Sachs through Pabst when he had acted as a consultant on the film *Secrets of a Soul*. Bryher was a lifelong supporter of lay analysts, feeling that the medicalization of the movement would only constrain it. For example, she created The Hanns Sachs Training Fund to provide support for refugee analysts arriving in the United States. Sachs' own application of psychoanalysis to film was a possible model for Bryher.

Bryher's writings sought to highlight the consequences of the war, and demonstrate the irrationality of everyone involved. She saw in psychoanalysis an explanatory model that could excavate that behaviour in new ways. Michael Rustin describes the aim of psychoanalysis as 'to extend the domain of reason to the sphere of the emotions, and of the residues of irrationality which were

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[354] Quoted in Magee and Miller, p. 26.
[355] Magee and Miller, p. 7.

not readily comprehensible within rationalistic categories'.[356] Rustin notes that psychoanalysis is based on a fundamentally realist model of the world. He explains that '"Realism" refers to the idea that the objects of our consciousness exist independent of our knowledge or awareness of them'.[357] He continues,

> It follows from the realist ontology […] that what may be directly manifest to the senses will not be coterminous with reality. Since these 'levels' or structures of reality are causally related to (though not reducible) to one another, it follows that what we observe or experience through our senses may also lie in a causal relation to such structures.[358]

Psychoanalysis then is a means of accessing entities that lie beyond one's senses: in this model, unconscious libidinal impulses might cause neurotic symptoms. The analyst examines the symptoms in order to access a more fundamental reality that underpins human behaviour.

Bryher was excited by psychoanalysis, both for its insights into individual subjectivity but also for its power to illuminate patterns of behaviour that constituted social realities. While *Civilians* had claimed to be 'NOT fictitious' in its presentation of society's problems, the exact root of these ills was unclear. In the novel, Bryher did not attribute the problems to a specific fault: some were

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[356] Michael Rustin, 'Psychoanalysis: The Last Modernism?', in *Psychoanalysis and Culture*, ed. by David Bell (London: Duckworth, 1999), pp. 105-21, (p. 106).
[357] Ibid., p. 113.
[358] Ibid., p. 114.

caused by political decisions and structures beyond the characters; some stemmed from individual character flaws. Psychoanalysis became a way to diagnose these realities, and provided Bryher with a language to discuss them and bring them to the surface.

Bryher wrote about the significance of her introduction to psychoanalysis in her autobiography:

> It is given to many to dream but to few to find their dreaming granted. Up to that moment, I had asked questions but had received no answers. The object of my search since I had been a small child was absolute truth.[359]

This description of a search for 'absolute truth' is crucial to understanding Bryher's applications of psychoanalysis. In the passage, she goes on to compare psychoanalysis to a compass, a means of accessing fundamental realities, that could not be seen but were nonetheless present, like the magnetic poles.

In *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, Bryher uses a psychoanalytic model to explain characters' behaviour in films. The book was published by POOL in 1929, and Bryher began by complaining that critics politicised Russian films so that they were always approached with bias. The problem was that people were either devout communists, or believed that watching a single Soviet film would spontaneously spark a revolution: 'it appears, you must be prepared to bayonet your aunt because she won't read Karl Marx, or else you must leave the room

[359] Bryher, *Heart to Artemis*, p. 255.

because *Potemkin* is mentioned.'[360] Instead, she saw these films as the 'truth' because they revealed psychology that could be seen across the world and was therefore universal. Bryher continued to explain that every time she saw a Russian film she was 'ashamed because it was only a handful of us seeing it, and I knew what it would mean to scores of English people I know, to see their thoughts and their problems, set down in these films'.[361] In its truthful presentation of life, Soviet cinema was far ahead of other countries. Bryher noted: 'American, English, and most foreign films are not allowed to be founded upon psychology, but must conform to a standard of "conventional morals" issued in printed form by censorship departments and which are happily rare in real life.'[362] Psychology, and specifically psychoanalysis, was a way to critically deconstruct these 'conventional morals'.

Bryher's reading of Pudovkin's 1926 film *Mother* shows her application of psychoanalysis in action. She described the film as 'the story that has gone on in every savage tribe and in every civilisation; the eternal story of human wisdom and beauty broken by tribal conventions and stupidity'. [363] The 'eternal story' that *Mother* showed was 'a drunk father, a son, [and] a mother cleaning up the kitchen'. [364] According to Bryher, this was the psychological tragedy of the world'.[365] Bryher noted, '[y]ou might find the same situation in a Sudanese

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[360] Bryher, *Films Problems of Soviet Russia* (Territet: POOL, 1929), p. 11.
[361] Ibid., p. 12.
[362] Ibid., p. 17.
[363] Ibid., p. 50.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid.

hut, a New York tenement or a London slum.'[366] People fell into these roles – the 'drunk father', the son, or the 'mother cleaning up the kitchen' – because their education had failed. [367] In *Civilians* the characters also experienced failures in their education, but now Bryher was able to put into language why that happened: their education failed because the system 'offers repression instead of individual development'. [368] Bryher believed that both traditional education and religion teach that '"pleasure is a sin" and "nothing that is not disagreeable of accomplishment is work"'.[369] Bryher concluded, '[t]herefore we have the kitchen in Mother, with the woman washing the clothes and the man getting drunk'.[370] All of the characters are limited to their particular roles and mental states through repression and lack of understanding.

Although still ostensibly discussing *Mother*, Bryher launches into examples of this 'repression' in the English education system, where boys 'emerge at sixteen unable to read a book intelligently, ignorant of the names of the most common plants or animals, knowing nothing of geography, modern history, the most elementary economic principles, or of how to form an independent judgement'.[371] The schoolboys, rather like Louise in *Civilians*, do not learn anything that could be practically of use. Consequently, they end up in 'the same mental state as the father when he slouches into the village inn for a

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[366] Bryher, *Film Problems,* p. 50.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid., p. 50-1.

drink. Their attitude to their wives resembles his. A little sentimentality, some cruelty, the evasion of definite issues'.[372]

Bryher then moves on to discuss the problem of the prevalence of jobs that bring no fulfilment:

> In spite of the proved efficacy of vocational tests they are seldom given or the result disregarded. Yet half the trouble in the world to-day is caused by people being forced to work hours at day jobs for which they are unfitted. It would be so easy to teach the use of modern appliances and the results of modern knowledge in school, but it would make life pleasanter and would involve new issues. Therefore nothing is done. Exactly as in *Mother*.[373]

Bryher shifts from discussing the father and mother in a film to seeing their story repeated across the world; to the repressive nature of the education system, which fails people so that they end up in these roles; to the need for vocational testing to find appropriate jobs that people can take pleasure in.

In the text, after this aside, Bryher returns to *Mother*, as though she had not stopped discussing the film. As Bryher had established that the characters' irrational behaviour was due to their repression, she could now show how the situations were repeated in different places. Bryher explained that the son was dissatisfied with his father's behaviour, and so attended meetings with the

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[372] Bryher, *Film Problems,* p. 51.
[373] Ibid.

strikers and, in the middle of the night, hid arms for them under the floorboards. For Bryher this was simply the story of youth rebelling against the establishment. She explained: '[i]t happens to be arms. It might equally well (as far as the spirit is concerned) be a book, or a friend, or a desire to study some other trade.' [374] When the White soldiers arrive and ask the son where he has hidden the arms, he refuses to tell them. In the mistaken belief that she is saving her son, the mother shows the soldiers. Again, this act is universal for Bryher:

> As parents all over the world might condemn their children. It is better, they say, for X to be a doctor, though he hates it, than to look after sick animals which he loves, because a doctor can achieve a better position than a veterinary surgeon; it is nicer for Y to marry, though she may have no aptitude for housework, than for her to work in a shop and become independent.[375]

Finally, Bryher finishes recounting the plot, in which both the mother and the son die at the end of the film. Bryher declares: '[f]orget about Russia and remember that *Mother* fundamentally is the story of many English homes, with disease or stagnation, or the Colonies as a substitute for the ending.'[376] Psychoanalysis provided Bryher with a powerfully universalising vocabulary, through which specific stories could be connected to global problems.

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[374] Bryher, *Film Problems,* p. 51.
[375] Ibid., p. 52.
[376] Ibid., p. 56.

Repression meant that no one could learn and this led people to the same pathologies and character flaws.

Bryher's unusual application of psychoanalysis is brought into relief when it is compared to Hanns Sachs' analysis of the same film in an article for *Close Up* in November 1928. In 'Film Psychology', Sachs discusses the way in which film can make visible 'closely interwoven psychological coherencies'.[377] He dissects one particular scene: a moment of tension when the mother, visiting her son in jail, waits for an opportunity to hand him a note detailing a plan for his escape. The guard's attention is diverted to a bowl of milk, which a cockroach has crawled into. As the cockroach tries to escape, the guard takes great pleasure in pushing it back into the milk. While he is distracted in this manner, the mother passes the note to her son. Sachs explains the psychoanalytic significance of the scene as it repeats

> [T]he main movement of the drama: here [with the cockroach], as there [with the son], we are faced by a prisoner who strives to free himself and is thrust back. But that which brings destruction to one is to the other the first step towards freedom.[378]

[377] Hanns Sachs, 'Film Psychology', *Close Up*, 3.5 (1928), pp. 8-15, (p. 8).
[378] Ibid., p. 13.

For Sachs the cockroach also acts as a presentiment for the film's finale: 'for the son falls later under the bullets of the soldiers just as he has escaped from prison.'[379]

As well as these parallels between the son and the cockroach, Sachs also believes the milk to be symbolic of the mother: it is 'her first and most important gift to her child linking together forever the giver and the receiver'.[380] The son's death in her arms, as the cockroach dies in the milk, is hinted at even before he escapes from prison. In the seemingly insignificant scene of the guard getting distracted, 'the deep intrinsic emotional value of this work of art [is] both epitomised and anticipated'.[381] Sachs' application of psychoanalysis to the film is far closer to what one might expect: he reads the scene as a symbolic enactment of the drama between the mother and son at the end of the film. In contrast, Bryher's reading moves away from the events of the film almost immediately. The notable difference in their ideas is that while Sachs uses psychoanalysis to explicate a scene in the film (his analysis is diegetic: he uses one scene to draw out themes *within* the film and foreshadow events), Bryher's reading uses the characters to discuss examples of these symptoms in society more generally. If psychoanalysis was a way to make the mind knowable, Bryher took this rationalising impulse to the extreme. Psychoanalysis did not merely explicate an individual character's psychodrama; it revealed impulses that spanned from 'a Sudanese hut' to 'a New York tenement'.

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[379] Sachs, p. 13.
[380] Ibid., p. 14.
[381] Ibid.

For Bryher in the late 1920s, psychoanalysis was not only a way of excavating the problems that she identified in *Civilians*, it could be their solution. As I outlined in the first section of this chapter, the characterisation in *Civilians* suggested that the problems in society were obvious. This placed the reader in the position of seeing everything. Now, the only way to break the cycle was for people to undergo psychoanalysis. In light of this transformative potential, Bryher favoured low-cost analysis, for short periods, with as many people as possible and lamented the Left's view of it as bourgeois.[382] She persuaded – and often paid for – those she knew to undergo analytical treatment. H.D. was analysed by Mary Chadwick before she started sessions with Freud in Vienna in March 1933 and then continued with Walter Schmideberg, or 'Polar Bear' to the group, back in London. Petrie Townshend and Herring also underwent analysis. However, Bryher's close friends did not always share her enthusiasm and faith. Macpherson, although intellectually stimulated by psychoanalysis during the years of *Close Up*, had resisted being analysed himself until 1935. In that year, he wrote to H.D. to forewarn her of an argument he and Bryher had had:

> Fido [Bryher] will bring it in person I expect, and let me warn you right now that you're going to hear plenty of complaints about your old Rover [Macpherson]. Don't pay too much attention to them. Not till you've heard my side of it. Use your judgement, remembering what Fido can be like – arrogant, mad and cataleptic. […] I reminded

[382] Magee and Miller, p. 27.

> her I had promised I would have a talk with the Turtle [Sachs] and no more. That if – having arrived – I didn't want to go through with it I wouldn't. On that understanding (as I thought) we sailed. But no, I had promised. Bryher went up in smoke. Either that, said she putting pistol to head, or divorce.[383]

Macpherson paints Bryher as controlling and unreasonable, a characterisation that Barbara Guest repeatedly returned to in her biography of H.D., rather unfairly labelling Bryher a 'permanent child'.[384] But Bryher was probably strengthened in her resolve when Macpherson admitted a short time later:

> I do feel a subtle difference in my grip on life, an added vista or perspective, as though I were able to see for the first time, myself in review. It is immensely consoling and definitely fortifying. I see, too, why Fido bludgeoned me toward a means to such consciousness. It's difficult to put into words but to me excitingly interesting. It is

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[383] Kenneth Macpherson to H.D., 1935, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 12, Folder 420.

[384] Guest, p. 115. Susan McCabe rightly disputes this characterization in 'Bryher's Archive: Modernism and the Melancholy of Money', *English now: Selected Papers from the 20th IAUPE Conference in Lund 2007* (Lund: Department of English, Lund University, 2007), pp. 118-25. She summarises this melancholy as Bryher's paradoxically 'generous funding of others' and her own 'sense of inadequacy'. McCabe, 'Close Up & Wars They Saw: From Visual Erotics to a Transferential Politics of Film', *The Space Between*, 8.1 (2012), pp. 11-35, (p. 12).

> oneself unchanged but with a fog suddenly gone, so one can see and sense the contours of oneself.[385]

Macpherson's account of his analysis here accords almost exactly with Bryher's hopes. He refers to the powers of vision it offers: he is able to see himself as though for the first time. Psychoanalysis was then a powerful and radical tool for social change. With analysis, Bryher believed that people would not only be able to recognise the world she had been trying to show them, but that, in understanding the roots of their own behaviour, they would have the ability to change. As Stephen Frosh notes, '[t]he task of psychoanalysis is to control this something, to channel its energy into personally and socially useful ends.'[386]

Susan McCabe, in discussing Bryher's pivotal role 'at the ethical, intellectual and political helm' of the POOL group, emphasised that Bryher's view of film presented spectatorship as a form of analysis in itself.[387] In reading Bryher's review of Pabst's 1930 war film *Westfront 1918*, McCabe notes:

> she believed film theatres were akin to 'nurseries', whereby spectators could be retrained in the desire for total omnipotence and the expression of aggressive id desires; in other words the spectator, analogously to the analysand, could ideally 'work through' his or her primal urges. By projecting these urges

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[385] Kenneth Macpherson to H.D., 25 April [1936?], The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 12, Folder 421.
[386] Stephen Frosh, 'Psychoanalysis in Britain: "The Rituals of Destruction"', in *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, pp.116-37, (p. 118).
[387] McCabe, '*Close Up* & Wars They Saw', p. 12.

> outwardly or perceiving them as deflated (as with the war films Bryher admired), the spectator might be inadvertently 'educated' to pacifism.[388]

But Bryher's explanation of *Mother*'s educative potential shows some of the peculiarities of her application of psychoanalysis. Bryher uses the characters as case studies to illustrate her particular views of the problems in society. While her reading of *Mother* is ostensibly psychoanalytic in its emphasis on repression, the ease with which the characters' unconscious yields to understanding is typical of Bryher's thought. She describes the characters in *Mother* as though they are as transparent as those in *Civilians*. In Rustin's discussion of psychoanalysis, a fundamental tenet is the impossibility of total understanding:

> The heroic attributes of the search for understanding in the era of high modernism reflected the belief that such understanding could be won only with difficulty, and that the outer boundaries of what remained to be explored were probably infinite. The full transparency of nature, human nature, or society, to human understanding were a remote if not unattainable condition.[389]

This hardly resembles the apparent ease with which Bryher as novelist and critic unveils the hidden structures of human behaviour. Furthermore, taking

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[388] McCabe, '*Close Up* & Wars They Saw', p. 22.
[389] Rustin, p. 117.

McCabe's suggestion that the spectator could become analysand, Bryher's reading seems to allow for none of the difficulty of transference and counter-transference in the analyst-analysand relationship. I will return to some of these tensions later in the chapter in examining the presentation of Ernest in Bryher's novel 'Manchester'.

Bryher's view is encapsulated in a conversation with Sachs recounted in her memoir. She insists that 'man's stupidity could be fought […] if only the analysts would be less prudent'.[390] To which, Sachs gently admonishes her, '[y]ou cannot treat the psychoanalytic movement like a boxing match […] things have to go slowly.'[391] Bryher's reply is that she 'believed in speed': indeed, '[i]f only they would get a move on […] we could change the world.'[392] There seems to be a fundamental tension between Bryher's belief in transformation through simple recognition, and the rigours and unpredictability of psychoanalysis as normally conceived.

The Failure of Sight: 'Manchester'

After Bryher wrote *Civilians* there was an eight-year break until her next novel, during which time she wrote articles for *Close Up*, worked on POOL's films, published *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*, and co-wrote a German language textbook. In 1935 and 1936 'Manchester' appeared in serial form in *Life and Letters To-day*. The first two sections of this chapter explored Bryher's desire to

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[390] Bryher, *Heart to Artemis,* p. 270.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Ibid.

use psychoanalysis to apprehend 'real' problems in society, and to resolve them by teaching people about their irrational behaviour. In Bryher's thinking, psychoanalysis could repair faulty thought patterns, enabling those who underwent treatment to operate in society in more functional ways. 'Manchester' continues to explore some of these notions but also provides an insight into the difficulty of seeing psychoanalytic truths as absolute.

In the novel Ernest is a businessman in the line of agricultural products, who has decided to take a holiday in Manchester, leaving those who know him thoroughly perplexed at his choice of destination. Ernest's characteristics recall Bryher: Ernest knows 'several hundred words in three or four languages'; he has 'an insatiable curiosity'; and he has worked in film but detests commercial cinema.[393] Ernest also holds the same beliefs as Bryher and at several points echoes her ideas: for example, explaining that society would be better if people could enjoy their work, just as Bryher concluded in her analysis of *Mother* in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia*. He muses: '[i]f we could be left alone to do the work we really wanted […] anxiety and disillusionment would become words in an old book, we should look up their meanings in a dictionary.'[394] Ernest is even keenly interested in aviation, just like Bryher. Bryher often described the way that flying brought her clarity. She recalled in *The Heart to Artemis* that flying offered her a new perspective: the patterns of the landscape from a plane showed her that the abstract lines of modern painting were essentially realist. Ernest similarly explains that he 'clung to the realism of flying as to a parachute;

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[393] Bryher, 'Manchester', *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.2 (1935) pp. 89-112 (p. 90 and 91).
[394] Ibid., p. 92.

there was something steadying about clouds and wind velocity, they were there and there was nothing imaginative about them.'[395] In both cases, aeroplanes offer a different, more 'real', perspective than earthbound experience.

Ernest is accused of going to Manchester in order to meet a business acquaintance, Pryce, to discuss starting a budget airline to Portugal. However, he actually travels north with his friend Theodora, a serial fiction writer, to see the opening night of a play starring Cordelia, a famous actress he knows. As Cordelia has made Ernest promise that he will not come to the first performance, he spends much of the novel hiding and worrying what she will say if she finds out that he is there. Just as Ernest recalls Bryher, Cordelia was based on Elisabeth Bergner. Bryher was, for a period, fixated on the actress: there is a folder in Bryher's archive containing dozens of pictures of her, cut out from various film magazines. Indeed, the plot of 'Manchester' was based on Bryher going to see the play *Escape Me Never*, by Margaret Kennedy, in which Bergner starred. The characters were not just based on people Bryher knew, then, but the scenario derived from Bryher's life.

In *Civilians*, Bryher did not employ an omnipotent narrator; the characters, for the most part, revealed their situations through their speech and their thoughts. The worldview presented in *Civilians* was still overwhelmingly Bryher's, but the novel had a guise of impersonality. In 'Manchester', Ernest changes this. He appears as a realist in the same ways Bryher had presented herself in the late 1920s: Ernest can see what is 'really' happening, just as Bryher could in *Civilians*. For example, Hope Tiptaft in 'Manchester' is described

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[395] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 90.

in almost identical terms to Matilda Bennett: she is the same age, sixty; she was also sacked from her previous job; she has no savings; and she has no contingency plans for her future when Ernest no longer needs her services. Hope, like Matilda, also lodges in a house where she is cheated. Ada, Hope's sister who runs the house, charges Hope too much in rent and secretly goes through her belongings when she is at work.

In *Civilians*, the characters were aware of their flaws: Edmund knew that he wanted to trap Alice with children. However, Hope is completely oblivious most of the time: she trusts that providence will save her. Because of her belief in a benevolent, divine power, she does not reflect on her situation: when she was fired from her previous job, she remarked that '[h]er whole world had been turned upside down' but that she was 'not conscious of having committed any sin. Not one that would have justified such wholesale punishment'.[396] It then becomes Ernest's role to reveal the 'reality' of Hope's situation. Ernest complains that Hope is 'lamentably ignorant of politics' and that she is 'the serf of an era struggling with its own old age and there was nothing for her in the new, but the blame for her precarious position, without pension or prospect'.[397] Ernest also incisively notes that her trust in providence 'was less religion with her than an envelope, a kind of safety balloon'.[398] Hope uses religion to abdicate herself from any responsibility for her life. In calling her 'hope', Bryher reminds the reader of the absurdity of believing that everything will resolve itself.

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[396] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 98.
[397] Ibid., p. 105.
[398] Ibid., pp. 105-6.

In *Civilians*, there was a depressing inevitability about the characters' fates as they could see their situations but seemed unable to change them. At the end of *Civilians*, Matilda's future was bleak. Even Sylvia settled for a resolution within the system in getting married. Unlike the characters in *Civilians*, Ernest has the power to change Hope's life: he resolves her looming unemployment by hiring her to look after his house when, at the end of the novel, he decides to go to New York for a new business venture. Ernest's offer not only resolves Hope's employment, it also allows her to leave Ada's house. While Hope places her trust in providence, Ernest has an almost paternal power in the way he takes care of Hope, even while he disapproves of her lack of independence. In creating Ernest, and giving him the power to help Hope, Bryher goes beyond *Civilians*. She has created a character to intervene and help those who could not help themselves. In light of Ernest's job offer, Hope's trust in providence is not as misplaced or foolish as it seemed at first. Susan McCabe notes that Bryher played this role frequently in her life, often using her vast wealth to support fellow writers and friends.[399]

But Ernest not only repeats Bryher's social commentary, he also absorbs her psychoanalytical model of understanding the world. The way in which psychoanalysis appears in 'Manchester' is a development from the late 1920s. In 1929, when *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* appeared, Bryher was using psychoanalysis to explain the behaviour she observed. By the early 1930s, Bryher was pursuing a lay analyst's license so that she could treat patients herself. As Sachs was a lay analyst, he had some difficulty in organising Bryher's

[399] McCabe, 'Melancholy of Money', p. 119.

training as the movement became increasingly 'medical-moral'.[400] Bryher also expressed frustration in a letter to H.D. that she had to undergo her own lengthy bout of analysis before she could, 'get through and experiment on other people!'[401] It was not until 1938 that Bryher was denied a license by the Boston psychoanalytic society and so in 1935, when Bryher was writing 'Manchester', she still regarded herself as a potential practitioner.[402]

Bryher's increasing knowledge and experience of psychoanalysis seem to have had an effect on the form of 'Manchester'. Unlike her other novels Bryher attempts to represent Ernest's mind and, in these sections, her narrative style becomes more experimental. On the train to Manchester, Ernest begins by reflecting that Cordelia had made the same journey the day before him. Then his thoughts become abstract:

> It was uncertain, life for both, flying against the unexplored, the newly assailable clouds. There were too many armies. Land stirred under the unconscious mind, there was the will to stay, 'I got too freckled lying in the sun.' But to be anchored was to die, barbarians marched. New was to come, aeroplane civilisation, and they rose to it, they with others, for the brain was shaken out of gear by fissures

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[400] Quoted in Magee and Miller, p. 17.
[401] Magee and Miller, p. 13.
[402] Kusch, <https://hdis.chass.ncsu.edu/hdcircle/bryher/> [Accessed: 19 August 2016].

> in the earth, it was microphone sensitive to the cloud changes, the vibrations of the wind and way safety was to follow it.[403]

Ernest's stream of consciousness returns to some of the ideas in *Civilians*: there are 'too many armies' and the 'barbarians marched'. Against the threat of mass irrationality, Ernest and Cordelia must fight the desire to stop and instead rise towards some more sophisticated civilisation, possibly linked to aviation. The prose moves between fleeting thoughts rather than clearly expressing one idea. Moments such as these, where Ernest's unconscious shapes the form of text, are scattered throughout 'Manchester'.

As well as attempting to represent Ernest's mind, Bryher gives Ernest the ability to analyse the other characters and explain why they behave in the way that they do. Bryher herself was exploring this in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* where she explained her view that repressive attitudes prevented people from accessing meaningful education. By 1935, Ernest confidently applies his theories to Cordelia. The theatre appears to be an ideal place for analysis because of the possibility that things might go wrong in a live performance. This meant that underlying emotions sit close to the surface. Ernest notes the problem with theatre is that '[t]he end that was to be triumph could so easily slide to failure'.[404] Indeed, Ernest fears running into Cordelia after she has asked him

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[403] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 106.
[404] Ibid., p. 102.

not to come to the opening night because '[h]e knew too much about psychology, Cordelia, the theatre and what might happen'.[405]

Bryher discussed the differences between the cinema and the theatre in her letters:

> I see somebody in the States has said that the realists go to the cinema and the imaginative to the stage, which is, I think very true. I can face a bad movie, where it is hard for me to sit through the best theatre. Cordelia is different, I'm there as analyst, watching an interesting patient.[406]

The fact that Bryher refers to Bergner as 'Cordelia' indicates the extent to which 'Manchester' often collapsed the distinctions between Bryher's life and the world of her fiction. In 'Manchester', Ernest goes to Cordelia's play to psychoanalyse her, and to understand the 'absolute truth' of her behaviour. In fact, Ernest is so absorbed in this task that the reader never learns the name of the play or the plot.

Ernest observes Cordelia carefully and theorises why she is attracted to the stage. He explains that she

> *was* her imagination, her ordinary life revolve to nightmare. Her bed folded into a prehistoric monster to torment her, the

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[405] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 103.
[406] Bryher to H.D., 2 June 1936, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 118.

> messenger who brought her roses, through a mere knock on the door, set her shivering from insecurity. Even the blowing curtains were a threat. She was only safe when canvas and paint and her own silences, isolated her from the hallucinations of a normal day.[407]

While mundane events in everyday life terrify Cordelia, acting protects her by providing an environment that she can control. In many ways then, she is the exact opposite of Ernest who clings to the tangible. Ernest explains that Cordelia likes him because he is: 'the exotic flower of everyday life'. [408] He 'had his breakfast at eight, he went to his office, he wrote letters.' [409] He declares: 'I am change to her, funny as it sounds, adventure.'[410]

Ernest constantly explores ways to explain Cordelia's behaviour. When Penelope criticises Cordelia for hiding in her room rather than observing people and learning about human nature, Ernest defends her saying that she might be recognised. Ernest goes on to note, '[s]omething had wrecked Cordelia far too early; she needed no experience of crowds. Beyond the terror that was in part her fantasy, was the reality of some primal shock.'[411] Using a Freudian model, Ernest distinguishes between the symptoms of terror, and the underlying reality of a primal experience. Ernest seeks to excavate Cordelia's experiences to get to

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[407] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 106.
[408] Ibid., p. 91.
[409] Ibid.
[410] Bryher, 'Manchester', *Life and Letters To-day*, 14.3 (1936), pp. 94-115, (p. 97).
[411] Ibid., p. 99.

the root of her problems. Indeed he thinks can cure Cordelia. He recounts telling her:

> 'I could give you sleep,' he had said, 'if you would let me help you. Quite abstract help, I should ask for nothing from you afterwards…' gold, nor a part in your next play do not touch my world, he thought, you are safe, even if you wish I shall forget the mysteries; the mysteries that I must know if I am to quiet you, the shock your conscious mind has never remembered, but that is in your eyes, staring at the Verona night, the rough words at three years old, that colour the way you lean against a door… but he had seen that it was no use.[412]

Ernest believes that Cordelia needs to tell him the 'mysteries' that are impermissible to her conscious mind. Only with knowledge of these can Ernest, as an analyst, help her.

Ernest also turns his attention to the audience. 'Manchester' is interested in the experience of the audience, which Ernest initially believes is characterised by passivity. Hiding in the hotel, Ernest imagines what he would say if he ran into Cordelia by accident. He decides that he would reassure her that the audience were not really interested in her performance at all: '[y]ou are only another dream to make them forget winds and winter gales a little longer. You

[412] Bryher, 'Manchester', 14.3, p. 111.

must not be afraid. They will be kind. They will only half hear you.' [413] Indeed, during the performance, in the final instalment of 'Manchester', Ernest hears two people talking. A woman comments, '[w]hy do they have to choose somebody so lame for the old father?' Her companion explains the actor who plays the father has rheumatism. She responds:

> 'Oh, is he, but I should have thought with all this unemployment, they could have found an actor without a limp.'
> Ernest twisted in his seat to try to hear more of the conversation. Could people really lose their consciousness so completely? If so, the primitive identification of the savage must exist in apparent civilisation, far more frequently than was imagined. It must be uncomfortable to be such a victim of belief; with factory whistles for background instead of prickly African trees.[414]

Although the woman recognises that the actor and the character are not the same person, she wants the actor to be able-bodied because she does not believe that the character should have a limp. In stating this, she reveals a desire to collapse the distinction between the play and reality. Ernest believes this makes her a 'victim of belief' and declares that it is primitive identification but in a civilised society. As an analyst, Ernest is immune to this passive identification. Rather than watching the play, Ernest admits that '[h]e wanted to

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[413] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 111.
[414] Bryher, 'Manchester', *Life and Letters To-day*, 14.4, (1936), pp. 74-99, (p. 90).

turn and look at the faces, their intentness astonished him, the way the story really held them' and that '[h]e was always more conscious of his individuality in a crowd than when alone'.[415] Ernest is separate from the play most of the time. He exists outside to comment on and analyse what is happening both on stage and in the audience.

Ernest's comments about the play reveal Bryher's nostalgia for silent film more generally. Ernest remarks: 'If he watched her only, he could be so swept. Not if he listened.'[416] He continues: '[i]t was less that the characters were psychologically untrue (he suspected the author of depicting her own emotions sincerely), than that the motives behind the actions were ignored.' [417] It seems as though the only way Ernest can lose himself in the play is if it shows the underlying drives that Bryher believed she saw in Soviet Films. In *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* Bryher read *Mother* as universal because she believed that the characters' actions were based on fundamental repressions that everyone shared. In the play, the lack of attention to these underlying drives meant that Ernest could not recognise himself in the characters. As always, this was a matter of importance for society as a whole. Ernest notes: 'Penelope believes in them [motives] at surface-value, he reflected dismally, and as long as people so believe, Hope and thousands like her will face the workhouse, there will be wars, we shall be brought up on lies.'[418]

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[415] Bryher, 'Manchester', 14.4, p. 91.
[416] Ibid., p. 90.
[417] Ibid., p. 90-1.
[418] Ibid.

Ernest sees the audience as absorbed in their own fantasies, and he is disappointed by the surface-level treatment of psychology. However, Cordelia herself seems to offer the possibility of transcendence. From the beginning of the novel, Ernest acknowledges that she might be able to reach to the audience's unconscious through her acting alone: '[o]nly if something in you [Cordelia] is so great that you break through their dream to awaken their reality, then in success may be apparent failure.'[419] Indeed, at the end, the performance does what Ernest thought was impossible: it breaks through to awaken his 'reality' and he too becomes mesmerised by the artwork:

> Now Cordelia was doing something that numbed the mind, the words or scene were becoming unimportant. They were symbols to her; she was working where there were no barriers, but all arts met. She was making even his ears not listen, his eyes not see; her voice brought sounds, her face brought moods from the stratosphere of thought. This was the imagination of loneliness, the abstraction of strength. She was a magnet for the unconscious, where no phrases mattered.[420]

Cordelia's acting unifies the senses and accesses the unconscious. Ernest's analysis of what Cordelia is achieving is framed in terms of mysticism:

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[419] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 111.
[420] Bryher, 'Manchester', 14.4, p. 92.

> It was her triumph that he forgot that she was there. The key of civilisation, Ernest thought, is in our hands. This is the last moment. We already know; the language will open. We shall all be initiate. Once, perhaps in a thousand years, the world adds a new ring to the cycle of its growth. It is happening now, across continents.[421]

Bryher brings her reading of the play to the same end as her reading of the cinema: Cordelia has the power to alter civilisation as she creates a universal language and the audience becomes 'initiate'. Bryher's rationalising impulse made psychoanalysis key to achieving progress, but here she makes clear that art could achieve the same ends. She wholly believed in the mystical power of art as a force for transformation. 'Manchester' explored many of the ideas that she was experimenting with in the late 1920s: the problems with society, the need for people to understand the unconscious and the place of psychoanalysis, art and indeed Bryher herself, in this process.

Through her writing, Bryher valued particular modes of representation and ways of seeing the real: in her autobiographical novels she tried to capture the real in terms of her experiences; *Civilians* was 'NOT fictitious' in its attempts to show problems in society; *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* explored psychoanalytic truths in people's behaviour. But 'Manchester' combines all three into one: Bryher was, at once, writing her experiences into fiction, analysing people she knew, and drawing attention to societal problems. 'Manchester' forefronts the problem with the real, and the fundamental

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[421] Bryher, 'Manchester', 14.4, p. 92.

instability of the concept, because the novel raises questions around its relation to life. For example, how far was Ernest supposed to resemble Bryher? In many respects he is identical but there is a danger in collapsing the distinction entirely. Bryher had presented herself as a realist in her earlier works: she could see the real, and had to labour to bring others to the same understanding. In 'Manchester', Bryher cast Ernest as a realist but, at times, in ways that are more playful than her earlier writing. In Ernest's line of work, he sells agricultural mulch to improve the yield of crops. When Ernest explained his business to Theo, he says:

> 'It's mulch' Ernest felt the sample in his pocket but decided not to take it out. 'You get tomatoes ten days sooner and thirty per cent more crop. It's splendid for salads and doubles cucumbers. They are trying it now for flowers […] you roll it along the beds in spring, like a strip of linoleum. Black keeps the heat in and makes things warmer, it is so stupid of farmers to keep on painting their frames white'.[422]

He enjoys his job because it is concrete: 'an acre of lettuces needed so many rolls.'[423] Ernest continues: '[p]erhaps it was not spectacular work, but he was dealing with actual substance, with seed and soil and stones, boxes and markets, not with ciphers, loans, and intangible affairs.'[424] Ernest is enthusiastic about his product because it is 'real'. And yet there is an absurdity to Ernest's

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[422] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 104.
[423] Bryher, 'Manchester', 14.4, p. 76.
[424] Ibid.

faith in his mulch as he launches into his sales pitch at any opportunity. Bryher had used the name 'Hope' to show that character's naivety. Bryher's creation of E[a]rnest perhaps signals her awareness that a rationalising impulse could appear in that way. At times, Ernest was clearly supposed to be taken seriously but at other times, he seems like a parody of Bryher: her enthusiasm for progress and change is turned into enthusiasm for mulch.

The ambiguity between what Bryher perceived, what she changed for effect, and what was outright fantasy are apparent in the letters in Bryher's archive. For example, Dorothea Petrie Townshend appeared as the character Theodora in 'Manchester'. Bryher's portrayal of Theodora in the novel is cutting. Ernest explains that he has known Theodora since childhood, and presents her as hopelessly affected. At one point, Ernest looks at her and notes: '[s]he powdered her nose, thinking he was sure, of Byzantium. (Theodora must be the result of her early empress fantasies). Her coat was slit to the seam, but she saw herself with slaves sprinkling gold dust on her hair.'[425] Ernest is also scathing about her abilities as a writer and suggests that her publishers had taken her on because they were almost too embarrassed to turn her down. In fact, Ernest is constantly criticising Theodora in his thoughts. Townshend was unsurprisingly unhappy with the portrayal. Herring wrote to Bryher to warn her of Townshend's complaints. Herring told Bryher that Townshend had said that Bryher's characters:

[425] Bryher, 'Manchester', 13.2, p. 102.

> are nothing but enlargements of your own distorted conception. Not only that, but you don't keep pace with the people. They change and you fail to see them as anyhow but as you first knew them. You spoil effect by exaggeration. […] And much else. [426]

Townshend's complaint that Bryher's characters are her 'distorted conception' shows the slippage between Bryher's perception and the perception of the people featured in the novel. While Bryher might have felt she was using her vision as Nancy did to see 'straight through people and action and condition', Townsend did not subscribe to Bryher's views.[427] Townshend accused Bryher: 'you are a camera-plate recording every detail, and that is all you are.' [428] Although Bryher's method of surveying in a detached manner was one of the ways in which she attempted to show the truth, Townshend uses the comparison to suggest artlessness: Bryher had no imagination and just copied the world around her.

Townshend was not the only person in Bryher's group to express her views about 'Manchester'. Indeed, Bryher was surprised about the range, and strength, of the reactions to her novel. Bryher had sent copies of the manuscript to H.D., Marianne Moore, Pabst, Macpherson, Herring, Hanns Sachs and Dorothy Richardson, who even offered to rewrite it for Bryher. Herring and H.D. were positive about the novel. H.D. was particularly encouraging: she praised

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[426] Herring to Bryher, [1935, Nov 1936?], The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 19, Folder 716.
[427] Bryher, *Development and Two Selves*, p. 213.
[428] Herring to Bryher, [1935, Nov 1936?], The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 19, Folder 716.

'Manchester' and suggested various publishers that might take it on, including the Woolfs.[429] H.D. was even inspired by the character of Ernest to create her own playful male double, Helforth, in her novel *Nights*, which I will discuss in the next chapter. She said, '[n]ow your Manchester IS excellent, it is a sort of Douanier Rousseau style- WE know that.'[430] In referring to the self-trained painter Henri Rousseau, H.D. saw 'Manchester' as a masterpiece despite its seeming naivety.

But it was Hanns Sachs's response that Bryher dwelt on most in her letters. Within the novel, Ernest is able to see others clearly and analyse them; Sachs had this power over Bryher in life. Accordingly, Sachs did not read the novel in the same way as Townshend, or H.D. Bryher said Sachs 'pulled my tail about Manchester' and that:

> He shook his head solemnly after four chapters and said it was a deeply repressed hatred of my school days (he never would take them seriously) that led me to depict in so uncalled for a manner, that great embodiment of virtuous English spinsterhood, Theodora. Not a word of my inimitable style, not a sentence about Cordelia.[431]

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[429] H.D. to Bryher, 6 Feb 1935, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 14, Folder 108.
[430] H.D. to Bryher, 11 Feb 1935, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 14, Folder 108.
[431] Bryher to H.D, 30 January 1935, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 107.

Theodora was a symptom brought on by Bryher's painful experience of school. Bryher had read *Mother* as a story that was brought about by dangerous repressions. Now, Sachs read 'Manchester' in the same way.

Representing all that Bryher felt to be urgent and important, the real was always necessarily subjective but it seems as though she seldom recognised it as such. Though Sachs' comments seem like a minor criticism, and Bryher makes light of them, his observations were a challenge. It clearly affected her as she complained about Sachs' judgement several times in her letters to H.D., each time drawing on the same criticism. In a letter a few days later, she repeated to H.D.:

> Turtle wishes me to re-write Manchester. He did not indicate why except that Theodora showed I had a dangerous repression of adolescence (and have I ever been allowed to talk about it in pa [psychoanalysis].) and that Pryce was bad. He thought I had done Hope best and condescended to say it was more mature than usual.[432]

Only two days after this, she again wrote to H.D. to explain that Sachs had 'condescended at last to pronounce on Manchester: he likes the end, finds I do old dames well, is shocked about Theodora whom he thinks must be a neurosis, and considers that re-written it should be in time sure of a small but select circle

[432] Bryher to H.D, 4 February 1935, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 108.

of readers.'[433] Bryher was clearly caught on Sachs' view and her act of repetition might in itself be considered worthy of analysis. Ernest, Bryher's version of herself who can see the truth, was easily pulled apart.

It is necessary to read Bryher not just through the modern, and modernist influences that provide a context for her work – the camera eye; anti-war, 'objective' writing styles; the impulse to rationalise and progress through psychoanalysis and education; and new aviation technologies – but to recognise that the modern is inextricably linked to the real in her thinking. The modern influences are all in the service of attempting to access the real. While Bryher excavates the real, her supposedly stable 'reality' shifts and absorbs new influences.

[433] Bryher to H.D, 6 February 1935, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 108.

H.D.'s Multiple Shifting Realisms

> *Layers of life are going on all the time only sometimes we know it and most times we don't know it. Layers and layers of life like some transparent onion-like globe that has fine, transparent layer on layer of life (interpenetrating like water) layer on layer, circle on circle. Plato's spheres. Sometimes for a moment we realize a layer out of ourselves, in another sphere of consciousness, sometimes one layer falls and life itself, the very reality of tables and chairs becomes imbued with a quality of long-past, an epic quality so that the chair you sit in may be the very chair you drew forward when as Cambises you consulted over the execution of your faithless servitors. Cruelty and beauty and love of beauty is the common heritage of the whole race.*[434]

In this passage from the 1921-22 novel *Asphodel*, H.D. outlines a model of perception that she would repeatedly return to in her writing. She explains that there are several different layers superimposed upon one another and that one's awareness can shift between them. Using the cosmological associations of 'Plato's spheres', H.D. suggests these layers not only underpin the prosaic details of everyday life but extend to the heavens. In the above passage, the

[434] H.D. *Asphodel*, ed. by Robert Spoo (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1992) p. 152.

interweaving of these layers means that an apparently mundane set of tables and chairs can evoke an ancient history or the world of myth.

Critics have identified this notion of layering as central to H.D.'s writing. Considering H.D.'s career between her early imagism and later epic poetry, Gary Burnett draws on the idea of layers to defend her against charges of eschewing engagement with her period in favour of a remote Hellenism. He notes: 'hers is a poetics directly of its time insisting on absolute presence and on its place within a palimpsest of all times.'[435] Burnett argues that: '[i]t is this which removes her poetry from the narrow definitions of a Hellenistic anachronism and which give it its particular power.'[436] Burnett frequently invokes the image of the palimpsest, emphasising H.D.'s 'reading of her own time as a super imposition over other times and her own writing as a similar overlay'.[437]

The palimpsest image is also used by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and by Susan Stanford Friedman, to suggest that feminist readings of texts must dig beneath the surface narrative to expose underlying, concealed truths.[438] Sarah Dillion argues that while these readings of H.D. have provided an important counterpoint 'within a history of reception governed by an impersonal and distinctly masculine imagist aesthetic', other critics have recognised the danger of reducing the female author to the text. Dillon, along with such critics as Claire Buck and Diana Collecott, attempts to complicate the opposition between an

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[435] Gary Burnett, *H.D. Between Image and Epic: The Mysteries of her Poetics* (Ann Arbor, MI; London: UMI Research Press, 1990) p. 24.
[436] Ibid.
[437] Ibid., p. 20.
[438] Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Continuum, 2007), pp.102-4.

'official' and a 'repressed' narrative by tracing 'the interlocking narratives of fiction and autobiography, masculinity and femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality that characterise writing, gender, sexual identity and the writing and written subject that is "H.D."'[439]

Rather than the palimpsest, Adalaide Morris turns to the metaphor of projection to discuss H.D.'s superimposition of different layers. Morris considers H.D.'s visionary experience in Corfu when she witnessed a series of images projected on the wall in front of her. The origins of these images are ambiguous: they might come only from the artist's mind, or they might be interpreted 'by the classical belief that gods speak through dreams and oracles' and so come from 'another world, another state of being'.[440] Morris argues that the episode is crucial to understanding H.D. as 'projection is the master metaphor' of her technique: '[i]ts operations connect the material, mental and mystical realms and enact her belief that there is no physical reality that is not also psychic and spiritual.'[441]

The palimpsest and projection have thus been put forward as central structuring concepts in H.D.'s thought, and therefore as ways to understand her writing. While they carry different emphases, both 'master metaphor[s]' illustrate H.D.'s preoccupation with layering: of texts, of times, of psychological states. But no critic has given sustained attention to how this concept of layering connects with, and throws light on, H.D.'s understanding of the real

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[439] Dillon, p. 108.
[440] Adalaide Morris, 'The Concept of Projection', in *Signets: Reading H.D.,* ed. by Susan Stanford Friedman and Rachel Blau DuPlessis (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 273-298, (p. 274).
[441] Ibid., pp. 274-5.

explored in her writing. In this chapter, I begin by examining H.D.'s film criticism for *Close Up*. I argue that H.D. called films 'real' when she felt the images on screen were universal enough to evoke other artworks and experiences; by this process of inter-textual and inter-domain bridging, in which apparently remote images are called simultaneously to the viewer's mind, 'real' films possessed the power to loosen the binds of a single reality. At the same time, in their impressionistic style, and habit of cataloguing successions of film images, without further explication, the form of her reviews enacts the same openness that H.D. admired in the films themselves. The images in films offered visionary potential for H.D., but she too produced texts about those films that confused the distinctions between realities.

While H.D.'s film writing has often been read alongside her poetry, I consider the way in which the concept of the real in film influenced her prose experiments in the 1930s.[442] In the novel *Nights* (published in 1935 but written in 1931 and 1934) Natalia's sexual encounters with David are described through abstract images that not only obscure their graphic nature, but also open them to interpretation and reworking in a manner reminiscent of H.D.'s reading of 'real' films. H.D.'s daughter, Perdita Schaffer suggested that the prose of *Nights* mimics filmic techniques: it uses 'a restless dizzying montage. It darts and

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[442] Susan McCabe argues that the cutting of H.D.'s early imagist poetry was preparation for the cutting of the film *Borderline*. Susan Edmunds argues that montage is a key concept in H.D.'s long poems. But the focus on H.D.'s poetry means there has so far been little attention to her film writing alongside the prose she was writing contemporaneously. Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Susan Edmunds, *Out of Line: History, Psychoanalysis and Montage in H.D.'s Long Poems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

zooms, pans in on tantalizing close-ups, veers off again, highlights vignettes in lost corners'.[443] Rachel Connor even goes so far as to compare the novel to the *film noir* cinema of the 1940s and 1950s.[444] However, I argue that H.D.'s prose of this period is filmic in a further sense: like those films she most admired, her writing for *Close Up* and *Nights* depict a type of experience, and use a style of representation, that suggests the possibility of multiple, simultaneous realities. I also consider the prologue to *Nights*, added just before publication, and what its description of the novel as a specifically realist work suggests about H.D.'s methods and aims.

I then discuss the 1936 short story 'Ear-ring', published in *Life and Letters To-day*, in which H.D. examines the superimposition of realities from the opposite perspective. While in her film writing and in *Nights*, reaching the state in which multiple realities were layered upon one another was desirable, in 'Ear-ring' the protagonist Madelon initially finds just such an experience overwhelming. She is in an environment in which everything shifts and recognises the interplay of different forms of reality: the financial, artistic, scientific, and imaginative. In order to steady herself in such an environment, she focuses on a woman's diamond earrings. By the end of the story she has realised that the diamonds too are unstable and that the only way she can articulate all of their possibility is by describing them as a series of shifting, abstract, and paradoxical images. The facets of the stones then come to represent a model of the type of vision where all things are inter-related, and it

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[443] Perdita Schaffer, introduction to John Helforth [H.D.], *Nights* (New York, NY: New Directions, 1986) xii.
[444] See Connor, Chapter 3, 'Narrative Cinematics: a 'restless, dizzying montage'.

is this that lies behind the creation of the new art. Madelon finally understands the way in which to master and represent such multiplicity.

Examining the real contributes to critical understandings of H.D. as it provides a lens through which to read what happened to some key impulses behind her early imagist poetry after the end of her involvement with the movement. In examining the real, I show that the image was reconfigured by her interest in film, and became the centre of her experimental 'realist' prose in the 1930s.

The Real in H.D.'s film writing

In her first article for *Close Up*, 'The Cinema and the Classics: Beauty', H.D. outlined many of the ideas that she would explore in later articles: the prejudices held by intellectuals about film; the role of the avant-garde in leading mainstream tastes; and, in an echo of Macpherson, the way that censorship dictated the available range of films, and therefore the films that audiences were conditioned to enjoy. She also demonstrated her ideas of realism in her discussion of G.W. Pabst's film *Joyless Street*. As I outlined in the introduction, various versions of the real were circulating in the Weimar Republic during the years that *Close Up* was being published. Initially H.D.'s article seems to celebrate a type of tightly located and time-bound realism, praising the film's accurate description of the devastating poverty in a Vienna ravaged by war and hyper-inflation. She recalls the opening with 'the sombre plodding of a one-

legged, old ruffian. No appeal to pity, to beauty, the distinguished mind that conceived this opening said simply, this is it, this is us, no glory, no pathos, no glamour.'[445] However, alongside this time-bound notion of realism, her language suggests that the real can be something altogether more abstract and timeless:

> La Petite Rue Sans Joie was a real, little street. It was a little war street, a little post-war street, therefore our little picture palace in our comparatively broad-minded Lake Geneva town, is empty. People won't, they dare not face reality.
>
> And beauty, amongst other things, is reality, and beauty once in so many hundred years, raises a wan head.[446]

Joyless Street illustrates a 'real, little street', and yet the star Greta Garbo also represents another reality that exists across time. To H.D., Garbo is a manifestation of something that existed before, and endures beyond, the film's specific historical setting: 'Miss Garbo is a symbol, was, I should say, a symbol as I saw her in *Joyless Street*.'[447] H.D. recalls the other images of beauty that Garbo evokes: 'Helen who ruined Troy seems to have taken shape, but this time it is Troy by some fantastic readjustment who is about to ruin Helen.'[448] Pabst's Vienna becomes Troy, and then Babylon: '[b]efore our eyes, the city was

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[445] H.D., 'The Cinema and the Classics: Beauty', *Close Up*, 1.1 (1927), pp. 22-33, p. 30.
[446] Ibid., p. 32.
[447] Ibid., p. 29.
[448] Ibid.

unfolded, like some blighted flower, like some modernised epic of Troy town is down, like some mournful and pitiful Babylon is fallen, is fallen.'[449] In the review, H.D. also imagines Leonardo and Tintoretto marvelling at the actress. It is cinema's ability to contribute to the eternal stock of beautiful images that raises it to the status of an art: '[a]s long as beauty is classic, so long beauty on the screen, presented with candour and true acumen, must take its place with the greatest master-pieces of the renaissance and of antiquity.'[450] In this way H.D. reads filmic images as pointing beyond themselves, leaving the viewer to experience the inter-connections.

H.D. saw these links operating not just between works of art, but also between the work of art and the world of spirit. As Morris argues, for H.D. the spiritual is transposed onto the earthly. H.D.'s appreciation of films is often framed in terms of religious epiphany. In a later review, she asked:

> Is Art religion? Is religion art? That is where the point comes. But all discussions of Art, Religion and Life are febrile and old fashioned really. All I can know is that I, personally, am attuned to certain vibrations, that there comes a moment when I can 'witness' almost fanatically the 'truth'. I knew as regards the Germans that G.W. Pabst is an artist, an intellectual, a being, a giant of realism. Yet realism for all its devastating sincerity in *Joyless Street* maintains a sort of sanity, a meaning that applies to everybody. In other words it

[449] H.D., 'Beauty', p. 28.
[450] Ibid., p. 29.

> is a work of art as we are accustomed to understand the term in all its implications.[451]

After seemingly dismissing discussions of religion and art as 'febrile' and 'old fashioned', H.D. continues to frame her response to Pabst's film in quasi-spiritual terms: she is attuned to the 'vibrations' of a film, and can witness the 'truth' with the clarity of an ecstatic religious experience. The concept of 'vibrations' recurs in H.D.'s writings, frequently describing the connections between films and other artworks, and between art and the spiritual realms.

H.D.'s discussion of Pabst in part acknowledged the ways in which realism was understood in the period – as a realistic portrait of post-war suffering – but quickly moved to her model of the real as eternal and spiritual. Her reading of Russian films is similar. In her article 'Russian Films', H.D. discusses the standard realist conventions of the time. For example, she notes that the realist film uses location settings, with the result that 'the world of the film to-day (there is no getting away from it) is no longer the world of the film, it is the world'.[452] As I have already discussed, the move away from studios gave audiences the sense that they lived in the same world that was depicted on screen. For H.D., the Russians had taught people, 'the idiocy of the painted drop curtain, the elaborate and false studio interior'.[453] In so doing, they had made people realise 'the beauty of shadow and rain and general natural effect that achieves depth and reality and the heights of impressionistic artistry through

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[451] H.D., 'Expiation', *Close Up*, 2.5 (1928), pp. 38-49, (p. 43).
[452] H.D., 'Russian Films', *Close Up*, 3.3 (1928), pp. 18-29, (p. 20).
[453] Ibid., p. 27.

naturalness' [original italics].[454] H.D. also discusses the actors in Russian cinema, and the way they too blurred distinctions between the world of the film and antecedent reality. She noted that:

> Russia has taught us that every man, every woman and every child is a 'star'. We are all 'stars'. There is not one of us who, under skilful directorship cannot create a character, provided it is a real character and an English character, and not a diluted and febrile imitation of Hollywood being English, or Russian or Fiji-Island-ish.[455]

As long as people were playing versions of themselves, anyone could act. This equivalence between characters in films and people in the world would have appealed to H.D.. Firstly, it offered the possibility that she could act in films – as she did in POOL's productions. Secondly, it allowed her to alter the world: if the film could be reinterpreted by the audience, and Russian films collapsed distinctions between the film and antecedent reality, then the world was similarly able to be reshaped.

H.D. evidently began to collapse the distinctions herself, and in a letter to Bryher from 1927, described leaving the house with Robert Herring who went 'down the stairs with Sophie and a glimmer of worn out electric tourch [sic] and down the stairs and into the street, into the night in the best film tradition'.[456]

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[454] H.D., 'Russian Films', p. 27.
[455] Ibid., pp. 27-8.
[456] H.D. to Bryher, 21 October 1927, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 13, Folder 545.

Similarly, in her 1934 Dijon novel *The Usual Star* the experience inside the cinema begins to blur with life outside, as the characters project their inner world onto the landscapes around them. Doing so allows them to see the landscape in new ways, mingling inner and outer, and fantasy and reality. The main character Raymonde laments that Daniel (the Macpherson figure of the novel) cannot see London precisely because he knows it too well. Raymonde tells Daniel, '"I want you to see London. A Londoner, though you aren't exactly that" (she had said all this so often) "can't ever hope to see it."'[457] It is as though Daniel's familiarity with the city precludes the possibility of it awakening his inner world. To help Daniel experience the landscape as she does, Raymonde must alter his mind. H.D.'s prose enacts the melding of their personalities and viewpoints:

> Daniel felt as she felt (pin-prick of Danielraymonde) saw as she saw. 'London was never like this... it's this sort of troll thing.' 'It was... was always like this.' 'It took us both to see it.' They had projected London, made it, pin-point of imperfection, blight on material surface. 'We have made this thing, as people make screen vision. We have projected London.'[458]

The two characters, in their joint state, have utilised Raymonde's inner world and, through this, have re-shaped the way in which London appears to Daniel.

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[457] H.D., *The Usual Star* (Dijon, Darantière: 1934), p. 12.
[458] Ibid., p. 20-1.

In *The Usual Star*, seeing is no longer just a case of sight but is intrinsically linked to an inner world of fantasy. 'People, things,' as H.D. reminds us, 'exist in relation to the mind that sees them'.[459] Through seeing the mind's inner visions projected onto the outside landscape, the characters create a reality that is just as 'real' as the material world. I will explore the idea of altering reality through vision later in this chapter when discussing 'Ear-ring'.

Like *Joyless Street*, H.D. also saw Russian films as connected to existing artworks, and to spiritual realities. She describes her favourite Russian films as biblical, signalling both the universality of the stories and their spiritual potential. She argued that '[t]he new great outstanding Russian films are in spirit Biblical films' and that the 'drive behind the Russian film at the moment is a religious drive'.[460] She further explained: 'if your life is straight and your conscience is straight' then one would not 'disturb yourself with the ancient internecine history of the Old Testament' and 'unbalance yourself with the mystical doctrine'.[461] Russian films, like 'the New Testament and the Old Testament are for people who are hungry, literally, spiritually hungry'.[462] And H.D. saw Russian films as 'transcending politics' and nationality, as did Macpherson and Bryher:

> We should not think David was a Jew, Leonidas a Greek. These are epic characters, and as long as we are citizens or subjects of the

[459] H.D., *The Usual Star*, p. 56.
[460] H.D., 'Russian Films', p. 18.
[461] Ibid., p. 19.
[462] Ibid.

> world, the vibration set up by the heroism of a David of the beauty and restraint of a Leonidas belong to us, to each one of us individually. [463]

She continued '[s]o in facing "mother" with her red flag, I am "mother", a mother to these people whose martyrdom is our martyrdom and whose crown is our crown'.[464] We have seen how Macpherson and Bryher believed Russian films were 'real' because of their acute depiction of psychological states. H.D. instead focuses on the films' creation of images of heroism and beauty whose 'vibrations' resonate across the ages.

Laura Marcus draws attention to H.D.'s 'fascination with hieroglyphics', noting that she shared this with Ezra Pound and that it emerged, in part, from both Freud and Eisenstein's theories. The image as hieroglyphic was 'a conjuncture of poetics, politics, psychoanalysis (particularly Freud's theories of symbolization and of the dream-work)'.[465] Marcus explains that this interest in the image was part of a '"modernist" fascination with the varying relations and interactions between different entities, temporalities, images, and concepts, and the exploration of an art and a politics of juxtaposition, palimpsestic superimposition, simultaneity, collision, and dialectic'.[466] Reading the image in terms of the real, emphasises an element of this that was enduring and stable, recurring at different moments.

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[463] H.D., 'Russian Films', p. 23.
[464] Ibid.
[465] Marcus, p. 364.
[466] Ibid.

From its beginning, *Close Up* had the task of using different mediums – words and photographs – to stand in for film, which was an absent form at the heart of the journal's discussions. As though to signal this pull, *Close Up* advertised both typewriters and cameras within its pages. The prose forms that writers adopted in their reviews often dramatised their particular understanding of films. Bryher's descriptions in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* are clear and methodical. She described *Sühne* as follows:

> The story is simple. Man and wife, two other men, and their servant Jack, have dug summer long for gold. Winter in the wilds is upon them. Jack, the servant (played by V. Fogel), discovers gold, but is not entitled to share in it. As the monotonous days pass waiting for the spring, they amuse themselves describing what they will do with the riches and now and then mocking Jack, who will have nothing to show on his return. Someone jeers once too often. Jack snatches up his gun, there are shots, fighting. Two are dead on the floor, upset food spills across a table. It is tragedy this. And the servant, the murderer, lies bound, with husband and wife staring down at him.[467]

Although Bryher uses present tense to suggest the immediacy of the action, she organises the plot for the viewer, working through the events in an ordered manner. Even as the film unfolds in front of her, Bryher maintains a critical distance.

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[467] Bryher, *Film Problems*, p. 22.

In contrast, H.D.'s reviews demonstrate that she is more embedded in the cinematic experience than Bryher. As can be seen from her review of *Joyless Street* and her discussion of Russian cinema, H.D. did not necessarily see films as part of a time-bound context, but rather as a series of abstract images that could be freely interpreted. Consequently, with her experimental writing style, H.D. often neglected to explain the details of a film (plot, characters, setting), only coming to them halfway through a review, if at all. H.D.'s review of *Sühne*, under its French title *Expiation*, demonstrates the difference of her approach to Bryher's. H.D.'s article begins with her journey to the cinema, and she only arrives when a third of the film was over. Both Laura Marcus and Susan MacCabe have pointed to this review to illustrate the way in which H.D.'s experience outside of the cinema becomes filmic as it feeds into the act of watching the motion picture. H.D. explains:

> Rain poured over a slab of earth and I felt all my preparation of the extravagantly contrasting out of doors gay little street was almost an ironical intention, someone, something 'intended' that I should grasp this get this, that some mind should receive this series of uncanny and almost psychic sensations in order to transmute them elsewhere; in order to translate them.[468]

[468] Marcus, *Tenth Muse*, p. 364; McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism,* pp. 150-1; H.D., 'Expiation', pp. 39-40.

Marcus notes that, in this passage, H.D. finds 'herself impelled to create a form of pre-filmic experience from the vision of the street'.[469] It is as though the action outside of the cinema trained H.D. to interpret her experience inside.

When she finally settles into the film, H.D.'s prose style shows the way in which she works to interpret the symbols that she sees in the film:

> Apparently there had been death in this bad land, how could there be other? But death and all its drab significance rose in its starkness to some almost Elusinian note of purity. So abstract the land, so remote and symbolical the two figures of the living that dragged the two sacks or canvas sails that had been wrapped about the two long bodies of the slain, so heavy and dreary the rain, so slippery the mud, so terrible the lowering of the sky above the rain (which one sensed was there simply for the re-harrowing of these living figures) that the spirit as in the Aescuylean drama rose above it, shouted almost audibly with the elements, *the soul, the soul survives* [original italics].

The location and the characters are not named but are 'abstract', 'remote' and 'symbolical'. H.D. describes the images of the scene – the land, the figures, the two sacks, the rain, the mud, the sky – as they appear to her, and as she describes them she works to interpret them: the deaths of the two characters in the film ascend to the level of an 'Elusinian note of purity', as though they are

[469] Marcus, *Tenth Muse*, p. 364.

the outcome of the mysterious ritual and connect to a spiritual realm; the lowering of the sky was to re-harrow the figures; and the difficulty of surviving in the bleak landscape recalls an Aescuylean drama. H.D.'s review is not like Bryher's, where the use of present tense lent immediacy to an ordered account. Instead the unfolding images are interpreted, both in terms of their connection to other artistic truths that are repeated across history, and in terms of spiritual realities. As Jonathan Foltz notes:

> For H.D., in writing and film, the image is 'the element of a work that stands eerily outside of its narrative strategies, thereby challenging any attempt to define art in terms of its 'internal laws'. The image – in writing as in film – opens the work to an intertextuality that grossly exceeds a particular narrative or set of themes ot motifs, for it always exists 'outside' of its present usage.[470]

The language of H.D.'s reviews enacts a similar interpretative simultaneity. When H.D. is most engaged in film, she emphasises the images. Thus the prose itself, full of abstract dislocated images, opens the possibility of interpretation for the reader. The experience of a 'real' film and the prose that H.D. employs to describe it are connected. As Marcus suggests, much of *Close Up*'s project was 'to do with creating a discursive medium and forum commensurate with

[470] Jonathan Foltz, 'The Laws of Comparison: H.D. and Cinematic Formalism', *Modernism/Modernity*, 18.1 (2011), pp. 1-25 (p. 7).

the new art, and constructing spectatorship and "writing about cinema" as a form of "film-making"'.[471]

Indeed, the most striking characteristic of H.D.'s review of *The Student of Prague* is the way in which her writing is structured by the images of the film, rather than any desire to relate the narrative. In fact, the narrative is so unimportant that when H.D. does describe the events of the film, they are out of order, with Veidt's death coming half way through the review, though this is clearly the film's climax. The first time H.D. attempts to interpret the images, she says she does not understand them but she can sense that they have meaning beyond what she can see: '[t]hat little man means much more than that. He isn't an absurd little obvious punchinello. He is symbol, an asterisk, an enigma.'[472] Her ability to read these symbols at this stage and to understand their significance is limited; she can simply identify that they are important in a way that she cannot grasp: '[t]he horses filing again, in obvious procession, mean something.'[473] There is a sense in this article of H.D. working to break down the codes of the film in order to reveal its secrets. Film has opened up this possibility to its entire audience: the Punchinello character 'has opened doors to the uninitiate. They don't know that that umbrella tucked so ridiculously under his left arm-pit, means something. I know that it means something but I

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[471] Marcus, *Tenth Muse*, p. 323. Foltz seeks to move away from the well-known 'definitions of cinematic beauty' in H.D.'s film writing, and to instead consider the modes of writing which cinematic spectatorship enables. He notes: '[h]er dense and elusive commentaries must be read carefully as themselves mini performances of the ideas they are trying to convey'. Foltz, 'The Laws of Comparison: H.D. and Cinematic Formalism', p. 3.
[472] H.D., 'Conrad Veidt, The Student of Prague', *Close Up*, 1.3 (1927), pp. 34-44, (p. 35).
[473] Ibid.

don't know what (outside the obviously obvious) it does mean.'[474] H.D., though perhaps not yet the initiate, is distinctly different from the uninitiate because she knows that the images need decoding.

H.D. seems to equivocate about reading these symbols: '[h]e is and isn't just this person sitting under a tree […] This is and isn't Conrad Veidt or this is and isn't Baldwin the famous fencer.'[475] But her persistent efforts pay off and it seems as though she is suddenly able to translate the images before her with more certainty: 'the least hunch of shoulder of this famous artist has some hidden meaning. He is lean and wild. He is sophisticated and worldly.'[476] Now that meanings have yielded, she is able to piece together many images: '[i]t is true there should be Baldwin upon Baldwin, Veidt upon Veidt, elegantly pursuing (across some marble entablature) Baldwin upon stripped Baldwin, Veidt upon naked Veidt.'[477] This echoes Macpherson's idea that 'layer on overlayer, and state of mind on state of mind' are revealed to those that can understand the abstraction within realism. Once H.D. can read the symbols, the new information enables her to retrospectively read the signs that previously could not be accessed: 'Punchinello has promised our hero a fortune or rather an heiress and that's what the horses were solemnly about.'[478]

If H.D. valued films that were 'real' because they allowed her to reimagine and connect to the artwork in a palimpsest that extended to the spiritual, one of the repeated refrains in her *Close Up* reviews was that other films were *too*

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[474] Ibid., pp. 35-6.
[475] Ibid., p. 36.
[476] Ibid.
[477] H.D., 'Student of Prague', pp. 37-8.
[478] Ibid., p. 38.

real in a more foreclosed sense. H.D. described films in this way when they overwhelmed her ability to recast their images as symbols. In the review 'Joan of Arc' she begins by explaining that Carl Dreyer's film had caused her 'more unrest, more spiritual forebodings, more intellectual racking, more emotional torment' than any other film she had seen.[479] She explains, 'we all have our own Jeanne, each of us in the secret great cavernous interior of the cathedral (if I may be fantastic) of the subconscious'.[480] Dreyer's Jeanne replaced the Jeanne of H.D.'s fantasies: '[n]ow another Jeanne strides in […] a better Jeanne, a much, much better, more authentic Jeanne than our Jeanne; scathing realism has gone one better than mere imaginative idealism.'[481] At several moments in the review, H.D. seems to struggle to reclaim her own Jeanne:

> We are allowed no comfort of mere beatific lillies, no hint of the memory of lover-comrade men's voices, the comrades that Jeanne must have loved loyally, the perfect staunch child friend, the hero, the small Spartan, the very Telisila upon the walls of that Argos, that is just it. This is no Telisila upon the walls of Argos, no Athene who for the moment has laid aside her helmet for other lesser matters than that of mere courage and fidelity.[482]

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[479] H.D., 'Joan of Arc', Close Up 3.1 (1928) pp. 15-23, p. 15.
[480] Ibid., p. 16.
[481] Ibid., pp. 16-7.
[482] H.D., 'Joan of Arc', p. 17.

As H.D. lists what she is denied, she attempts to return to her mode of reading: she relates Jeanne to the woman poet Telisila and the goddess Athene. At another moment, she explains that she admires Dreyer's artistry but that his film lacks the 'hint of the angelic wing tip, of the winged sandals and the two-edged sword of Michael or of the distillation of maternal pity of their "familiar" Margaret'.[483] These other possibilities for Jeanne were 'in no way psychically manifest' meaning it did not have 'something in something, something beyond something. It is something one feels, that you feel'.[484] H.D. tries to re-imagine Jeanne but cannot as Dreyer's 'authentic Jeanne' has 'rob[bed] us of our own Jeanne.'[485] As such, H.D. feels the same violence that Jeanne feels as she is taunted and beaten by her captors: 'I am shut in here, I want to get out. I want to get out.'[486] After having planned to see it again, H.D. makes clear that she cannot: '[w]e do not go and see a thing that is real, that is real beyond realism. AGAIN.'[487] The experience of a film that is too 'real' is distressing as there is no space for H.D. to interpret the images and imaginatively add to the artwork. As H.D concludes, 'it doesn't link up straight with human consciousness.'[488]

In 'The Mask and the Movietone', H.D. discusses seeing a sound film, and again finds that the result is a cinematic experience that is too real. H.D. asserts that she does not want sound to be introduced to the cinema because she wants the actress to be like 'a doll, a sort of mask or marionette about

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[483] Ibid., p. 22.
[484] Ibid.
[485] Ibid., p. 17.
[486] Ibid., p. 19.
[487] H.D., 'Joan of Arc', p. 20.
[488] Ibid., p. 23.

which one could drape one's devotions, intellectually, almost visibly'.[489] In the sound film, she explains that: '[o]ur old doll became replaced by a wonder-doll, singing, with musical insides, with strings that one may pull, with excellent wired joints. But can we whisper our devotions to this creature?'[490] As a member of the audience, H.D. wants to

> help to add imagination to a mask, a half finished image, not have everything done for me. I can't *help* this show. I am completely out of it. This acting, singing, facial beauty is perfected. This screen projection is not a mask, it is a person, a personality. That is just it. Here is art, high art, but is it our *own* art? Isn't cinema art a matter (or hasn't it been) of inter-action? [original italics].[491]

The sound film prevents H.D. from participating; although it is perhaps more like everyday experience, it is not 'real' according to H.D.'s schema because she cannot treat the images as abstract and so imaginatively rework them.

This means that the spiritual element of film is lost. She explained:

> The Movietone has to do with things outside the sacred precincts. […] If I see art projected too perfectly (as by Raquel Meller) don't I

[489] H.D., 'The Cinema and the Classics: The Mask and Movietone', *Close Up*, 1.5 (1927), pp. 18-31, (p. 21).
[490] Ibid.
[491] Ibid., p. 22.

> feel rather cheated of the possibility of something more divine behind the outer symbol of the something shown here?

H.D. can only 'worship a thing' 'that is a symbol of something that might be something greater'.[492] She described the audience as like a moth 'paralysed before too much reality, too much glamour, too many cross currents of potentialities'.[493] Instead, they want 'healing in blur of half tones and hypnotic vibrant darkness'.[494] H.D.'s film writing repeatedly uses images of moths and butterflies to emphasise a spiritual element in the cinematic experience: both insects are associated with metamorphosis because of their transition from pupa to adult. The world of the film is linked to another reality and, as these creatures have made the transition from the internal – the moth's/butterfly's chrysalis – to the external world, their sensors seem imbued with the power to detect the 'vibrations'. The spectator is like a moth, both in their hypnotic attraction to the light of cinema, and because it is precisely that trance-like state that enables a heightened sensitivity to the 'light' of transcendence. In the sound film, the spectator as moth is 'paralysed'. The notion of the real provides a clear link between H.D.'s film writings and later spiritualism, which was to emerge with more clarity and confidence during her sessions with Freud after the end of *Close Up* in 1933 and 1934.[495] Brenda S. Helt notes that during her analysis, H.D. described 'divinely inspired visions she characterised as "real" and

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[492] H.D., 'Mask and Movietone', p. 30.
[493] Ibid., p. 31.
[494] Ibid.
[495] Helen Sword, *Engendering Inspiration: Visionary Strategies in Rilke, Lawrence, and H.D.* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 149.

that this insistence on the reality of the divine should be understood, not as metaphorical, but as metaphysical as she becomes increasingly interested in mysticism and spiritualism.'[496] H.D.'s writings for *Close Up* reveal that these ideas were in place much earlier.

In her final review for *Close Up*, H.D. neatly articulated her understanding of the real in relation to cinema:

> Perhaps we never realised how badly humanity in general had suffered at the hands of the film producers until we saw it dignified, humanised, rehabilitated in our first 'real' films. There is no use going back to *Joyless Street*, certain phases of *Jeanne Ney*, and the first prodigy of *Mother*. We know there people moved, acted, suffered, we might almost say for the first time, not parodies of people, at best ghosts, but spirits. Living spirits moved with a suavity and despair that no stage since has ever given us. We saw decisively that the stage had crippled vision.[497]

The characters in 'real' films move, act and suffer; this does not make them life-like in a traditional sense, but rather like 'spirits', allowing the audience to use their 'vision' in a way the stage does not require. If Bryher believed that she could 'see' the world accurately, using her vision to both survey and penetrate

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[496] Brenda S. Helt, 'Reading history in *The Gift* and *Tribute to Freud'*, in *Cambridge Companion to H.D.*, ed. by Nephie J. Christodoulides and Polina Mackay (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 159-73, (p. 163).
[497] H.D., 'Turksib', *Close Up*, 5.6 (1929), pp. 488-92, (pp. 489-490).

events to access an absolute truth, H.D.'s understanding of reality was very different, and required a different form of looking. While Bryher searches for something singular, which was the end point of truth, H.D. allows for multiple, shifting realities to exist alongside one another. Furthermore, she discusses them by emphasising the images in a film, thereby adopting a prose style that in itself opens up the possibilities of interpretation.

'The realism of white lightning, of the "radium ray"': *Nights*

Alongside H.D.'s writing for *Close Up*, she was producing a series of short fictions that would become known as the Dijon novels because of the location of the printer Bryher used, Darantière.[498] All of the Dijon novels engage with cinema in different ways, some more obviously than others. In this section, I focus on *Nights* and argue that H.D. further explores the concept of cinematic realism that was shaping her reviews. *Nights* was written in two parts. The first section H.D. wrote, just after her last article for *Close Up*, is an account of Natalia's twelve nights of sexual encounters with her lover, David. Natalia began the affair to distract herself from her absent husband, Neil, who left before the beginning of the narrative to pursue a homosexual relationship abroad.[499] I begin this chapter by examining the abstract images that H.D. employs to

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[498] H.D referred to them as the Dijon novels herself in *Compassionate Friendship*, and noted they were written between her mother's death in 1927, and her analysis with Freud in 1933-4. Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H.D.'s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 216.

[499] The events of the novel are loosely autobiographical: Macpherson had left H.D. in this manner. Schaffer, introduction to *Nights*, xi-xii.

describe Natalia's interactions with David in which she seeks to get out of her body and pursue a spiritual realm. After discussing Natalia's section, I consider the second section H.D. wrote, an introduction that she added to the novel in 1934 before publishing it in an edition of 100 that she distributed amongst friends.

Natalia's section opens with her thinking back to her relationship with Neil and his sister Renne and considering the person she was with them. She recalls: 'Natalia, they had called her'. [500] While they seemed to see her in terms of a fixed identity, her new relationship with David allows her more freedom: 'it was Nat or Neith now. Neit or Neith is what he called her; he said, "Neith" and she felt rhymes go with the word; sheathe, unsheathe.'[501] The use of rhyme here mirrors Natalia's unfixed identity with David: her name shifts and morphs even as it is articulated. Although she worries that her young lover David will 'renew her in an old mould' which she feels very strongly 'does not fit', he allows her to enter a trance state in which the boundaries of her identity are fluid.[502]

David offers Natalia this freedom through their sexual encounters, which H.D. describes through abstract imagery that obscures the actions. In the first night that Natalia is with David images of lightning, associated with Natalia's absent husband Neil, and watery depths, associated with David, dominate the scene:

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[500] H.D., *Nights*, p. 33.
[501] Ibid.
[502] H.D., *Nights*, p. 33.

> Where was this taking her? Notes rise from under the floor, domed music. A dome spreads over and domes superimpose darkness upon darkness. Pray God, Neil's lightning doesn't strike through domes of music, domes of sand, darkness. Is she buried now, safe-dead? She is lying under sea-level, she says, 'I am lying on a sea floor.' Her words are part of three columns of dark music, struck, muffled (a heart?) under her hand. She is rooted in silt and sand; even if she wanted to rise up, she dared not, for that destructive memory of heat-lightning across ice-floes.[503]

Throughout the novel she returns to these images as she describes the men and their respective characters. In this instance, she takes refuge in David so that she does not have to return to the pain of her separation from Neil. The use of 'sand and silt' versus 'heat-lightning' is suggestive but unclear. However, abstract language not only obscures the events, it also mirrors the state that Natalia seeks through sex: it allows for the possibility of reading the experiences in a range of ways and this freedom from restraint is what Natalia seeks when she wants to get out of the 'old mould'.

Some of H.D.'s Dijon novels did employ parallels to filmic techniques. For example in *The Usual Star*, H.D. employs a soft focus close up in a description of 'mounds of solid white snow'.[504] It only becomes apparent that she is describing swans on a lake when she has 'zoomed out' and further described the setting.

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[503] Ibid., pp. 39-40.
[504] H.D., *The Usual Star*, p. 13.

However, I would argue that *Nights* does not employ such clear equivalences between the writing style and a camera. Instead, *Nights* is filmic because Natalia mediates and filters the events so that the experience of reading *Nights* is like reading one of H.D.'s *Close Up* articles. In her articles for *Close Up*, H.D. discussed 'real' films through focusing on a film's image so that she could reimagine them and connect them to other works of art. The fluid images in 'real' films connected to other realities. I argued that H.D.'s reviews had a similar effect to the films that she described because they also layered images upon images and used them as moments to shift between her interpretations of the film, and the other realities they evoked. In reading *Nights*, I want to suggest that there are structural similarities between the openness of 'real' film, which is read as a succession of interpretable images, and the sexual encounter obscured by abstract images. For H.D., 'real' films and *Nights* are linked by the type of language that enacts the multiplicity that it seeks to describe.

Natalia works hard to keep her encounters with David in the realm of abstraction. One of the ways she does this is by dismissing him when he tries to assert his character or his individuality. Their dialogue often appears in italics, as though it is not part of the narrative of the novel but rather an interruption. For example, David asks:

> *'Why don't you call me David? You never say my name.'*
>
> *'You haven't a name, you aren't now, David.'*
>
> *'I am, I am. Nat. You do care?'*
>
> *'No. I told you, quite frankly, in the beginning that I don't love you.'*

> *'You do love me.'*
>
> *'No. I told you in the beginning.'*
>
> They repeat this with slight variations.[505]

Not only is the dialogue set apart in this manner, it is also evidently formulaic and hardly worth relating: they just 'repeat this with slight variations'. David is only important as an abstract ideal. The moments in which they interact normally, bound by the ordinary circumstance of their particular context are the parts that interest Natalia the least.

As her sexual encounters are like 'real' films Natalia is able to reinterpret and reshape them. In fact, Natalia reworks her experiences, even as she is engaged in them. Shortly after this conversation, she sees David as 'Angelo Titian, not yet hewn out'.[506] She continues: '[h]is arms are perfect and the arch of his back, is already personified, cast in bronze. The torso is not yet finished, there is flabbiness here, it must be beaten down, pounded in the clay.'[507] He protests, '[d]on't hurt me there, don't claw me in that way' but she immediately dismisses him, explaining: 'I wasn't hurting you. I want to get you perfect'. [508] After this, she can participate once more in her fantasy: '[n]ow, for a moment, everything is perfect. She is with him, under him; he is dead weight.'[509] Natalia wants to reimagine David as a work of art even while they are engaged in their affair.

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[505] H.D., *Nights*, p. 40.
[506] H.D., *Nights*, pp. 40-1.
[507] Ibid. p. 41.
[508] Ibid.
[509] Ibid.

By doing this, Natalia can escape the 'ordinary dimension'.[510] She retreats into her mind so that though they speak it is only '[v]oices, coming from caves, sound hollow; small sound of echo of echo of voice sounds over the static quiet of the place'.[511] After they have had sex, she withdraws further into her thoughts:

> She whispers, 'beautiful, beautiful, beautiful', all to herself now. His shoulder will heave and rock hers, like avalanche from unknown crater. After all, she has been down in an unfamiliar cavern, and her world, her own terraine is just that – 'beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.' The air from the open window is more firm than she is; she could fall and be held there, by air; it is platinum edged with frost. Ground-mist follows the stream and blots out the stems of the paper-birches. This might be anywhere.[512]

Through her experience with David, Natalia becomes separate in 'her world'. She is so light that she might be held static in the air, and she 'might be anywhere'. She becomes dislocated from a specific time and place.

This is alarming to Natalia because her desire for an abyss is also a desire for death. Shortly after this passage she thinks about Neil's rejection of her and '[s]he wants suddenly, as David's shoulder touches hers, as her mind had

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[510] Ibid., p. 34.
[511] Ibid., p. 41.
[512] H.D., *Nights*, pp. 43-4.

predicted, to fall out, forward into platinum'.[513] Her desire to get out of self is indistinguishable from a suicidal urge. Natalia wishes that she could do something trivial like go to the Rialto or find a shop to mend some earrings: '[s]he wants to see herself, as silly as that, with ear-rings, not disembodied, with silver before her and inchoate rock at her back.'[514] She pushes herself in these encounters to become unanchored but the result is both liberating and frightening.

Even when she kisses David, she describes it as 'sleep and opiate', which she struggles to shake off to stay in the 'ordinary dimension'.[515] Susan Stanford Friedman has pointed to David's inexperience as a lover and characterised his kisses as clumsy and suffocating. However, throughout the novel David comes to resemble Neil, thus he is increasingly appealing to Natalia.[516] Natalia's fear of drowning in his kisses, then, does not seem to be a comment on technique. Instead, her drowning is symbolic of leaving her body behind. She describes at one point how

> His kiss was broken seal of one of the apocalyptic seven seals of a book, some old, old manuscript, still rolled carefully, no doubt, but in strips, buried under sand. When David kissed her like that, her

[513] Ibid., p. 43.
[514] Ibid., pp. 43-4.
[515] Ibid., p. 34.
[516] Schaffer, introduction to *Nights*, xiii.

> breath stopped and, in a moment, the thread of the present was broken, she was back in the past.[517]

David's kiss enables the oblivion that Natalia seeks as it links her to other realities and times. But Natalia worries that the kiss 'would kill her' and describes it as the Death card in a pack of tarot cards. [518] She elaborates, that 'David's kiss was death because there was only blackness as she dropped under it and it spread (when she stopped breathing) a black canopy over her head'.[519] For Natalia, this suffocation is proof that his kiss is 'authentic'.[520] Natalia's prose establishes a link between the authenticity of David's kisses, an ability to access other realities, and a fear of complete detachment, thereby triangulating sex, a spiritual awakening, and death. She suggests that her relationship with Neil, the 'butterfly brother', had also taken her 'out of the world' when they were together.[521] But her encounters with David seem to be more dangerous. She reflects that, in her experience with David 'she had almost got "out"' before continuing that 'she had never been so "out of the world" with Neil, but it was another world, this was the catch, she was "out" in.'[522]

Throughout her account of the nights, Natalia is also seeking something beyond either of the men. In Night II, David orgasms too quickly and, feeling embarrassed offers, '[y]ou're sure, you don't want –', to which Natalia replies

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[517] H.D., *Nights*, p. 78.
[518] Ibid., p. 79.
[519] Ibid.
[520] Ibid.
[521] H.D., *Nights*, p. 36; p. 37.
[522] Ibid., p. 45.

'[n]o, darling, this is a dream, let me keep this dream'.[523] As soon as he is gone Natalia masturbates. The experience is described in religious terms. The episode begins: '[h]er deity was impartial; as the radium gathered electric current under her left knee, she knew her high powered deity was waiting.'[524] As Natalia continues, she is presented as passive and ready for the connection to her god: '[s]he was sexless, being one chord, drawn out, waiting the high-powered rush of the electric fervour.'[525] Afterwards, she reflects that 'she was nearer than she had ever been to the source of this power'.[526] She explains, '[s]he hated the spend-thrift of beauty, as much as the miser. Each must find his own high-road to deity. To-night she was not far off.'[527] Beauty becomes the catch-all phrase for the abstractions of reality, just like in the *Close Up* reviews.

For Natalia then both men are ultimately inconsequential:

> David or Neil, they were only bridges, they led her to her dream, they were the rainbow arch, they were their own particular colour, or their own timbre or electron, but they were the bridge, were not the dream; she loved the dream. She spoke to the dream and her own vibrant deity was waiting.
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> The god was there.[528]

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[523] Ibid., p. 50.
[524] Ibid., p. 51.
[525] Ibid.
[526] Ibid., p. 52.
[527] Ibid.
[528] H.D., *Nights*, p. 87.

Natalia explains that her god will continue to incarnate himself in lovers for her, 'provided, she held conclusive – *the dream is greater than reality!*' [original italics].[529] As Natalia abstracts her experiences and attains a state where she is out of her mind, she is seeking a 'dream' that transcends her bodily experiences with the men. In *Nights*, Natalia's sexual experiences (both with David and those she pursues alone through masturbation) offer transcendence, allowing her to access a more 'real' level of being.

When the sexual encounters become spiritual, the language is reminiscent of the spiritual encounters in H.D.'s film reviews. At the beginning of Night VIII, David again orgasms too quickly and their sexual encounter is cut short. In order to comfort him, she resorts to abstract images:

> Sometimes, on waking, there is a fragment of a fragment of a memory, the slope of a hill through crystal, the slope of a hill covered with violets or the slope of a hill, white with whitethorn or elderberry or one or two ghost trees, stark smoke and ghost and spirit against a black edge of a wood.[530]

Natalia then thinks about the episode privately:

> [T]his butterfly moment that she has held, had endured, perhaps, six heart-beats; in those slow heart-beats, she had known everything; just for that time, had realised perfection; they were so delicately

[529] Ibid., p. 88.
[530] H.D., *Nights*, p. 85.

> poised and he seemed so sure. Of course, that tender almost imperceptible vibration that had quivered while they held the moment static, was too much, the vibration was out of time, beautiful.[531]

The language here – the 'butterfly moment' and the 'imperceptible vibration' – is reminiscent of H.D.'s *Close Up* reviews. Sex creates the same spirituality as the cinematic experience, the same hinting at other possibilities. The only way in which Natalia could articulate this to David was through a series of abstract descriptions.

However, by Night IX, Natalia realises that the nature of their relationship has changed: '[s]he had said, in the beginning, "I don't love you, and you aren't David." She knew, now, that the moment, last night, had been too perfect and he had been almost David.'[532] She seeks distance from the relationship because 'she must be free' and she fears what it might mean if David is himself.[533] Lara Vetter has discussed *Nights* in terms of the dangers that are presented by a heterosexual relationship. She examines H.D.'s use of electromagnetic metaphors for desire in *Nights*. Vetter notes that while D.H. Lawrence uses metaphors of magnetic attraction to suggest the strength of desire in heterosexual couples, H.D. is far more ambivalent. [534] H.D. 'either employs these metaphors conventionally by way of critiquing heterosexuality or

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[531] Ibid., pp. 85-6.
[532] Ibid., p. 89.
[533] H.D., *Nights*, p. 90.
[534] Lara Vetter, *Modernist Writings and Religio-Scientific Discourse: H.D, Loy and Toomer* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 56.

to subvert the logic of electromagnetic polarity entirely'.[535] In fact, Vetter notes, 'heterosexual relationships […] are lethal' and threaten electrocution. Although Vetter focuses particularly on electromagnetism, Natalia's relationship with David feels lethal in other ways too. It seems as though by the end of her account, drowning is the only way to reach her desired abstraction without men, and without having to compromise herself. The novel ends with the lines, '[s]he was hovering over a stagnant pond, while the sea was waiting, while it only had to draw her – out – '.[536] Sexual experience always promised Natalia the ability to get out of her body; death is just another form of this.

It is not clear whether H.D. intended to publish this piece in 1931 but she revisited it in December 1934, adding a prologue to Natalia's section by the fictional editor John Helforth. Helforth begins by explaining that Natalia committed suicide shortly after the end of her narrative and that Renne, Neil's sister, had approached him with Natalia's manuscript in the hope that he might provide an introduction. Throughout the rest of his section Helforth is critical of Natalia, accusing her of indulging in prose experiments while he has had to work for his living.[537] H.D. noted that adding Helforth's prologue gave her the opportunity to playfully call up others' critiques of her. In her letters to Bryher, she explained that she enjoyed creating a character to 'comment morally on the lapses of the late H.D'.[538] She told Bryher: 'it's quite the joke' and that writing it

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[535] Ibid., p. 61.
[536] H.D., *Nights*, p. 106.
[537] H.D., *Nights*, p. 5.
[538] H.D. to Bryher, 17 Dec 1934, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 14, Folder 563.

made her 'scream with mirth'.[539] But H.D.'s letters reveal that Helforth was inspired by Bryher's Ernest, who was Bryher's twin, and in many ways Helforth resembles both H.D. and Natalia. Indeed Renne asked him to be editor because he is, like Natalia, a 'half and half sort of person'.[540] Helforth elaborates: '[m]y psychological investigations were marred by my own imagination, and when I wanted to let go and write a purely popular, or even slightly acceptable tale or novel, my scientific training spoilt it.'[541] So although Helforth distances himself from Natalia by painting her as creative and himself as scientific, they have more in common than this distinction suggests.

Because of Natalia and Helforth's similarities, Susan Stanford Friedman reads *Nights* as continuing the theme of fractured identities explored in H.D.'s post-war writings: they 'represent exaggerated "masculine" and "feminine" fragments of H.D. herself [and] […] are doubles for each other and for H.D.'s own life story.'[542] For Friedman, Helforth proves that, ultimately, 'the writing woman can survive only in the persona of a man'.[543] Katherine Elizabeth Hopewell, quoting Naomi Jacobs' discussion of narrative framing devices in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* notes that the frame is 'a means of depicting and negotiating censorship, since the structure "exemplifies a process necessary for both writer and reader, of passing through or going behind the official version of reality in order to

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[539] H.D. to Bryher, 16 Dec 1934, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 14, Folder 563.
[540] H.D., *Nights*, p. 5.
[541] Ibid., pp. 13-14.
[542] Friedman, p. 271.
[543] Ibid., p. 270.

approach a truth that the culture prefers to deny."'[544] Hopewell characterises Helforth as pompous and narrow in his attitude towards Natalia. In particular, she believes the 'comical misapplication of psychoanalysis in *Nights* is a way to suggest that "salesmen" like Helforth were using the insights of Freudian psychoanalysis as a blunt instrument to impose normative behaviour upon women'.[545]

Helforth certainly is a manifestation of patriarchal male dominance, for all the reasons these critics outline. But the similarities between Helforth and Natalia create a complex interchange of ideas that is not adequately explained by this gender polarisation. I argue that although Helforth is a symbol of the literary establishment and 'quite the joke' some of his comments resonate beyond this. It is difficult to know when Helforth's criticisms of Natalia are meant to be taken in earnest, and when his commentary instead serves to crystallise ideas that H.D. was using the character of Natalia to explore. Although Hopewell's reading of Helforth as a framing device suggests that he is an official version of reality that the readers must discard in order to access the truth, one of the key ways that he echoes Natalia is in his insistence that her writing captures the truth in a unique way.

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[544] Katherine Elizabeth Hopewell, '"The leaven, regarding the lump": Feminism and Cinematic Spectatorship in H.D.'s Writing on Film', Diss. University of Liverpool, 2003, p. 158. Hopewell quotes Naomi Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*' in *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 16.3 (1986), pp. 204-19, (p. 204).
[545] Ibid., pp. 164-5.

Helforth describes Natalia's writing as 'too terribly, too blazingly true, to be quite bearable'.[546] Of course Natalia's account is sexually explicit and so his response might be prudishness. But Helforth insists it is more than this. He explains: '[s]he was presenting truth, or what she saw as truth, in other words, not as a photographer, a journalist, or even a portrait-painter or a dramatist, but in some other medium.'[547] He notes that in poetry 'emotion, no matter how true, how brutally realistic, can be translated into another symbol, a sort of hieroglyph of rhythm and metre and poetical image'. [548] Helforth highlights the constructed nature of poetry: it is created through transforming one idea into another representation. Helforth continues, '[w]e say, "that is poetry," it can be labelled poetry, "O, it is only poetry."'[549] Stating that it is 'only poetry' implies that through the process of representation, some of the potency of the original emotion is lost. Natalia's abstract images gets closer to, not further away from the truth.

Helforth claims that Natalia 'seemed to work actually in radium or electricity' and asks 'Is that […] the medium for a novel?'[550] The terms electricity and radium echo Natalia's descriptions of her sexual encounters. But 'electricity' has several other associations. Vetter notes that for H.D., 'electromagnetism is the connective and transmissional medium that binds the heavens and the earth' and so is part of her broader interest in spiritualism.[551]

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[546] H.D., *Nights*, pp. 21-2.
[547] Ibid., p. 22.
[548] Ibid.
[549] Ibid.
[550] H.D., *Nights*, p. 22.
[551] Vetter, p. 57.

Of course, electricity also recalls the cinema, where the projection equipment is literally animated by its power. It is also a term H.D. used to describe the process of creating art. In *Paint it To-day*, she notes: '[a] work of art is the materialization of the electric force of the artist, electric force plus the directing impetus of the intellect.'[552] In 1921, when she wrote *Paint it To-day*, H.D. identified the most immediate medium as sculpture:

> The material of the sculptor is the most definite of all. His electric impulse is materialized in definite form. The dynamic strength of his original impulse should therefore reach us less encumbered (as in the other arts) with our own impulses. In music, in painting, in poetry, our own emotions are apt to intrude, to cloud over the original impulse (or as commonly called, inspiration) of the artist.[553]

By the time H.D. wrote Helforth's section of *Nights* in 1934, she applies similar ideas of immediacy to Natalia's writing. To say that Natalia's medium is electricity is to suggest that the form of her prose is somehow more vital, and less mediated than other forms. Indeed, the style of her narration switches between present and past tense so that some sections feel as though they are unfolding as they are read.

Helforth's comparison to radium also hints at form. Carolyn Thomas de la Peña has explored the cultural history of the element and notes that the

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[552] H.D., *Paint it Today*, ed. and intro. by Cassandra Laity (New York, NY; London, New York University Press, 1992) p. 61.
[553] Ibid.

announcement of radium in 1902 was followed by decades of speculation in the popular press about its supposedly rejuvenating properties.[554] One of the reasons for the widespread fascination it evoked was that it provided a challenge to entropy. Thomas de la Peña explains that: 'due to its extraordinarily long half-life, radium's energy seemed to defy the laws of science: it did not decline in perceptible mass or energy, even over years.'[555] Between electricity and radium, Natalia's writing is associated with artistic inspiration and vitality, and with the expansive, immersive qualities of a substance with apparently endless power.

Helforth sets Natalia's 'lightning realism' in opposition to other, more recognisable forms: the '[r]ealism of the dust-on-the-commode school', and 'the pig-sty of erotic realism'.[556] Neither of these sardonic descriptions are explained in the text but the former suggests a jibe at nineteenth-century realism, with its presentation of the material world in abundant detail; and the latter, a jibe at eroticism that claims authenticity through revelling in sordid details. Helforth's section is a way for H.D. to foreground her self-conscious experiments with a specifically modernist version of literary realism; experiments that came after, and in response to, her views of filmic realism.

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[554] Carolyn Thomas de la Peña, *The Body Electric: How Strange Machines Built the Modern American* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).
[555] Ibid., p. 174.
[556] H.D., *Nights*, p. 26. and p. 29.

Faceted Realities: 'Ear-ring'

In 1935, after Bryher bought *Life and Letters To-day*, H.D. began contributing poetry, prose and reviews. The only short story that she published in the journal, 'Ear-ring', appeared in 1936 under the pseudonym D.A. Hill. In H.D.'s *Close Up* reviews 'real' films allowed for simultaneous meanings, and in *Nights* Natalia's sexual experiences similarly enable her to 'get out of her mind' and into other realities. Both *Close Up* and *Nights* then, articulate a desire for multiplicity. The main character in 'Ear-ring', Madelon, has the opposite problem. Throughout the story Madelon struggles to find something to hold onto until, by the end, she realises that recognising the multiplicity of realities is how the artist creates the new art.

At the opening of the story, it is Madelon's third evening at the *Hôtel Acropole et Angleterre* in Athens and she is overwhelmed by the chaotic environment in the dining room. Having been drawn to another guest's diamond earrings on the two previous nights, Madelon begins to use the diamonds to steady herself:

> Madelon measured time by those diamonds, they stressed something, were other than they appeared (don't look at her), were shriek-marks obviously, were paper weights, set at two corners of the billowing fabric of her perception […] Madelon measured time by those stones; I have been here three days, I sailed from the port

> of London to the port of Athens; it must be now, nearly a month since we left. One had to hold onto something.[557]

Madelon's perception is indeed billowing in the story. She later explains: '[e]verything, in this backwater, left by the high-tide of events, went round in concentric circles.'[558] The image of the concentric circle in the quotation from *Asphodel* that opened this chapter, signalled the excitement of other realities layered upon one another. But here such a layering further overwhelms Madelon. In this environment, '[o]nly the diamonds remained static'; they are 'the only reality in the surcharged atmosphere of a room, where everything might, at any moment, slip over the edge of nothing into nowhere.'[559]

The bustling atmosphere of the hotel and the myriad of guests are part of this flux. Madelon is the guest of her friend Eleanor Eddington, along with Archie Rowe. The hotel has attracted a whole host of different people, often only identified by their nationalities: a Dutch ambassador, an American petroleum magnate and his secretary, 'England talking French to somebody with morose almond eyes, who might be Persian'.[560] Madelon describes 'an incredible babel of tongues' where 'French, English, English-French, French-English' cut across one another.[561] The interactions of guests are dictated by unspoken social rules. Madelon, conscious of drawing attention to herself,

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[557] D.A. Hill [H.D.], 'Ear-ring', *Life and Letters To-day*, 14.4 (1936), pp. 116-128, (p. 116).
[558] Ibid., p. 119.
[559] Ibid.
[560] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 118.
[561] Ibid., p. 117.

carefully considers the etiquette in the bustling international milieu of the hotel, a claustrophobic space where 'everyone knew everything'.[562] She drinks *prophilia* (a local wine) and gets progressively drunk. Marshall Berman depicted a similar atmosphere 'of agitation and turbulence, psychic dizziness and drunkenness, expansion of experiential possibilities' as 'the atmosphere in which modern sensibility is born'.[563] Berman was referring to Rousseau's romantic novel *The New Eloise* in 1761 but this sense of flux and uncertainty also characterises the modern experience for Madelon.

As well as using the diamonds as anchors, Madelon repeats the date, 'nineteen-twenty', like a 'charm' to remind her where she is: '[n]ineteen-twenty, Madelon repeated, like some abracadabra (1-9-2-0), a charm to make this snap into some proportion. I am in Athens, she said to herself, and this is nineteen-twenty; she repeated it like a telephone number.'[564] She continues: 'the hard fact of four decisive numbers in a row (1-9-2-0) had jerked her into some feasible contact with these others.'[565] Seeing the diamonds and chanting the date initially performs the role of anchoring Madelon in her overwhelming environment.

But even as she uses the date to offer stability, its meaning begins to shift. Almost as soon as she chants the date, she notes: '[o]ne, nine, two, 0. Write it in a row, like a sum from the baby arithmetic, or write it, with dashes in

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[562] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 116.
[563] Berman, p. 18.
[564] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 119.
[565] Ibid.

a row between, like Morse code signal.'[566] The date, which is supposed to locate her, can be transformed into another symbol simply by adding dashes between the numbers. Similarly the diamonds, instead of offering her something to hold onto, begin to morph in her imagination. She sees the diamonds in terms of the field theories of modern physics: '[t]he diamonds were cutting into circles of small-talk; compact, magnetic centres, grouped around small tables, and, at intervals, larger tables, by some law of common gravitation, gravitated from them.'[567] Then she shifts to chemistry: '[t]he diamonds were two radium-points of something indissoluble, where everything else was seething. The rest of the mixture, vibrated away in chemical disapprobation, would have nothing to do with them.'[568] Then wonders if it is not something mystical which attracts her: '[t]he diamonds, rather than the woman who wore them, sought recognition. Or were the diamonds arrogant in their indifference, did they, by some occult power, drive these human entities to shun them?'[569] Then they become metaphors for lighthouses: '[t]hey were search lights. Revolving lights, from a squat lighthouse, cut across small tables and larger tables, all of whose personal individualities were magnetized to this one point, their supreme indifference.'[570] Madelon then imagines the gap between the tables as Lethe or Styx. The diamonds might have seemed to offer stability but Madelon does not let them remain still in her mind.

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[566] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 120.
[567] Ibid., p. 116.
[568] Ibid., p. 120.
[569] Ibid., p. 116.
[570] Ibid., p. 117.

Madelon also seems to be fascinated by the way in which the financial value of the diamonds shifts. In the first line of the story, Madelon considers the Russian woman as part of a transaction: 'someone had bought her with two diamonds and she carried that implication with her, as heads turned, self-consciously and a shade too indifferently, did not turn towards her.'[571] Madelon speculates that this woman is a 'white Russian', fleeing the revolution. The diamonds contribute to this image, signalling both the riches of her pre-revolution lifestyle and acting as a down-payment so that she can afford to continue it: Madelon notes that though these 'white Russians' are 'doomed', they can 'hold out' 'as long as they could accrue credit, or attain merit, from the diamonds'.[572] The diamonds have become destabilised, both through the way in which Madelon imagines them, and through her recognition of their fluctuating financial value.

It was common during this time to see diamonds as commodities that were subject to changes in the market. This view was particularly prevalent from the late 1920s when De Beers' monopoly of the diamond market was established and their advertising campaigns had begun to drive up demand. F. Scott Fitzgerald explored the phenomenon in 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz'. First published in 1922, the character Fitz-Norman Culpepper Washington is faced with a dilemma upon discovering that his mountain is '*one solid diamond*':

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[571] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 116.
[572] Ibid., p. 122.

> if it were offered for sale not only would the bottom fall out of the market, but also, if the value should vary with its size in the usual arithmetical progression, there would not be enough gold in the world to buy a tenth part of it.[573]

The problem is a peculiar one: on the one hand, public knowledge of such a huge gem would bring down the value of all diamonds and yet, if it did not, there would not be enough gold in the world to purchase it. As the character in Fitzgerald's story notes, '[i]t was an amazing predicament. He was, in one sense, the richest man that ever lived – and yet was he worth anything at all?'[574] In fact Fitz-Norman's granddaughter, Kismine, demonstrates exactly what a market flooded with diamonds might think of the stones. At the end of the story, after she has fled from her house mid-way through its invasion, Kismine looks at the jewellery she brought with her to ensure her economic survival and realises she has accidentally picked up rhinestones. She explains, '[t]hey belonged on the dress of a girl who visited Jasmine [Kismine's sister]. I got her to give them to me in exchange for diamonds. I'd never seen anything but precious stones before.'[575] Kismine finally decides, 'I think I like these better. I'm a little tired of diamonds'.[576]

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[573] F.S. Fitzgerald, 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz', in *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1962) pp. 92-138 (p. 107).
[574] Ibid.
[575] Ibid., p. 137.
[576] Ibid.

The same problem is explored from another perspective in Virginia Woolf's 1920 short story 'Solid Objects', which shows a character bestowing value on glass and pieces of china as though they were precious stones. John, upon finding a piece of glass on the beach holds it in his hand and reflects: 'it was nothing but glass'.[577] And yet, in the very next clause he continues:

> It was almost a precious stone. You had only to enclose it in a rim of gold, or pierce it with a wire, and it became a jewel; part of a necklace, or a dull, green light upon a finger. Perhaps afterall it was really a gem; something worn by a dark Princess trailing her finger in the water as she sat in the stern of the boat and listened to the slaves singing as they rowed her across the Bay.[578]

Through conferring imaginary value upon the object, it becomes something genuinely of value in John's life and he abandons his responsibilities in parliament to sit and gaze at his collected pieces of glass and china. He becomes a miser, imaginatively creating the value of his hoard: the ultimate act of fetishisation. Similarly, when Madelon is using the diamonds to 'measure time' and stabilise herself, she imagines their worth in terms like Woolf's character, also drawing upon a fantasy of their evocative history and imagining a romantic, archaic view of the East. Madelon thinks: '[t]hey might have been gouged out,

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[577] Virginia Woolf, 'Solid Objects', *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989) pp. 102-107. (p. 103).
[578] Ibid.

en passant, from a royal diadem, or, equally, they might have been filched from some sacrosanct Byzantine shrine.'[579] And yet, in both cases, the value of the glass and the diamond is not inherent to their material form. The possibility of the diamonds offering stability is undermined by their economic worth as a commodity. Walter Benn Michaels, discussing Marx, succinctly articulates this point. He explains,

> The 'qualities' of commodities 'are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses', hence, while pearls and diamonds, for example, have 'physical' 'qualities' that make them industrially or aesthetically useful, their value as exchangeable commodities is 'physically imperceptible': 'So far no chemist has ever discovered exchange value either in a pearl or a diamond.'[580]

At one point, Madelon hints at this when she thinks, '[b]ut this was ridiculous. She was giving them undue value'.[581] Douglas Mao discusses this relation to objects – where they are understood neither as commodity or as symbol 'but as "object," where any or all of the resonances of this complex polysemus word might apply' – as a 'peculiarly twentieth-century malady or revelation'.[582] Mao notes 'this feeling of regard for the physical object as object – as not-self, as

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[579] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 116.
[580] Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 20-1.
[581] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 117.
[582] Douglas Mao, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 4.

not-subject, as most helpless and will-less of entities, but also as fragments of Being, as solidity, as otherness in its most resilient opacity [...] seems one of the minor trademarks of the writing of this period'.[583]

Madelon concludes that '[d]ollars and diamonds', 'the only feasible and solid points of reality were, yet, the most unreal'. [584] She elaborates:

> The white Russians depended on that most mystical value, a value set by some Levant merchant on two diamonds, on their lives exactly. Wall-street might totter, at any moment, like a too-high wall of bricks, come tumbling down and Liberty fall, with a splash, to rust in the north river.[585]

The value of the diamonds is 'mystical' but dollars are similarly unstable. H.D.'s reflections about the volatility of dollars are partly a consequence of the time in which she was writing: 'Ear-ring' is set in 1920 but was written in 1932 and edited before publication in 1936.[586] The story is therefore informed by the economic climate of the Great Depression. In particular it can be read to reflect the larger concern of moving away from the gold standard. The gold standard, only really in practice on an international level between 1880 and 1914, was a system whereby '[m]oney supplies in each country were linked directly to

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[583] Mao, *Solid Objects*, p. 4.
[584] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 122.
[585] Ibid.
[586] The H.D. Papers at the Beinecke Library contain a typescript with a few minor corrections marked in pencil but no earlier drafts so it is difficult to tell whether H.D. made any significant changes between 1932 and its publication in 1936.

domestic reserves of gold, and balance-of-payments adjustment was accomplished through international shipments of precious metal'.[587] This meant that '[m]onetary authorities were restrained from indulging their preference for inflationary finance, and the relative stability of prices that resulted was conducive to steady income growth'.[588] Furthermore, '[s]ince the authorities in each country were subject to the same gold standard constraints, the system brought about a *de facto* harmonisation of monetary policies without requiring explicit coordination'.[589] This system came to an end with the outbreak of World War I, when 'belligerents engaged in deficit spending financed by money creation to mobilize resources for war'.[590] This meant that convertibility was unofficially suspended (so that money in one's possession could no longer be converted into gold upon request) either through appeals to patriotism or by governments making it difficult to obtain insurance and shipping space in order to transport gold. By the end of these measures, inflation made it impossible to return to prewar parities and the gold standard was abandoned.

The monetary history of the 1920s then saw 'strenuous and ultimately futile efforts to restore the international gold standard' as '[f]rom the outset there existed widespread agreement on the desirability of returning to gold'.[591] Although a gold standard was eventually reintroduced during the interwar years it was 'susceptible to convertibility crises and thus failed to embody the

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[587] Barry Eichengreen, Editor's Introduction, *The Gold Standard in Theory and History* (New York, NY; London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 1-35, (p. 2).
[588] Eichengreen, p. 2.
[589] Ibid.
[590] Ibid., p. 19.
[591] Ibid.

principal virtue of the prewar monetary system'.[592] In fact, Britain's return to the gold standard in 1925 created 'a costly loss of output and employment' and was viewed as an error on the part of Winston Churchill, the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, who had been misled by advisors.[593] This was a contributory factor in the onset of the Great Depression, from which knowledge H.D.'s story 'Ear-ring' benefits. Having lived through the end of the gold standard, the economic system in 1932 must have seemed to H.D. to be frighteningly unanchored. 'Ear-ring' has as its backdrop an anxiety concerning the international economic stability that had passed with the start of the Great War.

Lawrence Rainey has characterised H.D. as unconcerned with the markets of modernism because she relied on Bryher's patronage. His account of H.D. describes her as:

> a coterie poet, one whose writings circulated, like bonbons at a dinner party, among a cénacle of friends and hangers-on in wealthy bohemia. Bereft of a genuine public [because of Bryher's financial support], deprived of critical give-and-take, she wrote against the back-drop of travel between her psychoanalyst in Vienna, Sigmund Freud, and the beaches at Capri and Greece, between the villa

[592] Eichengreen, p. 21.
[593] Ibid., p. 20.

> overlooking Lake Geneva and the furnished apartment that awaited her in London.[594]

However, 'Ear-ring' shows economic developments filtering into H.D.'s writing during this period, even as she explores concerns that had interested her for much longer. Far from being oblivious, H.D. received constant updates from Bryher in late 1931 advising her about her money. Bryher told H.D., 'Dada says the pound is going to ten shillings as regards exchange – that he doesn't know what is going to happen and is profoundly gloomy' and that she should 'as far as you can, change your American dollars to francs and those to marks or Mr Renkevietch would probably change your American cheques direct to marks but don't change English money more than you can help'.[595] Bryher was having to balance the building of Kenwin with the financial crisis, and was losing money:

> I have lost in 24 hours four hundred pounds so you can guess how I am feeling. I am struggling desperately to rush money to Switzerland to pay house as in strictest confidence and do destroy this letter or this bit of it, they say the other nations are making an attack on the pound and we are going to crash pretty completely for about 6

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[594] Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1998) pp. 148-9.
[595] Bryher to H.D., 30 November 1931, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 3, Folder 93.

> months though Dada thinks afterwards we may come up again, because even he feels all Europe may go more or less.[596]

Bryher even advised H.D. to 'send some scraps to Harriet Monroe and some of the magazines to get American money'.[597] Of course it is true that Bryher insulated H.D. from many financial concerns. But these written exchanges show that H.D. was also aware that writing was a commodity that could be marketed at times of need.

'Ear-ring' then is set against this idea of money, and commodities like diamonds, as part of a fluctuating economic system, one in which it is possible to lose hundreds of pounds over night. Madelon's comment that dollars and diamonds are 'real' – the most important things in a capitalist society – but yet unreal – symbols in a system that can collapse without warning – are prescient. In 'Ear-ring' H.D. sees the world – both in terms of the social and the economic – as fluctuating and contingent.

Madelon reflects:

> There was no tracking down reality, through poetry, or was it the *Prophilia*? I've not had more than two glasses. Archie tilts the bottle toward me as I finger the stem of my glass, an almost empty crystal

[596] Bryher to H.D., December 1931[?], The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 3, Folder 93.
[597] Ibid.

> goblet in which I might see anything. Hold onto some reality. What then, is reality?[598]

In this unanchored state, it seems as though there is nothing that Madelon can use to stabilise herself. Like Natalia, who when 'out of mind' might float through the air, Madelon has to be careful that the music she hears does not carry her away: '[a] single violin cut a swallow-wing pattern through the air, and she would be transposted [sic] with it if she were not careful. Even to think "*heptanésos*, seven-isles," was too much.' [599] Madelon decides that it is not time to 'try her own wings, float above this heavy laden atmosphere'. [600] Alongside the reality of dollars and diamonds, a spiritual and mystical reality seems to beckon. Madelon remarks that,

> The only thing that vied, in clarity, with debit and credit and the idea of numbers ruled on paper, was a fight of silver, that was yet a violin, that, with all its exaggerated and emotionally timed rise and fall, swept over their heads, out to the bluer aether.[601]

But just as Natalia's desire to get 'out of her mind' was intertwined with a dangerously nihilistic tendency, Madelon seems to recognise the potential danger of relinquishing control: she reflects that maybe the other guests 'were

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[598] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 122.
[599] Ibid., p. 125.
[600] Ibid.
[601] Ibid., p. 126.

right to shut out what was so real'.[602] Madelon finally decides that '[s]he must hold on a little longer'.[603]

When she finally breaks her silence and discusses the diamonds, which she has been obsessively reimagining and turning over in her mind from the beginning of the story, the only language that can articulate their shifting variety is abstract images:

> But her words fell, too late, between them, annihilated diplomacies, space, time and distance, 'It's smaller than anyone could think. It's smaller and colder. It's frozen. It's alive. It's more alive than any thing living to-day. It's far and cold, like a flower frozen under white ice. It is white ice, and white fire. It has never been ruined, for it has never been built. It's in a state of building.' [...] 'It's like a flower seen frozen in a crystal. It's even more luminous than anything, anyone yet saw; someone dreamed it... in a crystal.'[604]

H.D.'s presentation of the diamonds begins by flitting between different descriptions. They are small, cold, alive, a frozen flower, in a state of building, white ice, white fire, and a crystal. The only way to capture their reality is to turn it into the roving abstractions that recall Natalia's sexual encounters. Through this transformation, they can encompass all of the ways that Madelon

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[602] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 125.
[603] Ibid., p. 126.
[604] Ibid.

has imagined them. In describing them in this language Madelon becomes a visionary: '[s]he was burning with that fanatic fervour that leads eccentric, middle-aged derelicts to stand up, on a tub, at Hyde Park Corner and hold forth about the millennium. She was holding forth and she didn't care who saw it.'[605]

Rather than trying to hold onto something, Madelon now takes pleasure in flux because she recognises the potential of multiplicity. Madelon has found '[a] secret that she hadn't striven to solve, that she had dismissed as unworthy of solution'.[606] She begins to enjoy that this night is different from all the others on the trip: '[t]o-night, she was whirled into the whirl-pool in a back-water, the scum of little tables was lifted high, they were all flung out and back into unpredictable dimensions.'[607] The way in which she conceptualises this is through a faceted mode of vision, like looking through a diamond:

> In your mind, you have a sort of tube, like their nursery kaleidoscope, all the colours are there, violet, violets of Hymettus, ultra-violet and sea-purple; you say *Mavrodaphne* and you get drunk, she had told Archie, like that. *Prophilia* was something different. It was the sharp edge of a cut-off triangle, that must be the one facet of that diamond. That must be each facet of a diamond that was a new way of thinking. Everything dissolved in the chemistry of this post-war, Balkan dining-room, in the *Hôtel*

[605] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 126.
[606] Ibid.
[607] Ibid., p. 127.

> *Acropole et Angleterre*, but this thing. A new way of looking at things.[608]

A faceted mode of perception, in which '[e]verything seems unrelated yet diametrically related' is the only way to find reality.[609] The only thing to hold onto is not the diamonds themselves but the new form of perception that they symbolise. This prismatic, shifting type of vision is akin to the concentric circles that H.D. described in the passage that opened this chapter as it is a mode of looking which relates seemingly disparate ideas. However, while the concentric circles seem to suggest a relatively structured model of reality, in which echoes and associations can reveal glimpses of some of the other layers, in 'Ear-ring' these layers seem to have merged into one chaotic, multiple, shifting whole.

The story ends with Madelon's revelation: if the world is fragmented like the facets of a diamond, then modern, experimental forms – such as the 'new painting' with its 'cut-off triangles' and 'the new music' – are in fact mimetic.[610] She is excited to share her 'new discovery' with Eleanor:

> I can tell Edd, or E.E., as I have learned to call her, how she can paint pictures like that. This is the new music. Everything seems unrelated yet diametrically related, as you slant one facet of a diamond into another set of values.[611]

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[608] H.D., 'Ear-ring', p. 128.
[609] Ibid.
[610] Ibid.
[611] Ibid.

The fluidity of this way of looking, this 'new layer' means that everything is inter-related, even those things which seem to be opposed. This model of the world focuses on connectivity; it is the artist who is able to recognise this and record it in their works.

H.D.'s writing throughout the period of *Close Up* and *Life and Letters To-day* demonstrates the potential of the abstract image in prose to open up possibilities and connect realities. I began by examining the way in which 'real' films were read as a series of images that could be reworked and reinterpreted before exploring how the style of H.D.'s reviews themselves echoed this abstraction. In *Nights*, I drew parallels between the images of H.D.'s readings of films and Natalia's sexual encounters and showed that once again they allowed access to a spiritual experience. Finally, I examined 'Ear-ring' which began with Madelon amidst the uncontrollable flux of different competing realities and searching for a way to anchor herself. But by the end of the story, she can describe the diamonds in a way that captures this flux: through abstract images. This means that she understands how new art is made. All three sections in this chapter are concerned with representations of reality that allow flux and multiplicity and how the artist can utilise it for their visionary power.

In her memoir, *H.D.* by Delia Alton, H.D. looked back on her early imagist poetry and expressed annoyance with the descriptor of 'crystalline' used by critics. She asked:

> For what is crystal or any gem but the concentrated essence of the rough matrix, or the energy, either of over-intense heat or over intense cold that protects it? The poems as a whole … contain that essence or that symbol of concentration and of stubborn energy. The energy itself and the matrix itself have not been accessed.[612]

Eileen Gregory notes that even in her early imagist verse, H.D. had recognised the danger of 'aesthetic crystallization – a kind of oversalting of the soul: "I had drawn away into the salt, / myself, a shell / emptied of life"'.[613] Expanding upon these lines of verse, Gregory notes that the 'identity between "salt, / myself,"' indicates 'the crystal as a too-fixed "self"'.[614] Gregory reads *Trilogy* as the final resolution of this potentially stultifying form of stasis. Indeed many critics have attempted to rethink H.D.'s work beyond her early involvement with imagism: Morris suggests *Trilogy* and *Helen of Egypt* are the final manifestations of much of H.D.'s experimentation with projection. Vetter suggests that examining the notion of electromagnetism similarly provides 'a movement away from the solid, static, "pure crystalline" or "clear-cut crystal" writing of imagism and toward writing that is more dynamic and animated'.[615]

In these critics' analyses, it is clear that H.D.'s writing was not defined by imagism. I further suggest that the use of the image continued as part of exploring the nature of reality. In her expansive, stream of consciousness prose

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[612] H.D., 'H.D. by Delia Alton', *Iowa Review*, 16.3 (1986), pp. 180-221, (p. 184).
[613] Eileen Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 90.
[614] Ibid.
[615] Vetter, p. 66.

style, the abstract image is part of a sequence that, far from remaining fixed, constantly shifts and signals the possibility of other realities. To use H.D.'s own terms in the above passage, she seems to use her prose as a way to access the 'matrix itself'.

Robert Herring and Muriel Rukeyser's Spanish Civil War

> *I never read an issue of Life and Letters To-day without feeling more resolute and more able to have hope for the world. And how full of incentive for one, its envious capacity to be various.*[616]

In the previous three chapters, I examined the different ways in which Macpherson, Bryher and H.D. employed the real: Macpherson and Bryher discussed psychology as 'real', while H.D. turned to more abstract and mystical ideals. Although I touched on *Life and Letters To-day* in the chapters on Bryher and H.D., it was in the context of ideas that both writers were already exploring in *Close Up*. In this chapter I consider the way *Life and Letters To-day* continued the legacy of *Close Up* but aim to show that it also represented a very different project. I examine Herring's editorship and argue that because aesthetics were still Herring's central interest, he responded to the decade's increasing engagement in politics by structuring the journal to be implicitly anti-fascist. With the beginning of the Spanish Civil War Herring made the decision to become more explicitly political and attempted to provide readers with facts that they might not find elsewhere. However, alongside this was an impulse to persuade people of the urgency of the conflict and the need for action. In this

[616] Marianne Moore quoted by Herring, in News Reel, *Life and Letters To-day*, 21.20 (1939), pp. 1-9, (p.1).

mode of writing, the 'facts' are more difficult to hold on to as they become embroiled in propaganda. The articles Herring published about the Spanish Civil War, and some of his more polemical editorials, demonstrate the difficulties in writing about the conflict.

I then turn to Muriel Rukeyser's first contribution to the journal 'Barcelona, 1936'. As I outlined in the introduction, Herring had asked Rukeyser to travel to Spain to report on the People's Olympiad, an alternative to the Nazi Olympic games. Just as she arrived, the nationalists staged a coup and she instead witnessed the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Through examining 'Barcelona, 1936', I continue to explore the problems the Spanish Civil War presented for writers who sought to capture it in their work. Rukeyser's account was one that Herring recommended for the 'facts' he deemed it presented. At a time when there were so many accounts of the conflict, there were considerable pressures on the writer as the perceived veracity of the individual's eyewitness testimony and their motivation for writing such an account, was under scrutiny.

In the final part of this chapter I examine the novel that Rukeyser eventually wrote about her experiences in Spain, *Savage Coast*. Representing the facts of the conflict continued to present difficulties. In this account, Rukeyser becomes Helen, one of the central characters. As Rukeyser writes herself into the events everything suddenly seems to become 'unreal'. Although Helen knows she is witnessing a historical moment, Rukeyser cannot record them with the same objectivity as when she wrote herself out of the account. Helen repeatedly reminds herself that the events were 'real' thereby

embedding a connection within the novel between the witness and the events. Throughout the chapter, I argue that the difficulty of capturing the 'real' Spanish Civil War resulted in a persistent anxiety surrounding the role of the writer and their ability to capture the 'truth'.

An 'envious capacity to be various': *Life and Letters To-day*

In Herring's first editorial, he explained that *Life and Letters To-day* had 'eschewed' politics. [617] For a journal starting up in 1935 – midway through a decade that is considered pivotal for politically engaged writing – this might seem like an odd position to take. However, he explained to Bryher in a letter just before publication of the first issue of *Life and Letters To-day* that he was 'naturally anti-fascist, and was before fascism began' but that he thought politics were 'incidental'.[618] He continued '[o]ne is against all the things of which fascism is one form. Its only interest as a phenomenon is that it is the most recent and dangerous.'[619] He saw politics as secondary: 'I see them only as a small side of the general thing, my primary concern with which is the artists. Not as ostrich-manoeuvre, but as expression of the general thing which I can best understand.'[620] For Herring, getting the art right would mean politics would take care of themselves.

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[617] Herring, Editorial, *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.1 (1935), pp. 1-2, (p. 2).
[618] Herring to Bryher, 23 April 1935, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 19, Folder 712.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Ibid.

Although *Life and Letters To-day* did not have a manifesto – a far cry from the little magazines and movements of the 1910s and 1920s in which a declaration of an emerging group's principles was common – Herring clearly outlined the intentions of the journal in his first editorial: his main aim was to present diversity. He explained '[o]ur aim is not to split into groups, of which there are already enough, but to select and coordinate for the future'.[621] The geographically and temporally disparate groups that are brought together in the first number demonstrate this:

> There is work here by authors from England, Scotland, Ireland, America, France, U.S.S.R, Germany. There are articles on a sixth-century Byzantine and a post-war German dramatist; on American poetry, Russian films, Monte Carlo ballets, nineteenth-century England and twentieth-century wars. There are reviews of plays music and books.[622]

But the focus on variety meant the journal could appear confused. In his second editorial Herring quotes one reader who found their selections baffling. The reader complained that *Life and Letters To-day* 'inevitably lack[s] the sort of imprint borne by Mr. Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*'.[623] Herring was undeterred and indeed, future issues were just as varied as the first. The journal published literature from all over the world and Herring continued to emphasise his desire

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[621] Herring, Editorial, 13.1, p. 2.
[622] Ibid.
[623] Herring, Editorial, *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.2 (1935), pp. 1-2, (p. 2).

to bring ideas together. He claimed that '[n]o one group, be it of artist or artisan, socialist or psychologist, painter, photographer or printer, can live in ignorance of implications of the other'.[624] The journal did not want to be considered 'a purely literary paper'.[625] 'If,' he said, 'as an august weekly found us, we were also "a little too varied to leave an impression of individuality", that must be because variety was avowedly our aim.'[626] Much later when *Life and Letters To-day* absorbed *The Mercury* (and therefore also *The Bookman* which had merged with the *Mercury* in 1934) Herring explained that there were continuities between all three publications. The main difference was that *Life and Letters To-day* 'took in more than the *Mercury*, which in turn took in more than the old *Bookman*'.[627] *Life and Letters To-day* was undoubtedly one of the most varied journals of the time.

Herring not only emphasised variety within the pages of *Life and Letters To-day*, he also advertised and encouraged readers to subscribe to other journals, mentioning *The Booster*, *Poetry*, *Wales*, *The Welsh Review* (with which he had strong links), *Twice a Year*, *Commune Mesure* and *T'ien Hsia* amongst others in his editorials. Thus the publication was part of a network of international periodicals whose variety itself provided a context for the publication's notional promulgation of dialogue and eclecticism.

Herring had said before he took on the editorship of *Life and Letters To-day* that art was his primary concern and that politics were 'incidental'. But his

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[624] Herring, Editorial, *Life and Letters To-Day*, 14.4 (1936), pp. 1-2, (p. 2).
[625] Ibid.
[626] Herring, Editorial, 13.2, p. 2.
[627] Herring, 'Three in One: An Editorial', *Life and Letters To-day*, 21.21 (1939), pp. 9-14, (p. 14).

manner of selecting art, and the wide range he hoped to show, was intended to encourage a society that was open and diverse. He noted that he wanted to 'fight for recognition of the best qualities in this world' and 'for continuance of spiritual freedom'.[628] Thus, presenting such variety was implicitly anti-fascist and though Herring claimed the journal had eschewed politics it was not entirely apolitical. An article announcing the beginning of *Life and Letters To-day* in *The Times* noted, 'its columns will be open to such promising authors who under present conditions run the risk of being silenced for ever at the most critical point in their careers.'[629]

Although Herring was the most visible member of the journal's management because he wrote all the editorials, he was not the only person running the journal. Bryher was also an active presence. It is difficult to know how involved Bryher was in the venture because she was not formally recognised. However, she had written to H.D. before she bought the journal to explain that general control would be hers although she was not 'to appear on [the] paper in any way officially' and her archives contain hundreds of letters between her and Herring discussing the business of *Life and Letters To-day*. [630]

Bryher's attitude to politics was similar to Herring's. In Chapter 2, I outlined Bryher's understanding of the real: she admired films that showed universal patterns of behaviour, which she excavated through idiosyncratic psychoanalytic readings. The films themselves, and undergoing psychoanalysis,

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[628] Herring, Editorial, 13.1, p. 2.
[629] 'Life and Letters To-day', Review, *The Times,* 6 August 1935, p. 8.
[630] Bryher to H.D., 17 April 1935, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 109.

would help people to understand their behaviour and, in turn, they would be enabled to act in more rational ways. This was at the heart of Bryher's political beliefs: art and psychoanalysis could aid progress and help create a more just society. Thus, she ignored the overt political messages of Soviet cinema because 'real' films were an important educative tool and promoted understanding between nations.

Bryher was also an important financier of many other writers, both through commissioning contributors to *Close Up* and *Life and Letters To-day*, and through providing direct financial assistance to those in need. In this respect her priority was once again primarily artistic. She aimed to support writers who she considered to have artistic merit but who might not find publishers because of their lack of commercial appeal. In a 1935 letter explaining her distrust of the commercial art of Fleet Street and Wardour Street, she told Herring that they must share the same understanding of writing if they were to work together on the new journal: she wanted to make few concessions to the commercial and instead develop 'the world of Eisentstein [sic] and Marianne Moore. Of Gertrude Stein, transatlantic, Brecht and the new American painting'. [631] Bryher certainly supported political writers but as a part of her broader desire to move beyond the confines of a narrow literary market and to promote art, which would in turn have benefits for society.

However, even though she too thought art was the most important concern, she was more politically engaged than Herring and would discuss

[631] Bryher to Herring, May 1935, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 19, Folder 713.

politics directly. In her *Close Up* article 'What Shall You Do in the War?', written in 1933, she describes events in Germany where '[h]undreds have died or been killed, thousands are in prison, and thousands more are in exile'. [632] Bryher reports that Jews are being 'eliminated from the community' and that any Germans who complain about the new laws are 'beaten to death or sent to a concentration camp'.[633] She further notes that '[b]ooks by Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Remarque, Arnold Zweig, Stefan Zweig, Tucholsky, Feuchtwanger, Schnitzler, Glaeser, and many other authors, together with foreign translations have been taken from libraries and publicly burnt.'[634] In the article Bryher still believes that peace is possible but calls everyone to action 'to fight for it now as hard as we should fight in war'.[635] Even pacifists could fight actively, 'not through the signing of resolutions but through an attempt to help those who are now suffering because they believed in peace'.[636] Readers of *Close Up* could fight for peace through the cinema. She asks them to do this:

> By refusing to see films that are merely propaganda for any unjust system. Remember that close co-operation with the United States is needed if we are to preserve peace, and that constant sneers at an unfamiliar way of speech or American slang will not help towards mutual understanding. And above all, in the choice of films to see,

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[632] Bryher, 'What Shall You Do in the War?', *Close Up* 10.2 (1933) pp. 188-191 (p. 188).
[633] Ibid., pp. 189-90.
[634] Ibid., p. 189.
[635] Ibid., p. 190.
[636] Ibid., p. 191.

> remember the many directors, actors and film architects who have been driven out of the German studios and scattered across Europe because they believed in peace and intellectual liberty.[637]

Throughout the article, she asks readers to *act* in directly political ways. Here, she notes that even readers' choices about the films they watch, and the way they respond to films, are modes of action.

Having the financial means to act meant that Bryher was particularly attuned to the practical ways one could help. Unlike Herring, she did not think that if the art was right, society would simply follow. She actively wanted to change society: whether paying for her friends to undergo analysis, making sure that a wide range of writing was published, imploring pacifists to help other pacifists, or reminding film goers that their choices mattered. Indeed, during the Second World War Bryher helped refugees escape Nazi Germany, using Kenwin as a receiving station in Switzerland. Of the 105 people she helped, only two did not escape, one of whom was Walter Benjamin.[638] Bryher was not aligned to any type of party politics – she no doubt would have seen following any particular doctrine as illogical – but was nevertheless engaged and pragmatic.

Herring was perhaps more passive than Bryher when he started *Life and Letters To-day*. However, being editor of a journal was a position from which one could make a difference. It seems that the Spanish Civil War made Herring realise this and move from an implicitly anti-fascist stance to a more explicitly

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[637] Bryher, 'What Shall You Do', p. 191-2.
[638] Bryher, *Heart to Artemis*, p. 327.

political one. In 1936 Herring announced that the journal needed to change to reflect events happening in the world: 'a year ago is a year ago, and it would be useless to maintain now that Spain's civil war is none of our business. It is everyone's business.'[639] Samuel Hynes remarks that by this time, 'midway through the thirties, young critics take it as given that political content is unavoidable for the serious writer' hence they use temporal phrases such as 'becoming' and 'we can no longer', or in Herring's case 'now'.[640]

The journal's implicit anti-fascism meant that *Life and Letters To-day* was well placed to discuss politics. In the summer of 1936, the International Association of Writers in Defence of Culture, an organisation created in response to the rising threat of fascism, held its second congress. *Life and Letters To-day* reported that the congress had decided that 'in order to make for greater understanding between people, books of members of the Association should [...] be translated simultaneously into seven languages'.[641] The conference also proposed 'the project of a new encyclopaedia, that would gather together the scattered knowledge of our time and set up in the twentieth century "a common front of knowledge such as was reached in the eighteenth"'.[642] André Malraux outlined the idea to Herring as 'a History of Culture and a History of Science, on each subject there would be two divisions, knowledge before 1914 and knowledge after'.[643] This encyclopaedia was

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[639] Herring, Editorial, *Life and Letters To-Day,* 15.5 (1936), pp. 1-4, (p. 2).
[640] Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1982), p. 161.
[641] Herring, Editorial, 15.5, p. 2.
[642] Ibid.
[643] Ibid.

proposed in order to 'hold together the ideology of the world', and though Herring notes that the idea appals those English writers who attended the conference (H.G. Wells in particular), he fully supports the project. Both the desire to publish writers from across the world to improve understanding between people, and the notion of a collection of international writing which would help to 'hold together the ideology of the world', seems to echo the project *Life and Letters To-day* set for itself at its inception in 1935, a year before these measures were formally identified at the congress.

Using the reputation for variety that they had built up in their approach to art, Herring seems to have wanted to continue to provide readers with variety in their coverage of Spain. However, they would not survey the whole political spectrum, as Herring pointed out 'that whilst insisting on our right as men of letters to be able to criticise all parties, we have not once affronted readers with fascist or Nazi work'.[644] Herring sought a range of contributors who sympathised with the Republican cause to write about the Spanish Civil War. In this, his aim was to provide information about Spain that was not widely available. He criticised the coverage so far: 'one fact has emerged that is, in so much as it concerns writing, specifically our business, and that is the attitude of certain sections of the English, no less than of the French, press towards the rebellion.' [645] He drew attention to the biased and monolithic nature of the journalism:

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[644] Herring, News Reel, *Life and Letters To-Day,* 16.8 (1937), pp. 3-11, (p. 10).
[645] Herring, Editorial, 15.5, p. 1.

> There were plenty of stories of boys of seventeen shooting fascists in 'cold blood'; not so many that explained their presence in the loyal forces by the fact that the army, recruited to fight for its country, was in revolt. Fascists firing from cathedrals, nuns leaving their charges were not featured so heavily as 'nuns stripped by Reds' and churches destroyed.[646]

For the facts of the conflict, Herring directed readers to a letter in *The New Statesman* by Stephen Levy.

Levy's letter is representative of the kind of coverage Herring wanted. Levy had returned to England from Spain a few days before his letter was published. He explains that he was surprised that 'even the most reputable newspapers, both in this country and in France, seem to be representing a criminal rebellion by the Army and the church as a Red Terror'.[647] He hoped to offer a corrective by explaining what he had witnessed during his time there. Levy reports that the armed government men who came to his hotel in Sitges said '"Good evening" to us and told the manager that he was above all things to see that all the foreigners were properly fed and looked after'.[648] He further explains he 'neither experienced nor heard of any atrocities perpetrated by the Government supporters in either Sitges or Barcelona, with the exception of the doubtful story of the decapitation of the Italian Consul in Barcelona'. [649] In

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[646] Herring, Editorial, 15.5, p. 1.
[647] Stephen Levy, Letter, *The New Statesman and Nation*, 1 August 1936, p. 154.
[648] Ibid.
[649] Ibid.

contrast, 'the story at Barcelona is that the revolution had hardly started when a rain of machine-gun bullets poured indiscriminately into the crowds of civilians going up and down the Ramblas'. [650] Levy emphasises that although his impressions 'are, of course, subjective', he is 'a Conservative' so 'need not be accused of undue bias to the Left'.[651] To Herring's mind, through their factual impartiality Levy's observations showed up the righteousness of the Republican cause. As well as Levy's letter, Herring also recommended Muriel Rukeyser's article in *Life and Letters To-day*, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Herring wanted *Life and Letters To-day* to provide facts in the same manner as Levy and this meant publishing writing from multiple contributors that surveyed the situation. But as well as his aim to provide clear facts, Herring wanted to inspire readers to act. The Spanish Civil War took on symbolic significance to many at the time. Writing in 1967, Frederick R. Benson noted that the conflict was often reduced to an allegory:

> A vast majority of the writers in Europe and the United States defined the conflict as a graphic struggle between the defenders and the destroyers of democracy, between the Spanish people and a reactionary group of aristocrats, priests and generals, between constitutional and arbitrary authority, and between freedom and repression […] Thus the Spanish Civil War was transformed into an

[650] Levy, p. 154.
[651] Ibid.

> allegory in which the major social and political philosophies of the time were the chief antagonists.[652]

Though this series of dramatic oppositions was too simple, as I will discuss shortly, this notion of a fight between the Left and Right created a sense that urgent action was necessary.

Herring began, like Bryher, to appeal to readers to act: he seems to have wanted to convey the severity of the situation in Spain and so included articles such as Heinrich Mann's 'Spain and Culture', a speech Mann had prepared to give in the Albert Hall on the 24 June 1937. Mann begins by stating that '[e]ven one whose heart has never been open to generous sympathies, even one who has never felt or suffered for a good cause, could not help being moved by the terrible fate that has overtaken the noble Spanish people'.[653] He explains that General Franco cannot 'guarantee the security of the operations for the evacuation of women and children from Bilbao' and details other atrocities committed by the fascist rebels. [654] Mann explains:

> Everyone can see for himself on which side there is good faith and on which side bad faith. There is no longer the slightest doubt about it. […] Republican Spain has on its side not only formal justice and

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[652] Frederick R Benson, *Writers in Arms: The Literary Impact of the Spanish Civil War* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1967), p. 3-4.
[653] Heinrich Mann, 'Spain and Culture', *Life and Letters To-Day*, 17.9 (1937), pp. p. 9-13, (p. 9).
[654] Ibid.

> law, and the assent of its people. It represents inner righteousness, clear conscience, and true morality.[655]

As Benson noted, the conflict was seen to signal the stark battle between right and wrong.

Mann then moves on to focus on photographs of children that were bombed by German aeroplanes as they left school. These photos 'give us pictures of a reality of which we had previously never dreamt'.[656] Mann graphically describes their deaths: 'One sees these children with their heads shattered by fragments of bomb; in one an eye has been knocked out; in another, part of the skull has been blown off. Most of them have their mouths still open.'[657] But he then embellishes them by imagining the dead children's response to the violence. He tells the reader: 'they seem to be still speaking, to be asking "Is it true?" and to be answering "What a pity for us – and for you."'[658] Mann claims the photos show 'a reality' and at the end of the article states that intellectuals should put aside all their doubts because '[i]t is high time that we should speak simply and clearly'.[659] The writer was tasked with exposing the truth about what was happening: in this case, the suffering of the children. And yet in the very act of writing, Mann reinterprets events that were already mediated to begin with, continuing the exaggerated language of propaganda. Truth claims become increasingly difficult to maintain.

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[655] Mann, p. 10.
[656] Ibid.
[657] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[658] Ibid., p. 11.
[659] Ibid.

The purpose of Mann's article is clear: he wishes to persuade the reader of the importance of their support and of the righteousness of the Republican cause. In contrast to the violence of the fascists, who will not even spare women and children, '[a]mong the Republicans, prisoners are not put to death'.[660] Mann explains that '[s]oldiers desert from the fascist forces and come over to its side' while '[o]n the Republican side there are no deserters'.[661] These new Republican recruits 'sing the hymn of liberation as if they had never been fascists. They join up in Republican battalions and forget all the madness for which they have so long been made tools of by their oppressors'.[662] Mann's account went far beyond the 'facts' that Herring had wanted to expose.

Herring was caught between a desire to survey impassively and to persuade and inspire action. In the issue in which Mann's piece appeared, Herring explained in his editorial that he was aware that the tone of Mann's speech was problematic and so, next to it, he published an account by T.C. Worsley warning of the dangers of propaganda. Like Mann, Worsley details violence as the 'reality of war' but, unlike Mann, Worsley does not connect this violence to any kind of heroic battle between right and wrong. Instead he characterises the violence as senseless and chaotic. He recalls his experience:

> I saw the doctors making hasty examinations to pick out the worst cases, deftly unwrapping the pulp of a shoulder or an eyeless forehead: when I noticed the purple jellified mess of a man shot in

[660] Mann, p. 12.
[661] Ibid., pp. 11-2.
[662] Ibid., p. 12.

> the genitals, and the lolling delirious mouth of a legless boy – I didn't need to remind myself that the justice of the cause makes no difference to the reality of war.[663]

Worsley notes that writers who have tried to convey graphic or distressing truths have been suppressed. For example, *The Martyrdom of Madrid* 'is a terrible story and, significantly, his [Louis Delaprée's] paper refused to publish half the articles. People do not want to realise the truth'.[664] In contrast to this 'reality' and 'truth', Worsley quotes a passage from John Sommerfield's *Volunteer in Spain*:

> I began to feel fine, so did John. I must say it seemed against nature: it would have been more reasonable to have felt awful: the others did. When we told them how fine we felt they hated us. The lorry came, and there were buckets of hot coffee with brandy in it, plenty of it, and some biscuits. 'This is a fine war,' said John. 'Sure,' I said, 'it's a fine war'.[665]

Worsley criticises the novel commenting, 'I noticed that it was a quite common thing in Spain for people to behave not as if they were themselves in the Spanish war, but as if they were characters from Hemingway's forthcoming (?)

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[663] T.C. Worsley, 'Propaganda and Spain', *Life and Letters To-Day,* 17.9 (1937), pp. 14-8, (p. 14).
[664] Ibid., p. 15.
[665] Ibid., p. 16.

novel on the Spanish war.'[666] Worsley explains that his appraisal of Sommerfield is not meant to belittle those fighting in Spain, rather '[i]t is simply to state the truth about war and the wideness of the gap between the real feelings of the actual combatants and the faked feelings of propaganda departments'.[667] For Worsley literature operates like propaganda, romanticising and obscuring the war, and the 'truth' is the actual violence and horror behind the heroic pretence.

Both the Mann and Worsley articles claim to be revealing the 'truth' and the 'reality' about Spain but both are written for very different ends: Mann to inspire people to believe in the heroism of the cause; Worsley to criticise exactly this way of thinking. In both Mann's and Worsley's accounts there is an acute anxiety about the type of language that could be used to write about what was *really* happening in Spain. The turn away from literary language is one of the recognisable characteristics of 1930s reportage and documentary. Placing these articles next to one another demonstrates some of the tensions: surveying the facts versus using the facts to inspire action. These articles show that the Spanish Civil War prompted a desire to find an authentic language with which to discuss the conflict.

The proliferation of media accounts of the conflict meant that notions of 'reality' were problematic. Keith Williams called the Spanish Civil War 'arguably the first fully modern media conflict', while Lara Feigel noted Spain was the first hyper-real conflict because the vast majority of people accessed it through

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[666] Worsley, p. 16.
[667] Ibid., p. 17.

media representations alone. Feigel explains, 'the British media was so saturated by photographs of the atrocities committed by both sides that many writers found it hard to disentangle photography from actuality, or the sign of the real from the real itself'.[668] As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, since the invention of photography photographs have been seen as 'real' because of their indexical relation to the world. Furthermore, their creation through a mechanical device means that they seem reassuringly objective and unmediated. However, Feigel examines the complexity of collapsing distinctions between photographs and the real. She notes that Robert Capa's famous photo 'Loyalist Militiaman at the Moment of Death' was initially staged for Capa who was trying to manufacture some convincing shots. Just as Federico Borrell Garcia, the soldier in the photo, stood up for Capa, an enemy machine gun opened fire. In this instance the staged becomes the real, or the hyper-real. Feigel discusses this incident as one that straddles the real and the hyper-real, so that the sign of the real and the real itself become indistinguishable.[669]

Both Williams and Feigel primarily discussed photos and films but similar problems can be seen in writing from the period. The nature of the medium of the word makes this is even more complex. While photos seem – even if they are not – free from human subjectivity, the word is obviously always filtered through human consciousness. Words are therefore seen as subjective and liable to distortion, whether intended or not. Words might be entirely

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[668] Keith Williams, *British Writers and the Media 1930-1945* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 3; Lara Feigel, *Literature, Cinema and Politics 1930-1945: Reading Between the Frames* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 144.
[669] Feigel, p. 148.

fabricated. Orwell famously wrote in *Homage to Catalonia*, 'I saw great battles reported where there had been no fighting, and complete silence where hundreds of men had been killed', and that '[o]ne of the dreariest effects of this war has been to teach me that the Left-wing press is every bit as spurious and dishonest as that of the Right'.[670]

Part of the problem was the complexity of the conflict itself. Anthony Beevor points out that it was more than a battle between fascism and the Left. To understand the conflict he looks to the sets of opposing forces at work: one was between class interests but clashes between authoritarian rule and the libertarian instinct, and central government versus regionalist control were just as important.[671] These different axes of conflict help to explain much of the in-fighting in the Popular Front, as Orwell demonstrated in his explanation of POUM's aims. He summarises their position:

> It is nonsense to talk of opposing Fascism by bourgeois 'democracy'. Bourgeois 'democracy' is only another name for capitalism, and so is Fascism; to fight against Fascism on behalf of 'democracy' is to fight against one form of capitalism on behalf of a second which is liable to turn into the first at any moment. The only real alternative to Fascism is workers' control.[672]

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[670] George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938), p. 85.
[671] Anthony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Cassell, 2003), p. 12.
[672] Orwell, p. 78.

Beevor highlights the difficulty of knowing the truth about a conflict like Spain. He notes that the Spanish Civil War, even after more than 40 years, 'is probably the most convincing reminder that the last word on history is impossible. The absolute truth about such a politically passionate subject can never be known, because nobody can discard prejudice sufficiently'.[673]

Although Herring did not often try to persuade in in his own editorials, when he occasionally did he was subject to the same problems as Mann. In writing about the Spanish Civil War and the Second Sino-Japanese War, he told readers: 'Basques are without homes; Chinese, in thousands, without bodies. These are facts. We ask you to be emotional about them because you ought to help.'[674] But in attempting to inspire people to care about particular issues, his language became emotive and embellished, just as Mann's had. As he discussed the Basque and Chinese civilian casualties, Herring considered the impact of war on children and the long-term damage to their psychological development. He described these children as 'without heads, limbs or intestines. Many dying after pain for which it seems there can be no excuse for having brought them into the world'.[675] He notes:

> The parents of these children have died, gallantly fighting. When the history of this age comes to be written, if there remains a generation able to write or enough who will read, it will not be the personality parade that matters. It will not be the English, the

[673] Beevor, p. 8.
[674] Herring, Editorial, *Life and Letters To-day*, 17.10 (1937) pp. 1-3 (p. 1).
[675] Ibid.

> Italians, or Germans who are honourably 'mentioned'. It will be the brave dauntless Basques, the grimly courageous Chinese.'

His appeals about 'gallant', 'dauntless' and 'courageous' people sounds rather like the language that Worsley criticised as false. Herring himself recognised this in his Spring 1938 editorial when he announced that they had commissioned an article on Republican education so '[f]or the time being we shall abandon what may be described as the emotional and generalised view of Spain for the more intellectual specific – what is being *done*, not only what is felt.'[676] We can see in this a further attempt to find a 'real' rendition of the conflicts in Spain and China: truth and authenticity might be served by eschewing the emotional.

Many of the pictures emerging from Spain (and China) were shocking and understandably elicited strong emotional reactions. And of course accounts of the conflict were not all equal: some were more reliable than others. There is a danger in treating the articles and photos as endless proliferations and detaching them all from reality. But there were difficulties in being so far removed from the conflict and yet still wanting to cover it. Herring had a platform through *Life and Letters To-day*; there must have been a strong impulse to use this to do more than survey the events of the Spanish Civil War. But Herring was caught in an impasse: he chose articles that would reveal the violent reality of the conflict to rally readers into action, but given the problems around authenticity and propaganda, claims to reality were very difficult to

[676] Herring, Editorial, 18.11, p. 2.

maintain. It was impossible not to become tangled in discussions around language and truth when it came to Spain.

In 1938, when *Life and Letters To-day* moved from a quarterly to a monthly publication, Herring announced that he would no longer write editorials. His final editorial suggests some frustration around his role as editor. He had started the journal minimising his role and stating that '[o]ur individuality must be looked for, where it will then, we think, be found, in the outlook of our contributors whom we hope will continue to be as varied as it is consonant with good writing and clear thinking'.[677] Now that Herring was going to stop his editorials, he explained that instead of the editorial 'we', he 'is going to reduce his plurality and be only "I"'.[678] The editorial is highly self-critical: he explains that, since *Life and Letters To-day* is moving to a monthly format, he will not 'bleat benignly or belligerently out of force of habit month after month' as '[i]t produces at the outset a lifelessness in magazines which can ill afford to give that impression'.[679]

Herring also had numerous personal reasons for his hiatus. His change in tone might be a consequence of his psychoanalysis, which he began around the same time that the journal started and which was reaching a crucial point in 1938.[680] Letters between Bryher and H.D. during this period make regular

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[677] Herring, Editorial, 13.2, p. 2.
[678] Herring, Editorial, *Life and Letters To-Day*, 19.13 (1938), pp. 1-3, (p. 1).
[679] Ibid.
[680] In a letter in 1935 Herring thanked Bryher for the money to start analysis. Like many of 'the bunch', Herring was subject to Bryher's philanthropic project to get everyone she knew to attend analysis. Herring to Bryher, 12 Aug 1935, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 19, Folder 714.

references to Herring's difficulties in coping. In April of that year, Bryher wrote to H.D.:

> Poor dear Buddy, I get pages. One must be terribly careful for he wants to break with Schmide [Walter Schmideberg, Herring's analyst] who is everything that is horrible. I'm sorry for Bud, but it a symbol to him, it is not I think a reality. I'm trying to do the best I can, and am so terribly sorry for him. But having got so far, he must – for his own security – go the step farther.[681]

Bryher, as outlined in Chapter 2, believed that psychoanalysis was a key way to access 'reality' and so was dismissive of everything except the underlying forces that dictate behaviour. Nevertheless, this period of turmoil culminated in Herring 'scramming' from the paper in September of that year to go to Iceland. He told Bryher that he was 'So tired of explaining my actions, & this I know is psychically best'.[682] The next issue that he actively contributed to editing was the December edition. As well as his analysis Herring was in the midst of a tempestuous relationship during this time.[683] Bryher saw Herring's involvement in politics as a useful distraction for him. She told H.D.:

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[681] Bryher to H.D., 29 April 1938, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 132.
[682] Herring to Bryher, Sept 20 1938, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 19, Folder 715.
[683] Meic Stephens was curious as to why Herring promoted so many Welsh writers in *Life and Letters To-day*. Herring's partner is only named Johnnie or 'Wales' in letters so this might provide a connection. Herring letters reveal that he even visited Wales with Johnnie during the war and pretended to be a

> Poor Bud, he is in a state, but better for him I think to cope with refugees than to worry too much over the Welsh boy. I am fearful of what might happen there, because I think when together they both get on each other's nerves.[684]

Engaging in the politics of the Spanish Civil War gave Herring a break from his personal life but perhaps part of Herring's impassioned tone was actually directed at his partner, who Herring described in a letter to Bryher as 'apathetic'. This might account for his occasional lapses into an emotive style in his writing. The break from writing editorials was then personal as well as to do with the consistency of the aims of the journal.

Although ostensibly taking a break from writing editorials Herring continued writing the News Reel section, which was the second feature of every issue, just after the editorial. In the first issue, Herring described the News Reel's purpose:

> because so much is swept away before it is savoured, we shall seek to record those lesser happenings which, through some touch of colour or absurdity, supply a footnote or a flourish to the page of fact, which might otherwise lack illumination. With them also will be

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soldier. Meic Stephens, 'The Third Man: Robert Herring and *Life and Letters To-day*', *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays* (1997), pp. 157–69.

[684] Bryher to H.D., 28 May 1938, The H.D. Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1905-1961, Box 4, Folder 132.

> included reviews and notes on single events, or subjects of which there are not enough in that issue to provide a separate Chronicle.[685]

The News Reel was an interesting feature in terms of the journal's aims of plurality. Although Herring forgoes writing editorials when the publication moves to a monthly format, and relinquishes an editorial 'we' in favour of a singular 'I' voice, that voice continues to be heard split across a whole host of minor observations. Occasionally, he even used the first paragraph of the News Reel as a short editorial, especially in the months leading up to the Second World War when he began his editorials again.

When Herring's editorials reappeared as a regular feature in late 1939, he made clear that he would not write about this war in the same way that he did about Spain:

> But on the whole I shall not do over this war what we did about the others which this paper has undergone. We printed work from the Spanish and Chinese fronts, because I felt the habitual ignorance and indifference of English readers to outside events must be shaken by accounts of suffering, which those very qualities were about to cause them to share.[686]

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[685] Herring, 'News Reel', *Life and Letters To-day*, 13.1 (1935), pp. 3-7, (p. 3).
[686] Herring, 'News Reel', *Life and Letters To-day*, 23.26 (1939), pp. 4-14, (p. 13).

Herring had attempted to both convey facts to readers in a dispassionate way and to shock them into action in his discussions of the Spanish Civil War. The Second World War would be different as '[t]here is no such reason to regale readers with war-stories of our own war.' [687] Herring abandoned his calls to action and instead sought solely to publish diverse voices.

In his discussions around the Second World War, Herring returned to his earlier conception of the journal: the primary purpose of *Life and Letters To-day* was once again to promote writing, culture and diversity. This gave Herring clarity over his position as this was the place he was most comfortable. In fact, he believed that an artistic contribution to society was a contribution to the conflict. For Herring it was a form of fighting: 'one can fight for recognition of the best qualities in this world. One can fight for continuance of spiritual freedom, hardy thought, expression and mental adventure.'[688] Herring noted that writers, through preserving culture in their work, 'fight' '[n]ot only Hitler but what made him powerful and possible'; and that it is 'for the larger land of the mind and the soul, the poets have fought, always will'.[689] Writers must resist 'war-mongering' and rebuild culture:

> But we fight more than the cause of Hitlerism. We fight for the cure. There must be no waste land when this war is over. In such terrains tares trespass. It is the work of all writers not to cash in with writing which is in one way or another war-mongering, but so to settle with

[687] Herring, 'News Reel', 23.26, p. 13.
[688] Herring, Editorial, 13.1, p. 2.
[689] Herring, Editorial, 23.26, p. 1.

> themselves that when they have leisure to take up their pens, it will be for pleasure in culture and with purpose to create.[690]

Once again, writers did not fight by espousing particular political dogmas, rather in their work they enacted the plurality that he saw fascism opposing.

This had implications for his understanding of literary language. Before, Herring wanted to expose the facts of the conflict, and this created an anxiety about the way in which to write about politics. Now literature was the cure for propaganda. He stated:

> We must face propaganda and admit that words may have to endure as much as buildings, camouflaged out of recognition. And all the time, appreciating the necessity for this, we must, in our living and our work, keep the word real. We must use it, that it may not rust; preserve and practice with it that it lose not its flexibility nor we our skill.[691]

In his conception of the 'real' word, Herring believed the artistic purpose was the pure one. This meant that Herring could return to trusting art and literary language as it was the most truthful and pure. He further explained that words are materials like '[w]ool, metal and wood' that have been 'deflected from their

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[690] Herring, Editorial, 23.26, p. 2.
[691] Herring, Editorial, *Life and Letters To-day*, 25.34 (1940), pp. 229-232, (p. 231).

peacetime use'.[692] The writer's duty was to use words for a more positive end to preserve some of their pre-war diversity. Writers were then like the doctor who 'operating in an air raid, saves with his scalpel the lives wrecked by other steel'.[693] By using words for the purpose of preserving culture, the word is '[t]he weapon of the writer' and '[h]is duty will be always to keep it strong, pristine and clear'.[694] It is hard to see this other than as a retreat. Herring's struggles to find a way of representing the real throughout discussions of the pre-World War II conflicts – aestheticism against political engagement, dispassionate factual statement against emotionalism – were lost in an attempted retrenchment to an aesthetic ideal, though one inflected by the political situation. Although *Life and Letters To-day* continued to publish political articles by contributors, Herring's own attempts to rally readers into action were over.

Examining *Life and Letters To-day*, and in particular the relationship between art and politics in the publication, is an important contribution to discussions of the decade. Keith Williams and Steven Matthews have noted that many critics 'sustain a damagingly restricted canon centred on a narrow genealogy of polarised relations between aesthetics and politics, or between difficulty and accessibility, textuality and content'.[695] *Life and Letters To-day* demonstrates that in practice it was not possible for aesthetics and politics to be starkly polarised. It was not just for reasons of polemic – to report injustice

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[692] Herring, Editorial, 25.34, p. 231.
[693] Ibid.
[694] Ibid., p. 229.
[695] Keith Williams and Steven Matthews, Introduction to *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. by Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (New York, NY: Longman, 1997), pp. 1-4, (p. 1).

and give witness to savagery – that politics intruded. The pursuit of realism – conveying the true and the authentic – made the differentiation untenable.

Herring was an editor who did not want to explicitly treat politics, but nonetheless the political was a key factor in influencing the type of art he commissioned. Furthermore, for him the problem of how to represent what was true and real was, given the conditions of the time, the problem of how to resolve the conflicts between aestheticism and plurality on the one hand, and politics on the other. The Second World War resolved the political problem for Herring in some respects: allegiance was no longer problematic, it was now our war, and advocacy was no longer needed. However the realism problem – how to say what is true – remained. To what extent he recognised this clearly and consciously is uncertain, but I have tried to show that it is immanent in his writings.

Barbara Guest dismisses Herring, and indeed *Life and Letters To-day*, arguing that he was an 'unfortunate choice' because he 'had none of Desmond McCarthy's genius for editorship' and that 'the freshness of *Close Up*, with its deliberately cultivated amateurishness, was here dissipated into incompetency'.[696] Meic Stephens has noted that 'Guest's unspecific judgement seems unduly harsh'.[697] Stephens called for a re-evaluation of both *Life and Letters To-day* and its editor but recognised that the task would not be easy as

[696] Guest, pp. 232-3.
[697] Stephens, p. 161.

Herring 'remains a rather shadowy (not to say enigmatic) figure'.[698] I argue that while Herring's position remains consistent throughout his editorship – that art and its plurality are central to life – he struggles with how these desiderata are sufficient to convey what is real. If reading *Life and Letters To-day* makes it hard to find the same sense of identity as *Close Up*, this is because the journal itself was a political response to the times.

Reporting the Real: 'Barcelona, 1936'

In this section I explore Rukeyser's article for *Life and Letters To-day* 'Barcelona, 1936' and suggest that she adopted a style not typical for her writing. I argue that, while Herring found it difficult to form a response to the conflict, Rukeyser struggled to represent the events she had witnessed. In 'Barcelona, 1936' she seems to have resolved this by writing herself out of the account and producing a distanced perspective. I set this style of writing into the context of the documentary movements of the 1930s before moving on to her novel about the same events, *Savage Coast,* in the final section.

In his editorials for *Life and Letters To-day*, Herring struggled to find a language with which to convey the urgency of the Spanish Civil War. Both his desire to expose the 'truth' and his reversion to an idea of 'pure' writing are naïve conceptions of language. In many ways, Muriel Rukeyser would seem more assured in negotiating these problems. Rukeyser was already an

[698] Stephens, p. 158. Part of the difficulty in finding information about Herring is that is that he died in a house fire that also destroyed all his papers. 'Mr Robert Herring', Obituary, *The Times*, 6 November 1975, p. 17.

established political writer, even by the time she went to Spain at the age of just twenty-two. Her collection *Theory of Flight*, had won the Yale Young Poets Award in 1935, and her politically-inflected, high-modernist writing was an ideal model of what engaged art might look like. Her poetry uses language that constantly moves across the boundaries of the public political and the abstract personal. John Malcolm Brinnin, noting Rukeyser's ability to write across these intersections, remarked that, in her use of symbols, 'the first are public, the last, even though they may represent universal issues are privately conceived and privately endowed'. [699] Brinnin sees this as one of the central problems of the social poet who wished to use the full resources of language but yet was also tasked with speaking clearly and persuasively.[700] Rukeyser then would be unlikely to retreat to aesthetic ideals like Herring.

However, Rukeyser's journey to Barcelona in 1936 was very different to what she had previously experienced. By the time Rukeyser went to Spain, she had already travelled across America to investigate the Scottsboro trials in 1933 and to West Virginia to report on the Gauley Bridge disaster in early 1936. Whilst these were both widely publicised cases of injustice, the beginning of the Spanish Civil War was an event that Rukeyser was caught in the middle of, watching it unfold: she was, in the proper sense of the term, a witness at the outbreak of the conflict. I would argue that this changes her initial representation of the experience: much of the archive material surrounding the trip to Spain and her article for *Life and Letters To-day*, 'Barcelona, 1936', reveal

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[699] John Malcolm Brinnin, 'Muriel Rukeyser: The Social Poet and the Problem of Communication', *Poetry*, 61.4 (1943), pp. 554-575, (p. 555).
[700] Ibid.

an uncertain version of the young poet. Instead of deftly merging the public, political moment with her personal response, Rukeyser turns exclusively to the events that are happening around her.

During her time in Spain, Rukeyser kept a brief diary. This two-page record of the events in Spain, whether through stylistic choice or practical need, suggests a series of events quickly unfolding. It begins:

> Cerbère – Port Bou – customs, passports – teams – 3rd class – peasant woman – small towns – politics – Hungarian – Spanish family – soldiers visiting 1st – stops – discussion – France, Spain, politics – stops – Moncada – peaches, sausage, bread, almonds, wine – news – general strike – re-arrangement of train – Martha Keith – reds – the town – anarchists – Beeth V – radio – the English.[701]

The writing itself is fragmentary, as though there is no time to process one image before another comes to replace it: the people she meets are recorded in the same way as the soldiers, the politics and the food she eats. It seems that nothing is privileged in this account.

Rukeyser's archive contains various attempts to record the experience: a hand-drawn map of Moncada Station, and further list-like reminders of events. One postcard simply reads:

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[701] The Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Box I: 1, Folder 2, Manuscripts Library, Library of Congress.

roosters

bombs

Church 5 off.

fire

breakfast

warning

buying

school

Aaron's Rod

peasants house

glass

sniping

school

Team's dep

camion

Otto.[702]

In addition to these items from Spain itself, the archive also contains pages of lists, both typed and handwritten, of the episodes that will make up the novel *Savage Coast*, which I will discuss in the next section. These have a similar appearance to the diary and the postcard: single word reminders about the events and the order in which they will be treated in the chapters. Furthermore,

[702] The Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Box I: 56, Folder 1, Manuscripts Library, Library of Congress.

Rukeyser created still more lists of the 'supplementary facts' that she could use from the diary of one of the fellow Americans, Ernest Tischter.[703] The archive reveals Rukeyser's strong desire to record every detail accurately.

Rukeyser's article for *Life and Letters To-day*, 'Barcelona, 1936' shares many of the same qualities as the archive material. As I outlined above, Herring introduced the piece in the News Reel by stating: '[f]or facts which were not given prominence [in the mainstream press], we refer readers to […] the article which we owe to the spirit of a young American poet that we are able to print in this number.'[704] Indeed, Rukeyser focuses almost exclusively on facts. She seems to scan her surroundings, in a similar manner to the diary, moving between images before they can be developed:

> Two Spanish soldiers, in comic-opera olive uniforms with natty yellow leather straps, patent-leather hats slapped down on top, grin over English cigarettes and the conversation of the Spaniards, deep in political discussions with the Olympic athletes. Catalonians answer 'No', with a swipe of the hand to all questions about the army, 'Some on one side, some on the other... Not good to talk.' They are pointing out olive trees, castles, churches. There is time to point out any amount of the landscape. At the little stations, the

[703] The Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Box I: 56, Folder 1, Manuscripts Library, Library of Congress.
[704] Herring, Editorial, 15.5, p. 1.

> soldiers stick their guns out of the windows, and armed workers patrol the platforms. This impresses the foreigners.[705]

Each image or moment is given more space than in the diary but not much more: it retains the same movement and speed.

Within the attempt to record the external events, the material in Rukeyser's archive has little evidence of the presence of a first-person narrative: the observations in the diary and her various lists unfold but do not seem to come from a viewing subject. In a similar way, any sense of self is effaced in 'Barcelona, 1936'. It begins, '[a]s the train began to wake up, Cerbère was reached, the last town in France, and the old water, the Mediterranean'.[706] The train begins to wake up, not Rukeyser herself or the other passengers, and 'Cerbère was reached' is purposely constructed without a first person presence. Even passages in 'Barcelona, 1936' that directly refer to Rukeyser, do not explicitly mention her in the narrative. For example, in *Savage Coast*, Rukeyser identifies that she and a fellow passenger collected a small contribution to present to the Mayor of Moncada. And yet in 'Barcelona, 1936' it simply says, '[t]wo members go down the length of the train, taking up a collection'.[707] Perhaps part of the seeming absence of Rukeyser herself comes from using another person's diary alongside her own. Tischter wrote in his account: '[o]ccupied 1st class places. Decided with Muriel Rukeyser, Molly Sobel,

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[705] Muriel Rukeyser, 'Barcelona, 1936', *Life and Letters To-day*, 15.5 (1936), pp. 26-33, p. 26.
[706] Ibid.
[707] Ibid. p. 28.

gentleman in Sobel Compartment [??] + lady from South America to take up collection for benefit of townspeople.'[708] Sometimes even Rukeyser's own writing feels as though it comes from another spectator. In fact, throughout the eight-page article for *Life and Letters To-day*, there are only eight instances of the use of first person, and when it does appear it is always the plural 'we'. It is difficult to locate Rukeyser here, even though she is at the centre of the observations as the eyewitness.

Not only is Rukeyser absent from 'Barcelona, 1936' but so too are the details of the people she was with. Markers that indicated conversations between herself and the other passengers are removed so that dislocated sections of speech float through her observations. In *Savage Coast*, after hearing gunfire, Helen, the Rukeyser figure, and Peter, the character based on Tischter, have the following exchange:

> 'CAN YOU TELL where the sounds come from?' Helen asked.
> 'I don't think John Reed could tell, in these hills', Peter smiled whitely. 'We could be in the middle of a thing like that, I'll bet, and not know what was going on.'
> 'Well, he was always at the bottom of a flight of stairs when something was happening at the top, wasn't he?'[709]

In 'Barcelona, 1936' this passage is far more impressionistic:

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[708] The Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Box I: 3, Folder 2, Manuscripts Library, Library of Congress.
[709] Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, p. 49.

> The Americans talk: this is what they have been talking about, in little rooms in New York, in meetings in Union Square. Everything is confused; John Reed could not tell what was happening during 1917, on top of a flight of stairs when something went on at the bottom, the revolution all around, almost silent, the rapid rumours.[710]

Most of the named characters in *Savage Coast* are anonymous voices in 'Barcelona, 1936' identifiable only by the nationality of the speakers: the Spaniards, the Catalonians, and a Hungarian. Rukeyser herself is reduced to one of 'the Americans'. Individuals are depersonalised in the confusion of the experience: they are voices amongst many.

The way in which Rukeyser appears to record the external rather than registering a subjective personal response, suggests that the account is written like an objective camera, neutrally capturing the events as they happen. It would not be a coincidence if Rukeyser turned to a camera-like style of writing to describe what she had seen in Spain. Before the trip, Rukeyser was already engaged in the aesthetics of documentary. The links between Rukeyser and the various documentary movements of the 1930s have been discussed by Catherine Gander. Gander notes that Rukeyser was actively involved in the movement and had already studied film editing in 1935, before her trip to Spain. Indeed, the way in which the fragments and lists are cut and reordered

[710] Rukeyser, 'Barcelona, 1936', p. 28.

into various other pieces of writing is reminiscent of film editing: the same phrases reappear in multiple accounts. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, Rukeyser had collaborated on a number of Frontier Films and had become friends with many documentary filmmakers and writers, including Joris Ivens, Ben Maddow, Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz.[711] Rukeyser also admired the documentary talents of the groups that formed behind such productions as *Spanish Earth, Crisis. Native Land, The City* and *Heart of Spain*.[712]

But there are several aspects of a camera that might apply to 'Barcelona, 1936' aside from the documentary nature of the writing. The image of the camera is apt not only for its objectivity, but also for its lack of power to affect events. In Spain, Rukeyser waited with the other foreign nationals to find out her fate: she was unsure how she would get to Barcelona, and how she could be useful to the Popular Front in Spain. The camera image then also evokes the position that Rukeyser was in; the writer must continue to record the quick succession of images, without being able to intervene in the events themselves, or even process them as they unfold. Part of the responsibility of the witness is to recount every sight and sound but there is the sense that this has a dizzying effect: in 'Barcelona, 1936', Rukeyser wrote that '[t]he speed and externality of every incident is unbelievable'.[713] Recording the outer events seems to preclude the possibility of developing a personal response.

In the 1930s, the idea that the novelist was recording events rather than writing fiction was popular: the proletariat novelist Jack Conroy said of his

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[711] Gander, p. 8.
[712] Ibid., p. 7.
[713] Rukeyser, 'Barcelona, 1936', p. 30.

writing, 'I, for one consider myself a witness to the times rather than a novelist'.[714] This type of writing not only made the writer a witness but aimed to assign this role to the reader: the camera, according to James Agee, 'made the viewer almost an eyewitness'.[715] The notion of a viewer, or reader, becoming a witness was popular in photography and writing during the Depression. Indeed, the concept of the witness later became central to Rukeyser's theory of poetry because it underlined the social purpose of art. When the *Life of Poetry* was published in 1949, Rukeyser wrote that she uses the term 'witness' rather than audience: 'I suggest the old word "witness", which includes the act of seeing or knowing by personal experience, as well as the act of giving evidence.'[716] For Rukeyser, the 'overtone of responsibility' in the word 'witness' was not present in words such as audience, the individual reader or listener.[717] Critics often refer to this passage when they discuss Rukeyser. But 'Barcelona, 1936' gives a different perspective on what happens to the witness at the moment of seeing: the self becomes lost.

'Barcelona, 1936' was not the only article Rukeyser wrote about Spain at the time. Accounts appeared in several different forms in other publications. The first was 'Start of Strife In Spain Is Told by Eyewitness' published in the *New York Herald Tribune*. It appeared on 29 July, the same day that Rukeyser returned to England from Spain. The article is introduced as 'an eyewitness account' and, as would be expected in a commercial newspaper article, focuses

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[714] Jack Conroy cited in William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 120.
[715] Stott, p. 76.
[716] Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry* (Ashfield, MA: Paris Press, 1996), p. 174.
[717] Ibid.

on facts. The opening sentence establishes the tone, '[w]hen we crossed the French border at Port Bou on Sunday morning, July 12, in watching the officials take down all our names separately and with care, we should have known that there was something up.'[718] Rukeyser is qualified to write the article because she was an eyewitness, therefore it is key that she is at the centre of the events. In a sense, although it deals with the same material, the *New York Herald Tribune* article is the opposite to the style of writing employed for 'Barcelona, 1936', where it is the reader rather than Rukeyser herself who is positioned as a witness. A version of 'Barcelona, 1936' was also published in the *New Masses* as 'Death in Spain: Barcelona on the Barricades'. The article again feels very different in character from 'Barcelona, 1936' because, like the *New York Herald Tribune* piece, it locates Rukeyser. Early in the article, Rukeyser explains:

> I had been sent to cover the First People's Olympiad in Barcelona by the London magazine, *Life and Letters To-day*. It was to be the great anti-Nazi celebration of the workers' sport clubs of Europe and America, the retort to Hitler Olympics, a week of united front games, theatre, festival.[719]

The same stories appear but they are explicitly marked in this text. Key moments, such as the 'noisy henhouse' are absent. As would be expected in an overtly Left-wing publication, the focus is on the political details of the conflict

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[718] Muriel Rukeyser, 'Start of Strife In Spain Is Told by Eyewitness', *New York Herald Tribune*, 29 July 1936, p. 2.
[719] Muriel Rukeyser, 'Death in Spain: Barcelona on the Barricades', *New Masses* 20 (1936), pp. 9-11, (p. 9).

and their wider ramifications: '[t]he generals, the priests, the wealth of the country, had risen against the people and a people's left wing government, uniting with the Carlists in a savage attempt to make a fascist, if not a monarchist, Spain.'[720] Formally, these articles are far less experimental than 'Barcelona, 1936'.

Herring was excited when he received Rukeyser's article. *Life and Letters To-day* at this point was still a quarterly publication and so very rarely had stories that were breaking news. In an effort to capitalise on this account, Herring wrote to Bryher suggesting that the magazine put posters in bookshops to advertise. He also suggested placing an advert in *The London Mercury* that would read '[t]ruth about Spain Eye-witness account of Barcelona by Muriel Rukeyser'.[721] Rukeyser's focus on the events in Barcelona compliments Herring's desire to tell readers the facts about Spain, so it follows that he might characterise it as the 'truth'. But Rukeyser had a more fluid conception of the conflict than Herring's absolute ideas: there was no singular 'truth' that she tried to expose. In fact, truths for Rukeyser were often personal and closely connected to dream states, and myths. Rukeyser often wrote across the boundaries of the real and the surreal, a fact that critics discussed when she was first writing, and continue to discuss fruitfully today. As Clive Bush notes, she was a writer who 'fought any attempt to pigeon-hole her as one who preferred "reality" in an impossible opposition to "myth", often using both concepts as moments in a dramatic argument of poetic discourse that could go

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[720] Rukeyser, 'Death in Spain', p. 9.
[721] Herring to Bryher, 27 August 1936 and 31 August 1936, The Bryher Papers, Series I. Correspondence 1911-1978, Box 19, Folder 721.

either way, or indeed, preferably, somewhere else'.[722] For Rukeyser then, 'Barcelona, 1936' is an unusual account. Herring was not a witness and was almost tasked with trying to mediate responses for the reader so that they might feel responsibility. Rukeyser had witnessed a limited but significant moment in the outbreak of the conflict. She too had to negotiate the place of the writer and the way in which language could be used to capture events.

'It isn't a novel and I won't make it compose like one': *Savage Coast*

This section moves on to discuss Rukeyser's novel *Savage Coast*. Although the novel was not published in *Life and Letters To-day*, I explore the way it develops 'Barcelona, 1936', and resolves some of the difficulties around representation in the earlier account. The novel writes Rukeyser back into the events and, in doing so, begins to explore what the 'reality' of the conflict might have looked like from the perspective of a located viewing subject. I therefore place the novel in dialogue with the journal and suggest that representing the 'reality' meant writing personal confusions into the text along with asserting their 'realness'.

In 1937 Rukeyser wrote to Gregory to explain that she still found it a challenge to write about Spain:

[722] Bush, *The Century's Midnight,* p. 386.

> It's practically a year now, and I'm still having a great deal of difficulty about getting a hold on that week, as far as words on paper go. Speaking is a different thing, what I've done is grip hard as if the audience were the dentist, shut my eyes and remember – and it's generally carried them along with the material.[723]

Whilst Rukeyser could, with considerable emotional effort, recall the events, shaping that information into a narrative was proving more problematic. The difficulty of 'getting a hold on that week' was a question of representation. The very nature of the events in Spain encouraged revision and reworking. Within all of her accounts, Rukeyser recalls Martin, the organiser of the Games, and his parting advice to the foreigners in which he gives them a role in the coming conflict by asking them to return to their countries to share what they have seen in Spain. However, the language of this directive varies between accounts. In *The New Masses* article, Martin says:

> You came to see games, and have remained to witness the triumph of our People's Front. Now your task is clear; you will go back to your countries and spread through the world the news of what you have seen in Spain.[724]

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[723] Rukeyser to Gregory, undated, The Horace Gregory Papers, Folder 11, Bird Library, Syracuse University.
[724] Rukeyser, 'Death in Spain', p. 11.

In *Life and Letters To-day*, this same passage is: The athletes will 'carry to their own countries, some of them still oppressed and under fascism and military terror, to the working people of the world, the story of what they see now in Spain'.[725] The difference between spreading news and telling a story is significant as 'story' already imbues the civil war with a literary quality.

Telling the 'story' of what was seen in Spain was a difficult task. Writers knew, both at the time and afterwards, that the Spanish Civil War was a pivotal, historic moment. In *Savage Coast*, Peter says to Helen, 'I suppose we'll be talking about this for the rest of our lives […] I keep thinking: we mustn't dramatize it.'[726] Helen notes that, even as Peter spoke, 'the village rose up around him, the chalk-bright houses, the black sashes of the men, the guns, the challenges of trucks pounding the blank road.'[727] She replies, '[b]ut they dramatize it, don't they? It dramatizes itself. They know, sooner than we, that it is the historic moment.'[728] Writing about these events invites dramatization because they resonated beyond themselves: both in terms of the ideology behind the conflict and the repercussions for the rest of Europe. Thus the Spanish Civil War was inherently dramatic. As Worsley wrote in his article for *Life and Letters To-day*, writers were not behaving like themselves in Spain, but were already imagining themselves as characters in a Hemingway novel. There is a sense that any writing about Spain struggles with its own significance in history and with its status as a literary work.

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[725] Rukeyser, 'Barcelona, 1936', p. 33.
[726] Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, p. 92.
[727] Ibid.
[728] Ibid.

Robert J. Clements, in his foreword to the first book-length study of the poetry of the Spanish Civil War, demonstrates this impulse as his qualifying judgements of the poets revolve around truth claims. Rukeyser, Clements tells us, 'saw little but the first hours of the Civil War' and yet her poetry 'seems authentic and moving'.[729] Similarly, writing about Stephen Spender and Giorgio Braccialarghe, Clements concludes 'that one does write most authentically about what one has lived through'.[730] This judgement about the writers' accounts quickly becomes a discussion of form. Clements continued, 'those poets who have not lived through an actual battle tend to paint more graphic, naturalistic scenes than those who have experienced these moments of truth.'[731] As I suggested in the first section of this chapter, the Spanish Civil War created a self-consciousness about writing, and about the type of language most suitable to authentically capture the war.

These problems shape *Savage Coast*. While 'Barcelona, 1936' was like a record of the external events, *Savage Coast* attempts to rework them as a 'story'. In *Savage Coast* Rukeyser writes herself back into the account so that the civil war in Spain become an integral part of Helen, and her personal journey. But this is also a novel deeply concerned with the question of fidelity to reality, and what exactly this might mean. Indeed *Savage Coast* begins with a statement from Rukeyser: '[n]one of the persons are imaginary, but none are represented at all photographically; for any scene or words in the least part

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[729] Robert J. Clements, Foreword to Marilyn Rosenthal, *Poetry of the Spanish Civil War* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1973), xx.
[730] Ibid., xxi.
[731] Ibid.

identifiable, innumerable liberties and distortions may be traced.' While 'Barcelona, 1936' was an attempt to represent photographically, this novel is neither imaginative creation, nor factual depiction. Instead it weaves between both, using its narrative to question what the real might look like in an environment fraught with tensions around representation.

Rukeyser begins the novel with a scene that critiques a certain literary style. The train that carries Helen through France is emblematic of modernity: it is a sleek, fast, powerful, thrilling instance of technology. The train is, 'flashing down France toward Spain, a stroke of glass and fine metal in the night. Its force of speed held the power of a water-race, and dark, excited, heavy before morning: it was traveling, lapping in the country, in speed.'[732] Rukeyser continues to suggest that this severs passengers from the world: '[t]he tense, desperate stroke of the train relieved all the passengers: no responsibility, no world, only sleep, sleep and speed in the black, the calm night falling, preserving speed, opening up the shadows, drawing away to morning.'[733] At this speed there is no engagement with the human or the individual: Helen looked out of the window and saw a man leading a donkey, but very quickly, '[t]he black of another tunnel wiped him out'.[734] The woman in Helen's compartment, who is only referred to as 'Peapack' in the novel, is a product of this distanced perception.[735] Peapack is apathetic and displays a complete lack of interest in

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[732] Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, p. 7.
[733] Ibid., p. 8.
[734] Ibid.
[735] She is called Peapack after the city in New Jersey. In Rukeyser's account of Spain in *The New York Herald Tribune*, Peapack is named as Mrs. Martha Keith. Muriel Rukeyser, 'Start of Strife', p. 2.

politics. She cares only about her private concerns: she constantly shows Helen pictures of her children and proudly announces that she is going to the Nazi Olympic games in Berlin at the end of the week. Peapack is oblivious to the People's Olympiad, and when Helen explains that they will be '[i]n an entirely different spirit' to the Nazi Olympics, Peapack responds, 'I like the spirit of sportsmanship. We have some very interesting contacts in Germany. Why should there be games against games?'[736] Rukeyser begins *Savage Coast* then with a version of modernism that the reader may recognise: technological prowess coupled with political apathy. In situating this literary style in the text itself, Rukeyser suggests she will be moving away from it, or rewriting it into something altogether different.

As Helen leaves France, the world seems to change. This second train represents everything that the first did not: it does not sweep through the landscape obliterating responsibility but slowly winds through Spain, stopping at every town. Furthermore, the Spanish train is swelteringly hot and the Catalonian passengers debate politics noisily, and eat together. This train comes to a complete halt in Moncada, the final village before Barcelona. Everything now becomes surreal as Rukeyser emphasises the absurdity of the tourists' existence. Stepping onto the platform, the scene seems to Helen like a 'fair day', or a 'fairground' with crowds of people, despite the soldiers and guns mixed in amongst the passengers.[737] Even these soldiers, rather than appearing

[736] Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, p. 11.
[737] Ibid. p. 34, and 41.

threatening, take 'on the keepings of a secret romantic soldiery'.[738] To Helen they are 'struck with the strangeness'.[739] In addition to this 'strangeness', the radio plays a selection of music that, though familiar, becomes defamiliarised in the context: '[t]he radio put on another record. The stammer of machinery done, the words issued, crooning, native, absurd: *Alone, alone with a sky of romance above. Alone, alone with a heart that was made for love*' [original italics].[740] As though to further emphasise the difference to the first train, Rukeyser relates that the Moncada train was moved further down the track in the interests of hygiene, as the tourists continued to use the toilets, despite being instructed not to.

As well as the absurd setting, the passengers are detached from the scene because they cannot speak Catalonian and so cannot communicate with any of the locals. Helen frequently asserts that she 'had never wanted language so much'. This lack of language means that everything the tourists know is mediated through translation, and gets distorted. One of the Hungarian water polo team asks,

> Have you heard the rumors? […] All sorts of rumors, already. The English are saying that the Communists have bombed the tracks and that we can't go farther; and I heard the Frenchman say that the

[738] Rukeyser, *Savage Coast*, p. 34.
[739] Ibid.
[740] Ibid., p. 62.

> engineer has gone on strike, and won't move the train until he gets some kind of extravagant promise.[741]

In contrast to the tourists, who seem dislocated from the events, the Spanish speakers have an instinctive knowledge of what is happening: the grandmother of the Spanish family who Helen shared a carriage with

> looked like a Sibyl as she sat in her corner, turning her small face up, perfectly certain, matter of fact. 'This train', she said, raising her hand, palm forward, the wrinkled, small palm waving from side to side, 'this train isn't going to move, anymore'.[742]

In the manuscript, Rukeyser further described the grandmother as 'prophesising', although this was crossed out in her later revisions. The linguistic barrier means the tourists are unable to read the situations they find themselves in and there is a dislocation between language and its meanings.

In this defamiliarised, absurd environment in which nothing is what might be expected, Helen confuses her waking moments with those of a dream and begins to act differently. As she walks down the carriages, she thinks:

> The fever sense of a dream, dream unreal, spoke in her head. Dream, she thought, as if she had said it aloud; and, acting as she

[741] Rukeyser, *Savage Coast,* pp. 30-1.
[742] Ibid., p. 34.

> would in a dream, said 'Excuse me' to the first boy, and started to push by his gun.[743]

Later, when she falls asleep, she dreams immediately: 'SHE DREAMED THE sea: the green streaked sea, with black tremendous currents. And headlong, plunging through the stream, a force rushing, which carried her along; until she ceded her will to it a huge gesture.'[744] Her waking and sleeping worlds become intertwined. The Spanish train has caused boundaries to shift and become porous. Indeed, it seems at times that the world has been reversed: on the train through France, a man on the hill was wiped out by the train passing through a tunnel; here there are 'only the weird scenes: the church, the man on the hill, the plane, following so swiftly and inconsequently that there was no way to stop and set them in place, no way for the speeding mind to arrange them.'[745] Now it is the technological that seems inconsequential.

The style of Rukeyser's novel is hard to define. As Rowena Kennedy-Epstein notes, 'the prose that she writes is always nearer to poetry, and so the text has the feeling of an epic poem inside the realist novel'.[746] Indeed, within this surreal and dreamlike environment, Helen frequently asserts that her experiences are 'real', even when they appear otherwise: when talking to a member of the Hungarian water polo team, Helen 'told him, repeating what she had told the women, feeling very strongly the oddness of repetition; for a

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[743] Rukeyser, *Savage Coast,* p. 28.
[744] Ibid*.,* p. 78.
[745] Ibid*.,* p. 106.
[746] Kennedy-Epstein, Introduction to *Savage Coast,* xix.

moment, feeling the oddness of recognition in a dream. […] Real, it was entirely real.'[747] It is as though Helen must repeat this in order to anchor herself. At one point she looks around her and thinks: '[t]he street was dark and furiously real […]: the night was, all unidentified objects were real: the pregnant woman on the platform, the boy in the camion, nameless emotions'.[748] Each part of the scene, whether physical or psychical, is real. As Rukeyser retells the story, the real is characterised, not as the external events but as 'the sum of everything':

> The train was assured, the town was real; that was all. She might never have lived a day before, she thought: and immediately realised how insane she was being. Everything contributed to this – if this were real, it was because it was nearer the sum of everything that had happened before it than anything had ever been.[749]

The novel builds on 'Barcelona, 1936': the real is totalising and now encompasses everything.

From the scene in the train in France, it becomes clear that Rukeyser's novel is not going to be a clean, structured narrative: it is not driven by the plot so it meanders, repeats itself, and goes off track. Because of this, Rukeyser's publisher, Covici Freide, rejected *Savage Coast* on the grounds that it was not realistic. The reader report, written by Gregory, was cutting and noted that while 'Barcelona, 1936' was a 'fine contribution', *Savage Coast* was 'too

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[747] Rukeyser, *Savage Coast,* p. 19.
[748] Ibid., p. 107.
[749] Ibid., p. 143.

confused, too scattered in its imagery and emotional progression to be real'.[750] As Kennedy-Epstein points out, this was a specifically a gendered critique.[751] Gregory noted that the heroine was 'made to seem too abnormal for us to respect what she sees, hears and feels'.[752] There was a need for Rukeyser, particularly as a woman, to *prove* what she saw, heard and felt within the novel.

In fact, Rukeyser did not see the text as a traditional novel. She wrote to Gregory to explain: '[i]t can't balance, it ought to be the story and that's all, I know the big faults and can get those out and the right thing in, but it isn't a novel and I won't make it compose like one. I don't know what it is and I don't care.'[753] Gregory was sceptical and encouraged her to abandon the project in his letters:

> I wish I could convince you not to take time out now rewriting it: it simply WON'T GO in its present form, and no matter what you do to it, you must compress it and do the job swiftly, giving it at least the unity of emotion. I wish you were converting it into a poem, or a group of poems. I'm sure the novel is bad, but I'm also confident that there's not a mediocre line in it. Don't misunderstand me: you

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[750] Reader report of *Savage Coast*, The Muriel Rukeyser Papers, Box I: 23, Folder 5, Manuscript Library, Library of Congress.
[751] Rowena Kennedy-Epstein, '"Her symbol was civil war": Recovering Muriel Rukeyser's Lost Spanish Civil War Novel', in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 59.2 (2013), pp. 416-439, (p. 418).
[752] Reader report of *Savage Coast*.
[753] Rukeyser to Zaturenska, undated, The Horace Gregory Papers, Box 11, Bird Library, Syracuse University.

> can write and have written fine prose. But you've neither released nor unified your imagination in the novel.[754]

Savage Coast lacked unity, according to Gregory. But given the problems around writing about Spain, how else could the experience have been written? Rukeyser embeds her own uncertainty and anxiety within the text as this was the only way to respond to the crisis in representation that Spain had created. By embedding the veracity of her experiences within the text, in Helen's repeated reminders that it was all 'real', Rukeyser was insisting that the reality of Spain was 'confused' and 'scattered'.

Throughout this chapter I have outlined the significant shift in the real between the journals *Close Up* and *Life and Letters To-day*. When Macpherson and Bryher were using the real to refer to particular psychological states and H.D. was using it to describe the concentric circles created when art recalled others works, questions of representation were important but in many ways detached: film and words were employed to capture particular ideas of the real but these realities could, and often did, develop and shift. Even Bryher, who was perhaps the most insistent that her version of the real was immovable and factual, was in a continual process of constructing it. However, the Spanish Civil War presented a very different problem for Herring and Rukeyser as this was happening in antecedent reality. Finding language to represent it was not just a question of articulating a particular idea or theory, but an urgent attempt to

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[754] Gregory to Rukeyser, undated, The Muriel Rukeyser Collection of Papers, The Berg Collection.

find a connection to real people suffering in the conflict. Herring certainly found this responsibility difficult as he attempted to both provide a survey of facts and to persuade his readers of the significance of the events. He finally resolved this by taking a more distanced approach in which art was seen as a remedy to the mentality that had brought about fighting.

Rukeyser is considered to be a writer able to navigate the demands of balancing political writing with a personal response. But 'Barcelona, 1936' demonstrates some of the difficulties of being an eyewitness, such as the pressure to record external events accurately. With Rukeyser written back into the account as one of the central characters, the novel faced new difficulties around representation. Rukeyser was clearly worried about the project as her brief preface warned readers that what followed would be neither fictional nor photographic. Despite the difficulty of recounting Helen's personal experiences and the events in Barcelona, the novel is able to assert the reality of both. The novel is then an important development of some of the ideas that were being worked out in the pages of *Life and Letters To-day*, and which her own article 'Barcelona, 1936' could not reconcile. Although it remained unpublished in her lifetime and was deemed unsuccessful by her contemporaries, it shows an attempt to resolve issues central to *Life and Letters To-day*. Rukeyser finally balances the significance of the historical moment with her own personal account, insisting it was both dreamlike and real.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored a series of related case studies to build critical understandings of the dialogue between modernism and realism in the interwar years. The writers in this thesis – Macpherson, Bryher, H.D., Herring, and Rukeyser – specifically refer to the works they approve of, including their own, as 'real'. Undoubtedly, there are other writers who have used the term: it is not uncommon to say an experience felt 'real' as a vague shorthand for its vividness or immediacy. But Macpherson, Bryher, H.D., Herring and Rukeyser use the term with a regularity that merits critical scrutiny. The diverse output of this group – encompassing criticism, film, fiction, and psychoanalytic practice – provides a vantage point from which to consider the persistence of realist impulses, not as an anachronistic turn from modernity, but as an attempt to meet its distinctive demands more fully. The group therefore provides a series of illustrations of what it could mean to be a modernist realist in the interwar period.

The preceding chapters have explored approaches to the real that span theories, media, and forms of writing. Macpherson emphasised the potential of particular cinematic forms to capture psychological states, and developed an implicit theory of what constituted 'real' film. In so doing, he aligned apparently diverse filmic styles: he not only called documentaries like *Grass* 'real', but equally narrative-driven films such as *The Big Parade* and *Joyless Street*. To Macpherson, these films were united by the presentation of realistic psychology, the use of location shooting, as well as in many cases having been

produced by filmmakers from the places depicted. The POOL group's short films demonstrate the range of styles Macpherson could group under his conception of the real: while *Wing-Beat* and *Monkey's Moon* were both experimental, *Foothills* presented a fairly traditional love story, albeit with a keen psychological focus. Though *Borderline* has at times been considered as an exercise in avant-garde obscurity, I have argued that it too was a realist film according to Macpherson's schema. The film's poor critical reception, therefore, can be seen as the failure of Macpherson's ambition that his own interpretation of 'real' cinema would convert audiences to cinema as art.

Bryher's writing was equally driven by the aim of psychological realism. Her novel *Civilians* sought to document the social attitudes and injustices that she believed had led inexorably to the First World War. Building on these concerns, in *Film Problems of Soviet Russia* Bryher used the explanatory framework of psychoanalysis to delve deeper into the underlying pathologies that she identified as at the root of society's problems. To Bryher, psychoanalysis offered a solution: if only people would undergo analysis, they could understand themselves, and therefore be made capable of acting in more rational ways. Bryher's novel 'Manchester' depicts the quasi-analyst Ernest North, who uses his superior understandings of individuals and the social environment to resolve the other characters' problems. When Bryher shared her novel with friends – particularly those who had been portrayed in the story – their comments undermined Bryher's notion of a stable and objective truth that could be excavated through psychoanalysis. In fact, Sachs saw the novel as a product of Bryher's own dangerous repressions.

H.D.'s pursuit of the real was more allusive and mystically inflected than Bryher's or Macpherson's, but no less determined. Her critical writing for *Close Up* treats the filmic image as an intertext, which connects artworks to one another. The 'layer upon layer' of the cinema experience was a microcosm and illustration of H.D.'s overall model of reality, in which different planes are in a constant process of cross-reference and evocation. The most 'real' films were those whose images invited this allusive or palimpsest-like mode of viewing. This sense of layering was enacted in her film writing: she evokes the experience of watching a given film through a series of images which she then interprets, each image proliferating and merging with others in the process of explanation. The novel *Nights* uses comparable prose techniques to engage with H.D.'s multi-layered real: Natalia's sexual experiences offer the possibility of transcendence of herself, while being described in abstract images which themselves point to a diversity of worlds and states.[755] Natalia's escape from self and personal history is presented as liberating, but also profoundly destabilising, and indeed she commits suicide at the end of the narrative. When H.D. revisited the novel in 1934 she added Helforth's introduction, which specifically identifies the form of the novel as a new type of realism. The tensions inherent in H.D.'s concept of the real, as that which is both most essential and most ungraspably multi-layered, are encapsulated in the short story 'Ear-ring'. The character Madelon, overwhelmed by the chaotic atmosphere of a dining room, attempts to focus on a woman's diamond earrings in order to steady herself. But she finds the earrings themselves shift

[755] H.D., *Nights*, pp. 39-40.

and modulate in her mind: she imagines them in terms of physics, chemistry, economics, and a mystically evocative past. The possibilities of these multiple realities can only be contained within abstract images – the diamonds are 'ice', 'white fire', 'alive', 'like a flower' – and Madelon realises that the new art must be based on a type of vision that allows for all of these facets to connect together.

Though the preceding chapters have highlighted the diversity in these writers' approaches to the real, there were also shared interests across the group, and for many years they were in a sustained process of mutual influence. Chapter 2 focused mainly on Bryher's interest in psychoanalysis, but she also believed in art's mystical ability to connect to its recipient, recalling some of H.D.'s ideas. For example, when Ernest watches Cordelia's play in 'Manchester', he experiences a moment of epiphany: Cordelia suddenly appears invested with the power to alter civilisation as her acting becomes a universal language by which the audience might be made 'initiate'. Psychoanalysis was central to Bryher's rationalising impulse, but she also hoped that art was capable of effecting comparable transformations in society and human consciousness. Chapter 4 suggests this hope is evident in Bryher's attitude to patronage: for her, funding an array of writers was crucial for the progress of society. While Chapter 3 took as its primary theme H.D.'s understanding of the abstract image and her mystical notion of reality as a series of interconnected concentric circles, she was deeply engaged in psychoanalysis, and invested in film's potential to educate viewers through depicting shared psychological states. The final chapter focused on Herring's editorship of *Life and Letters To-day*, but

Herring's writing for *Close Up* echoes the others' discussions of film's ability to illustrate psychological states, and become a form of magic. For the purposes of clarity, I have separated these strands of thought, but they were certainly more intertwined than my chapters at times suggest.

Alongside these shared interests, Macpherson, Bryher, and H.D. were united by a belief that engagement with the real involves an uncovering of truths concealed below surface appearances or, particularly for H.D., outside the realm of everyday experiences. Macpherson's fascination with film derived from his hopes for a truly objective medium. And yet, unlike some other notable contemporary theorists, his writings persistently foreground the need for artifice if 'real' film is to delve into the inner workings of the mind. Macpherson shared the high ambition of Turvey's 'revelationists', that film could reveal the world, but he placed greater weight on the need for construction and narrative if film was to perform this function properly. In Macpherson's conception, the real generally did not present itself ready to be recorded, but had to be approached with guile and technique. Bryher's influences similarly guided her towards this hidden-depths model of realism: in her attempts to reveal the irrationalities of contemporary society, the expository impulse of nineteenth-century literary realism was given added force by the diagnostic apparatus of psychoanalytic theory. As I have suggested, H.D.'s thought was inflected by idealist, symbolist notions of the real as an internal state, to be reached only by privileged artists and visionaries. With their particular methods and concerns, therefore, all three writers were attempting to get beneath the veil of everyday phenomena to reveal hidden truths.

Although there are points of connection, Herring's idea of the real marks a departure from these images of excavation and uncovering. As discussed in Chapter 4, Herring – at least for some of the time of his editorship – presented the real as something lying in plain sight, which could and must be mobilised for political ends. Initially, Herring began *Life and Letters To-day* by claiming that the journal had 'eschewed' politics. At the same time, he sought to create a journal with a wide variety of contributors, and tackle a diverse range of topics. In Herring's view, this diversity gave the journal an implicitly antifascist stance. But the Spanish Civil War prompted Herring's editorship to become more explicitly political in both topic and tone. He published a range of articles about Spain, some of which attempted to outline 'facts' about the conflict, while others attempted to rouse his readers' consciences. Herring himself occasionally tried to shock his readers into action, but his language then increasingly resembled the propaganda that he criticised. With the start of the Second World War, he retreated from these attempts at explicitly 'engaged' literature, and instead reverted to his earlier sense that publishing a range of literature was in itself a form of fighting.

If Herring was assured of what was 'real' in the conflict, and determined to make it known to the reader, Rukeyser was more circumspect. Her article 'Barcelona, 1936' attempted to record the events that she witnessed in Spain, but in adopting a camera-like prose style, Rukeyser herself was written out of the narrative. Though this produced an article that Herring considered to be the 'truth' – he planned to take out an advert in *The Mercury* claiming as much – the writing was not typical for Rukeyser: her understanding of truth was more

usually intertwined with the experiencing subject. Rukeyser's novel *Savage Coast* is one of a number of occasions at which she returned to, and in some ways reconfigured, her experiences in Spain. Although the account was not published in *Life and Letters To-day*, the prose style develops the seeming absence of Rukeyser in 'Barcelona, 1936'. In *Savage Coast*, Helen described the events she witnessed as defamiliarised and dream-like, and yet insists that this very defamiliarisation was 'real'. The novel suggests that honestly witnessing the 'truth' about Spain meant writing a text in which the events were 'scattered' and 'confused'.

I have suggested that these writers demonstrate the persistence of realist impulses, and help map out the possibilities of modernist realisms in the period. But the use of this concept in turn helps to explicate some of the shared habits and concerns of these writers. Robbe-Grillet argued that '[r]ealism is the ideology which each brandishes against his neighbour'. With this in mind, establishing the primacy of a given 'realism' (and the particular real that underlies it) is by nature a battle. While making any generalisation about such an elusive concept must always be done delicately, the real is something about which one is passionate, and which demands evangelising zeal. This impulse is notable in all of the chapters of this thesis: in Macpherson's desire to convert readers to seeing film as an art form, and in Bryher's aim for everyone to undergo psychoanalysis. H.D.'s aesthetic realities are perhaps less widely accessible, but they nevertheless form a way of perceiving that was at the core of her own practice, as demonstrated by her repeated reconfiguration of these ideas at different periods. That reality is multi-layered and infinitely generative

of new connections, and that therefore our depiction of it must be similarly shifting, was clearly a notion that lay at the heart of her conception of the artist.

In the texts I have considered, Herring and Rukeyser's notion of the real had even more of the urgency that is a defining impulse of realism: they were not trying to expose hidden realities, but bring to wider attention the reality of a specific conflict unfolding at the very time they were writing. While Herring had given up attempting to document these realities by the start of the Second World War, Rukeyser repeatedly revisited her account of her time in Spain. I mentioned two of the articles – for *The New Masses* and *The New York Herald Tribune* – in Chapter 4, but she also wrote about Spain in her poem 'Mediterranean', in *The Life of Poetry* and in an article for *Esquire Magazine* in 1974.[756] If the real is that which makes an immediate demand on the reader's attention, it can also be those themes or experiences that the writer repeatedly returns to, seemingly without having extracted their full significance. In later accounts, her experience in Spain takes on symbolic significance as a demonstration of the role and importance of the artist.

I have sought to present invocations of the real as representing an urgent and direct appeal to the reader. Rachel Bowlby explains:

> Realist works can disturb or please or educate us by showing reality as not what we think we know, by showing realities we have never

[756] Rukeyser, 'We Came for Games', *Esquire Magazine*, October 1974, pp. 192-195, pp. 368-70.

> seen or dreamed, or by making speakable realities that might previously have seemed only idiosyncratic or incommunicable.[757]

Again, calling a work 'real' is a demand on the reader: for attention, for consideration, or even for refutation. A thread that runs throughout this thesis is the idea that representing the real is difficult, urgent, and recipient- (and at times action-) oriented.

As a collection of practitioners working on film, the POOL group have attracted considerations of their theories of cinematic reception. As Marcus and Friedberg have noted, *Close Up* was concerned with 'an avant-garde of cinematic reception: of viewing, criticism and theory'.[758] Marcus describes the group as committed 'to the concept of "active" spectatorship, contrasted with the "passive" consumption of commercial cinema'.[759] Marcus suggests that Richardson's writing for *Close Up* develops notions of the spectator: '[h]er aesthetic ideal and goal would appear to be precisely the contemplative concentration to which 'the cult of distraction' opposed itself.'[760] Jenelle Troxelle has similarly discussed Dorothy Richardson's film writing for *Close Up*, arguing that rather than shock, Richardson espouses 'a contemplative, absorptive mode of perception' which emerged as a result of, and linked to, her interests in mysticism and Quakerism.[761] Situating this in the context of the

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[757] Rachel Bowlby, Foreword to *Adventures in Realism*, xi-xviii (xviii).
[758] Marcus, *Tenth Muse*, p. 326.
[759] Ibid.
[760] Ibid., p. 357.
[761] Troxelle, p. 52.

avant-garde cinema of the time, Troxelle reads this as a particularly female response.

Susan McCabe touches on the difference between Bryher's and H.D.'s models for spectatorship in relation to war films. McCabe juxtaposes 'H.D.'s view of film as lyric "vision", an almost erotic and intimate experience that could create a healing cocoon for the war-tortured psyche, with Bryher's theory of film as stimulating shocks of memory'.[762] While H.D. reads films through their restorative power, Bryher emphasises 'the potential of jolting the viewer into action'. [763] I would argue that one reason that critical attention has been given to these notions of spectatorship is that film invites questions around reception more obviously than writing.

The concept of modernist realisms helps to open up questions of spectatorship beyond film, because it focuses on how artworks ask something of their recipient. In this thesis, I have examined films, but also criticism, novels, and articles by the writers at the centre of this project. Charles Altieri has explored the reception of modernist texts through the concept of the ideal reader. For Altieri, it is necessary to look beyond the actual readers of modernist texts as these works 'set themselves so aggressively against conventional reading practices'.[764] Altieri directs his focus to how writers 'construct the kind of readers who might be able to take on the powers that the

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[762] McCabe, '*Close Up* & Wars They Saw', p. 14.
[763] Ibid.
[764] Charles Altieri, 'A Legacy of the Constructed Reader', in *Modernism*, Volume 2, ed. by Astradur Eysteinsson, Vivian Liska, Anke Brouwers et al. (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Benjamins, 2007), pp. 67-86, (p. 68).

text projects as significant resistance to dominant cultural habits'.[765] Altieri is concerned not with actual audiences but with an abstract ideal reader whose existence is constructed from the challenges of the text itself. The focus on the reader of modernist texts is fascinating but the possibilities are overwhelming: every text might be read as creating a different reader.

I would suggest that the concept of modernist realisms helps to ground this notion. When a writer specifically calls their work real, it is not only a comment on a particular idea of the real, and its appropriate mode of representation, but also an invitation for reflection and interpretation. Each writer in this thesis is making a claim about the world, one that is more grounded than Altieri's notion of the ideal audience, because the claim is in a specific direction, and is liable to resurface across texts. Using modernist realisms is a way in which these claims can be situated and compared.

76, 682.

[765] Altieri, p. 68.

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